

**ADOPTION REUNION: RECLAIMING THE LOST OBJECT.**

**A PSYCHOANALYTIC AND OBJECT RELATIONS APPROACH TO  
UNDERSTANDING THE ADOPTEE'S EXPERIENCE OF REUNION  
WITH THE BIRTH MOTHER**

**By**

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**A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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Signature:

Date: 12.09.02.

**“And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time”.**

**“Little Gidding”**

**T S Eliot. Four Quartets.**

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## ABSTRACT.

This study explores the adoptee's desire for, and experience of reunion with the birth mother, from within a Psychoanalytic framework, and with an emphasis upon the Object Relations Theory perspective. Adoption reunion may be considered to be an attempt on the part of the adoptee to reclaim the *lost object*. There are numerous international studies on different aspects of adoption, however, South African studies are sparse. This study seeks to unite the dialectic of the clinical practitioner and adoption practitioner in order to provide a rich and meaningful understanding of post adoption reunion in South Africa.

The study is conducted from within a non-probability framework and is an empirical, ethnographic study with a predominantly qualitative, inductive approach, which is exploratory and descriptive in nature. The quantitative research provides width to the in-depth, qualitative data and takes the form of a content analysis. The qualitative aspect of the study employs an in-depth, face-to-face, unstructured interviewing technique, followed by an interview schedule. This approach enables the researcher to enter the world of the adoptee and render it understandable through providing an "insider" view of the personal narratives and experiences of the subjects. The qualitative sample is comprised of 8 adult adoptees, who experienced face-to-face reunion with the birth mother, while the quantitative sample is comprised of 207 contacts noted in the post adoption register of Cape Town Child Welfare between 1989 and 1995. The conclusion drawn from the study is that the adoptee's desire for reunion is a health-promoting process which may be motivated by both external, social factors as well as intra-psychic forces; the latter resulting from the interruption of early psychic processes. Reunion is seen to be a response to these forces, and enables adoptees to establish a more coherent and integrated sense of Self, and to place themselves within an historical and biological narrative. Adoptees, whilst seeking to reclaim the *lost object*, do so as a means of reclaiming and completing the Self, the development of which was disturbed as a result of premature interruption of the primary infant-mother bond. It is further concluded that the value of reunion is not synonymous with the success or outcome of reunion or of the adoption, that the majority of reunion contacts are discontinued, and that a negative adoption experience is not more likely to result in the adoptee seeking reunion. Furthermore, reunion constitutes a form of retrospective mourning, which sets the adoptee free to relinquish ties to the *lost object* and to reclaim the Self.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION:**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY:**

This chapter introduces the background and significance of the study, as well as the main research questions and definitions of concepts used. The research methodology and limitations of the study, as well as an overview of future chapters is presented.

### **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY:**

In this study, **Adoption Reunion: Reclaiming the Lost Object**, the researcher explores the adoptee's experience of reunion with the birth mother from within a Psychoanalytic and Object Relations framework. It is the researcher's experience that clinicians and adoption practitioners each approach the needs and experiences of the adoptee from their own exclusive perspectives. The adoption practitioner works from within an inter-personal and case management framework, and deals largely with the bringing together, or reunion of the different members of the adoption triad. The clinician, in contrast, functions from within an intra-personal and therapeutic framework, focusing on the internal experiences of the individual adoptee. The researcher will attempt to combine the richness of each of these two disciplines.

There are two aspects to this study. Firstly, the researcher will explore the adoptee's experience of reunion with the birth mother through in-depth interviews and the administration of an interview schedule. Secondly, the study will examine data recorded in the post adoption register regarding enquiries made at the Adoption Centre of Cape Town Child Welfare between 1989 and 1995. This aspect of the study will take the form of a content analysis and will be aimed at establishing whether the data suggests any significant trends or information regarding adoption and reunion. The literature review will set the topic within the wider context, as well as provide a critical framework within which the data collected within the course of this study can be analysed and understood.

It is the researcher's contention that the adoptee has, historically, been the most dis-empowered member of the adoption triad. The adoption triad, consisting of adoptee, birth and adoptive parents, ensures that both sets of parents have some degree of power and control regarding the initial adoption decision. However, the adoptee is a passive member of the triad upon whom the adoption will have a lasting and deep-seated impact. The researcher will thus seek to provide the adoptees who are interviewed with "a voice". This will be achieved through the medium of the in-depth interviews during which they will narrate their (hi)stories as part of the study. The narrative approach employed in this study concurs with the researcher's approach and experience as an adoption practitioner. According to Laird (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989), narratives are used to ". . . explain ourselves to ourselves and others and to consolidate a sense of self ". The narrative approach to the in-depth interviews is a "self constructive process" (Gergen & Gergen, 1983: 23), which is aimed at enabling the adoptee to redefine himself. Telling our story is, according to Campbell, (1949:96 - 97) "a powerful act of healing our child within . . . Perhaps the most healing feature is that we, the story teller, get to hear our own story".

### **1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY:**

The researcher's *professional experience* as an adoption practitioner, as well as her *personal experience* as an adoptee motivated the choice of research topic. *The possibility of post adoption contact has existed in the South African context for the past 19 years.* It is thus now possible to establish the long-term outcome of post adoption reunion in this country. The data collected in this study will be compared with the existing research on post adoption reunion. In addition, research and information on post-adoption reunion within the South African setting is sparse, and such a study such could provide valuable information to both clinical and adoption practitioners.

The researcher has been an adoption practitioner for a number of years. In this capacity she has had contact with members of the adoption triad, adoption practitioners and other professionals involved in adoption. Gaining entry to the field of adoption and establishing the confidence and trust of those involved with

adoption is usually a difficult task. This is because adoption practitioners tend to act as gatekeepers, maintaining strict boundaries in order to protect the identity of individuals, and to maintain the high standards of confidentiality expected in adoption practice. The researcher is known in the field of adoption, and will introduce herself (with the consent of Cape Town Child Welfare) as a member of a well-known adoption agency. This will assist in gaining entry to a closed and protected field and in establishing the trust of adoption practitioners and the adoptees who will participate in the research. The researcher's knowledge and understanding of terminology and issues related to adoption and reunion will assist in setting participants at ease. This knowledge will also mean that she is able to understand and negotiate any concerns and issues, which may arise in the course of contacts and interviews.

Existing data regarding post adoption searches and re-union has come mainly from the United States and Britain. It seems likely that the reasons for and outcomes of such reunions would be duplicated in the South African context. This research will provide information within the South African context as well as making it possible to compare the data with research and information from other cultures and countries.

It is hoped that examining the importance and meaning of reunion will make a valuable contribution to adoption and clinical practitioners, and their understanding of the adoptee's perspective of reunion. This may also be of value in counselling adoptees, who may wish, but are unable to trace or establish contact with their birth mother.

Finally, the researcher is herself an adoptee, and her personal experience of adoption, as well as the fact that she was not able to experience reunion with her birth mother has, at least to some extent, motivated this investigation. There is thus a personal interest in the topic. It is the researcher's contention that a psychoanalytic and object relations perspective offers valuable insights that will enable adoptees to understand their ties to "the lost object" and to develop strategies for relinquishing these ties that bind them to the "lost object" through a cycle of uncompleted grief and mourning.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:**

This research aims to:

- i. Locate the adoptee's experiences of reunion within a Psychoanalytic and Object Relations framework.
- ii. Explore and understand why the adoptee wishes to establish post-adoption reunion with the birth mother.
- iii. Investigate the impact of such reunion upon the adoptee.
- iv. Ascertain whether reunion contacts are more likely to be ongoing or discontinued.
- v. Collect new data, as well interpret existing, secondary data.
- vi. To provide information which will assist practitioners in assessing and improving current adoption practice and to identify areas for possible future research in this field.

#### **1.5 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

**The researcher will explore the following questions through the in-depth, qualitative aspect of the study:**

- i. Why do adoptees wish to establish reunion with the birth mother.
- ii. What impact does such reunion have upon the adoptee (how is it experienced).
- iii. Does contact established as a result of reunion result in an ongoing relationship between adoptee and birth mother.
- iv. How do adoptees define the term "successful" reunion.

**The following questions will be addressed through examining the quantitative data in the adoption register:**

- 1 Does the age and manner in which adoption revelation occurs:
  - i. impact on the adoptee's desire to establish contact with the birth mother.
  - ii. affect how the adoptee experiences reunion.
  - iii. affect how the adoptee experiences adoption.
- 2 Are adoptees who rate their experience of adoption as negative more likely to seek reunion.
- 3 Are the contacts established through reunion ongoing.

**1.6 RESEARCHER'S ASSUMPTIONS:**

There are a number of assumptions regarding post adoption reunion. These assumptions, will be examined against the findings of this study. They include the following:

- i. The fusion of the perspectives of clinicians and adoption practitioners might enhance our understanding of reunion and thus improve adoption practice in the future.
- ii. This study assumes the position that early, peri-natal history impacts significantly upon the development of the individual, and that the adoptee's need for reunion is inextricably bound up with these experiences, as well as with the losses sustained as a result of adoption.
- iii. Adoption constitutes a form of complicated grief, and a loss that must be mourned.
- iv. Post adoption reunion is an attempt, on the part of the adoptee, to recover "the lost object" and establish essential connections with the past.
- v. Adoptees wishing to establish contact with the birth mother are more likely to have experienced their adoption as negative and unsatisfactory.
- vi. The age at which adoption is revealed to the adoptee determines whether or not they seek reunion with the birth mother.
- vii. Most reunion contacts are discontinued after an initial honeymoon period.
- viii. Post adoption reunion allows the adoptee to revisit, and thus, to come to terms with the trauma of separation and loss which results from adoption.

## **1.7 DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY:**

Definitions for all terminology related to adoption are documented in appendix F, and a detailed discussion of the practice and meaning of adoption will follow later in this chapter.

Adoption is a permanent social and psycho-legal process, which provides the adopted child with full membership of a family into which s/he was not born and into which s/he is adopted. Through the act of adoption, the child becomes in every way as if born to the adoptive parents. Adoption confers upon the adoptive parents all the rights and responsibilities of the birth parents, who, in turn relinquish all their rights and responsibilities in respect of the child given up for adoption.

Post-adoption reunion refers to the contact that is established between parties previously separated through adoption. In the context of this research it refers specifically to meetings that have taken place between birth mother and adoptee after adoption had occurred. It does not include telephonic or letterbox contacts which did not culminate in meetings between these parties. In 1987 the adoption laws changed making tracing, and thus also this research, possible.

Adoption triad / triangle refers to the three parties involved in adoption. Viz the adoptee, the adoptive parent and the birth or biological parents.

Psychoanalytic theory encompasses a therapeutic technique, and a theoretical model of the human personality, and is rooted in the work of Sigmund Freud. The theory rests on the basic assumption that there is a hidden, unconscious aspect of the mind, which remains inaccessible. One of the aims of psychotherapy is to make conscious the unconscious. A number of post-Freudian theories have developed out of psychotherapy, one of these being modern, post Freudian psychoanalytic theory, which is referred to as object relations theory.

Object Relations Theory refers to “theories or aspects of theories, concerned with exploring the relationships between real, external people and internal images and residues of relations with them, and the significance of these residues for psychic functioning” (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983: 11–12). Object Relations theory explains” how the child’s early interactions with the mother or primary caretaker become internalized and result in images of the self and others and about what can be expected of relationships” (Klein 1995:52).

The Object is the thing, actual or internal, which is the target of a drive. The object constitutes both people in the external world and images of them that are established internally. It is a psychic representation, which in itself has the power to influence the individual’s affective states and overt behavioural reactions (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983: 14).

The “Lost object” “ refers, in the context of this study, to the birth mother who is the primal, or first, object of the human infant’s experience.

Grief refers to the personal experience of loss while *mourning* refers to the process that occurs after, and as a result of a loss.

Complicated grief refers to a loss, which is socially unspeakable and thus often negated. In such instances the bereaved is expected to behave as if the loss did not occur. Complicated grief may be variously termed pathological, unresolved, delayed or masked.

## **1.8 BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:**

This research constitutes an empirical, ethnographic study, which is conducted from within a non-probability framework. Quota, purposive, snowball and availability sampling will be used. The dominant aspect of the research is qualitative and employs an inductive approach, which is exploratory and descriptive in nature. Eight subjects will be selected according to criteria representative of the general population of adoptees. In-depth interviews will be conducted with these adoptees. An interview schedule (see appendix B: VI - XI), which will follow an open-ended approach, will be presented to the subjects after they have narrated their (hi)story. The quantitative research is a sub-dominant aspect of the study and will be used to add width to the qualitative data. It will constitute a content analysis of the post adoption register.

The researcher aims to obtain an “insider perspective” of the people and phenomenon being studied. This will provide a thick, in-depth description of the adoptee’s experiences of, and motivation to secure reunion. Data gathered from the qualitative aspect of this study will be presented in the form of themes, categories, words and quotes. Data obtained from the quantitative aspect of the study explores and describes, as well as quantifies the various aspects of post-adoption searches conducted through the Adoption Centre over a seven year period. This data will be presented in the form of tables and charts and will be used to place the data obtained in the qualitative aspect of this study within a broader context. This constitutes a content analysis.

There are a number of limitations and constraints, which may impact on this study. The limited size of the sample, the use of secondary data and the difficulty in reaching the population, are factors that bear consideration.

## **1.9 REFLEXIVITY:**

As this study is being conducted by a researcher – practitioner, reflexivity is particularly important. In addition, the researcher’s own personal interest in the subject requires careful attention, in order to ensure that researcher bias is avoided (see 3.1)

In the process of conducting this study, the researcher was brought face to face with the pain and loss incurred through her own adoption experience. It has been important to ensure that these emotions and expectations have not coloured the manner in which the study was approached or the interpretation of the data. Of personal interest has been the realization that reunion does not necessarily result in an ongoing relationship between birth mother and adoptee, and that reunion is first and foremost a journey to reclaim aspects of the Self, lost as a result of the separation and loss incurred through adoption. This has highlighted the need to find alternative ways in which adoptees, who are not able or do not wish to establish reunion, can complete their journey and establish a secure and integrated sense of Self.

Above all, this study has highlighted for the researcher that whether or not reunion is achieved, the pain and loss resulting from adoption must be grieved before the adoptee's ties to the "lost object" can begin to be relinquished.

#### 1.10 OVERVIEW OF THE REPORT:

The first chapter of this report provided a brief introduction to the study. In Chapter Two the contribution of psychoanalytic and object relations theory to the understanding of adoption reunion is explored, and literature regarding the history and practice of adoption is examined. The literature review sets the present study within a wider context and provides a critical framework within which to examine and understand adoption reunion. Chapter Three discusses the research design, methodology employed in this study, limitations of the research, and research ethics. Chapter Four comprises an analysis of the data collected in the course of the study. Chapter Five presents and discusses the results of the analysis. In the final chapter, the findings of the study are presented, and recommendations are made for practitioners. It is also the intention of the researcher that the findings of this study be made available to members of the adoption triad in order to enhance their understanding of the meaning and impact which reunion has upon the adoptee.

### **SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER:**

Chapter one provided a brief introduction to the study, together with definitions of terminology, rationale and objectives of the study, the main research questions, the researcher's assumptions, and some limitations of the study. Reflexivity has been afforded particular attention in view of the researcher's own personal and professional involvement in adoption.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW:**

### **2 INTRODUCTION:**

This chapter comprises a literature review which includes two sections. Firstly, the historical and legal development of adoption is outlined internationally and within the South African context. The second section explores the contribution of selected Psychoanalytic and Object Relations theories to our understanding of reunion.

#### **2.1 BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF ADOPTION PRACTICE:**

##### **2.1.1 ANCIENT AND INTERNATIONAL ROOTS OF ADOPTION:**

According to the Child Welfare League of America (1978: 11) legal adoption is the “method provided by law to establish the legal relationship of parent and child between persons who are not so related by birth”. Cole and Donely (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989) assert that adoption is an “age old institution in fact and myth”; it is a social construct, and as such is value laden and shaped by cultural forces.

The earliest written laws relating to adoption are to be found in the Code of Hammurabi (an early Babylonian code of law), which dates from around 2800 B C (Cole & Donely, in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989). This document indicates that contemporary concerns regarding the risks involved in adoption were also contemplated at that time. These concerns include the suitability (matching) of adopter and child to each other; the impact and trauma of separation from the first caretaker upon the child, and the issue of adoptees searching for birthparents. Clothier (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989) states that according to these laws, the child who attempted to search for his biological parents was to be returned to them. He also notes that while birth parents had no right to demand the return of their child, transgressions by the adoptee against the adoptive parents constituted grounds for the adoptive parent to return the child to the birth parents.

Early adoptions were usually effected for a religious or political purpose. In many cultures, adoption was a means of ensuring a male heir who could meet the demands of religious ceremonies and to ensure the perpetuation of the family. The Hindu and Chinese cultures practiced adoption as a means of procuring a passage to heaven; there are still certain cultures and religious groups who are similarly motivated to adopt. One of the earliest stories of adoption is the biblical tale of the baby Moses, who was found and “adopted” by Pharo’s daughter. Tales of adoption are no less prominent in the culture and literature of more recent times. Superman, originating from the planet Krypton is adopted by earth parents, while tales from Star Wars, to Batman and Spiderman all include aspects of adoption.

### **2.1.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADOPTION PRACTICE IN DIFFERENT CULTURES AND COUNTRIES:**

The paternalistic orientation of the Roman Empire meant that adoption was viewed as absolute and permanent in this culture. This concept was, according to Benet, to become central to modern American adoption law (Benet, in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989). The Napoleonic Codes also viewed adoption as permanent and encompassed the severing of all rights and responsibilities of the birth parent. In addition, it required that the adoptive parent be “over the age of 50 years, sterile, at least 15 years older than the person to be adopted and the adoptive parent was to have reared the person for at least 6 years” (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989: 275).

American adoption laws are rooted in English common law, which, prior to 1926, did not make provision for adoption. This was because adoption conflicted with the principles of inheritance, which laid down that land could only be passed on from one person to another based on blood lineage. (Presser, in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989: 274). However, in 1926 British law was altered to make provision for adoption in the English legal system. In 1969 these laws were again amended in order to remove the legal constraints hitherto imposed on adoptees, and 1975 English law changed to allow adoptees to search for birth parents.

Although adoption was practiced in America during the mid-nineteenth century, it was only in 1851 that the first adoption statutes were passed. According to Presser, this provided for legal control over adoption and for the first time laid down in law the fact that the purpose of adoption was to ensure and promote the welfare of the child. At this stage there was no investigation into the suitability of the prospective adoptive parents, or into whether the children were indeed parentless. Infants were seldom available for adoption, largely as a result of the extremely high death rate in institutions and because it was difficult to separate a nursing infant from its mother as infant formula only became available after 1920. Between 1900 and 1930 numerous states enacted laws prohibiting the separation of infants from their mothers during the six-month period immediately following birth. As recently as 1943 certain institutions and groups in America did not accept adoption as they believed that the birth mother, by caring for her child, could "atone for the behaviour that had led to unmarried motherhood", and that this would give her ". . . a focus and a goal and would aid in the reformation of her character" ( McConnell & Dore, 1983: 10). World War I and the ensuing outbreak of influenza resulted in a decline in the birth rate, which, in turn, resulted in an increased interest in adoption. After World War II, interest in adoption was restricted largely to infants. During the post war years the demand for adoption began to exceed the number of infants available for adoption. As a result, adoption agencies developed restrictions and eligibility criteria for adoptive parents.

### **2.1.3 HISTORY OF ADOPTION PRACTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA:**

Legalized adoption in South Africa is a relatively recent phenomenon. Adoption legislation and practice in South Africa is aimed at, and constructed to protect and ensure the best interests of the child. As in the rest of the world, adoption practice has been significantly affected by the socio-political changes, which have taken place over the years. The various prohibitions of the Apartheid era were reflected in the laws governing adoption. Changes that developed in the post-Apartheid era, were reflected in adoption practice and laws, which were altered to reflect the new approach. Unfortunately, changes in the law have not always been accompanied by changes in attitude and prejudice, and thus prejudice continues to exist, and this is often vociferously expressed.

The Golden Jubilee report of Cape Town Child Welfare Society (1958) informs that as early as 1915 twelve children were placed in adoption and that a large number of children orphaned by the great influenza epidemic of 1918 were placed for adoption with " . . . kindly people coming forward to offer homes ". In 1923 the Adoption Act was passed and made provision for legalized adoption in South Africa; this Act made no provision for disclosure / non-disclosure of information in an adoption. By 1926, the courts were referring adoption applications to the Society for investigation and recommendation. No adoptions were granted by the courts unless the child had resided in the care of the prospective adopters for a minimum period of 6 months. In this Act no provision was made for non-disclosure, and thus confidentiality of the parties involved in an adoption was not protected. In 1937 the Children's Act was passed and made provision for non-disclosure. In this Act the requirement of matching the race of the child to that of the adoptive parent was introduced. In 1941 the government agreed to issue an abridged birth certificate for the adopted child, giving only the adopted name and not reflecting the fact of adoption or illegitimacy. As in other parts of the world, the First and Second World Wars both led to an increase in adoption; this included children who were being adopted by relatives after they had been orphaned as a result of the war. In 1948 the first international adoptions were effected, when, with the consent of the government eleven war orphans from Jersey were brought to South Africa and placed in adoption here. As in America, the post war years resulted in an increased interest in adoption and by 1949 the list of prospective adoptive parents far exceeded the number of children available for adoption. Waiting lists extended, on average, from two to three years. By 1955 it became necessary to impose certain restrictions and criteria in respect of prospective adopters. These criteria are still in existence today where the demand for babies exceeds the availability.

In 1960, the passing of the Children's Act brought into being the requirement that the race, religion and language of the parties involved in an adoption be matched. These requirements reflected the socio-political climate of the time. South Africa's people and communities were divided along racial and cultural lines. The impact of the Apartheid era, the prohibition of mixed marriages, the policy of segregation and the Group Areas Act were reflected in the laws governing adoption as well as in adoption practice. There were numerous instances where

children of “questionable” race and appearance were withheld from placement in an adoptive family, sometimes for lengthy periods, while government officials scrutinized the child in order to make a decision as to his or her racial classification (personal communication, Bruce. A: 2001).

#### **2.1.4 RECENT CHANGES IN SOUTH AFRICAN ADOPTION LAW AND PRACTICE:**

In 1983 the Child Care Act 74 of 1983 was passed and brought about significant changes in adoption laws and practice, which came into operation in 1987. This legislation, allowed adoptees access to adoption records at the age of 21 (without the consent of the adoptive parents), and at the age of 18 with consent of the adoptive parents. The requirement that parties be matched according to race was replaced with the requirement in section 40 of the Child Care Act, that *due regard be paid to the matching of culture, religion and language*. Thus, the law now makes provision for a child to be placed in a culture different to that into which s/he was born. It is however still common practice that, where possible, a child should be placed in a family of the same culture and religion as that into which s/the was born. Where cross-cultural placements are made these must be well-motivated. In some instances Commissioners of Child Welfare require that the final adoption report state what attempts have been made to ensure this and what efforts were made to recruit suitable parents.

