

**Search and Reunion in Intercountry Adoption:
Lessons for Ireland's Intercountry Adoption Population as they
Come of Age.**

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Declaration

I acknowledge that I have read and adhered to the regulations related to plagiarism as outlined in the Masters of Social Work Course Handbook and the University College Dublin's Plagiarism Statement. I certify that the material in this dissertation is my own work and that all references to other people's work are referenced appropriately, both in the text and in the list of references.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my appreciation to my supervision, Dr. Denise O'Neill for her patience and guidance in her supervision of my dissertation. She gently encouraged me at times when I thought it was too difficult to go on. Your wise advice and steady support helped me to see that I could do it.

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Abstract

There is a growing recognition in Ireland that obtaining basic information about one's origins should be a human right. Search and Reunion is no longer seen as indicative of larger problems with one's adoption, but instead, considered a legitimate response to being raised apart from birth families. Most of the research on adoptees' reunions with birth families have focused on domestic adoptions while very little attention has been given to search and reunion for intercountry adoptees. Intercountry adoptions have become the major form of adoption in Western countries, including Ireland, during the past 30 years. These adoptees are starting to come of age where they may be considering search and reunion. A review of international literature on this subject may help them understand what to expect.

The purpose of this dissertation is to review the existing literature on intercountry search and reunion with a view to understanding the actual experiences of adoptees who choose to search for their birth families. It will focus primarily on the experiences of intercountry adoptees in the U.S.A, the Netherlands and Australia. Following on from this, recommendations will be made for Irish intercountry adoptees who are thinking about searching. Limitations of current research will be noted. Implications for policy and social work practice will be highlighted and the dissertation will conclude with a research proposal aimed at addressing the shortcomings in research on Irish intercountry adoptee's search and reunion.

This Dissertation is dedicated to my son, Daniel

'I would not exchange the sorrows of my heart for the joys of the multitude. And I would not have the the tears that sadness makes to flow from my every part turn into laughter. I would that my life remain a tear and a smile. A tear to purify my heart and give me understanding of life's secrets and hidden things. A smile to draw me nigh to the sons of my kind and to be a symbol of my glorification of the gods. A tear to unite with with those of broken heart; A smile to be a sign of my joy in existence'.

Khalil Gibran

Search and Reunion in Intercountry Adoption:

Lessons for Ireland's Intercountry Adoption Population as they Come of Age.

Introduction:

It has been 62 years since Ireland first legalised adoption in 1952. Since that time adoption has touched the lives of almost every family in Ireland, including mine. As a young woman, I gave my son up for adoption and went down the path of search and reunion when he was a teenager. The film 'Philomena' (Philomena, 2013), based on a true story of a mother who lost her son Anthony to adoption highlighted the pain and challenges confronted by both of them in their search for each other. While adoption may have legally severed the ties, the longing for connection stayed with Philomena and her son all their lives. Adopted people have argued that knowledge of their biological roots is vital for the development of their sense of identity (Mc Caughren & Ni Roghallaigh, 2015). Irish contemporary adoption practice recognises the importance of identity and have adopted a more open approach, however this is more difficult to it in inter-country adoptions. Since 1991, 4884 intercountry adoptions have been registered in Ireland from 40 different countries (AAI, 2014). In a study done by Green et al (2007), on outcomes of intercountry adoptions, it was found that adoptive parents had very little or no information on their children's birth family. There is currently no research in Ireland on the experiences of intercountry adoptees in search and reunion. This dissertation will review international literature on this subject and may shine a light on what to expect.

Background:

According to statistics produced by the Adoption Authority of Ireland (AAI) there were 44,270 domestic adoptions in Ireland from 1953 to 2014 (AAI, 2014). These adoptions took place at a time when 'Closed Adoptions' were the norm. They were characterised by no contact or sharing of information between the birth family and the adoptive family. The reality of adoption however was very different and research into the various peoples experience paint a different picture (O'Brien, 2013). There is a growing recognition that obtaining basic information about one's origins should be a human right. Many professionals also believe that an adoptee's search for 'his or her natural family and background is a healthy legitimate response to being raised apart from them (Robinson, 2000 p.148). While legislation to facilitate search and reunion in Ireland has not been forthcoming, lobbying groups and organisations such as the adoption rights alliance, have

been paving the way. The National Adoption Contact Preference Register (NACPR) was set up by the Adoption Board in 2005 to facilitate the matching of adoptees with their natural parents, however it has no backing in law. While the Information and Tracing bill (2014) is not yet enacted, there is currently no legislation in Ireland to facilitate adoptees to obtain their original birth certs. Procedures and best practice guides for search and reunion have developed over time. These include the Standardised Framework for the provision of a National Adoption Information and Tracing Service (2007). 'This Framework is based on a number of key principles including the need for preparation, the importance of third party mediation between searcher and searched, respect for confidentiality and an awareness that the complexity of individual situations can require a range of different interventions' (O'Brien, 2013, p.26). Inter country adoptees are now coming of age in Ireland and this framework may need to be re-examined in light of their needs. With the advent of social media many adoptees are undertaking their own searches. 'Social networkings offers a way to bridge physical distances and offers chances to search without having to spend huge resources on travel in getting results' (O'Brien, 2013, p.29).