In 1996 the Child Care Act 74/83 was amended and adoption practice in South Africa was altered to meet the requirements of these legal changes. Together with the Adoption Matters Amendment Act, this brought the Child Care Act and adoption procedures into line with the Rights of Natural Fathers of Children Born Out of Wedlock Bill. This change has had a major impact on adoption practice, and although granting fathers rights, has also created many problems for these same fathers, whom it serves to empower. It has also impacted significantly on adoptive parents and particularly on children being given up for adoption. This amendment to the law instituted a mandatory sixty - day period within which birth parents consenting to an adoption, are able to change their mind and withdraw their consent to the adoption. According to the amendments, the sixty - day period applies to birth fathers as well as birth mothers. If the birth parents do not

sign consent at the same time, this period increases as their consents do not run concurrently. The practical difficulties in tracing birth fathers or proving that their whereabouts are unknown often delays the finalization of adoption. The amendment has also impacted on the placement of babies for adoption. In some instances, birth mothers are reticent to consider adoption as they do not wish to involve the birth father in their decision; adoptive parents may also be reticent to accept the added risk which accompanies the involvement of the birth father. It is unfortunate that due to this new legislation, the rights of the birth father may, in some cases, take precedence over the rights of the child. These amendments to the Child Care Act also make it possible for birth parents to seek information about, and reunion with the child whom they relinquished. In order to do so, the adoptee must be at least 21 years old, and in addition, the consent of the adoptive parents is required. While South African law recognizes the permanence of adoption, it also makes provision for an adoption to be rescinded under certain circumstances. The law also sets out broad criteria for the acceptance of adopters as suitable parents. The change in socio-political values is reflected in our laws and has been an important factor in bringing about significant changes and developments in South African adoption practice and legislation.

## **2.2 THE CONTRIBUTION OF INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF REUNION:**

### **2.2.1 OVERVIEW OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE LITERATURE:**

There are a number of contributions from the literature, which may help to clarify the adoptee's search for the birth mother and experience of reunion. According to Brodzinsky and Schechter (1989:71) ". . . very little is known about the complex psychological meaning of search behaviour, and even less is known about the non-searcher". The psychoanalytic literature indicates that the adoptee, in his quest for reunion, is not simply responding to external factors in his life experience, but rather, is motivated by intra-psychic forces resulting from the interruption of early psychic processes. Schoenberg (1974:549) asserts that " the creation of families based on psychological, not blood ties, contains inherent

identity problems that practice and law seek to mitigate, but can never eliminate". The impact of the premature interruption of early psychic process is variously viewed by theorists such as Winnicott (1965), Freud (1961), Fairbairn (1968), Bollas (1987), and Mahler (1975), and will be considered later in this chapter. Brodzinsky and Schechter (1989: 74), assert that the literal object of the search, the birth parent, is seen as a means to another end. It is " . . . an attempt to repair aspects of the self that have to do with the sense of disconnectedness from the human race and with the sense of disadvantage vis-à-vis people who are 'born' rather than adopted".

The literature further suggests that early peri-natal history impacts significantly on the future development of the individual (Lichtenberg, 1983; Machter, 1985; Mayman, 1968; Peterfreund, 1978). The relationship with the first mother, in utero and in the days and weeks immediately following birth will leave an indelible impression on the individual. Quintilian (circa 35 – 100 AD) writing about the impact and significance of early life experiences said "*We are by nature most tenacious of what we have imbibed in our infant years, as the flavour, with which you scent vessels when new, remains in them . . .*". Sigmund Freud expressed a similar sentiment when he stated that "*. . . the very impressions which we have forgotten have nevertheless left the deepest traces in our psychic life, and acted as determinants for our whole future development*" (Freud, 1928. in Haimés & Timms, 1972: iv).

## **2.2.2 EXISTING RESEARCH STUDIES AND THEORIES ON POST ADOPTION REUNION:**

The major themes noted in the literature include the adoptee's search for identity, need to belong, and desire to resolve a sense of emptiness, confusion or chaos. Studies further suggest that reunion is linked to the adoptee's experience of adoption, the age at which adoption revelation occurred, and the adoptee's relationship with the adoptive parents. Brodzinsky and Shechter (1989: 81) assert that "the search, therefore, whether early (intrapsychic) or late (activated in later life), is an attempt to reconcile cognitive dissonances, to bring order out of a sense of chaos, and to gain active control over forces to which the adoptee has had to respond passively in the past . . . . the adoptee, through searching,

attempts to bring the locus of control from 'out there' to 'inside' him/herself'. It is a way the individual can experience the Self as capable of actively 'acting upon' the environment rather than passively being acted upon. This is a major factor in the establishment of a healthier identity. Haimes and Timms (1985: 50) state that the reunion is an attempt, on the part of the adoptee to ". . . place themselves in a narrative, in order to correct that part of their lives which gives them a marginal identity". Hodges (1984, in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989: 68) suggests that the child's "psychological need for knowledge " is linked to the frustrated attempts to construct a mental representation of the birthparents without having the necessary building materials to do so". Hodges furthermore states that studies reporting reunion data "emphasized the positive results expressed by the adoptees".

Studies by Trisiliotis and Sorosky, Baran and Pannor (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989), indicate that adoptees who search and seek reunion, indicate that they were informed of their adoptive status at an older age or, that they experienced adoption revelation as traumatic. In contrast, other studies (Thompson et.al, 1978) have not indicated that disclosure occurring at a late age results in the adoptee being more likely to search for reunion. Studies by Trisiliotis and Sorosky et al (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989) indicate that a negative adoption experience is more likely to result in the adoptee seeking reunion. Lifton (1994: 8) asserts that the adoptee's identity crisis is associated with the human need to connect with "their natural clan".

According to Brodzinsky and Schechter (1989: 69 - 71), various studies agree that ". . . the majority of searchers are female, in young adulthood: and that when a search is completed it usually results in significantly improved psychological changes within the adoptee". A study by Sobol and Cardiff (in Brodzinsk & Schechter, 1989) indicates a disproportionate number of female subjects seeking reunion. Two studies (Trisiliotis; Sorosky, Baran & Pannor; in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989) on non-clinical samples, indicate that adoptees who undertake post adoption searches are more likely to be female, an only child, and have little early information regarding their adoption.

Various studies (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989; Sorosky, Baran & Panor, 1975; Wegar, 1994) suggest that the adoptee's desire for reunion has tended to be associated with psychopathology and clinical symptoms. Brinch (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989: 42 - 43) cites numerous authors and researchers who take the stance that adoption and reunion are psychopathological in nature. Others have suggested (cf Sorosky et al. in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989) that there is a high percentage of adoptees represented in clinical samples. It was not possible to locate studies comparing the percentage of individuals who seek therapy after experiencing loss through means other than adoption, with adoptees seeking therapy as a result of adoption. Brodzinsky and Schechter (1989:50 - 52) state that ". . . adoptive status does not necessarily lead to psychopathology or lead to psychological health". They note that adoption is only one of a number of factors, which contribute to adoptees seeking analytic assistance. This would seem to contradict Feder's (1974: 491) contention that there exists an "adopted child pathology". Blum (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989) suggests that while there are, no doubt, adoptees who fall into these categories, it is likely that a combination of other factors, perhaps including adoption, but not adoption per se, gives rise to this. Studies by Blum (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989: 52) indicate that "no specific syndrome or disturbance has been associated with adoption". Two studies conducted by McWhinnie (1969) and Triseliotis (1973) (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989) reached the conclusion that the desire for reunion is psychopathological; they conclude that a negative experience in the adoptive family is more likely to result in the adoptee seeking reunion with the birth mother.

A study by Simos (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989: 159) supports the hypothesis that adoptees have more difficulty forming a sense of identity than do non-adoptees, are less well socialized, tend to be impulsive and demanding, and have a lower self-esteem. The outcome of this study is contradicted by Norvell and Guy (1977) who found that adoptive status alone does not result in a negative identity. A study by Stein and Hoopes (1985), noted that poor physical matching of adoptee and adoptive family tends to increase the likelihood of search behaviour. Several studies quoted in Brodzinsky and Schechter (1989) indicate that the desire to "resemble someone" was a significant factor in prompting search behaviour. Bertocci and Schechter (1987) indicated that a lack

of physical resemblance to the adoptive family was positively linked to search behaviour. In contrast, Sobol and Cardiff (1983) found that the degree of perceived similarity between adoptee and adoptive family bore no relationship to the adoptee's search activities.

Brodzinsky and Schechter (1989: 360) state that commonly mentioned needs which give rise to post adoption searching include "the desire to find some resolution for a sense of emptiness or confusion, for self-understanding (identity issues), specific pragmatic needs such as medical information, a sense of belonging, a sense of beginning and roots . . . ". A repeated theme which surfaces in existing studies is that of the adoptee "dutifully wishing to avoid hurting" the adoptive parents. Trisiliotis (in Haimés & Timms, 1985) state that many reunion contacts end soon after they are established.

### **2.2.3 THE IMPLICATIONS OF PERI-NATAL FACTORS:**

In this section, the nature of the infant's tie to the mother, the early infant-mother relationship, is explored. The mother's importance to the psychological development of the child is a basic tenet of psychoanalytic theory. Bowlby (1979), Wirz (1990) and Stern (in Holmes, 1979) have confirmed the existence of psychic and mental life in the infant, while the theoretical contributions of Balint (1984), Mahler (1975), Fairbairn (1994), Benedek (1970), Klein (in Segal (1978), Winnicott (1965) and Freud (1961) suggest that there is a unique and primal bond between infant and mother during the earliest days and weeks of the infant's life. This bond, which is already established in utero, further develops out of the daily interactions and inter-connections of the mother-infant unit, which consists of both conscious and unconscious elements. This early relationship results in a "psychic residue, which is of critical importance in the development of the individual" (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983: 11–12; Bollas, 1987). Michael Balint (1968) asserts that the infant-mother relationship is an intense and intimate one, and he is of the opinion that its roots lie firmly in intra-uterine existence. Balint (1968: 42) asserts further that the foetus is entirely dependent upon its undifferentiated and unstructured environment-mother, and that "they exist in an harmonious, interpenetrating mix-up" of amniotic fluid, placenta and foetus. This

is echoed by Herbert (1974: 113) who states that “the infant does not conceive of himself as a person; he merges with his surroundings and does not distinguish ‘things out there’ from internal impressions or feelings”.

In agreement with Balint, Rank (1929) and Greenacre (1945), (in Clerke & Clerke, 1976) similarly suggest that birth is a psychological trauma for the newborn infant, as it disturbs the equilibrium of the primal state of relatedness. The resultant dis-equilibrium forces upon the infant a fundamentally different environment as well as the need for adaptation. The first and most basic object relations develop out of this primary relationship and it underlies all others relationships (Wirz, 1990). Benedek (1949: 653) acknowledges the existence of an early and significant mother-infant bond. Fairbairn (in Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983), asserts that there is a total merger between infant and mother, and that this constitutes the infant's whole environment and world of experience, thus precluding any differentiation from the maternal body. He refers to this as a “state of fusion and primary identification” (in Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983:159). Thus, according to Fairbairn, the infant is intensely involved with others from the very earliest days of his existence. Ferreira (in Herbert,1974:37) produced evidence of a connection between the mother's emotional status during pregnancy and ‘upset’ behaviour in the offspring, thus underscoring the existence of an early mother-infant bond.

Research (Brazelton,1986; Clarke, 1978; Lichtenberg, 1983) suggests that there is a sensitive period immediately after birth, in which the newborn infant is alert and interested in engaging the mother, who in turn, is particularly wired to attune to the new infant. Those mothers who are given the opportunity to be with their infants over this period are more likely to become bonded with the child, to begin to respond to him, love him and care for him (Zeanah, 1993). Research on bonding raised awareness of the capabilities of the neonate, as well as the importance of skin-to-skin-contact between mother and infant in the immediate postnatal period, and indicates the enormous benefits of this approach for both mother and infant. Various theorists including Solomon (1999), Stern (1985) and Steele (1997) assert that separation immediately after birth interrupts fundamental processes between mother and infant. A study by Haze et al. (in Lichtenberg, 1983: 114-15) indicates the importance of immediate post-natal

contact and interaction between mother and infant and indicates that there is a marked sensitivity in the mother's responsiveness to immediate contact with her newborn infant. Kagan (in Clarke & Clarke, 1976:97) suggests that the experiences of the young infant have a powerful effect on his behaviour, temperament and knowledge", while Lichtenberg (1983) asserts that infant and mother are primed for social interaction from the outset, and that their attachment is based on reciprocity.

Psychoanalytic developmental theory highlights the powerful impact of early relationships on the future development of the individual. Winnicott (1958: 160) states that "the mental health of the human being is laid down in infancy by the mother, who provides an environment in which complex but essential processes in the infant's Self can become completed". Winnicott's contribution to our understanding of reunion will be further explored later in this chapter.

During the 1940s and 1950s, extensive research by psychoanalysts resulted in the establishment of a comprehensive body of knowledge on attachment and separation. Spitz (in Pine, 1985) highlights the importance of the pre-oedipal period in the child's development and the concomitant, early mother - infant object relations and theories of the self. Wirz (1990) asserts that the individual psyche consists of internalised images of self and others, and that these are formed out of the infant's primary relationship with the mother. There is firm evidence (Wirz, 1990; Buckley, 1986), that the neonate, in contrast to the self-absorbed and poorly - defined infant of Mahler, has a highly organized perceptual, cognitive and communicative ability. Buckley (1986: 124) states that Spitz ". . . was keenly aware of the importance of close contact between mother and infant and recognizes the negative impact of the Western world's increasing tendency to reduced skin contact between mother and infant". There is a resounding reiteration of this sentiment in current infant research (Lichtenberg,1983).

John Bowlby "moved beyond the main theories of attachment, psychoanalysis and learning theory" (Herbert, 1974: 114). Bowlby further states that "attachment is mediated by looking, hearing and holding . . . . The invariability of the mother's face, the recognition of it as a pattern, gives the baby a primitive sense

of history, of continuity through time, that is integral to the sense of self " (cf Bollas, 1987). This perspective is underscored by numerous other theorists (Wachs, 1982; Brazelton, 1986; Bick, 1968; Clarke & Clarke, 1978; Lichtenberg, 1983; Stern, 1985). Bowlby suggests that separation may have long-lasting effects on the sensitivity of brain receptors, leading to raised levels of anxiety (Van Der Kolk, 1987; Gabbard, 1992, in Holmes, 1993). According to Wirz (1990: 28) "the biological process and ties of the gestational period and of the process of pregnancy create a state of mother-infant unity and fusion" both on a physical and psychological level".

Bowlby (1980: 7) provides a framework within which it is possible to understand the human tendency " . . . to make strong affectional bonds with others and a way to understand the strong emotional reaction that occurs when these bonds are broken". He asserts that symbiosis entails "undifferentiated psychic fusion between mother and child" (1980: 8 – 9) and states that this is the basis upon which all other relationships are formed. According to Bowlby, " . . . there are good biological reasons for every separation to be responded to in an automatic, instinctive way . . . and the fact that losses are irretrievable is not taken into account; in the course of evolution instinctual equipment developed around the fact that losses are retrievable and behavioural responses that make up part of the grieving process are geared towards re-establishing a relationship with the lost object" (Bowlby 1980: 7 – 9). Although attachment theory departs from the emphasis of traditional psychoanalytic drive theory, Bowlby's focus on the early infant-parent ties is nevertheless consistent with contemporary psychoanalytic focus on pre-oedipal object relations (Bloom-Feschbach, 1994). Sroufe and Waters (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989) assert that the ultimate goal of attachment is not merely to maintain proximity to the primary caregiver, but also to achieve "felt security" through this relationship.

Mahler, Pine and Bergman (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989: 83) assert that one must first be firmly attached in order to fully separate and individuate, and further, that introjection of the parent is important in the formation of a stable self-image. The adoptee, faced with two sets of parents may, according to Pine and Bergman, experience difficulty in internalising the parental objects. One of the most difficult issues for the adoptee is how he is to separate from the object (birth

mother) when in reality he has never had the opportunity to attach and merge with her. The adoptee has, in all likelihood, internalised an image of the birth parent which is based on vague, uncertain hearsay; this internalisation nevertheless appears to exert a powerful magnetic attraction which is all the more strengthened by the “vacuum of information” with which the adoptee is faced (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989: 84).

From the above discussion it is clear that Psychoanalytic and Object Relations theory provides substantial argument for the existence of a unique and intense mother-infant bond which consists of both conscious and primitive, unconscious interconnections and interactions. In addition the literature supports the theory that a disturbance of these early, primitive ties will impact significantly on the development of the individual.

#### **2.2.4 GRIEF AND LOSS IN ADOPTION:**

The psychology of loss and separation is rooted in psychoanalytic theory and observation (Bloom-Fesbach, 1994: 8). However, whether the child is able to mourn in the same sense as the adult is somewhat controversial. Some, (cf Freud, 1960; Nagera, 1970), assert that children are incapable of mourning. This argument is based on the assertion that the complex ego functions involved in mourning are not yet sufficiently developed in young children, and that the developmental needs of children oppose the normal mourning process (Learner, in Frankiel, 1994). If this argument is to be accepted, it would seem that the infant who has experienced an early, pre-structural loss, such as adoption, having not grieved and mourned this loss, would need to do so at a later stage in order to come to terms with the loss. Learner notes, that in contrast to the disagreement regarding whether or not children are capable of experiencing mourning, there is however a general consensus that early loss of a parent is traumatic, and impacts significantly upon the formation of intra-psychic structures and emerging sense of self and other. He further notes that the younger the child, the more devastating the effects of the loss (Jacobson, 1964 and Loewald, 1978, in Frankiel, 1994). According to Marais (in Lendrum & Gabrielle, 1992: 393), “The loss of separation from a significant other is one of the most poignant and painful of human experiences”.

Lerner further asserts that early loss may result in a need for control, defensive use of compliance, yearning for a sense of belonging as well as a tendency to rediscover and symbolically reclaim the lost object (in Frankiel, 1994: 470 –471). Parks (1972) states that the experience of yearning, pining and emptiness is part of the mourning process.

According to Brinch (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989) some theorists assert that “telling a child of his adoption inflicts a psychological injury which cannot be mastered without certain inner, emotional and cognitive resources; resources which are not usually available to the child before the developmental period of latency”. This concurs with the view of Verrier who asserts that adoption inflicts upon the adoptee a narcissistic wound (Verrier, 1993). In contrast to those who approach reunion as psychopathological, there are a number of theorists whose views indicate that reunion is a healthy, transformative and creative experience. According to Bloom-Fesbach (1988: 3), “coping with loss is inextricably tied to creative transformation”. Mourning and grief may thus be seen to be a healthy, indeed creative process rather than being psycho-pathological in nature. Eisenstadt (in Frankiel 1994: 528) seems to echo this when he asserts that “The bereavement reaction can be an impetus for creative effort, a force for good . . . . In the creative mourning process there is a sequence of events whereby the loss triggers off a crisis requiring mastery on the part of the bereaved individual”. *The creative effort is seen as a restorative act.* Bollas (1987: 22) speaking of the adult's search for the transformational object states that it is a “somewhat manic search for *health*”.

Bowlby (in Holmes, 1993: 90- 91) “places the search for the lost object at the centre of the mourning process”, and asserts that the search is an attempt to recover the lost object. Freud however, saw the purpose of this mental search as that of detachment. In his paper *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), he argued that the loss of a loved object gives rise to feelings and behaviours, which are collectively referred to as mourning, and internalising or identifying with aspects of the lost object is part of the process of mourning (Freud, 1917). These psychological processes are always precipitated by the disruption of a precious attachment and leads to the relinquishment of the loved object. Furthermore, grief associated with mourning is not regarded as pathological. Freud states that

in *covert loss*, the individual cannot consciously perceive what it is that he has lost. “. . . *he knows whom he has lost, but not what he has lost in him*” (Freud, in Frankiel, 1984:40). According to Freud melancholic loss constitutes an “impoverishment of the ego on a grand scale”. In mourning, “it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself”. Engel (in Frankiel, 1994: 10 - 11) states that “*grief is a healthy, adaptive-and reparative process which corrects or overcomes a stress . . .*”. According to Simos (1979) loss always incorporates some degree of threat to our self-esteem, and an ungrieved loss remains alive in our unconscious which has no sense of time”. Tyson (in Frankiel, 1994: 273) asserts that when there is deprivation of a significant object prior to maturity, “*the structure of the personality is more vulnerable as the object is needed to supply experiences essential for normal growth and development*”. He further states that the pain of self-without-the-object “*threatens the constancy of the not yet stabilized sense of self, and a childhood loss of a significant object incorporates the loss of part of the self*”. Learner (in Frankiel, 1994: 478) notes that the symbolic reclaiming of the lost object creates the conditions whereby the object can be relinquished after completing the mourning process. Thahka (in Frankiel , 1994: 478) suggests that pre-structural object loss is experienced as a loss of the self-function rather than as the loss of a whole person. According to Joffe and Sandler (1965: 42) “*what was lost in object loss is ultimately a state of the self for which the object is a vehicle. When a child loses the mother he loses the sense of well-being that occurs as a result of that relationship*”. Thus, psychoanalytic and object relations theory emphasizes that a template emerges out of the caregiving relationships of early life, and that the psychological foundations of the individual rest upon this template, which shapes later interpersonal experiences, emotional well-being and responses to loss. Marais (in Lendrum & Gabrielle, 1992) states that “*grief works itself out through a process of reformulation rather than substitution*”. According to Brodzinsky (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989: 314), this reformulation is seen as “*finding one’s way back to what originally happened, taking a good, hard look at everything that happened, and coming to an understanding of the roles of everyone, including one’s self*”.

According to Bloom-Feschbach (1988: 28), “. . . response to separation exists at such a fundamental level of the entire personality organization that its influences can be discerned on many symbolic or disguised forms, all of which are responses to internal issues. Freud (in Strachey, 1964) asserts that the pain of loss is reduced through internalization of a part of the lost person. It thus seems that internal representation is a fundamental component of the individual's ability to adapt to the multitude of losses and separations which he is destined to endure throughout his life (Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989).

Klein (in Frankiel, 1994: 95 – 122) suggests that “the loss of a loved figure has a profound effect on the sense of well-being because the loss puts the internal object world into disarray. The pain of mourning is related to the collapse and rebuilding of the inner world and the restoration of an internal good object, which is the source of optimism and good feeling about self and the world”. Klein (in Frankiel, 1994: 95) further asserts that the process of normal mourning reinstates the “. . . sense of once again possessing the internal good object despite the loss of the external object . . .”. According to Klein (in Frankiel, 1994:95), through mourning, the individual “. . . overcomes his grief, regains security and achieves true harmony and peace”. The experiences of reunion would appear to simulate this process.

Haines and Timms (1985: 143) indicate that authors who explore the adoptee's loss of original name, knowledge, physical appearance and biological ties, “. . . tend to emphasize the psycho-pathological aspects and the necessity for the adoptee to undergo a period of grief and mourning for the past”. They further suggest that the loss inherent in adoption results in lacunae which impact significantly upon the adoptee. Similarly the correction of these lacunae will impact equally significantly. Klein, on the other hand, suggests grieving to be a normal process, which results in a sense of security and harmony, and provides the adoptee with a sense of completion and certainty (cf Manning, in Haines & Timms, 1994: 70 - 71). Manning asserts that “*adoptees become sort of psychological vagrants, with no particular ties to anyone. Since they are not rooted in natural relationships it is thought that there is no certainty about with whom they might align themselves; to natural or adoptive families, or perhaps to no one at all*”.

Nickman (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989: 72) distinguishes between the “overt loss” which the adoptee experiences as a result of separation from the birth mother, and the “covert losses” which have to do with the knowledge of having been relinquished rather than coming into the world as a wanted person. He suggests that the adoptee may be plagued by the pervasive fear that if loss could have happened once (in the form of separation from the biological mother), it might well happen again. This anxiety seems to surface when the adoptee contemplates searching, hence the reticence to “hurt’ or alienate ( risk losing) the adoptive parent.

The adoptee, like the grieving individual of Volkan and Josephthal (in Frankiel, 1994: 311) has unfinished business with the lost object, including “uncompleted intra-psychic processes”. Healing, according to Epstein (in Campbell, 1949) will be effected through the adoptee establishing a sense of ‘*coming into order*’, of wholeness or integration.