This literature review will primarily explore the experiences of intercountry adoptees in the U.S.A., the Netherlands and Australia involved in search and reunion. It will examine a theoretical framework for understating the losses involved in adoption. Following on from this, the literature review will investigate the context in which intercountry adoptions flourished, who chooses to search and why adoptees feel the need to reconnect with their family and country of origin. The actual search process will be explored followed by examination how the results of these searches effects the lives of adoptees.

Research Questions

Based on the overall aim of this paper this literature review will be informed by the following research questions:

1. What are the losses experienced by birth mothers and adoptees and what theoretical frameworks can be used to understand these losses?.
2. Who searches and why?
3. How do Intercountry adoptees perform a search and what effect does an unsuccessful

search have on the adoptee?.

4. What might adoptees expect during the initial reunion and how does the relationship with the birth family develop after reunion?.

Strengths and Limitations of Literature Review:

Whittaker (2012) describes a literature review as a summary and critical appraisal of the literature that is relevant to a research topic. This dissertation is based on a literature review and these are the strengths and limitations.

Strengths:

A literature review is versatile and can lend itself to almost every topic, providing information at an in-dept or overview level. It is important for not only acquiring an understanding of your topic, but it also allows the researcher to gain an insight into what has already been written about the topic, how it has been researched, and what the key issues are (Hart, 1998). A well structured literature review will not only show the benefits research brings to its field but will also aid the process of explaining the gaps (Ribeiro, 2015). These gaps can provide you with a unique topic for further research. Compared to other forms of research, literature reviews are relatively inexpensive as large volumes of data are available.

Limitations:

It is important to be aware of author bias when examining the literature (Whittaker, 2012). This bias may be evident if there is a conflict of interest for the person(s) doing, sponsoring or disseminating the study (Locke et, 1998). When evaluating the research it is important to critically analyse the data collection methods, sampling, research design, data analysis, credibility of the findings, generalisability of the findings , and research ethics. (Whittaker, 2012). It is possible that research in the area that is of interest may not have been previously completed, which leaves the researcher unable to reference that area of research. Bryman (2004) explains that if the researcher was sourcing data through qualitative methods they may be able to gain data through this method. Qualitative or Quantitative methods allows the researcher to become very familiar with the research

whereas the researcher may not be as familiar with the research on a literature review (Bryman, 2004).

Search Strategy:

A search should be systematic, so a research journal that records all searches and thoughts as the project progresses will be used. Firstly a search will be performed on the UCD library catalogue for articles on the chosen topic. This will allow me to become familiar with authors in the area. Books and journal articles will be sourced by these author providing me with a background and familiarity with my research topic. Research referenced in journal article will be noted and used. Research cited in multiple journal articles will be used, as this would suggest the research holds significance in my research topic.

Using the internet websites will be examined that have affiliations with adoption search and reunion. These included The Irish Social Workers Association, Barnardos, AAI (Adoption Association of Ireland), G.O.A.L. (Global Overseas Adoptees Link), and ICAV (Intercountry Adoptee Voices). An examination of the publication sections on these websites provided me with relevant material. Legislation is key to this area and is also examined using AAI, the Hague convention, and various government websites.

Using UCD'S Library website the databases used while searching for literature included JSOR, Psyc Info, Ingenta, Taylor and Francis and Zetoc. The search terms used while using these databases were "search and union in inter county adoptions", "transnational adoption" "trans racial search and reunion" "adoption search" "adoption reunion" "search and reunion" "birth family reunions" "identity in inter country adoption" "grief and loss in adoption". Google scholar was also used employing the same search terms and often yielded better search results. Google scholar results can also be sorted by date allowing the researcher to view recently published papers sorted by relevance. A quick review of the abstracts on these papers allowed me to choose the ones most relevant for my dissertation.