### **2.2.5 A CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOANALYTIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE ADOPTEE’S EXPERIENCE OF REUNION.**

The British Object Relations school, “ introduced a distinct body of non-traditional, psychoanalytic theory which contributed to our understanding of preoedipal phenomena” (Bloom-Fesbach, 1994: 8). Kernberg (in Bloom-Fesbach, 1994) integrates these theories into the mainstream of contemporary psychoanalytic ego psychology , while Stern (1985), integrates psychoanalytic theory and contemporary infant research, suggesting that, unlike the passive, tension-reduction seeking infant of traditional psychoanalytic theory, the infant is not only capable of differentiation, but indeed is differentiated from birth. He further suggests a state of merger in which the infant loses itself in the caregiver, in much the same way that lovers are merged in a state of oneness. He refers to this as the “*core-self need*”- an intersubjective union and a state of psychological unboundedness.

Verrier (1993) suggests that the interruption or severing of the primal mother- infant tie may result in the infant developing a lack of trust in the goodness and continuity of this environment and of himself. This concurs with the view expressed by Erikson

(1959: 165) that a healthy sense of identity is “a feeling of being at home in one’s own body, a sense of knowing where one came from. According to Verrier (1993: 153), adoption inflicts a narcissistic wound upon the adoptee, and “ searching is a critical means by which to heal the primal wound and calm the anxiety . . . “. The search may well be an attempt on the part of the adoptee to “confirm his own inherent goodness, and to reassure a birthmother fantasized as sharing the adoptee’s sense of loss” (Brodzinsky & Schechter. 1989:142). Verrier further asserts that reunion relationships which started off well may deteriorate and disintegrate. This is because while a symbiotic merger may be mimicked in the initial stages of the reunion relationship, the *souring* which often follows is perhaps a natural way of the adoptee achieving separation and differentiation. Verrier further suggests that in Erikson’s terms (1968), a failure to develop basic trust results in the development of self-reliance and compliance as well as in a disturbance of the infant’s very core, or sense of Self. Reunion constitutes a response to these forces and results in the possibility of the adoptee establishing a new sense of identity, of belonging, and of Self. Winnicott (1965) refers to this as a “True Self”. As the experiences and accompanying feelings of the adoptee stem from a pre- verbal period, it is no wonder that s/he has difficulty verbalizing the feelings and experiences of reunion. Verrier (1993: 184), suggests that as the infant lacked the security of the early symbiotic phase of life when his feelings were met “in a fluid symbiotic dance with the mother, he is left with a never-ending longing to have that experience”. David Richo (in Verrier, 1993: 185) states that “*Our problem is not that as children our needs were unmet, but that as adults they are still unmourned*”. According to Richo, when mourning an irretrievable loss we will be left with a feeling of something missing, a yearning for something unattained. Human beings, says Richo, are adaptable, but adaptation comes at a cost, especially when adaptation has begun at a preconscious and preverbal stage. Verrier sums up the mother-infant relationship as being “ so profound as to be mystical”, and according to her “The essence of core-being of a person” results in a sense of wholeness” (Verrier, 1983: 43).

In contrast to Mahler’s view of the infant as undifferentiated, merged in a symbiotic unity with the mother, and incapable of connection with the outside world, Kohut ( in Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983) views the infant as being communicative, cohesive, an active, eager learner, pre-wired and well-equipped for communications and interactions with the environment from the very beginning (Detrick & Detrick, 1989).

Infant research would seem to concur with this view of the newborn infant. Kohut submits that the "basic fault" results from a defect in the cohesiveness of the self. He defines the characteristics of the "*Real Self*" as "a sense of self-entitlement, continuity of self - the recognition that the "I" of one experience is continuous over time and related to the "I" of another experience; intimacy is the capacity to express the Self fully in a close relationship with minimal fear of abandonment or engulfment" (Kohut, in Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983: 354).

According to Fairbairn (in Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983), the early object relations of the infant are marked by a lack of differentiation. Gradually, in the context of this early mother-infant relationship, structuralization of the ego occurs. Fairbairn (in Wirz, 1990: 22) further avers that "where the natural, maturational sequence of emotional development is disturbed, internal fragmentation may result".

According to Winnicott (1965: 39), "There is no such thing as an infant . . . whenever one finds an infant, one finds maternal care, and without maternal care there would be no infant". Mother and infant form a unit which resembles closely the archaic self - self-object unit postulated by Kohut. Winnicott views the self as having an 'instinctive core', a potential personality or 'True Self'. Winnicott's infant starts out as *existing* rather than *reacting* (Winnicott, 1965: 148). He proposes that the infant develops from a state of absolute dependence on the mother to a state of individualization and personalization until he is defined as a distinct and original human being (Landman, 2000: 2). The maternal environment facilitates the developmental process. Through Primary Maternal Preoccupation the mother becomes attuned to her infant; this state of sensitivity is likened to a "primitive somatic identification" with her baby (Phillips, 1988). This attunement of mother to infant is vital to the development and emotional health of the infant. (Winnicott, 1965). Where the mother fails to achieve this state, a "False Self" is likely to result as the infant responds to impingements from the environment rather than to his own growth process (Winnicott, 1978). The False Self develops at the earliest stage of object relations and in the absence of "good-enough-mothering", and, may act as a caretaker and protector of the true self, thus resulting in feelings of emptiness, and a tendency to compliance (Winnicott, 1956). These are concepts commonly referred to by adoptees who seek reunion.

Where the mother is sufficiently attuned to her baby, the infant experiences the illusion of omnipotence, which Winnicott refers to as his inanimate, "Primary (psychic) Creativity" (Phillips, 1988:10). Winnicott asserts that the infant's emotional development is compromised where disillusionment occurs prematurely, at a stage when the infant is unable to cope with the transition from the symbiotic merger with mother to independence and separation. Such premature disillusionment results in premature independence, self-sufficiency, and the development of a "False Self" (Winnicott, in Newman, 1995). The mother, through her physical handling and through "holding" the infant in her mind provides the infant with the experience of "good-enough-mothering" which facilitates the integration of psyche and soma into a whole unit, a psychosomatic partnership, which enables the infant to anchor the "Self" into a physical body, and an integrated whole (Phillips, 1988). Where this containment has been successful, the infant is able to move between periods of *integration* and *unintegration* without experiencing the feeling that he is falling to pieces. Conversely, *disintegration* is, according to Winnicott, a terrifying feeling of "falling to pieces" or, of falling for ever, and an active production of chaos which, he proposes, occurs as a defense against *unintegration*, particularly where the mother has been unable to provide an adequate holding environment and sufficient ego support to facilitate *ego integration*. While the chaos of disintegration may be as terrifying as the unreliable environment, it is experienced as less frightening as it is felt to be under the infant's control (Winnicott, 1962). According to Winnicott the mother evokes the baby's existence through mirroring, and the mother gives back to the baby "the baby's own self" (Winnicott, in St. Claire, 1986: 76). Winnicott's infant might be seen to experience this as "When I look I am seen and so I exist" (1971: 114). According to Winnicott, a successful holding environment results in the infant feeling real. Good maternal care brings the infant into existence as a person, and through environmental provision and parental care that the infant's person becomes grounded in its own body, creating a body that provides a base for the ego. When this process fails, the infant is likely to experience a sense of being "out of touch with the self" (Winnicott, in St. Claire, 1986: 76), or depersonalized. It would seem that this echoes the experiences of the individual who experiences a premature severing of the primal mother-infant bond such as occurs in infant adoption.

Freud (1961) viewed the newborn infant as driven by instincts while relationships are seen as developing in the course of satisfying the instincts. Klein's (in Segal, 1979)

theory maintains that the infant is capable of relating to others from a very early age and that relationships with others are of primary importance. In Klein's view an internal mental structure is formed throughout early development via a series of experiences with others and through the process of introjection. The infant's first and earliest experiences are usually with the mother and thus she is usually the first internal object that is formed. According to Klein (Segal, 1979: 162) "object relations are the center of emotional life" and the ego exists from the beginning of post-natal life and is able to perform the basic mental processes of projection and introjection (Klein 1957:61). In her view there is an innate urge within the infant to relate and attach itself to the mother and this is a motivating force in human development. Stern (in Holmes, 1993: 7) states that "Klein was right in her emphasis on the early weeks and months of life – there is abundant evidence of psychic life from the moment of birth". Klein's infant develops his sense of self within the context of dependency upon an other and the sense of self which results will therefore bear the indelible imprint of this caregiving (Klein , 1995: 7-8). Klein asserts that the "earliest awareness of a sense of being", is the first step towards establishing a sense of identity and a cohesive, coherent sense of self. It is not "a sense of *who* I am but *that* I am (Morrison, 1986: 149).

Bollas (1987) examines the infant's experience of his first object relation, namely the mother, whom he refers to as a transformational object. He asserts that "the adult's search for transformation constitutes in some respects a memory of this early relationship", a relationship which was the very "essence of life before words existed" ( Bollas, 1987: 32). His views echo various aspects of the theorists previously discussed in this section. According to Bollas (1987), aesthetic experience echoes this early relationship which is registered through an experience of being, rather than cognitively. He refers to this aesthetic moment as the "*unthought known*" and asserts that, "*it is an existential recollection of the time when communication took place primarily through this illusion of deep rapport of subject and object*" (1987: 32). According to Bollas the infant takes in not only the content but also the form of the mother's communications. The mother conveys her form through her handling of the infant, and it is this "*facilitating environment*", which constitutes "*good-enough-mothering*", and which ensures that a "*continuity of being*" is maintained (Winnicott, 1965). According to Bollas (1987: 34) "transformation-object seeking is an endless memorial search for something in the future that resides in the past " his words seem

to portray the essence of the adoptee's search for reunion with the primary object, the birth mother " The subject is seeking the transformational object and aspiring to be matched in symbiotic harmony within an aesthetic frame that promises to metamorphose the self " (Bollas, 1987: 40). Bollas (1987: 14) further states that "As the mother helps to integrate the infant's being . . . the rhythms of this process . . . inform the nature of this 'object' relation . . . ". Furthermore, he asserts that the memories of this early object relation are transformational as the mother, who is not initially identified as a separate other, is experienced by the infant as a "process of transformation". Bollas contends that these transformational memories live on in adult life and furthermore, that the adult's quest is not to possess the object, but rather to "surrender to it as a medium that alters the self" (Bollas, 1987: 14). Following on from this, he asserts that the adult's search for the transformational object is an attempt to recollect an early object relationship, and to remember "not cognitively but existentially - through intense affective experience – a relationship which was identified with cumulative transformational experiences of the self" (Bollas, 1987: 17).

#### **SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER:**

This chapter presented an overview of the literature on adoption, attachment, infant research, and childhood grief and loss. Psychoanalytic, and more precisely, Object Relations theory has been explored in order to ascertain what it contributes to the understanding of post-adoption reunion. The following chapter will discuss the design and methodology employed in this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY:**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION:**

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology employed in the study. Sampling method, data collection, reliability, limitations of the research, and research ethics are examined.

### **3.2 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY:**

This study will be conducted from within a non-probability framework. Aspects of quota, purposive, snowball and availability sampling will be used. The dominant-less-dominant model of Creswell, as outlined in De Vos (2001) will be employed. In keeping with this approach, “. . . the researcher presents the study within a single, dominant paradigm with one small component of the overall study drawn from the alternative paradigm” (De Vos, 2001: 360). A combination of qualitative and quantitative research will provide insights into the subjective experiences of adoptees as well as objective data regarding adoption and reunion. This combination of research methods will allow the researcher to present the study within a single dominant paradigm (qualitative) with the less dominant (quantitative) paradigm providing a small proportion of the study. According to De Vos, the advantage of this approach is that it “. . . *presents a consistent paradigm picture in the study and still gathers limited information to probe in detail one aspect of the study*” (De Vos, 2001: 361). This research constitutes an empirical, ethnographic study and, accordingly, is predominantly a qualitative, inductive approach, which is exploratory and descriptive in nature. The qualitative approach lends itself best to the subject under examination. In addition “*Qualitative data provides the researcher with rich information about the social processes in a specific setting*” (Neuman, 2000: 124). In contrast, the quantitative aspect of the research is a sub-dominant aspect of the study and will be used to add width to the in-depth, qualitative data. It will constitute a content analysis of existing documents on post-adoption reunion. The combination of methods ensures that a variety of data gathering and sampling techniques will be employed; this provides methodological and data triangulation, which will

enhance the validity and reliability of the study. It further ensures a degree of objectivity, while at the same time preventing the sensitive human experiences related to adoption from being translated and understood simply in terms of cold numbers and statistics.

The qualitative researcher, according to Neuman (2000: 158), “. . . *interprets data by giving them meaning, translating them, or making them understandable. However, the meaning he or she gives begins with the point of view of the people being studied. He or she interprets the data by finding out how the people being studied see the world, how they define the situation, or what it means for them*”. The aim of such research is to understand the meaning of the data from the inside perspective of the people being studied. In the context of this study, it will provide a thick, in-depth description of the adoptee's experiences of reunion. According to De Vos (2001), this method of research seeks to understand phenomena rather than to control and quantify them. Unlike quantitative research it does not concentrate on precise measurement of variables or testing of hypotheses, but rather on an exploration and description of the experiences of the individual subjects included in the sample. Data gathered from the qualitative aspect of this study will be presented in the form of themes, categories, words and quotes obtained from the in-depth interviews that are to be conducted with adoptees.

The secondary, quantitative aspect of the research is the exploration and assessment of data noted in the Adoption Register. The quantitative paradigm takes the form of a study of the existing data documented in the post adoption register kept at the Adoption Centre between 1989 and 1995. It explores and describes, as well as quantifying the various aspects of post-adoption searches conducted through the Centre over a seven year period. Quantitative research methodologies, according to Leedy (in De Vos, 2001) deal chiefly with numerical data. Mouton and Marais (in De Vos, 2001) state that the procedures used in quantitative research are more formal and well controlled than qualitative research. Quantitative data will be presented in the form of tables and figures, and will be used to place the data obtained in the qualitative aspect of this study within a broader context. Content analysis allows the researcher to “probe into and discover content in a different way from the ordinary way of reading a

book . . . he or she can reveal aspects of the text's content that are difficult to see. Content analysis can document – in objective, quantitative terms – whether one's vague feelings based on unsystematic observation are true. It yields repeatable, precise results about the text" (Neuman, 2000: 203). The adoption register provides a secondary data source and the content analysis will constitute an analysis of data previously gathered by other professionals. According to Neuman (2000: 305), this method "is relatively inexpensive, facilitates replication and permits questions not originally thought about by the original researcher".

According to Neuman (2000), "*The aim of quantitative research is to objectify and measure . . .*" . Reid and Smith (in De Vos, 2001:15) state that the quantitative researcher's role . . . *is that of the objective observer . . . . Data collectors are to avoid adding their own impressions or interpretations*". De Vos further states that "The quantitative paradigm is based on positivism which takes scientific explanation to be nomothetic ( based on universal laws). It's main aims are to objectively measure the social world, to test hypotheses and to predict and control human behaviour". This aspect of the research will enable the researcher to ascertain whether there is any correlation between different aspects of the adoption and reunion experience. The quantitative data obtained in this study can more readily be generalized to the wider population.

A non-empirical aspect of this study is the analysis of the word and concept "successful" as used to refer to adoption and reunion experiences. According to De Vos (2001: 45) non-empirical research studies refer to "the analysis of the meanings of words or concepts through clarification and elaboration of the different dimensions of meanings". The use of non-empirical research will ensure clarity of the concept of "success" upon which much of the research is based. This facet of the research has been approached by discussing, clarifying and elaborating the dimensions of the concept during the in-depth interviews and survey of data from the adoption register.

### **3.3 REASONS FOR SELECTING THE PARTICULAR TYPE OF STUDY:**

The exploratory and descriptive nature of qualitative research makes it flexible, open to change, and allows a detailed illumination of the topic, as well as allowing new research questions to be identified as the research progresses. It is, furthermore, open to discovery and creativity, as well as enabling the researcher to organize a large quantity of data, such as will be obtained from the in depth interviews and the adoption register, into a coherent picture.

The use of inductive research enables the building up of theory from data as it is collected in the course of the research. This is important as such grounded research makes allowances for the fact that this particular area has, to date, received little attention in the South African context, and thus the research will be developing as it is conducted. This approach allows the researcher to capture, understand and portray the richness and diversity, complexities and similarities noted in the experiences of the adoptees who will be interviewed. The study aims to provide the adoptee with 'a voice', which will hopefully constitute a therapeutic gain, through the use of narratives, for the adoptees participating in the research.

### **3.4 SAMPLING:**

The study sample is derived from adoptees who have had contact either directly, or indirectly, with the researcher or Adoption Centre over the past 2 years. As the researcher is not able to access or trace all adoptees represented in the period under review, random sampling cannot be employed. According to De Vos (2001: 193) "*Often it is impossible to identify, contact and study the entire relevant population*". In the case of adoption this is indeed true. Adoptees are a 'hidden' population, and it is difficult to trace and contact them after they end contact with an agency or social worker. In the case of female clients the difficulty is greatly increased by the fact that the surname of the individual changes if and when they marry.

The qualitative research will use aspects of convenience, purposive and quota sampling and will focus on collecting a small sample of particular cases, which

will serve to clarify and deepen the researcher's understanding of the topic under investigation. The use of purposive, and quota sampling will ensure a percentage of representivity. The use of these sampling methods will enable the researcher to apply her knowledge as an expert in the field of adoption, and thus to select a sample from a specialized population that is largely hidden, widely dispersed and difficult to reach (Neuman, 2000).

The cohort to be used in the quantitative aspect of the research consists of a sample of 207 adoption contacts documented in the post adoption register of the Adoption Centre. While all entries in the register will be included in the research, considering the universe of the total population of post adoption contacts in South Africa, the small section of contacts made during a specific time period and at a particular agency indicates that this constitutes a non-probability sample.

According to Kerlinger (in De Vos, 2001: 246), representivity means that the sample " . . . should have approximately the characteristics of the population relevant to the research in question". Representivity will be achieved in this sample through including both male and female subjects, adoptees of different ages (at the time of contact), at least one respondent who initiated tracing themselves, and one who made contact after being approached to do so. Both subjects who traced without, and together with assistance from a social worker, will be included in the sample. Purposive sampling is, according to Singelton, Straits, Straits & Mc Allister (in De Vos, 2001: 198) " . . . based on the judgement of the researcher, in that a sample is composed of elements which contain the most characteristic, representative or typical attributes of the population". Similarly quota sampling will enable the researcher to draw a sample that closely replicates the population being studied. As a limited number of cases have been used, and include all the known elements represented in the population, a multi-dimensional form of quota sampling will have been employed in this study.

The cohort analysis of the quantitative research is specifically macroanalytic. This means that the researcher will examine the category as a whole for important features. The use of eight in-depth case studies will enable the researcher to "connect the micro level or actions of individual people, to the

macro level, or large scale social structures and processes” (Vaughn, in Neuman, 2000: 391 - 392). Although the size of the sample is limited, this is acceptable practice for qualitative research as such studies aim to investigate in detail and depth the experiences of a small number of subjects (Neuman, 2000; De Vos, 2001; Mouton, 2001).

#### **3.4.1 Sample collection:**

Initially, attempts were made to trace all individuals who made post adoption contact with the Adoption Centre between 1989 and 2001. As this proved impossible, subjects will be limited to individuals who have maintained or had contact with the researcher or Adoption Centre during the past 2 years.

Colleagues, professionals and members of the adoption triad with whom the researcher has contact will be informed of the research, and requested to refer suitable cases to the researcher. The details of individuals referred will be documented until individuals who meet the above criteria are represented. Subjects will then be approached to participate in the study, and the purpose of the research explained to them. As there is a likelihood that not all subjects approached will be willing to be included, and as some may decided not to continue to participate after initially agreeing to do so, the researcher will attempt to identify at least 10 potential adoptees, with the hope that 6 – 8 of these individuals will go ahead with the interviews.

All cases noted in the post adoption register will be included in the quantitative sample of this research. The entries of the register will be perused to ascertain types of information documented. Themes and categories of information will then be identified before being coded and quantified across all entries in the register. A manual system of coding will be employed, and numbers and details will then be computerized and converted into graphs and charts. The researcher will re-examine the categories to establish links and similarities as well as differences between categories. Markoff and colleagues

(in Neuman, 2000: 293) state that “textual coding might be a better name than content analysis . . . . The emphasis here is on quantitative data about a text’s content”.

### **3.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH:**

#### **3.5.1 Limitations of the sampling strategy:**

The population from which the sample will be drawn is small and limited. The small sample size means that findings cannot be generalized to the wider population. The sample is also limited as it includes only adoptees who have had contact with the Adoption Centre. As already stated, the research relates only to the view and experiences of one member of the adoption triad and more precisely to a section of this group. (the adoptee who has been reunited with the birth mother). It should, however be noted that this is an accepted limitation of qualitative research (Neuman 2000).

#### **3.5.2 Limitations of qualitative and quantitative research:**

Disadvantages of the qualitative, descriptive and exploratory research are that it lends itself to unnecessary and irrelevant details being included. Different degrees of detail may be given by different participants, and a greater amount of time and effort may be required both on the part of respondents (to narrate their story in detail) and the researcher ( to code and analyze data). It has been the experience of the researcher that individuals, involved in adoption, often prefer to speak to about their experiences on an individual basis. Individual sessions will thus be required for the sake of confidentiality of participants and in view of the sensitivity of the topic. This excludes the use of focus groups and richness and variety, which such groups might have brought about.

The measures to be used in this research study have been largely interpretive. The oral history of each participant, the study and interpretation of their memory and experience of events and emotional impact are all

important measures of the effects and value of post-adoption reunion. The difficulty related to this kind of research lies in how to record, analyse and interpret the (hi)stories of the participants, as qualitative data gathering and analysis lack standardization of measurement. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, it is not possible to ensure that respondents remain specifically focused on the topic; qualitative research will thus be time consuming. In addition, subjects may require ongoing support and counselling for a period of time after the research interviews are concluded.

While the quantitative aspect of the design will provide a form of triangulation and added breadth to the in-depth information of the individual interviews, it should be remembered that this sample is of limited size, compared to the general population of adoptees who make post adoption enquiries. The quantitative sample has been drawn from enquiries made only at the Cape Town Adoption Centre, which is only one of a number of organizations which offer post adoption services in this country.

### **3.5.3 Limitations of data collection methods:**

The use of secondary data (adoption register) does not allow the researcher to control or check for errors in collection of the original data. A further limitation is the use of the term "successful" as used by adoptees in describing both adoption and reunion. In order to redress this limitation, the interview schedule (see appendix B:VI) will address the definition of the term successful. The researcher will also watch for indirect cues in the interviews, which may further elucidate the meaning of the term for adoptees.

### **3.5.4 Limitations of the researcher:**

The researcher is both an adoptee and an adoption practitioner. This lends itself to the possibility of bias and lack of objectivity on the part of the researcher. In order to counter - balance any possibility of this, the researcher will employ the assistance of an objective consultant who has many years of experience in post adoption work and who is not herself a member of the adoption triangle. A second supervisor who has no vested

interest in the field of adoption work will also be consulted during the analysis of data. These limitations are also advantageous in that they make it possible to gain access to a difficult to reach population, and furthermore provide the researcher with a knowledge and understanding of the terminology, concepts and processes inherent in adoption. The researcher is keenly aware of the need to employ reflexivity in the course of this research study in order to ensure that she is objective and avoids researcher bias.

### **3.6 DATA COLLECTION:**

3.6.1 Quantitative data will be obtained through the content analysis of the adoption register. Existing categories of information noted in the register will be used. The researcher will quantify the information in the register according to the existing categories. Thereafter the information will be computerized and represented in the form of graphs and tables, which will assist in clarifying the relevance of these figures and categories. The categories will then be examined and compared in order to establish links, create new categories and identify missing values, should these exist. The researcher will focus on the register entries for those adoptees who sought reunion. It is beyond the scope of this study to collect and investigate data relating to adoptees who did not seek reunion and thus it is also not possible to make a comparative study of adoptees who seek reunion and those who do not continue beyond the initial post adoption enquiry.

3.6.2 Data relating to the qualitative aspect of the study will be obtained from in-depth interviews which will be semi-structured in format. The researcher's knowledge and experience of facilitating and observing adoption reunions will provide additional data. The interviews will be conducted in the researcher's counselling room, which will provide a private and safe environment for the adoptees, who will be recalling deeply emotional and, at times traumatic experiences and emotions. The containment of the adoptees, via the environment and through the "emotional holding" and counselling which the researcher will provide is an important aspect of the research. This will ensure that subjects are restored to a state of emotional equilibrium after the research has been conducted. It will also ensure that adoptees do not feel

exposed to Adoption centre staff when they are interviewed and that the identity of the final sample of adoptees, who participate in the research remains confidential. This is important in order to ensure that adoptees feel able to speak freely during their interviews. The semi-structured interviews will be conducted in the following manner.

- i. The adoptee will be briefly introduced to the aim of the research study and to what is required of them in the interview. The introductory remarks are included in the final appendix (see appendix E: XXX).
- ii. Consent will be requested from each adoptee for the tape recording of the interview.
- iii. Adoptees will be allowed to “narrate their (hi)story” in their own way and at their own pace. This will be allowed to proceed with as little direction from the researcher as possible. Comments and remarks used at this stage of the interview will be used only to encourage adoptees to tell their story and not to “investigate” the topic.
- iv. Once adoptees have completed their narrative, the researcher will employ an interview schedule in order to ensure that all subjects provide a bank of basic information regarding the topic under review. The interview schedule will allow an opportunity for the researcher to investigate the adoptee’s experiences and feelings of reunion in more depth. By making use of the interview schedule after the adoptees have narrated their (hi)story.
- v. Adoptees will be given the opportunity to ask questions or add further comments after the interview schedule is completed.
- vi. The researcher will do an “emotional check” with each adoptee at the end of the interview session in order to ascertain how they experienced the interview. This is important, since one of the aims of the research is to provide adoptees with a therapeutic opportunity through the telling and “re-storying” of their (hi)stories.
- vii. All adoptees interviewed will be informed that the researcher is available for counselling, without cost, should they require further containment or assistance within the six months following the research interviews.

By ensuring that adoptees are able to tell their respective stories before the interview schedule is introduced, the researcher hopes to minimize bias, and

prevent the development of preconceived ideas regarding what should be discussed during the interview. The researcher will, after a brief explanation as to why it is required, request the consent of each adoptee to record the interview. These recordings will be transcribed for use during data analysis. During the interviews the researcher will make only brief notes. This will ensure that she is able to observe and be aware of the adoptees' reactions to the subject, and to the emotional content of their responses and observations, as well as being able to note body language and nuances of behaviour, tone of voice and facial expressions which will not be noted on audio tapes. In addition to this, detailed notes will be recorded immediately after each interview. These will provide another form of triangulation, which will increase the validity and reliability of the data collected in the qualitative aspect of the study.

The flexible and less structured nature of qualitative research will permit the researcher to tailor each interview to the individual needs and situation of the adoptees. As the qualitative researcher is able to express interest and to enter into the situation the subjects can be encouraged to collaborate and to elaborate. This approach also enables the subjects to determine the pace of the interviews, which is important in view of the sensitive nature of the topic being studied, and in view of the fact that the researcher aims to provide a therapeutic experience through enabling the subjects to re-story their reunion experiences through the narratives which they share during the course of the interviews.

### **3.7 RELIABILITY :**

Qualitative researchers are, according to Neuman (2000: 171) “. . . less concerned with trying to match an abstract concept to empirical data, and more concerned with giving a candid portrayal of social life that is true to the experience of people being studied”. This research employed a pilot study, which served to test the questionnaire and refine the approach to be used in the interviews with adoptees. Triangulation will be employed throughout the study wherever possible in order to improve the validity of the study. Data collected in

the course of the research will be compared to other research studies and existing literature on the subject. As has already been noted the outcome of this study is not able to be generalized to the wider population. The reliability and validity of the study is thus limited to the sample used. The use of secondary data in the content analysis limits the reliability and validity of the study as there is no means of ascertaining the accuracy of the data entered in the adoption register. Neuman (2000: 308) states that problems may arise in respect of data used in a content analysis as “. . . the researcher lacks control over how information is collected . . . . Systematic errors in collecting the initial information . . . reduce measurement validity”. There may well be gaps in the data and the researcher will not be able to correct these. The researcher will strive to ensure reflexivity in the study. This is perhaps all the more important in view of her personal and professional involvement in the field of adoption.

### **3.8 RESEARCH ETHICS :**

According to De Vos (2001: 23), “ The final responsibility for ethical conduct rests squarely with the researcher concerned ”. De Vos notes a number of ethical issues, which the researcher should consider; these are discussed below.

- i. Harm to experimental subjects: According to De Vos harm to experimental subjects is usually of an emotional nature in the context of the social sciences. This is indeed true in the present study where the possibility of emotional harm to respondents must be guarded against in view of the sensitive nature of the topic under investigation.
- ii. Informed consent: Respondents will be fully informed as to the nature and aim of the research, the advantages and possible disadvantages of participation, and the procedures which will be followed during the investigation. Consent will be requested from each respondent for the tape recording of the interviews and the perusal of adoption files where applicable.
- iii. Confidentiality: This is particularly important when working with adoption. Respondents will be assured that their responses and comments will remain

strictly confidential and that identifying details will not be divulged, particularly to other adoption professionals. In view of the fact that information elicited in the process of the individual interviews is particularly sensitive and, at times traumatic, the transcripts of interviews will not be included in the appendix. This is particularly important as adoption professionals may identify the details of individuals through the content of the transcripts.

- iv. Deception of subjects: No form of deception will be employed in this study. Adoption, by its very nature, encompasses a degree of deception, and is an issue of central concern to most adoptees. In view of this, it is particularly important that deception of respondents is avoided in this study.
- v. Actions and competence of the researcher: De Vos (2001: 30) states that "Researchers are ethically obliged to ensure that they are competent and adequately skilled to undertake the proposed investigation. When sensitive investigations are involved this is even more important". The researcher will employ her professional and therapeutic experience and knowledge to ensure that the investigation is not harmful to respondents, and that it provides a valuable, therapeutic experience for adoptees who participated in the study.
- vi. Issues of power: This is of particular importance in this study as it is the researcher's contention that the adoptee is the most dis-empowered member of the adoption triad and it is therefore important that adoptees are not further dis-empowered through participation in this study. To this end, it is important that adoptees are able to narrate their (hi)story in their own way and time and that the researcher not simply use subjects to obtain data required for this study. The re-authoring of one's history is an empowering and healing experience, and this aspect of the interviews will require time and sensitivity on the part of the researcher.
- vii. Cooperation with collaborators: There is a limited body of information on adoption within the South African context. The researcher will thus seek the assistance of other adoption professionals in drawing together a body of information regarding South African adoption. Credit will be given for the cooperation and assistance of these professionals.

- viii. Release of Findings: A copy of findings will be made available to adoption professionals, Cape Town Child Welfare, and to respondents who request this.
  
- ix. Reflexivity: This will be particularly important in this study in view of the researcher's personal and professional interest in adoption. Throughout the study the researcher will reflect on her actions, thoughts and motivations in order to avoid researcher bias and to ensure objectivity. The assistance of a clinical and adoption consultant will further ensure reflexivity.

### **SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER:**

Chapter Three outlined the research design and methodology employed in this study. Sampling method, data collection and research ethics have been examined. The discussion of research ethics is particularly salient in view of the sensitive nature of adoption. As the adoptee has been the most dis-empowered member of the adoption triad, the researcher will strive to ensure that this is not repeated in their experience of this research study.

The following chapter will address the analysis of the data.

## **CHAPTER FOUR : DATA ANALYSIS: RESULTS AND MEASUREMENT:**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION:**

This chapter discusses the analysis of the data gathered in the course of this study, and outlines the steps followed in analysing the data. The quantitative and qualitative data are set out and discussed and the themes emerging from the data are highlighted.

### **4.2 DISCUSSION OF DATA ANALYSIS:**

The measures used in this research study are largely interpretive. The oral history of each participant, interpretation of their memory of events and the emotional significance thereof are important measures of how post-adoption contact has been experienced and why reunion was sought. The analysis of data followed the approach described by Rubin and Rubin (in Mouton, 2000: 198). "Data analysis begins while the interviews are still underway. The preliminary analysis tells you how to redesign your questions to focus in on central themes as you continue interviewing". Analysis of data commenced with the first interview and continued throughout the study. Morse (cited in de Vos, 2001: 340) states that ". . . creative and solid data analysis requires from the researcher a relentless search for answers, active observation and accurate recall. It is a process of fitting data together, making the invisible obvious and linking and attributing consequences". Neuman (2000) states that the researcher creates a sense of order out of the data that has been collected through two simultaneously occurring activities. The first of these is the "mechanical reduction" of the data; the second is the analysis and categorization of data into themes. Through coding, the data is reduced to manageable sections of information. A good thematic code will, according to Neuman (2000), capture the qualitative richness of the phenomenon being studied. The final data analysis commences with categorization of themes and concepts; this is followed by a comparison across categories, and is aimed at discovering similarities, connections, and variations in the themes. The themes are then integrated into an accurate and detailed interpretation of the data. (Mouton, 2001: 198 – 199). The approach put forward by Tesch (in De Vos, 2001: 343), was utilized in the analysis of qualitative data.

#### **4.3 THE FOLLOWING STEPS WERE UNDERTAKEN, ACCORDING TO TESCH'S PROCESS OF ANALYSIS:**

- Tape recordings of interviews were transcribed.
- In the first step of the analysis, the researcher carefully read through each of the transcripts a number of times in order to become familiar with the contents and to obtain "a sense of the whole" (De Vos, 2001). Brief notes were made in the margins as the transcripts were read.
- In the second step of the analysis the researcher selected and read each interview / transcript in turn, according to the order in which interviews had been conducted. The researcher then sought to identify the contents of each interview and to understand and identify the underlying meanings in the data.
- Further thoughts regarding the material were then noted down in detail, in the margins of the transcripts as well as separately.
- In the third step of the analysis, the researcher returned to the data in order to code the various topics; these were noted in writing, in the margins of the transcripts. Topics were also coded by using coloured pencils and highlighters, using a separate colour for each category or theme that had been identified. Once all the transcripts had been read, a list of the topics contained in the data was drawn up. The scheme of data organization was then checked in order to note whether any further categories might emerge. The assistance of a non-adoption, clinical practitioner was employed at this stage of the analysis; two additional categories were added as a result of the further perusal of the transcripts.
- The identified topics and themes were labelled, and were then further reduced by being grouped into related categories. A list of these categories was drawn up, and the inter-relationships between the various categories noted. This aided the development of the researcher's thoughts and theory regarding the reasons why reunion might be sought as well as the possible impact of reunion upon the adoptee. At this stage the final abbreviation for each code was established. Data from each category was then collected and a preliminary analysis undertaken. Once completed, the final data was recorded and analysed.

#### 4.4 QUANTITATIVE DATA OBTAINED FROM THE ADOPTION REGISTER:

A detailed outline of data regarding the 207 contacts in the adoption register is included below (see tables 1 – 6). Attempts to trace and contact adoptees involved in past reunions proved extremely difficult, time consuming and expensive. Thus it was decided to use the information provided in the adoption register-over the 6 year period that it was kept. While this is useful, it must be noted that the information is limited. The data indicates that “unsuccessful” or discontinued contact, in the majority of cases, occurs within the first two years after reunion, and in many instances sooner.

<b>Total number of enquiries made.</b>	207
Number of birth mothers who were deceased before contact could be established .	5
<b><u>Unsuccessful attempts at contact</u></b>	40
<b><u>Successful attempts at contact</u></b>	44
<b><u>Unsuccessful attempts at contact</u></b>	<b>40</b>
BM agreed to meet but never did so	1
Adoptee traced on her own	1
Adoptee backed out before meeting	1
BM Unable to be traced	2
BM refused contact	17
Could not be traced	18

<b>KEY:</b>
BM – birth mother
MF – birth father
AP – adoptive parent
AM – adoptive mother
AF – adoptive father

n = 207 enquiries noted in the adoption register.
---

<b><u>Contacts successfully established</u></b>	<b>44</b>
Contacts initially rated successful	36
Contacts initially rated unsuccessful	8
Rated "successful" initially, but later discontinued.	14
Relationship "sourred" after initial contact & ended	1
Ended as both parties found contact unsatisfactory	1
"Fizzled out"	1
	17
Contacts thus rated "Unsuccessful" after initially being rated "successful".	
Contacts rated unsuccessful & discontinued	26
Ultimately "successful"	19
Initial enquiries which did not proceed to search	72
Contact initiated by birth parent	2
Other family members traced but not birth mother	11
Contact made via letters and / or photos	10
Adoptee met but did not pursue contact after initial meeting	1

n = 207 contacts noted in the adoption register.

<b><u>Adoptions rated successful</u></b>	<b>113</b>
Adoptions rated fairly successful	32
Adoptee told about adoption at a young age	107
Adoptee never told about adoption	12
Friend or other told adoptee about their adoption	4
Adoptees told as adults	2
Adoptee told in early 20's	3
Adoptee told in teens	5
Told between 6 and 12 years	4

n – 207 entries noted in the adoption register

<b><u>Adoptions rated unsuccessful</u></b>	<b>94</b>
Told at a young age	25
Never told	1
Told at age 6 years	1
Told at age 8 years	1
Told at age 13 years	1
Adoptions rated "not very successful"	17
Told at "young age"	13
Told by someone other than the adoptive parents	1
Discovered as an adolescent	1
At ages 6,7,12 & 17 years	1 each
Adoptions rated a disaster	2
Told at young age	2

n = 207 contacts noted in the adoption register.

**Of 207 contacts established:**

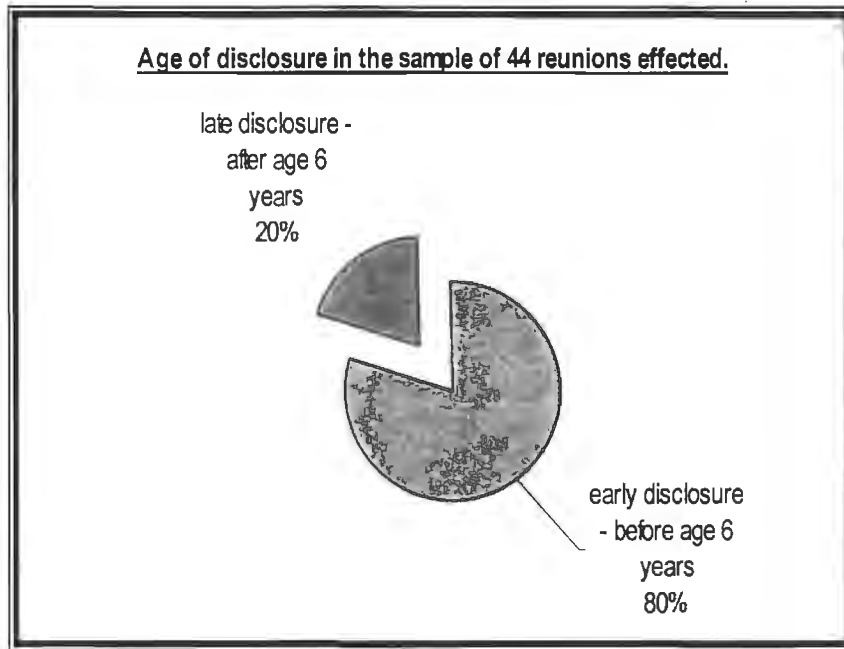
5	Adoptive parents were already deceased
70	Adoptive parents were not informed of the process
51	Adoptive parents informed but not supportive
2	Adoptive parents were confronted by the adoptee regarding never having been informed about their adoptive status
4	Adoptees no longer had contact with the adoptive parents
3	Adoptees had poor relationships with adoptive parents
22	Adoptees said they never discussed adoption with the adoptive parents
24	Adoptive parents were divorced
3	Adoptive fathers were reported to have problems with alcohol abuse
6	Adoptees stated as having emotional or behavioural problems
3	Birth mothers stated as being emotionally unstable

n = 207 contacts noted in the adoption register.

A total of 35 out of 44 adoptees (80%), who went on to establish reunion had been informed of their adoptive status at a young age. This comprises 14% of the total sample of 207 adoptees (see Figure 1). Of the 94 adoptions that were rated unsuccessful, 32% indicated that disclosure occurred at a young age. Non-disclosure of adoption was noted in 9% (21cases) of the total of 207 adoptions. The data indicates that, in 12% of adoptions rated successful, disclosure had not occurred. From the 207 entries in the adoption register, 2 adoptees developed

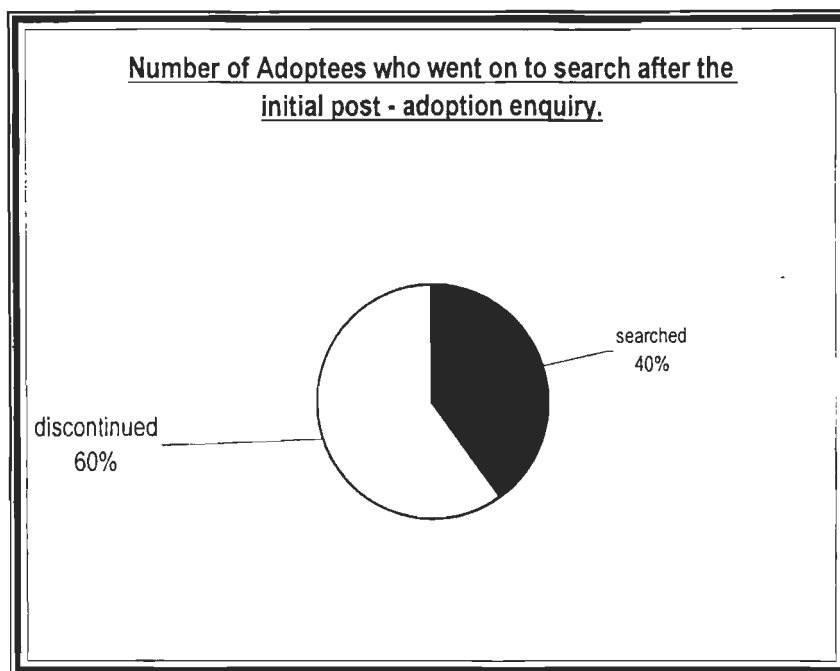
“unhealthy relationships” with the birth mother, and both had moved in to live with her. In both cases the adoptions were rated as unhappy and unsuccessful. The majority of post adoption enquiries did not proceed beyond initial information seeking. A total of 60% of adoptees did not continue beyond enquiry, while 40% of adoptees went on to search. (see Figure 2).

**Figure 1**



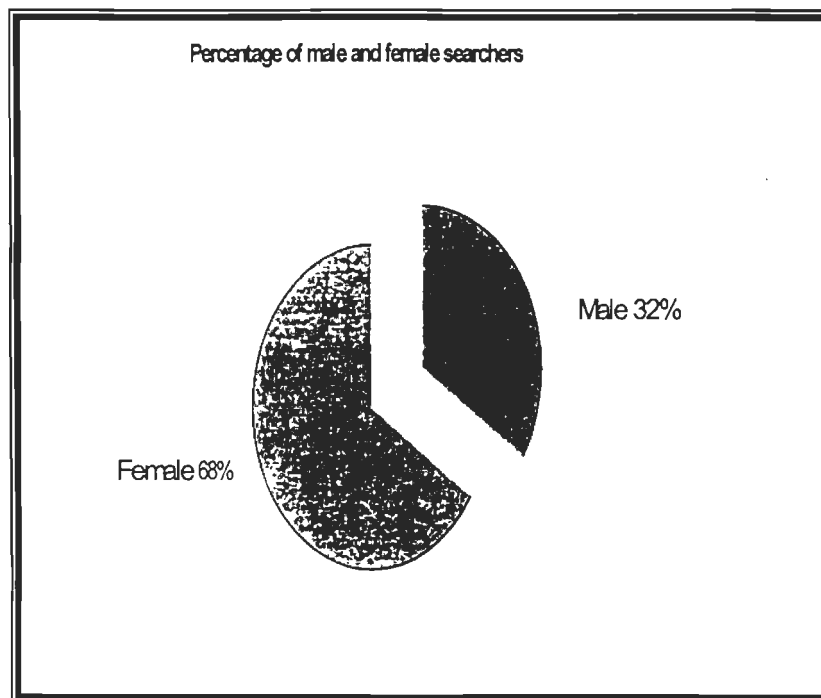
n = 44 reunion contacts established from the 207 post adoption enquiry noted in the adoption register.

**Figure 2**



n = 207 contacts noted in the adoption register.

**Figure 3**

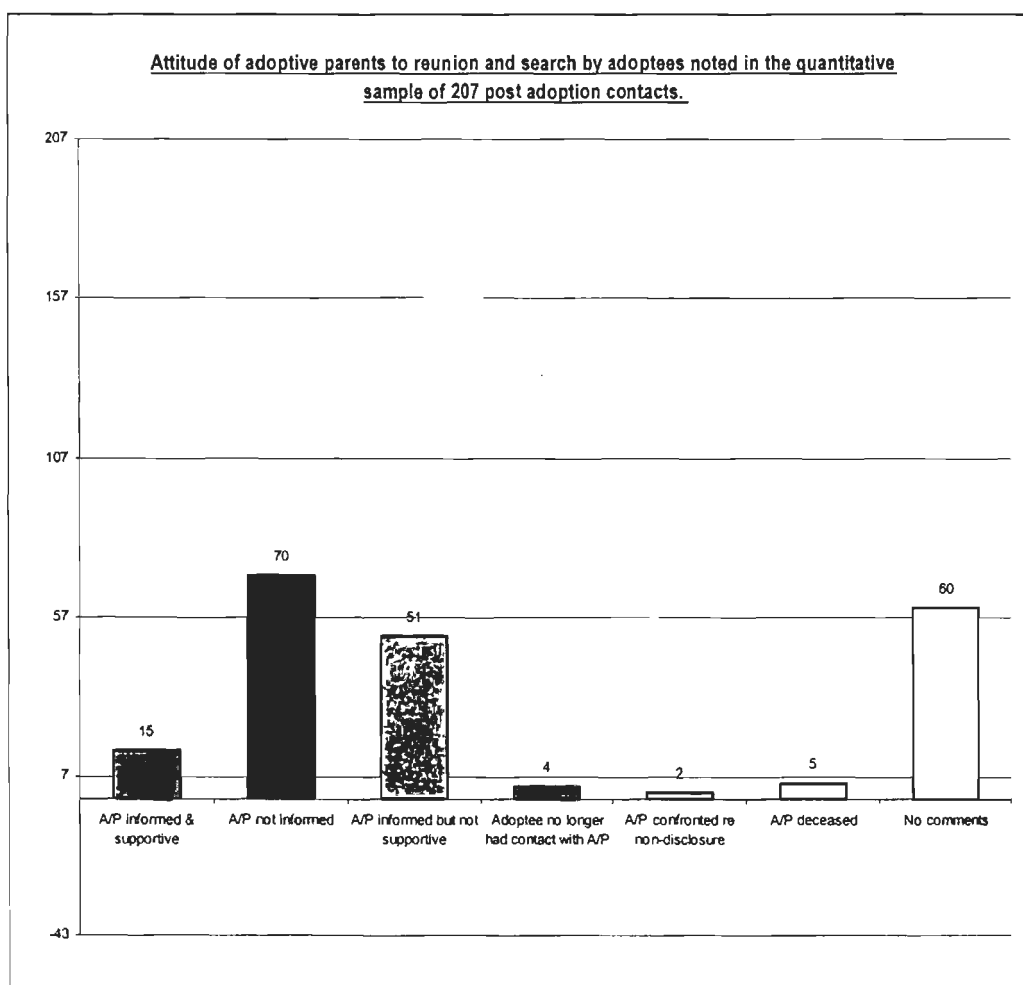


n = 207 post adoption contacts noted in the adoption register.

The data indicates that, of 44 reunions established, 14 enquiries were from male adoptees and 30 from females, (see Figure 3) and the majority of searchers were young adults. This concurs with findings of other studies which also indicate that the majority of searchers are female and in young adulthood (cf Triseliotis, 1973, Pannor et al, 1974; Sorosky et al., 1978; Depp, 1982; Webber et al. 1980; Bertocci & Schechter, 1987; in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989).

The present study indicates that of the 207 contacts noted in the adoption register, 8% of adoptive parents were noted as being supportive of the adoptee's search to establish reunion. The remaining 92% of adoptive parents were either not supportive, were deceased or had not been informed of the adoptee's search for reunion. (see Figure 4 ) .

**Figure 4**



n = 207 post adoption enquiries noted in the adoption register.

**DATA OBTAINED FROM THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS:**

Figure 5 (below) sets out the information obtained from the in-depth interviews regarding adoption disclosure.

**Figure 5**

**Experiences of adoption & reunion compared to age at which disclosure occurred: ( n = 8 adoptees in the quantitative sample)**

<b>Name (pseudonym) &amp; age of Adoptees</b>	<b>Age at which Disclosure occurred</b>	<b>Adoption rating</b>	<b>Reunion rating and status of contact</b>
<b>H 25+</b>	Young	Positive / happy	Positive / worthwhile Ongoing at a distance
<b>P 30+</b>	Young	Positive / happy	Worthwhile Wonderful. Not ongoing.
<b>Tr 30+</b>	Young	Positive / happy	Worthwhile, disappointing. Not ongoing.
<b>L 40+</b>	Adopted @ 3 years – always knew	Extremely unhappy	Worthwhile. Difficult & disappointing Ongoing contact at a distance.
<b>M 25+</b>	Young	Happy / positive	Worthwhile. Not ongoing.
<b>Wi 40+</b>	Adopted at age 3 years – always knew	Happy & positive until adoptive father died (adult years)	Sad, disappointing but worthwhile. Not ongoing.
<b>We 25+</b>	Discovered documents at age 18 years	Happy	Worthwhile although hurtful & disappointed by rejection of birth mother. Contact ended.
<b>K 20</b>	<u>Young</u>	Happy	Worthwhile. Contact ongoing at a distance.

**Figure 6**

**Details from 44 reunion contacts noted in the post adoption register:**

Number of adoptions rated Successful	Number of adoptions rated reasonable	Number of adoption rated unsuccessful	Number of adoptions rated disastrous
36 ( 76%)	1 ( 2%)	9 ( 20%)	1 ( 2%)

n = 44 reunion contacts established out of the quantitative sample of 207 post adoption enquiries.

#### 4.4.1 PROFILE OF THE QUALITATIVE SAMPLE:

A table indicating the data relating to the 44 reunions recorded in the Adoption Register is included in the appendix. Figure 7 (below) indicates the data of the 8 adoptees included in the in-depth interviews.

**Figure 7**

#### Profile of adoptees who were interviewed in the qualitative sample:

<b>Adoptee's age at disclosure</b>	<b>Marital status of the adoptee</b>	<b>Adoption Rating</b>	<b>Sex of adoptee</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Discovered at age 18 years.	Divorced; in relationship	Happy	Female	Ended
Discovered as an adult	Single	Happy	Male	Ended
3 yrs	Married	Happy until death of A/F	Female	Ended
3 yrs	Divorced	Unhappy from outset	Female	Ongoing at a distance
Young	Single	Happy	Female	Ongoing at a distance
Young	Single	Happy	Female	Ongoing at a distance
Young	Married	Happy	Male	Ended
Young	Married	Happy	Female	Ended

N = 8 adoptees included in the qualitative sample.

#### **4.4.2 CATEGORIES AND THEMES ESTABLISHED FROM THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS:**

- i. Loss, and abandonment: expressed as “gaps”, “emptiness”, a sense of incompleteness or unconnectedness.
- ii. Confusion: An overwhelming sense of confusion was noted in all the interviews and transcriptions. In a number of cases confusion was noted in the contradictory statements and comments made by adoptees during the course of the interview.
- iii. Emotions experienced by adoptees: The words used as well as underlying intention was noted.
- iv. Need for knowledge: This encompasses the adoptees’ desire for understanding their genetic history, roots, background, social / family history, as well as a need for understanding the circumstances which led to their relinquishment.
- v. Sense of belonging and need for connection.
- vi. Identity / Sense of Self: External identity is expressed as family likeness and physical similarities, and an internal identity is expressed as a more stable and coherent sense of self.
- vii. Feelings about social workers.
- viii. Issues of control and power: this is expressed as a need for knowledge, and understanding; making the journey, making one’s own decision; being in control for the first time since the adoptee became part of the adoption process.
- ix. Care-taking, responsibility: A sense of “making good” – expressed in the adoptee’s need to protect the adoptive parent.
- x. Compliance and conformity: The adoptee’s tendency to comply and conform was noted in qualitative aspect of the study.
- xi. Feelings about reunion: success and worth of reunion.

Data gathered from the interview schedule and the interviews was further edited in order to identify missing values. Where possible categories were merged before analysis and the entry of data onto the computer. This information was linked to the literature study and was used to generate graphs, charts and tables, which depict data in graphic form.

According to Neuman (2000: 422), *open coding*, employed in the first pass through the data, “. . . brings themes to the surface from deep inside the data”. Axial coding, used in the second pass through the data, focuses on the actual data and assigns labels to themes and categories that were identified. *Axial coding* aids thinking about linkages between themes and concepts (Neuman 2000). In the final pass through the data, *selective coding* was employed. This enabled the researcher to establish major themes and to illustrate them, collect comparisons and contrasts noted in the data. The researcher employed the *illustrative method* in order to anchor existing theory in the evidence and data collected in the course of this study. In focusing on that which is common across cases, the *method of agreement* has been employed. The use of colour coding in the transcripts assisted in the identification of common themes across the different interviews.

#### **4.4.3 Data obtained from the in-depth interviews with adoptees indicated the following:**

- i. All adoptees interviewed indicated satisfaction at having participated in reunion regardless of the outcome.
- ii. All adoptees stated that the *worth* of the reunion is not related to whether the reunion was rated “successful” or not. Adoptees who classified reunion as disappointing or traumatic nevertheless rated it as worthwhile. All of the adoptees indicated that reunion had made a difference to their lives in one way or another.
- iii. Whether reunion is rated “successful” is not linked to contact being ongoing. Adoptees linked the “success” of reunion to the fact that they undertook the process rather than to the outcome of the process.
- iv. Adoptees related “success” of reunion to whether the birth mother had in some manner indicated acceptance of them.

- v. Questions regarding the worth or success of reunion resulted in responses regarding adoptees feeling “more whole”, having “filled the gaps” and having a sense of completeness and connection.
- vi. Each adoptee suggested that the value of reunion lies in something other than whether contact is ongoing or whether it “worked out as planned or hoped”. All adoptees stated that they would recommend that other adoptees seek reunion. This confirms that the responses regarding the worth and success of reunion are valid, as this question provided a form of triangulation of data.
- vii. Of the eight adoptees interviewed, five have discontinued contact with the birth mother, while three adoptees have maintained some form of ongoing contact. Ongoing contact is maintained across a distance and is infrequent. In two instances the adoptee and birth mother live on different continents, and in another the adoptee (who lives in a different province to the birth mother) stated that contact at a distance is satisfactory, but the reality of close range contact is unsatisfactory and will not be pursued.
- viii. Of the five discontinued contacts, three were said to have “soured”, or “fizzled out”. Of these five reunions, one contact was labelled bad and unsatisfactory from the outset and was thus discontinued. One of the discontinued contacts had to be ended at the insistence of the birth mother’s spouse. A third contact ended because the birth mother refused further contact after the adoptee divulged her identity to the birth mother’s children.
- ix. The in-depth interviews excluded adoptees who had been diagnosed with psychiatric or behaviour problems. A comparison can thus not be drawn with this sample. It was however noted that 3 of the eight adoptees had been treated for depression, while a fourth was receiving psychological counselling. Thus 50% of the adoptees interviewed have received psychological treatment. It should be noted however, that these 4 adoptees had all experienced a trauma, which would indicate counselling to be appropriate. In one instance the adoptee had lost a parent as a result of suicide; another adoptee had experienced abusive parenting. A third adoptee discovered a history of instability and psychiatric illness in her biological family. The fourth adoptee

had received treatment for depression after discovering her adoptive status at age 18 years. In 2 of these 4 cases counselling may be directly related to adoption.

- x. Three adoptees expressed a feeling of embarrassment regarding the person of their birth mother and felt that they would rather not be connected to the kind of person she was seen to be.
- xi. A repeated theme which surfaces in the interviews is that of the adoptee "dutifully wishing to avoid hurting" the adoptive parents (cf Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989: 76). One adoptee expressed it as feeling torn between the adoptive and birth parents and feeling the need to "keep both parties happy". Another adoptee stated that reunion would not be "successful" or "worthwhile" if it meant losing or alienating the adoptive parents.
- xii. Words used to describe the reunion experience include the following:

Confusing, nerve-wracking, painful for both parties, disappointing, BAD !, turmoil, fulfilling, uncertainty, no spark, strangeness, sadness and madness, denouncement, abandonment, rejection, over-involved, swallowed up, I have tried to keep all parties happy, I feel very torn, it filled the gaps, it filled the emptiness, it made me feel more whole, it has filled up a bit of the emptiness – not all of it – that will always be there; it was nice to see who I looked like; unforgettable, amazing, healthy, enjoyable, epic, wisdom – have it and use it, lovely, a new type of relationship, genes, belonging, closeness to adoptive mother.

- xiii. Three adoptees noted that they wanted a friend, not a mother / father. Confusion was noted as a perusal of the transcriptions indicates that, at other times during the interview, they expressed the desire that the birth parent behave like a responsible, caring parent. One adoptee indicated this sense of confusion when she said of the reunion meeting "I didn't know who (adoptive or birth parent) to call mom".

xiv. Adoptees' responses to " What impact has the reunion had on your life".

Adoptees indicated that reunion provided a sense of roots and of belonging; that reunion has helped to deal with the sense of "*never having been born*", of "*feeling like an alien on a strange planet*", of abandonment and of feeling worthless. One adoptee captured this feeling when he said

*"I was shaken to my very core to think that I was nothing more than an allocation".*

Another adoptee stated that she has developed a sense of belonging and now knows that her birth mother cares about her even though reunion has not been particularly successful or pleasant.

"The fact that my birth mother was hurting made a huge difference to me because it meant I mattered to her".

Two of the adoptees stated that they were saddened by the fact that the birth mother had rejected them, and indicated a desire (yearning) for restoration and restitution of this relationship. This desire exists although they realize that it is hopeless and impossible.

xv. The theme of identity is indicated in various ways, sometimes directly, at other times indirectly and probably not consciously. Comments include the following.

"I have a different sense of identity, and it has actually become more difficult"; "Reunion has completed my identity and tied up the loose ends";  
"It has made me feel more whole";  
"I don't feel more whole, but it has filled up the gaps";  
"I feel less like an alien on a strange planet".

- xvi. Comments regarding adoption social workers indicate that the impact of the social worker in the process of reunion is significant. Whilst some social workers are experienced as *intrusive and controlling*, others were described as *wonderful and supportive*.
- xvii. Adoptees who experienced social workers negatively, seem to strive to understand and make allowances for this. It seems that this may be related to the tendency of adoptees to put a "positive spin" on things and to "make good" and thus to the compliance noted in adoptees as seeming to underscore a *false-self* (Winnicott, in Newman, 1995) .
- xviii. Positive experiences included adoptees experiencing the social worker as supportive, providing information while not being over-controlling. Negative comments fall into two categories; those social workers who gave little support, direction and information, and those who were perceived as intrusive and controlling of the parties and process of reunion.
- xix. Of the 8 adoptees interviewed, 6 indicated tremendous gratitude either to their adoptive or birth parents or to both sets of parents. One adoptee expressed this as being grateful that her birth mother had "*given her a chance at life*" while another felt that she was grateful for the way she had turned out and that growing up in her biological family was unthinkable as her parents seem to be from '*the wrong side of the tracks*'. To some extent the reunion seems to be motivated by a desire to express this gratitude to the birth parent ("I wanted to thank her").

### **SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER:**

The measurement and analysis of data has been discussed in the foregoing chapter. The themes and categories established in the course of the in-depth interviews have been set out and quantitative data from the adoption register has been explored and discussed. The following chapter discusses the conclusions reached from the data analysis as well as recommendations to practitioners.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION:**

In this chapter the major findings which have emerged from this study are discussed. Findings are related to the literature presented in chapter two.

### **5.2 DISCUSSION:**

5.2.1 The outcome of this research together with the literature, suggests that the desire for reunion is not simply related to external factors, but is motivated by intra-psychic forces resulting from the premature interruption of early psychic processes (cf Volkan & Josephthal, in Frankiel, 1994; Bloom-Feshbach, 1998). This was expressed by adoptees as a desire to understand themselves and to attain a sense of completeness or wholeness. It seems that as adoptees indicate that they are not seeking for a "mother", the desire for reunion is motivated by intra-psychic, rather than external factors (cf Bollas, 1987). Reunion constitutes a response to these forces and in adoptees feeling more "real", "complete" and "whole". This seems to relate to issues of identity and in the adoptee establishing a more secure, stable, coherent and integrated sense of Self. This seems to relate to what Winnicott refers to as a "*True Self*" (Winnicott 1992). This appears relevant whether one assumes the stance of self psychologists who see the infant as alert, communicative and pre-wired for interaction, (cf Stern, 1985) or the view that the infant is merged in symbiotic unity with the mother and is incapable of connection with the outer world ( cf Mahler in Wirz, 1990).

5.2.2 Adoption, causes the severing of the early, mother-infant relationship at the earliest stage of object relations, and interrupts the infant's experience of *good-enough mothering* (Winnicott, in Newman, 1995). The absence of the birth mother, together with the strange and changing environment in which the infant initially exists, results in failure to actuate the *omnipotence* of the infant. The infant now reacts from a *False Self* and may become compliant and lacks a sense of feeling real or genuine (Winnicott, in St. Claire, 1986).

5.2.3. This research suggests that the adoptee strives, through reunion, to recreate the state of fusion with the primary, or transformational object, the birth mother indicating the adoptees need for connection and a sense of belonging (Bollas, 1987). The experience of adoption results in an actual, rather than a *potential space* (cf Winnicott, 1992) for the infant and this impacts on the development of the Self during the early days of infancy. The desire to *re-connect with or "reclaim" the lost object* (birth mother) is a means to an end and not an end in itself (cf Bollas, 1987; Learner, in Frankiel 1994). It enables the adoptee to "reclaim and thereby re-instill the lost object as an internal representation" thereby completing and transforming their sense of Self and establishing a stable, coherent and integrated sense of Self (cf Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989). This appears to be related to the themes of *identity* and *belonging* expressed by the adoptees during the interviews. Reunion answers the questions "*who am I*" and "*Where do I come from*", thus providing the adoptee with an improved understanding of Self by rooting him / her within an historical and genetic narrative (cf Haimés & Timms, 1985.) It also provides an *aesthetic experience* which Bollas (1987) contends constitutes the "*unthought known*". It is suggested that reunion is therefore an attempt on the part of the adoptee to recollect the early object relationship.

5.2.4 The majority of searchers (113 of 207 adoptees) in the quantitative sample, (cf figure 6) rated their adoption experience as positive, while 94 adoptees rated their adoption as negative. Thus the data does not confirm the outcome suggested by Mc Whinnie (1969) and Triseliotis (1973), or the researcher's assumption that adoptees who rate their adoption as unsuccessful are more likely to seek reunion. Similarly, however, a positive adoption experience does not preclude the adoptee seeking reunion (see figure 8 in the appendix).

5.2.5 All 8 adoptees in the qualitative sample indicated that reunion had been *worthwhile* ( cf figure 5). The data confirms the assertion by Haimés and Timms (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989) that the impact on the adoptee, of the lacunae created by adoption, is significant, as is the correction of the lacunae via reunion. This concurs with Hodges (1985) who reports that research "emphasized the positive results expressed by the adoptees". From

the data obtained in this study, it seems that reunion constitutes a desire, on the part of the adoptee, to repair the lacunae that have resulted from adoption. This sense of loss has already been alluded to in the adoptee's experience and expression of concepts such as "gaps" and "holes" in their sense of self. In the researcher's opinion, reunion may be considered to be a form of re-grieving therapy which serves to repair these lacunae (see Appendix D: XXIX – XXXIII).

- 5.2.6 The *desire for information* was an important motivation in adoptees seeking reunion. However, unlike other studies (Stein & Hoopes, 1985; Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989), adoptees were not seeking specific medical information or physical similarities between themselves and their birth family. The desire for information suggests a need for control and empowerment. It is also an attempt to provide materials needed to build an internal representation of the birth parent (Hodges, in Brodzinsky & Shechter, 1989). A sense of chaos appears to result from the fact that loss of the object puts the internal object world into a state of disarray; reunion appears to assist the adoptee in bringing a sense of order to this chaos.
- 5.2.7 The research indicates that reunion is a way in which the adoptee can experience himself as capable of actively acting upon the environment rather than passively being acted upon – a major factor in the establishment of a healthier identity (Learner, in Frankiel, 1994). Brodzinsky and Shechter (1989) assert that "the search is an attempt to reconcile cognitive dissonances, to bring order to a sense of chaos, and to gain active control over forces to which the adoptee has had to respond passively in the past". . . the adoptee through searching, attempts to bring the locus of control from 'out there' to 'inside' himself.
- 5.2.8 The Self appears to be impoverished as a result of the premature severing of ties with the primary object. It is postulated that the disarray into which the internal object world is thrown, causes of the sense of chaos and confusion, which has emerged as a prominent theme in this research. The external world, and the social Self may be impoverished through the actual loss of the birth mother and the accompanying loss of the biological ties, and of a sense

has been lost, the internal, good object has also been lost and the Self depleted ( cf Thaka, in Frankiel, 1994).

5.2.9 Whilst there is some debate regarding the ability of the infant to mourn (cf A. Freud & Nageera, in Frankiel, 1994) there can be no doubt that what the adult adoptee expresses is a sense of grief. Furthermore, it is imperative that the adoptee grieve and mourn his losses, all the more so if he has not been able to do so as a child. It has been shown that this mourning is not pathological, rather, it constitutes a normal grieving process which enables the mourner to establish a sense of security and harmony. It might be better viewed as a *healing* process (cf Epstein, in Campbell, 1949) which provides the adoptee with a sense of completion and certainty (cf Manning, in Haimés & Timms, 1994: 70 – 71;). Healing, according to Epstein (in Campbell, 1949:34) means “coming into order”, wholeness or integrating . . . “ Healing, associated with recovery after loss, seems to reflect the experience of the adoptee who expresses a sense of chaos and a lack of wholeness and order. It establishes a sense of order out of the chaos which the adoptee experiences. Manning (in Haimés & Timms, 1994) asserts that “ *Adoptees become sort of psychological vagrants, with no particular ties to anyone. Since they are not rooted in natural relationships it is thought that there is no certainty about with whom they might align themselves; to natural or adoptive families, or perhaps to no one at all*”.

One adoptee in the qualitative sample expressed this confusion about belonging when she related how difficult it had been to know whether to address her biological or adoptive parent as her mother.

5.2.10 Were one to accept the view (cf Freud A, 1960 & Spitz R, 1946, in Bowlby J, 1980) that children are incapable of mourning a loss, then the need for re-grieving, or in this case, retrospective mourning could be seen to be important as the young child would not have been able to grieve the losses sustained as a result of adoption. Marais (in Lendrum & Gabrielle, 1992) asserts that “grief works itself out through a process of reformulation rather than substitution”.

Reunion seems to offer the adoptee the opportunity for reformulation and re-authoring his (hi)story, while adoption might be considered to be substitution.

5.2.11 The outcome of the qualitative aspect of this study indicates that unsuccessful or negative adoption experiences are not more likely to result in the adoptee wishing to establish reunion ( 12.5% of the qualitative sample and 25% of the quantitative sample). From this one might venture to suggest that reunion should be viewed as health promoting rather than pathological in nature. While the present study address the adoptee's difficulty in completing their sense of identity, the data does not concur with Simmos (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989) who suggests that adoptees have more difficulty forming a sense of identity than non-adoptees, who are less well socialized, tend to be impulsive and demanding, and have a lower self-esteem. The outcome of this study is contradicted by Norvell and Guy (1977), McWhinnie (1969) and Triseliotis (1973) who found that adoptive status alone does not result in a negative identity.

5.2.12 The outcome of the present study supports the view expressed by Brodzinsky and Schechter that the majority of adoptees are leading productive lives, free of any notable pathology. Were reunion to be seen as pathological in nature, one might expect to find that a considerable percentage of the 161 adoptees who were unable, or unwilling to effect reunion would display some form of psychopathology. In contrast, the present study indicated that a total of 3 adoptees out of the total sample of 207 (6%) experienced some form of pathology. Of these 3 adoptees, 2 had established reunion.

5.2.13 The theme of identity seems to be inextricably linked to two factors. Firstly to the *internal sense of Self*, expressed as the *core self*, and as 'who I am'; secondly to the *external, or social sense of self*, which is expressed as ' where I come from ' and in themes such as *identity, roots, background, information, history*. The research suggests that the adoptee's sense of Self is enhanced through the process of reunion with the birth mother, and that this results in a sense of belonging and connection experienced in infancy as fusion with the mother. Connection and belonging relate to the internal sense of self while

identity appears to relate to the external, social self. Both are brought to completion through the reunion experience. It seems that reunion allows the adoptee to develop or at least complete and refine their sense of identity. The data does not portray the self as being *damaged*, but rather, as incomplete, unconnected or lacking. One adoptee (see appendix D) stated

"I have some sense of belonging now. I have a sense of somebody that thinks about me. It is important for me to be loved. It has filled up a bit of the emptiness, not all of it, which I think will always be there".

5.2.16 The adoptee appears to need reassurance that the birth mother (lost object) has not been "damaged" and that the adoptee (infant) has not caused the separation or abandonment, which resulted in adoption. The adoptee's desire to express gratitude to and reassure the birth mother seems to be related to an underlying need to be reassured that s/he has not destroyed the birth mother (cf Klein, in Segal, 1973), or caused their own abandonment by their "badness". Linked to this is the adoptee's expression of relief at hearing and knowing that they "do matter" to the birth mother and that she "does love and care" for them in some manner. Nickman (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989) suggests that the adoptee may be plagued by the pervasive fear that if loss could have happened once (in the form of separation from the biological mother), it might well happen again and he would then be separated from someone whom he values. This anxiety seems to surface when the adoptee contemplates searching, and is noted in comments regarding not wanting to hurt the adoptive parents, and in the comment of an adoptee that

"If reunion means losing the adoptive parents, it (*reunion*) would not be worthwhile".

5.2.17 The present study concurs with the view expressed by Hodges (1984, in Brodzinsky & Schechter 1989: 72) that "the most poignant potential loss is that of the biological tie between adoptee and the adoptive parent. While it

has been noted in the non-verbal and unconscious behaviour of the adoptee, 3 adoptees were able to express the pain of this loss directly. One stated that

“Realizing that I am not truly part of my adoptive parents was more painful than having been rejected and abandoned by my biological parents”.

As suggested by Hodges, it would seem that this covert loss creates a sense of perpetual mourning in the adoptee. It is perhaps most difficult to mourn this particular sense of loss, for how does one mourn something which you never had and which you have never lost. The loss of connection to the adoptive parent constitutes a second loss for the adoptee, and one that is more real – in that it is a loss related to a parent who is known and with whom a close bond and relationship has been established. Yet it is also more unrealistic – for the adoptee has known all along that he was never biologically connected to the adoptive parent, and in one sense has not truly lost this parent. It is a *loss by omission*, but one that is no less powerful and painful than the loss, which occurred as a result of the act of adoption.

5.2.18 The impact of reunion upon the adoptee has been shown to be significant. This is so whether or not reunion is rated successful and whether it is ongoing or discontinued. All adoptees interviewed noted that reunion had been worthwhile and had made a significant difference to their lives (see figure 5). The data suggests that reunion facilitates grieving and mourning, enabling internalisation of the lost object, thereby enabling the adoptee to separate and individuate. The impact of reunion is expressed as follows by adoptees.

“I feel more complete & connected; I feel loved, worthy, connected”.

It is the researcher’s opinion that this may be related to the intra-psychic processes that were interrupted at the time of separation from the primary love object. Adoptees want the mother to see and acknowledge them, to provide confirmation of their existence, and affirmation. (see appendix D)

5.2.19 The research indicates that the majority of reunion contacts are discontinued after an initial “honeymoon phase” (see figure 5: p58). This was noted in

both the in-depth interviews and in the cases noted in the adoption register. The adoption register notes that 61% of the total sample of 44 reunion contacts were discontinued. It must be noted that, as the individuals concerned could not be traced at the time of conducting this research study, it is uncertain how many of these contacts continued in the long term, and it may well be that a higher percentage of reunion contacts are discontinued than is indicated in the data from this study. Discontinuation of reunion contact is not related to whether the adoptee perceives the reunion to have been worthwhile or not (cf figure 5: p58). This concurs with the findings of Triseliotis (1985). It must be noted that the long-term outcome of reunion could not be established in this study. However, the data obtained does provide the opportunity to compare the outcome of this South African study with existing international data and studies. In many respects the results of the study concurs with international studies, however, the major area of disagreement is that of the adoptee's search being motivated by the desire to resemble someone and to obtain medical information. However, no adoptees in the present study expressed this need.

5.2.20 \_The present study does not indicate a positive link between late revelation of adoptive status and the desire to establish reunion (see figures 9a & 9b of appendix C: XXII -XXIII). Indeed, early disclosure is more likely to result in searching behaviour according to the data. Research by Triseleotis and Bretal (in Brodzinsky & Schechter, 1989) indicates that searching is not linked to late revelation of adoptive status. In contrast, other studies have indicated that disclosure occurring at a late age results in the adoptee being more likely to search and desire reunion (cf Sorosky et al. 1978, Triseliotis, 1973; Thompson et.al. 1978).

5.2.21 The outcome of this study supports the view that the degree of perceived similarity between adoptee and adoptive family bears no relationship to the adoptee's search activities. Findings from a study by Sobol and Cardiff (1983) concur with this. No adoptee in the qualitative study indicated the desire for physical similarity to have precipitated or contributed to the search. Three adoptees, on being asked about this, did indicate that they were pleased to note such similarities.

5.2.22 The outcome of this research supports the view that the desire for reunion could be seen as a health-promoting process. Of the 207 enquiries noted in the adoption register, 3 adoptees were noted as having emotional, psychological or behavioural problems; this amounts to 1% of the total population of 207 adoptees.

5.2.23 The outcome of this study favours the view that the adoptee's search and mourning of the lost object is not a pathological process, but rather a health-promoting process which is aimed at reinstating the lost object in the internal, psychic world of the adoptee, thereby enabling him to achieve stability and security (Frankiel, 1994). This appears to enable separation and individuation, which in turn results in the establishment of a "whole" (coherent, intergrated and stable) sense of Self. This concurs with the view posed by Bowlby (1980), that "losses are retrievable and behavioural responses that make up part of the grieving process are geared towards re-establishing a relationship with the lost object".

#### **SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS DISCUSSED IN THIS CHAPTER:**

In conclusion, the data gathered in this study appears to support the suggestion that reunion is a journey to reclaim and transform the Self, and not merely a means of reclaiming the "lost object" (birth mother). The value of reunion does not lie in the "success" or outcome of the reunion, but in the value of the experience; this appears to be related to addressing and filling the sense of lacunae caused by early separation from the birth mother as a result of adoption. Adoptees express reunion as having an empowering and healing effect regardless of outcome of reunion contact. Reunion facilitates mourning and is therefore a healthy (rather than a

pathological) experience, which sets the adoptee free to take up the “True Self” and to cast off the “False self” which the adoptive status has conferred upon him / her, resulting in the adoptee’s tendency to conformity and compliance. Whilst reunion does constitute a reclaiming of the lost object (in the form of the birth mother) it is not in itself the aim or ultimate value of reunion. It is postulated that reunion could facilitate the internalisation of the lost object, thus facilitating the journey to reclaim aspects of the self and contributing to the establishment of a more stable, coherent sense of Self for the adoptee. Furthermore, this study provides strong evidence that there is a positive relationship between reunion and the adoptee’s desire to fill a sense of emptiness, to achieve a sense of connection, belonging and improved self-understanding and to understand and order the confusion and chaos, which they feel. The study indicates that the age at which disclosure occurred, and how the adoption was experienced, do not, on their own, result in search behaviour. Furthermore, the majority of reunions are discontinued after an initial “honeymoon phase”.

### **SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER:**

This chapter discussed the findings which emanate from the data collected in this study. These findings have been substantiated with literature and research discussed in chapter Two of the study.

The following chapter will discuss the researcher’s conclusions and the researcher’s recommendations based upon the findings made in the study.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER**

This, the final chapter, presents the conclusions drawn from the data collected in this study, and presents the researcher's recommendations based on the information obtained from the research.

### **6.2 CONCLUSIONS:**

The severing of the primal mother-infant tie impacts significantly and indelibly upon the individual's life and future development. This study indicates that the adoptee lacks a cohesive sense of self and that s/he is seeking to achieve cohesion and stability of the Self. This is substantiated by a review of the literature and from the outcome of the qualitative aspect of the study. If the infant is accepted as having the mental capacities indicated by infant research, then in being subjected to a separation, s/he might experience the loss of the desired merger-with-mother as profoundly painful, impoverishing and poignant. It is the researcher's contention that the process and experience of reunion is a restorative and health-promoting journey for the adoptee. Reunion provides a means of restoring to the adoptee those aspects of the Self, which were lost together with the object. For the adoptee, loss of the primary love object occurred before s/he could internalize and integrate the birth mother. It occurred pre-verbally and pre-structurally and thus it could create chaos and disarray in the inner object world of the adoptee. It seems that reunion could enable the adoptee to internalise the lost object retrospectively, and to mourn it through the search and reunion process.

The adoptee suffers both overt and covert losses. The "overt loss" which the adoptee experiences is that of separation from the birth mother, the loss of the "holding environment", while the "covert losses" have to do with the knowledge of having been relinquished and not coming into the world as a wanted person, a sense of "never having been born", the shock of realizing that one is "*. . . nothing more than an allocation*".

The literature clearly establishes that early, peri-natal history impacts significantly upon the development of the individual, and that the adoptee's need for reunion is inextricably bound up with these experiences, as well as with the losses sustained as a result of adoption. The interruption of these early intra-psychic processes affect the development of the Self significantly. The process and experience of reunion could provide an ameliorative function, which may enable the adoptee to redress the deficits caused by the premature severing of the primary mother-infant bond and thus to establish a "True Self". Through reunion the adoptee may be assisted to internalise the "lost object" and thus to mourn and relinquish the object, to separate and individuate, thus feeling a new and healthier sense of self. While there are numerous factors which may act as ameliorative and which should not be ignored, it is however beyond the scope of this study to examine these factors. The outcome of this study, suggests that *post adoption reunion could be linked with the adoptee's desire to recover "the lost object" and establish essential connections with the past. However, of more importance is the fact that in so-doing the adoptee appears to complete and restore his sense of Self, the development of which was hindered by the early, premature severing of the infant-mother bond.* In the words of Kiekegard, (1849, cited by Tyson, in Frankiel 1994: 255)

***"And so it is with all cases of loss . . . The unbearable loss is not really in itself unbearable. What we cannot bear is being stripped of the external object. We stand denuded and see the intolerable abyss of ourselves".***

**The main conclusions reached in this study may be summarized as follows.**

1. The adoptee, whilst seeking to reclaim the 'lost object', appears to do so as a means of reclaiming and transforming aspects of the Self, the development of which was disturbed as a result of premature interruption of the primary infant-mother bond and of early intra-psychic processes.

2. The adoptee's desire for reunion is a health-promoting process, which could be motivated by both external, social factors and intra-psychic forces. The process of reunion may have therapeutic, healing value for the adoptee. It is this, which appears to restore the Self, addresses the lacunae created by adoption, and which could restore a sense of order to the chaos experienced by the adoptee.
3. The age at which adoption revelation occurs does not, on its own, determine whether or not reunion is sought by the adoptee, and early disclosure did not preclude the adoptee from seeking reunion and later disclosure did not necessarily result in the adoptee seeking reunion.
4. A negative adoption experience is not more likely to result in the adoptee seeking reunion.
5. Reunion results in the possibility of the adoptee establishing a more secure, stable, and integrated sense of Self, and of rooting themselves within an historical and biological narrative.
6. The value of reunion is not synonymous with the success or outcome of reunion or of the adoption.
7. The majority of reunion contacts are discontinued.
8. Reunion contact maintained over a distance, or indirectly appear to be more satisfactory than direct, ongoing contact.
9. The data from this research indicates that the desire for medical information, or for physical similarities did not motivate the adoptee to seek reunion.
10. The outcome of this study concurs with data from existing studies, which indicate that adoptees seeking reunion are more likely to be female, and in their early adult years.

11. The majority of adoptees who sought reunion rated their adoption as positive, thus supporting the view that reunion should not be viewed as a pathological process.
12. Reunion may be viewed as a form of retrospective mourning. It may provide the adult with the opportunity to mourn the early, childhood losses of adoption, thereby making possible the completion of early, pre - structural intra-psychic processes. Reunion enables the adoptee to internalise the lost object thus setting the adoptee free to relinquish their ties to the lost object and to reclaim lost aspects of the Self.

### **6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

From the data obtained in this study and from the literature presented, a number of recommendations seem appropriate, and will, hopefully make a valuable contribution to practice.

#### **The major recommendations stemming from this study are as follows:**

**That it is important that the adoption practitioner, in the process of the search and reunion, provide support and direction without dis-empowering the adoptee.** This does not imply leaving the adoptee to his own devices, but rather that the practitioner should supportively accompany him through his journey, enabling the establishment of a more secure and stable sense of Self through the process of reconstructing and internalising the early lost object, the birth mother.

**That reunion should be acknowledged as a normal and healthy process** which enables the adoptee to establish a new, stable and sense of Self.

**That reunion should remain the personal journey of the individual adoptee, who should be allowed to control the process as far as possible, even if this results in the “outcome” of reunion being less satisfactory.** It is furthermore important that practitioners remember that the outcome of reunion is less important than the process or “journey”, which while being an attempt to “reclaim the lost

object", is ultimately aimed at the adoptee reclaiming and repairing aspects of the Self.

That through the search and reunion process the development of the adoptee's sense of Self could be facilitated and that in this process, the adoptee may need to relinquish the need to conform and to put the needs of others above their own.

That practitioners understand that the search, incorporating the journey to reunion, the interpersonal and intra-personal experiences of the adoptee, could constitute a valuable therapeutic function for the adoptee. Viewing reunion as the mere meeting of parties may negate the value of the intra-psychic processes which are set in motion through the process and experiences of reunion.

That the use of narrative therapy is a useful adjunct to traditional methods employed in adoption practice. It could facilitate the adoptee in reworking his /her (hi)story, and placing him/herself within an historical and biological narrative, ~~is a useful adjunct to traditional methods employed in adoption practice.~~ It is the researcher's contention that narrative therapy is used in many instances without adoption practitioners being aware of this, and that practitioners may benefit by becoming acquainted with the use and value of this form of therapeutic intervention in order to maximize its use in adoption work.

That the concept of "re-grieving" deserves further investigation in order to understand how it can be applied to adoption and reunion. The information should also be investigated more closely, in order to establish what contribution it might offer to our understanding of how best to assist children and adolescents in coping with the losses incurred through the process and experience of adoption.

That, while it is accepted that the adoption practitioner does not enter into therapy with the parties involved in reunion, it is the researcher's contention that s/he should nevertheless be aware of the therapeutic value and effect of the reunion process and experience in order to maximize the value of reunion for the adoptee. Furthermore, the adoption practitioner's awareness and sensitivity

to the process and place of mourning in post-adoption work, would seem to enhance their role in facilitating the adoptee's journey through reunion.

**Final recommendations for future research are:**

1. That the experiences and profile of the non-searcher (the adoptee who does not wish to establish reunion) be explored.
2. That the experiences of pre-structural, preverbal loss in adoption be compared with similar early experiences of loss within a non-adoption context.

**SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER:**

This chapter has presented the main conclusions drawn from this research study. Based on the analysis of the data, and the conclusions reached, a number of recommendations have been made, including recommendations for future practice.

# Appendix A

**DATA REGARDING ADOPTEES IN THE QUANTITATIVE SAMPLE WHO WERE REUNITED WITH BIRTH MOTHER:**

Race & Sex	Age	Marital status	Educ /employment	Age placed	Age told	Ad succ / unsucc	A/P Alive, informed, supportive	Remarks		
White male	24	Married	Wage clerk	Birth	Young	Fairly successful	AP informed	Successful @ first – later relationship “sourer”	1	
White male	30	Single	Unemployed / policeman	3 – 4 yrs	Young	Successful but relation with A/P later deteriorated	AP not informed	Meeting changed P’s life. Was first fostered with sib, then adopted	2	
White Male	22	Single	Boiler maker	Birth	Young	Successful. But adoptee “difficult”	Supportive of tracing	BM’s other son a jockey & adoptee had wanted to be a jockey.	3	
Mixed race Female	25	Divorced	Housewife	Birth	Uncertain	Successful	Ad F deceased	Incorrect infor given re BF who was said to be “White” but was actually Black	4	
White Male	23	Single	Music teacher	Birth	Young	Successful with A/M	AF died when adoptee was 11	Ongoing contact but restricted as BM children do not know.	5	
White Female	47	Married	Housewife	Birth	12 yrs	Successful	AM died 1972	Meeting took place	6	
White Female	48	Married	Telephonist	Birth	12	OK	AF died when adoptee was 15 years old	Meeting took place	7	
White Female	22	Single	Agricultural college	Birth	Young	Unsuccessful	AP divorced when adoptee was 4 yrs old. AM disabled. AP not	Adoptee moved in to live with B/m & family – unhealthy situation of mutual dependence	8	

							informed of tracing			
White Female	19	Single	Expelled from school; failed twice. Odd jobs	Birth	Young	Fairly successful	AP divorced when adoptee was 7. AM informed & consented	Meeting but no ongoing contact established.	9	
White Female	21	Single	Diploma auditing	Birth	Young	Successful	Informed	Adoptee met BM but decided not to pursue contact.	10	
White Male	21	Single	marketing	birth	young	Unsuccessful	Informed	Positive contact but fizzled out	11	
White Female	25	Married	Snr lecturer Tech	Birth	Young	Successful	Informed	BM made first contact & adoptee agreed to meet	12	
White Female	49	Divorced & married	Housewife / cashier	birth	young	Unsuccessful	AF deceased. No contact with AM	Adoptee traced & pitched on BM's doorstep. Became problematic as BM started demanding money.	13	
White Male	21	Single	Engineer	Birth	Young	Ok	Informed – very controlling	BG given in 89 & return in 94 for tracing. BM found in UKZ – very successful	14	
Coloured Male	28	married	Changes frequently	birth	Kenw from 16 but only "informed" at 23 yrs	Successful	AF deceased when adoptee was very young. AM informed	Info given but did not trace. BM later enquired & contact was established – very successful. & ongoing. BP married	15	
White Male	22	Single	Sap	Birth	9 yrs	Successful	Informed	BP married. Meeting very successful and contact ongoing.	16	
White Female	18	Single	Social Work student	Birth	Young	Not successful	Informed	Lots of similarities between BM & adoptee. BM suffered breakdown following meeting.	17	
White Female	27	married	housewife	birth	Young	Unsuccessful	AM deceased. AF not informed	Adoptee married at 15 as she was pregnant. BM first refused contact as husband was unaware of adoption. Joyous reunion.	18	

White F		Single	No fixed job	Birth	Young	Successful	AM died. AF supportive	BP married later divorced. BM & AM knew each other but not aware of situation.	19
White Female	23	Single	Worka for AF	Birth	Young	Successful	Informed & supportive	Info given & contact established 4 yrs later. Contact curtailed. Different socio-econ bg – BM unstable.	20
White Male	24	Single	Engineer	Birth	Young	Successful	AP divorced	AM more keen re tracing than adoptee. Information given & adoptee only traced later.	21
White Male	20	Single	Odd jobs & studying	birth	young	Disaster	AP rejected adopt. Adoptee on drugs.	Adoptee - behaviour problems - , in childrens' home & later in jail. Went to live with BM in Israel	22
White Female	47	married	housewife	birth	young	Successful	Deceased	Took years but adoptee traced & met BM who was ill & dying – dream come true – wonderful story	23
White Female	18	Single	Scholar	Birth	Young	Successful	AM deceased, A F informed & supportive	BM in UK – met whole family – BM delighted as life badly affected by adoption.	24
White Male	19	Single	B com student	birth	young	Successful	Informed	Enquiry made & later returned to trace	25
White Female	26	Married	Beautician	Birth	Young	Unsuccessful	AF had drinking problem. AdM informed	Contact initiated via letter, then met & contact ongoing.	26
White Male	31	married	Estate agent	birth	17	Successful	Not informed	Difficult childhood – teased Suffers from depression Divorced twice	27
White Female	37	Divorced	Receptionist	Birth	Young	Successful	Deceased	Ongoing contact	28
White Female	26	Single	UCT	Birth	young	Unsuccessful	Not informed	Met BM in USA – ongoing contact. Dramatically positive for both parties	29
Coloured Male	32	Divorced	Electrical draughtsman	Birth	Not told – found out at	Successful Happy childhood	AP told re his need for	BP both traced – much lower socio-econ. Class. Not at all successful	30

					32 !	Successful	information.		
White Female	27	Single	secretary	birth	Young	Successful	AF died, AM told	Contact est. after lots of letters. Lots of similarities. Very successful	31
Coloured Female	29	Married	hairdresser	birth	Std 4 – told by cousin	Ok	Not informed	Long search; continued contact unlikely	32
White Female	30	married	housewife	birth	Young	Successful	AM died when adoptee was 16. AF not informed	Continued contact unlikely	33
White Female	27	Single	Bank	Birth	Young	Successful	AF deceased, AM told	Adoptee traced BM on own & BM initially refused contact. Later sw spoke to BM & she met adoptee. Successful & contact likely to be ongoing.	34
White Male	24	Single	Farmer	birth	Young	Successful	Not informed	Successful meeting took place. Made enormous difference to both parties	35
White Female	21	Single	Student	Birth	Young	Successful	AP informed & very supportive	Successful contact – ongoing Marked similarities between BM & adoptee	36
White Female	35	common law marriage	Secretary	Birth	Young	Successful	AP both deceased	Ongoing contact	37
White Female	20	Engaged	Au pair	Birth	Young	Successful	AP div when adop was 6 yrs	Met BM & family & contact ongoing	38
White Male	20	Single	unemployed	birth	Young	Ok	AM consented AP marital problems	Adop. Deaf & depressed Adop est. contact - ongoing	39
White Female	19	Single	Std 7 - unemployed	Birth	Young	Unsuccessful	AP consented – hoped for a "cure"	AM met BM & bf– adoptee on drugs	40
White Female	21	married	secretary	birth	Young	Successful	AM informed not Af	Contact established & ongoing	41

White Male	19	Single	Unemployed	Birth	Young	Successful	AP div. When adopt very young. No contact with Af	Met BM & her children – very successful	42
White Female	28	Single	Branch manager	birth	Young	Not very successful	AF died when aged 10 yrs	Very successful – lots in common	43
White Female	31	Married	Secretary	Birth	Young	Unsuccessful	AF died AM ill with multiple sclerosis	Very unhappy childhood in a childrens' home. Traced but contact unsuccessful and not ongoing. BM - lots of problems & diff. Soc. Class	44

# Appendix B

## POST - ADOPTION REUNION INTERVIEW SCHEDULE:

- Is the individual being interviewed an .

Adoptee

Sibling

Birthparent

- Who initiated contact.

Sibling

Birthmother

Birthfather

Adoptee

Other

- How was contact established.

Via a third party

By a social worker

Directly between the parties after getting information from social worker.

I traced & made contact myself - no social worker involved

- How old were you at the time of contact.

- How old was the other party at the time of establishing contact.

- Was the adoption effected by the Children's Placement Center.

- Can the other party still be traced.

- How close / far apart do searcher and "searchee" live.

- 
1. Have you maintained contact with the person you traced / who traced you.

2. For what period of time was / has contact been maintained.

IF CONTACT HAS ENDED ANSWER QUESTIONS 3 – 7 THEN PROCEED TO QUESTION .

IF CONTACT HAS BEEN MAINTAINED OMIT QUESTIONS 3 – 7 AND PROCEED TO QUESTION

3. If contact has ended, when did this occur.

Who initiated the ending of contact. (you may chose more than one of the following).

The searcher

Adoptee

Birthparent

Sibling

4. How did contact come to an end.

5. Do you still think about the other party.

Yes

Never

Often

Sometimes

6. If yes, how often.

IF CONTACT IS NOT MAINTAINED DO NOT COMPLETE QUESTIONS 8 AND 9

Daily

Weekly

On special occasions like birthdays or Christmas

Now and again

Not very often & for no particular reason

7. How often do you have contact.

As little as possible

Daily

Weekly

On special occasions

Regularly

Seldom

8. In what form is it maintained.

Letters or E Mail

Telephone

Visits

Other

9. Are you pleased you participated in the reunion.

Yes	No	Uncertain	Sometimes	Yes but I wish things had ended differently
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10. Do you regret becoming involved in the reunion.

Yes	No	Sometimes	Uncertain	Perhaps a bit.
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11. Has the reunion made any difference in your life. (please elaborate).

No	Not particularly	Not sure	Yes but it is difficult to explain	Yes it has made a huge difference
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12. What impact has the reunion had on your life.

13. What, in your opinion, makes a reunion *successful*.

Do you feel that reunion must be *successful* in order for it to be worthwhile.

14. If you had the opportunity to advise others facing the decision of whether or not to reunite with someone they were separated from through adoption, what would you say to them.

15. Are you aware of the new law allowing birth mother's to access information regarding children given up for adoption.

How do you feel about this new law.

 Yes No Uncertain

16. Would you say you look similar to each other.

 Yes, in some ways Yes, we look a lot alike No not at all Uncertain Other people seem to think so

16 b. Are you similar in other ways. If answer is yes please explain

 Yes No Uncertain

17. Do you think these similarities or differences are important. (Please explain).

 No Yes Not sure

18. The social workers / agency are keen to know whether there are any things which you feel should be different or which you would be willing to share with them in order to improve adoption practice in the future.

19. One of the adoption social workers I know has often said that if she had a magic wand and a crystal ball there are many things that she would like to do or change. If you were given these "magic tools" what would you do or change with them ?
20. Without censoring your thoughts, what words come to mind when you hear the word adoption.
21. What have you lost as a result of adoption.
22. What have you gained as a result of adoption.

# Appendix C

Outcome of reunion contacts of the 8 adoptees in the qualitative sample.

<u>CONTACT BETWEEN ADOPTEE AND BIRTH MOTHER</u>	<u>NUMBER OF ADOPTEES</u>	<u>AGE AT WHICH DISCLOSURE OCCURED</u>	<u>MANNER IN WHICH DISCLOSURE WAS MADE</u>
Contact ongoing, but at a distance	3	Young Remembers Young	Parents / positive Not 'told' - , negative Parents / positive
Contact soured or fizzled out & thus ended	3	Young / positive 18 yrs/ negative Young	Parents / positive Discovered at age 18 / extremely negative. Adopt. Mother / positive
Contact discontinued after initial meeting	2	Remembers Young	Always known / no negative connotation Parents / positive
Contact continued on a close, personal basis.	<u>0</u>		

n = 8 adoptees in the qualitative sample.

**Experiences of adoption & reunion compared to age at which disclosure occurred:**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Age at placement</u>	<u>Adoption rating</u>	<u>Reunion rating &amp; status</u>
H	Young	Positive / happy	Positive / worthwhile Ongoing at a distance
P	Young	Positive / happy	Worthwhile Wonderful. Not ongoing
<u>I</u>	Young	Positive / happy	Worthwhile, disappointing. Not ongoing
<u>L</u>	Adopted 3 years – always knew	Extremely unhappy	Worthwhile. Difficult & disappointing Ongoing contact at a distance.
<u>Mi</u>	Young	Happy / positive	Worthwhile. Not ongoing.
<u>Wi</u>	Adopted at age 3 years – always knew	Happy & positive until adoptive father died (adult years)	Sad, disappointing but worthwhile. Not ongoing.
<u>We</u>	Discovered documents at age 18 years	Happy	Worthwhile although hurtful & disappointed by rejection of birth mother. Contact ended.
<u>Kk</u>	<u>Young</u>	Happy	Worthwhile. Contact ongoing at a distance.

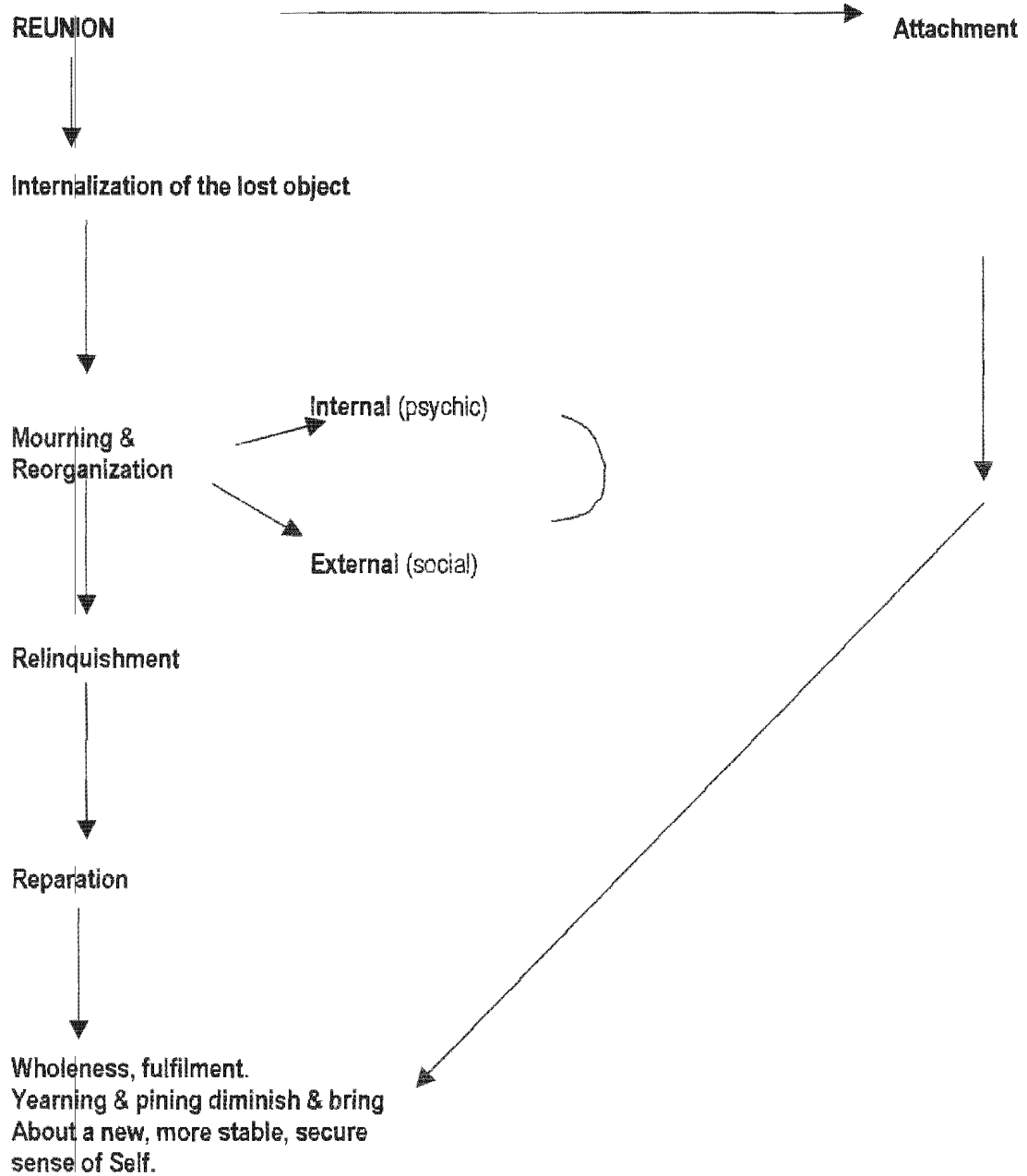
n = 8 adoptees in the qualitative sample.

**METHOD OF DISCLOSURE IN QUALITATIVE SAMPLE:**

<b>Names</b>	<b>Method of disclosure</b>	<b>Adoption rating</b>	<b>Reunion rating &amp; status of contact.</b>
H	Parents openly discussed adoption; had an adoption story,	Positive / happy	Positive / worthwhile Ongoing at a distance
P	Parents openly discussed Adoption.	Positive / happy	Worthwhile Wonderful. Not ongoing
T	Parents openly discussion	Positive / happy	Worthwhile, disappointing. Not ongoing
L	Always knew, and possibly remembered. (was older) Bad, negative connotations & comments made about adoption by adoptive parents.	Extremely unhappy	Worthwhile. Difficult & disappointing Ongoing contact at a distance
<u>M</u>	Adoptive. Mother told & openly discussed adoption. Adoption Story used. Adoptive Parents used arrival of adopted brother.	Happy / positive	Worthwhile. Not ongoing
Wi	Adopted at age 3 years – always knew. Has clear memory of being collected by Adoptive Parents. Never really told & adoption not discussed.	Happy & positive until adoptive father died (adult years)	Sad, disappointing but worthwhile. Not ongoing.
We	Discovered documents at age 18 years – was very angry & confronted parents .	Happy	Worthwhile although hurtful & disappointed by rejection of birth mother. Contact ended.
<u>Ks</u>	Always knew; was a fact of life.	Happy	Worthwhile. Contact ongoing at a distance

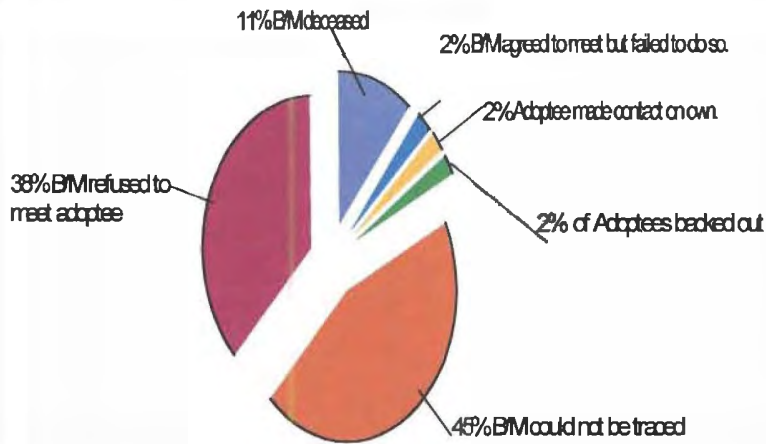
N = 8 adoptees in the qualitative sample.

**DIAGRAMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS OF REUNION**



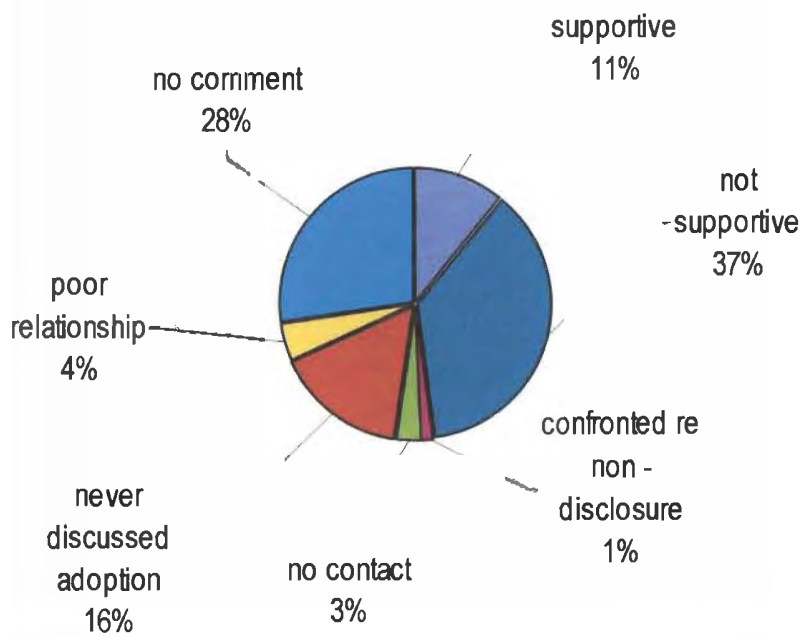
Scordilis, M.W. 2002.

## **GRAPHS**



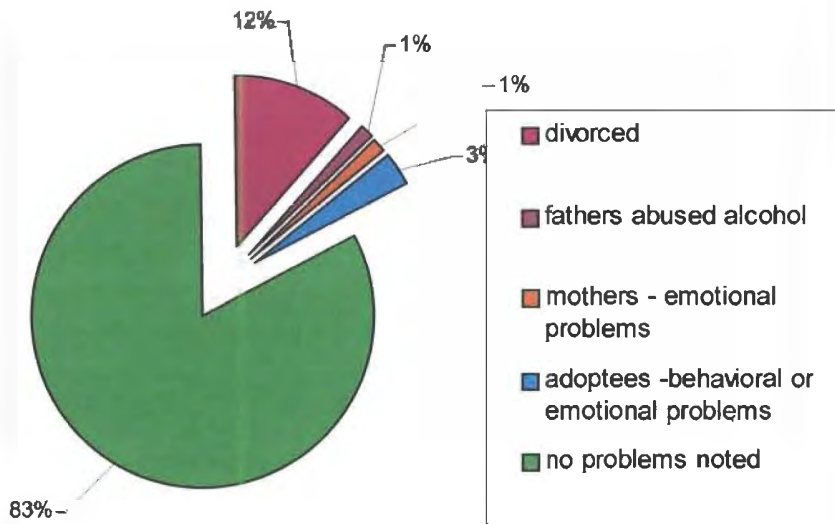
n = 207 adoption contacts noted in the adoption register.

**Adoptee comments about contact / relationship with adoptive parents**



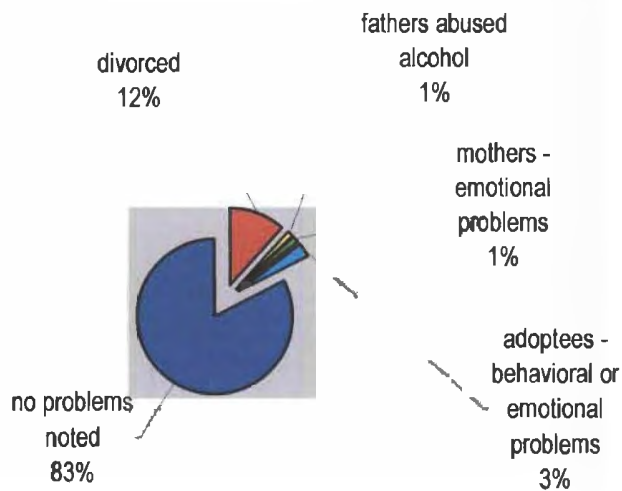
n = 207 post – adoption contacts npted in the adoption register.

**Problems noted in adoption placement**



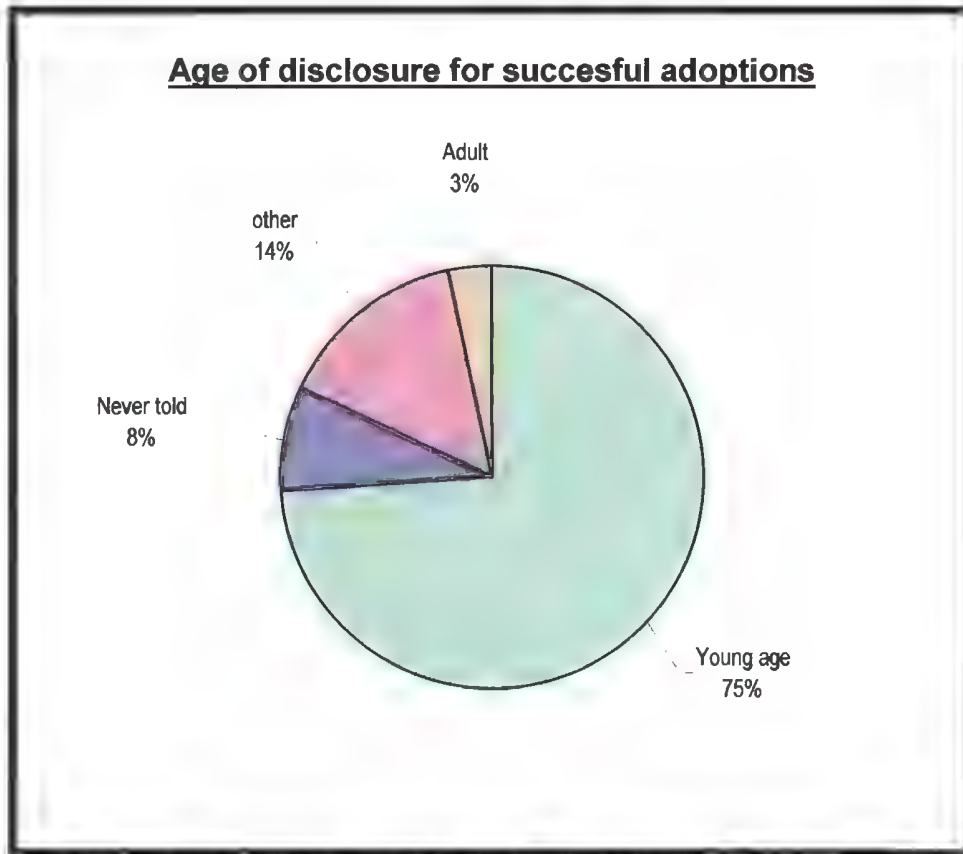
n = 44 reunions

**Problems noted in quantitative sample for 44 reunions established.**



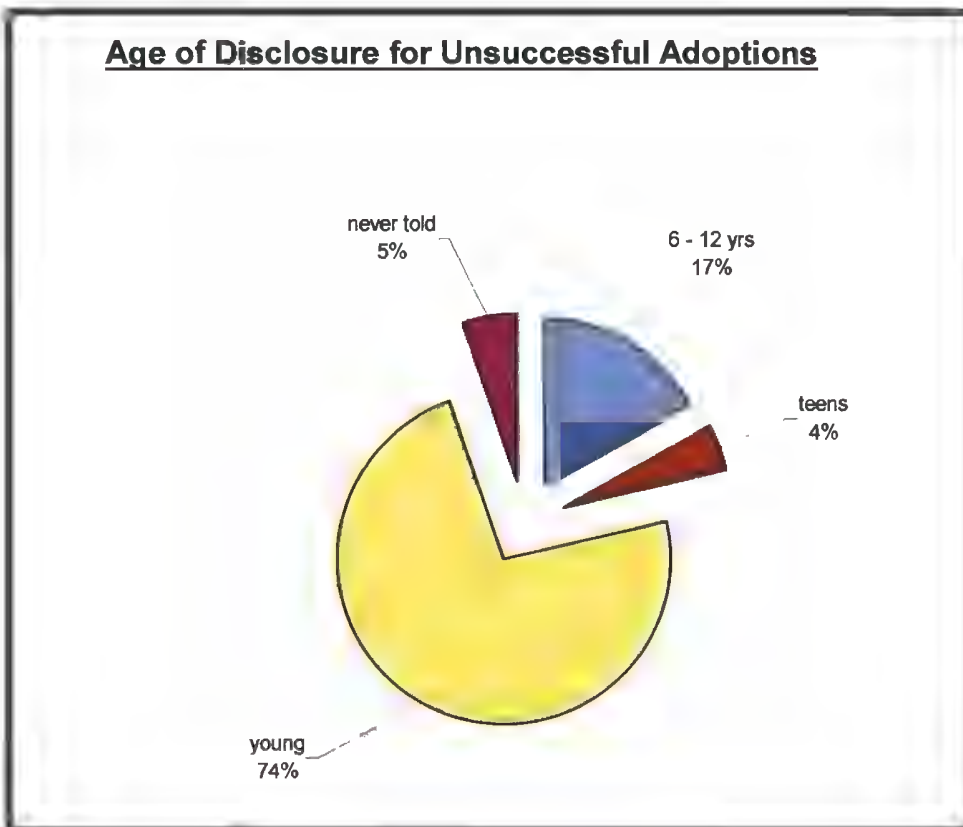
established from the qualitative sample of 207 post –

Figure 9a

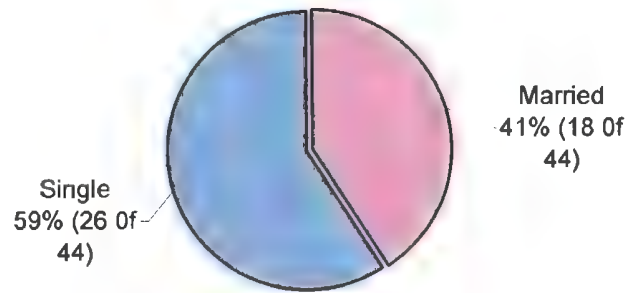


n = 207 past – adoption contacts noted in the adoption register.

Figure 9 b



**Marital status of adoptees in the quantitative sample**



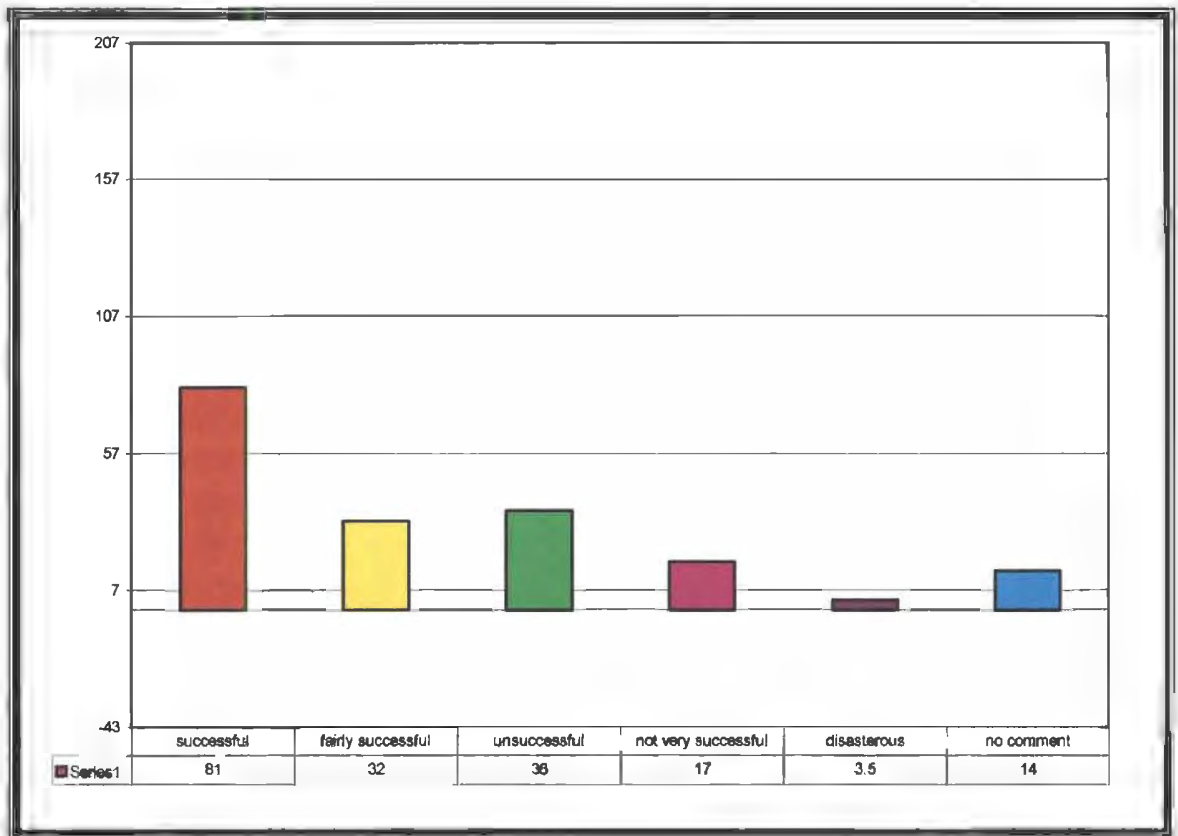
n = 44 post – adoption contacts noted in the adoption register.

**Sex of adoptees who sought reunion in the quantitative sample of 44 adoptees**

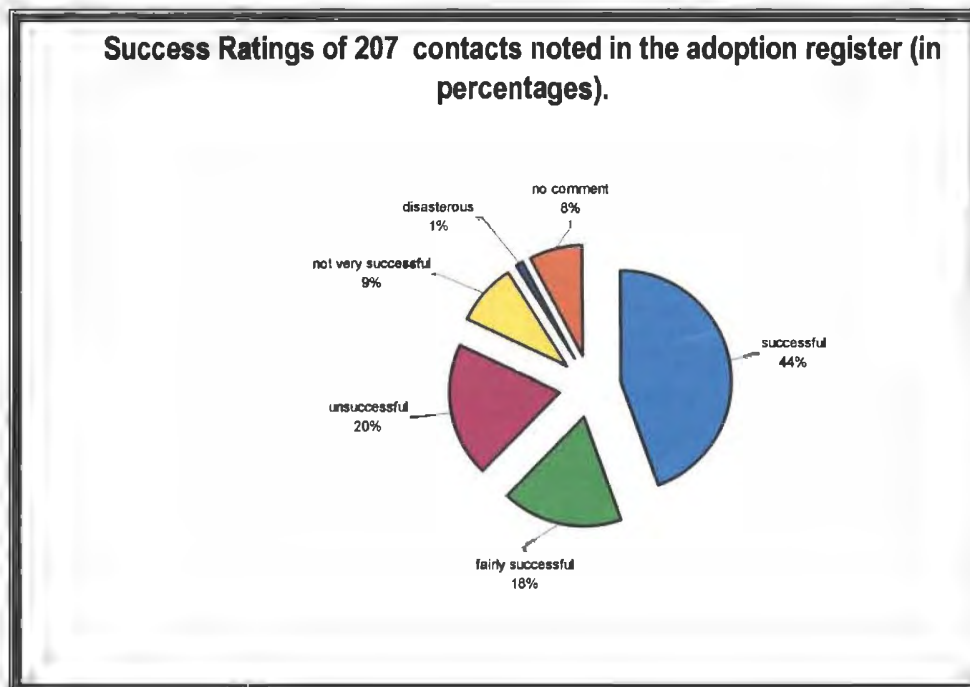


N = 44 reunion contacts established out of 207 post – adoption contacts noted in the adoption register.

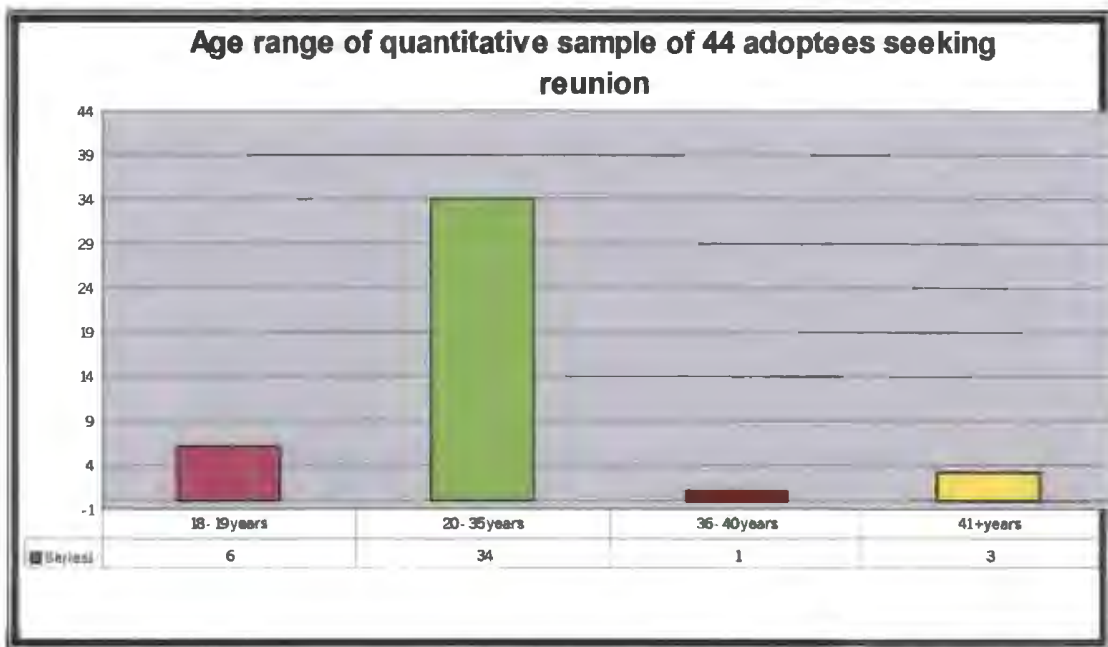
**Success ratings of 207 adoptions noted in the adoption register**



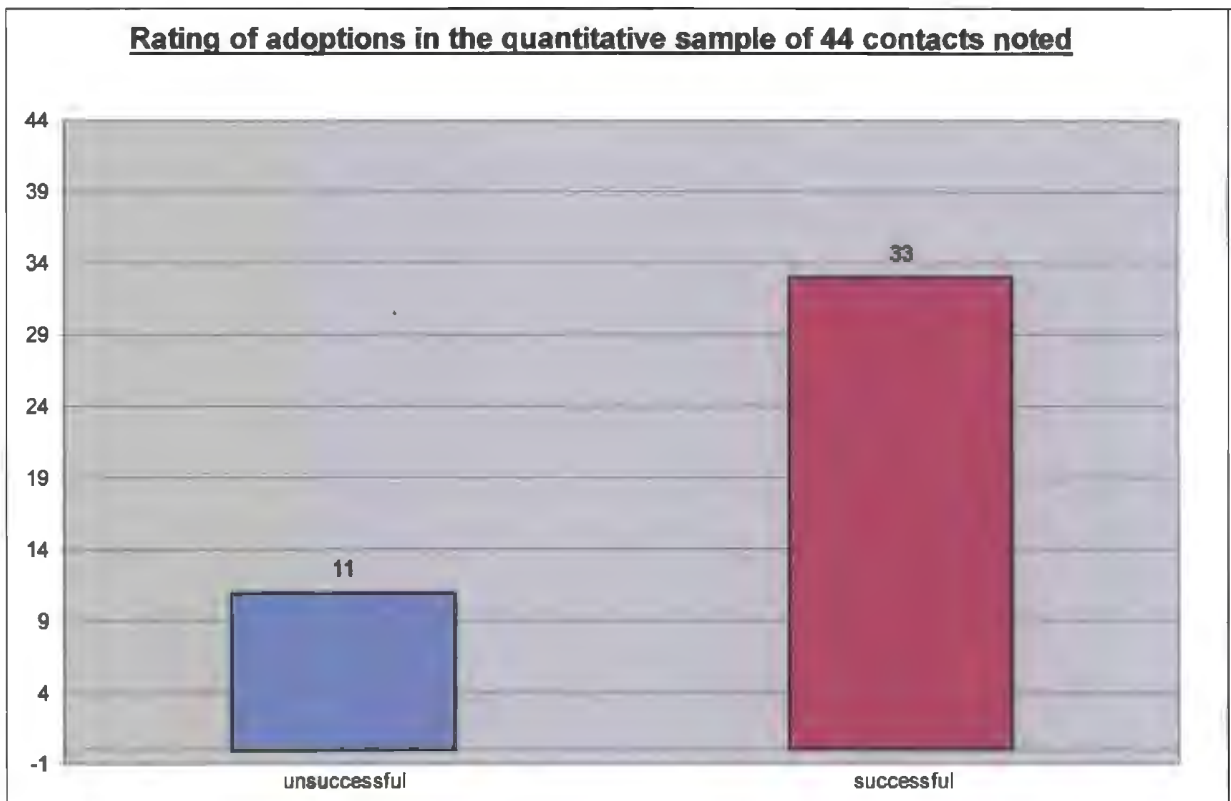
n = 207 post – adoption contacts noted in the adoption register.



n = 207 post – adoption contacts noted in the adoption register.

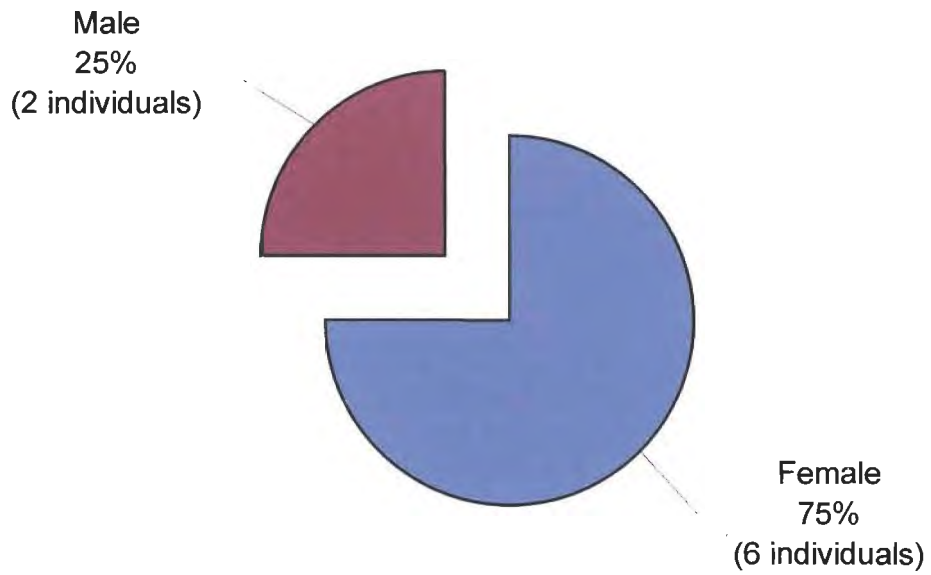


n = 44 reunion contacts established out of the quantitative sample of 207 post – adoption contacts noted in the adoption register.



n = 44 reunions established out of quantitative sample of 207 post – adoption contacts noted in the adoption register.

## Sex of Adoptees in the qualitative Sample



n = 8 adoptees in the qualitative sample.

# Appendix D

## **QUOTES FROM INTERVIEWS WITH ADOPTEES:**

**Words used to describe the reunion experience include the following:**

Confusing, nerve-wracking, painful for both parties, disappointing, BAD !, turmoil, fulfilling, uncertainty, no spark, strangeness, sadness and madness, denouncement, abandonment, rejection, over-involved, swallowed up, I have tried to keep all parties happy, I feel very torn, it filled the gaps, it filled the emptiness, it made me feel more whole, it has filled up a bit of the emptiness – not all of it – that will always be there; it was nice to see who I looked like, unforgettable, amazing, healthy, enjoyable, epic, wisdom – have it and use it, lovely, a new type of relationship, genes, belonging, closeness to adoptive mother.

**Adoptees' responses to " What Impact has the reunion had on your life".**

***Reunion gave me a sense of roots and of belonging***

Reunion has helped to deal with the sense of never having been born.

I feel less like an alien on a strange planet".

It has filled up the gaps, I know where I came from now.

THE FOLLOWING IS A SELECTION OF QUOTES FROM THE TRANSCRIPTS OF  
INTERVIEWS WITH ADOPTEES.

"I have developed a sense of belonging and now know that my birth mother cares about me even though reunion has not been particularly successful or pleasant".

"The fact that my birth mother is hurting makes a huge difference because it means I must have mattered to her".

"It really tears me up inside to think that my birth mother refused to meet me. I wish it had turned out differently; I know it probably never will change but somehow I just keep hoping".

"I do need my biological parents and I actually get on well with them and there are a lot of similarities, but it kind of disrupts".

"I was swallowed up (*by the birth parent*)".

"I have tried, over tried to keep my (adoptive) family and ( birth parents) happy".

"I (*adoptee*) gave her (*birth mother*) a chance to be a friend and she wanted me back as a daughter".

"They (birth mothers) gave the child up for adoption and they should have some sort of right".

"She (adoptive mother) goes right through my mind. She will always be a part of me. I could have been aborted and yet she gave me a chance to survive".

"It is a very tragic story about two people (birth parents), who , I think really did love each other very much".

"It can be very exciting to have fussing over you . . . and being so influential as a little baby in people's lives".

"I grew up in a very happy family and I was oblivious to how I was born into this world. I is sad and it's nice to know I have that kind of history, but it has nothing to do with me".

"I know its over; I blew it when I went against her wishes and told her children who I was. At first I was really pissed off but now I have accepted that this is how it is, and probably always will be. In some strange way though, I still keep hoping and wondering about whether it will change – It's crazy at 38 I'm thinking, hoping. I called her on my last birthday. Its silly really a grown woman like me hoping that things might still change. She just put the phone down on me".

"She (adoptive mother) said to me that in actual fact she wasn't the one that wanted to adopt. All she wanted was to please him (*adoptive father*), and now that he is no longer there she doesn't have to accommodate me any more".

"You (*adoptee*) have to be serious about keeping the door open (*maintaining contact*), because the person (*birth mother*) cannot accept the rejection a second time round . . . . I don't think it is fair to give them that rejection twice. To have to give up the baby once and then to have to give it up again, I don't think it is fair". (*adoptee speaking about the birth mother*).

"It takes a while to digest everything, but it makes you stronger. It makes you more grateful. What you are prepared to put in, that is what you are going to get out at the end of the day".

"There should be something that can safeguard both parties".

#### Quotes on the theme of identity:

"I have a different sense of identity, and it has actually become more difficult";

". . . it was nice to see her and see who I looked like. I got her toes and her fingers unfortunately, but the rest there's not much resemblance".

"Seeing those things (*similarities*) and *photos* brings some sort of sense of belonging".

"Just going back into the family, there was a sense of connection and there is an echo in yourself, there is something there that is you, and that was very meaningful".

"On a cognitive level you should be able to get on with your parents because they should match you and . . . a lot of the stuff I would like to talk about, I cant talk about with my (adoptive) mom because we are different".

"Its important knowing and understanding where you came from. Having the knowledge. It makes you a more whole person in a way".

I needed to know that I wasn't the product of rape".

"Reunion has completed my identity and tied up the lose ends";

"It has made me feel more real".

"I don't feel more whole, but it has filled up the gaps".

"I feel less like an alien on a strange planet".

"I was shaken to my very core to think that I was nothing more than an allocation".

"My mom doesn't look anything like me . . . .".

"I don't look anything like my mom and I couldn't figure out which dad I am from".

"Her (biological sister) son looks just like my son".

"She (birth mother) threw a cup at me, and said you remind me of him (birth father).

"All the others (biological siblings) have dark complexions and are just like my mom".

"My one brother . . . wanted to fetch me and take me for a blood test because he doesn't think I am his sister".

"Now I understand myself better, I know where I come from".

"I am strong like him (biological father) in temperament, but I would like to meet him".

"My adoptive mom said before I left, you will probably turn out just like your mom, no good, mentally ill and a husband that's a drunkard. That has been at the back of my mind all the time, so I try to keep myself as stable as possible".

"My (*birth*) father came from an incredibly intellectual family and he is a great thinker".

"I don't have any religious identity or cultural identity, so I have a centre, but I walk around the edge of the circle and everything I pick up disintegrates and what I have realized is that through this, is that I have not developed an identity".

"I think it is important to understand your core. Although you haven't been brought up by them, they are your blood".

"She (adoptive mother) threw the cup at me, and said you remind me of him (*adoptive father*)".

"I needed to make contact to establish who I was and where I came from".

#### **Adoptee's comments on the value and experience of reunion:**

"It makes the unknown known".

"It taught me to be very much more patient and to understand people without judging them too harshly. It affected my relationship with my adoptive mother and I am closer to her".

"Just in my outlook on life, and seeing that I have been able to have more than I would have had had. I am very happy with what I got. I have learned to appreciate my lifestyle now, because it would have been so different",

"Often when it is not worthwhile it is very useful. You can work out a lot of things from it".

"It has made a difference. I don't get depressed on mother's day and at Christmas. I have a sense of belonging now. I have a sense of somebody that thinks about me. It is important for me to be loved; it has filled up a bit of the emptiness".

"I definitely don't regret meeting them (*birth parents*). It's like a learning process . . . . but it was also a dark thing".

"Despite my own curiosity, I would have not got so involved, and caught up in the excitement and I would have made sure I only saw them (*birth parents*) a lot less frequently. I think the worst thing to happen is to get involved and then try and restore and withdraw; that is when people start getting hurt".

"I don't regret it, I have always thought it was good. You understand yourself a little bit better".

"I had a lot of questions. It has made me more whole and I would not change a thing".

"I didn't know who to call mom. (*adoptive or biological mother*) It was nerve wracking".

"It has given me a greater sense of loss".

"I have gained a very warm and welcoming family".

"There is pressure, like too many people asking too much of me, but at the same time there is a feeling of being loved and needed".

"It hasn't added anything – but in a strange way it has given me a lot more – a new relationship. I am not dependent on my birth mother to create or give me identity. I already know whom I am and meeting her just added to my identity – completed it. Tied up loose ends.

"I have been able to fulfil everything I wanted. I received more than I ever wanted. It hasn't been successful although I've accepted everything and got everything I wanted".

"It is important for self discovery, a sense of belonging and identity, for understanding yourself. We (*adoptees*) have never had that. It helps to objectify yourself. It is lovely".

### Adoptee's comments on the adoption social workers:

"(Social worker) highly recommended that we meet at the adoption agency. (We) over rode that and then (social worker) was furious.

"I went off and didn't keep coming back to see her (social worker) t hen when things fell apart I went back to the agency. My whole life was beginning to disintegrate and then I went back to see (social worker), and she was tight lipped, and said 'you haven't been coming (to see me), what do you expect'. I felt guilty about that, and it eats you up".

" I think right from the beginning it is easy to pick holes, lots of them. There were major mistakes".

"It might have gone better if I had listened to her (social worker)".

"She was wonderful. It was great to have her there".

"She was so ineffectual"

"She said, 'once you open the door (let birth mother into your life) you can't close it again'. I think those were very harsh words".

"She (social worker) was very approachable, and that made it easier".

"The social worker can make a huge difference".

"There should be alternatives (different social workers)".

"They love the power and control they think they have over you. But you have to play the game their way, or at least let them think you are, in order to get what yoj want out of them".

**Adoptee's responses to the question "What would you advise others who are contemplating seeking reunion with their birth mothers":**

"I would say go ahead anyway because she is always going to want to (*meet the birth mother*) and find out. Never dictate to a person (*adoptee*) like saying don't do it".

"Go for it" !

"As long as your first time you enjoyed each other and you had a smash, I think that's great. You have gained something. Doesn't have to be that you carry on with each other for the rest of your life".

"Go ahead - without a doubt. It's the best thing and the worst thing".

"It's right and to be encouraged. Depending on the situation - always remember there are two world coming together, and be aware that there are ripple effects".

"The adoptee must be ready. It is my journey, I would not like to be deprived of the right to initiate it myself. Until now everything has happened to you and you are not in control. Now you can be in control of it and this is significant and fulfilling".

"Put on your crash helmet. I would let them go. It is worth it. Those tears and that pain and that anger, and the experience, it is worth it".

**Adoptee's responses to the question "If you had a crystal ball and a magic wand, what would you change about your adoption and reunion experiences":**

"I would go all the way back and wish for parents that were capable, able, I would wish for a different set of parents to start off with, and a family – I wouldn't say rich and wealthy, but able to look after me". Go all the way back, like rewinding a video. Change a couple of laws, and do a couple of things – like the charmed one (*on television*). And from my conception just change everything".

"I would not have had either family . . . I would not have been born. I would have unmade myself".

"I'd want to be born to my adoptive parents, not my birth parents".

**Responses to the question what have you lost as a result of adoption:**

Never really knowing what it is like to be born.

Roots.

Nothing

A bit of myself

I have lost ME deep down.

# APPENDIX E

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO ADOPTEES INTERVIEWED.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of this study. I would like to explain the nature and aim of the research to you before we start the interview.

This study is a requirement for the Masters Degree in Clinical Social Work which I am presently completing. I have chosen to do research on the adoptee's experience of post adoption reunion with the birth mother. Due to the limited nature of the study, and constraints of time and facilities I have limit the study and am concentrating only on the perspective of adoptees and more specifically of those adoptees who have met their birth mothers in a face to face encounter.

Firstly it is important for me to say that everything that is said and discussed during the course of the interview will remain anonymous; no names will be used and information published will be such that other professionals cannot identify the source of information. The final thesis will be available to adoptees who have been interviewed should you wish to peruse the document. I will contact individuals to inform them when it is available. I would like to ask your permission to tape record the interview. The aim of this is to be able to transcribe the tapes to enable a more accurate interpretation of the data and so that I do not take any notes while interviewing you. The tapes will be destroyed once the study has been completed and the transcriptions will also be destroyed, although sections of these may be quoted in the thesis – without any names.

Would you be willing to allow this? (thank you).

I will make myself available after the interview should you wish to avail yourself of counseling and further counseling will be available to you for a period of 6 months after the interview , free of charge. This is important as we may touch on and uncover difficult and emotive issues in the course of our discussion today. Please also remember that you may at any stage you decide not to continue with the interview or to withdraw from participation in

the study. It would be helpful for me to understand why you have decided to do so if you do reach such a decision as this will enable me to provide you with appropriate counseling thereafter. The offer of counseling stands whether or not you complete the study. I will make one follow up call a week after I have interviewed you and then you should feel free to contact me at any stage should you wish to avail yourself of counseling.

I would like you to start by telling me a little bit about the details of your adoption, and then the circumstances of your reunion. How you came to decide to seek reunion, how it came about and what it was like for you. You do not need to follow any particular order or cover any special details. Just feel free to me your story as you see and have experienced it. If I don not understand or am uncertain I will ask you to clarify things for me, and if you seem to be getting struck I will help you. There is no "right " or "wrong" and I would like you to go at your own pace. I will ask you a few questions using a an interview schedule after you have finished telling me your story, so don't worry about leaving out details, as we will come back and cover anything I need later. This will also give you another opportunity to make any comments or to add any details you may feel you left out earlier on.

Please start your story when you are ready.

# APPENDIX E

## ADOPTION TERMINOLOGY:

Adoptee: The individual who is given up for adoption. The word may refer to a child relinquished for adoption or to the adult who was relinquished for adoption as a child. An individual may only be adopted up to and not including the age of 18 years as this is the age covered by the Child Care Act.

Adoptive parents: The adopting parents who legally take on the child relinquished to them by the birth parents. Adoptive parents take on full legal responsibility for the child they adopt, and the adoption is permanent.

Birth / biological parents: The parents to whom a child is born. The terms biological and birth parents are used interchangeably. The term refers to both the biological mother and biological father. South African law now acknowledges the rights of unmarried fathers who are required to be informed of and give consent to the adoption of any child born to them, whether in or out of wedlock.

Adoption triad / triangle: The three parties involved in any adoption; the adoptee, the birth parents and the adoptive parents. The term does not include professionals involved in adoption practice.

Non-disclosed adoption: A form of adoption where the birth parents do not have access to the identifying details of the adoptive parents. There are various

degrees of openness in non-disclosed adoption, from the provision of simple background information to a meeting of the parties. However the birth parents are never given identifying details of the adoptive family.

Disclosed adoption:

Adoption where both the adoptive and biological parents have access to identifying details of the other party. This kind of adoption includes step-parent adoptions, family and related adoptions as well as third – party adoptions (where unrelated persons agree to give and accept an unrelated child for adoption).

Adoption Reunion:

Meeting of the birth parents and the adoptee after adoption has been effected. Such meetings may include adoptive parents. The law states that adoptees may seek information about their origins at the age of 18 years – with the consent of the adoptive parents, and at 21 years of age without the consent of the adoptive parents. Recent changes in South African law has made it possible for birth parents to make the first enquiry with respect to obtaining information or seeking contact with the other party. However, the law requires that the adoptee have reached the age of 21 years and that the consent of the adoptive parent be obtained. This would seem to contradict the constitutional rights of the individual (adoptee), however this has not as yet been challenged in court.

Letterbox contact:

Contact between adoptee / adoptive parents and birth parents which does not include direct face – to – face meetings. This usually takes the form of letters and gifts exchanged through the social worker.

Child Care Act 74 /83:

The law which deals with legal matters relating to children. A child is classified as a person under the age of 18 years of age. Section, 17, 18, 19 and 40 of this act refers specifically to adoption.

Commissioner of Child Welfare:

The magistrate in the Childrens' Court who is responsible for adoption ( all other child-related matters).

Childrens' Court:

The section of the magistrate's court which deals with matters relating to children. Adoption matters are dealt with in this court although adoption matters may proceed to the High Court under certain circumstances.

Rescind:

This term refers to the fact that, under specific circumstances noted in the Child Care Act 74 /83, an adoption can be over turned and declared null and void.

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