The main types of literature used for this review were Journal articles. Using UCD'S abstracts and indexes for Applied Social Sciences, journal articles were chosen from publications such as Adoption and Fostering, Adoption Quarterly and Child and Adolescent

Social Work. Academic books by well known authors in the adoption area were also used. Grey Literature which included theses, dissertations, research reports, government publications and website literature were also considered

Hart (1998) recommends placing parameters around the time frame, language, place and population of the topic. The time parameter used will be from 2006 to 2016, although older literature and studies by highly regarded authors in this area will be included. This literature review will focus on the United States, Australia and The Netherlands. The practice of adopting from abroad started in the United States after the Korean war and the U.S. remains the 'leading receiving country' of adoptees in the world (Jones , 2010). As a developed country, Australia also has a long history of inter country adoption (Quartly, 2013). The Netherlands is a European country and physically closer to Ireland. Like Ireland, these countries have ratified the Hague convention that promotes the development of post adoption services.

Definition of Terms/Concepts:

Adoption - 'A permanent, legally binding arrangement through which a person, usually a child or teenager, becomes a member of a new family. In this arrangement, persons other than the birthparents assume all parental rights and obligations. The birthparents no longer have these rights and obligations and are no longer the legal parents of the child.' (adopt.org, 2016)

Adoptee - A person who joins a family through Adoption.

Adoptive parent/family - A person or persons who become the legal parents of a child through adoption.

Birth mother - A woman who gives birth to the child.

Birth family - An adoptees relatives by birth.

Identity - 'The characteristics that determine who or what a person or thing is'. (oxfordictionaries.com , 2016)

Identifying information - 'Information which discloses an individual's identity, such as name, address or detailed family history'. (adopt.org, 2016)

Intercountry adoptee - individual who is adopted from a different country in which the adoptive parents reside.

Intercountry adoption/International adoption - 'An adoption in which the child and adoptive parents reside in two different countries'. (adopt.org, 2016)

Interracial - 'A couple, family or other group which includes individuals who are members of different races'. (adopt.org, 2016)

Open Adoption - Allows for some form of communication between birth family, adoptee and adoptive family. Open adoptions sit on a continuum. At the lesser-open end of the spectrum the adoptive and birth parents may occasionally exchange letters and pictures throughout the adoptee's childhood and at the more-open end where the birth and adoptive parents may spend time together during the child's life (Scherman, 2012).

Search - 'In adoption, search may refer to (1) a process used by the agency to locate a missing birthparent in order to notify him/her of rights and responsibilities in regard to a child, (2) a process whereby a birthparent or adoptee seeks information and/or contact with a family member from whom they were separated through adoption proceedings, or (3) the process used by a family and/or the family's worker or agency to attempt to locate a child for the family. (adopt.org, 2016)

Reunion - 'A meeting of a birthparent and an adoptee who become re-acquainted with one another after having had no contact due to a closed (traditional) adoption'. (adopt.org, 2016)

Triad - Refers to the main parties involved in adoption, birthparent, adoptive parent and adopted child or adult.

Ethical Considerations:

Since adoption has personally effected my family's life it is important to be aware of this possible bias during the research process and report findings with complete honesty. A literature review involves reviewing other people's work therefore it is important to give appropriate credit to the work undertaken by all authors. Plagiarism can also be avoided by acknowledging other people's work. The author should not misinterpret, mislead, and/or intentionally misinterpret. (libguides.logan.edu, 2016). When reviewing research it is imperative to ensure that the research was carried out in an ethical manner and if not, it should be excluded from the literature review. Creswell (2016) warns against duplicating or producing piecemeal publications. The author of this dissertation will adhere to the UCD School of Social Science referencing guidelines and also be mindful of the NASW *Code of Ethics* when completing research.

Plan of the Review:

Chapter one - Introductory chapter which sets out a plan showing the intent of the dissertation. Research questions are presented which forms the basis for this thesis.

Chapter two - Theories surrounding loss and grief in adoption will be examined. The chapter will start with an exploration of the losses experienced by adoptees and their birth mothers when they are separated from their family and culture of origin. Their grief will be examined using Doka's model of disenfranchised grief.

Chapter Three - Will look at the context in which intercountry adoptions thrived. This chapter will explore the research on who chooses to search and why.

Chapter Four - Outlines the methods used to search and the search process. Will explore obstacles, such as language and culture, and how these were overcome. Will look at how adoptees coped with an unsuccessful search. Explore the impact of reunion on the adoptee and how the adoptee manages the relationship with the birth family over time.

Chapter Five - This chapter will summarise the findings and offer recommendations for social policy and future social work practice in this area.

Chapter 2

Theories of Loss in Adoption.

Introduction:

Before one can understand the search and reunion process it is essential to comprehend the loss involved in adoption. Loss experienced by all parties in the adoption triangle have featured significantly in adoption literature (Brodzinsky, 2011; De Simone,1996; Henney et al, 2007; Aloï, 2009; Robinson, 2000; Verrier,1993; Treacher 2001). In particular, Robinson (2000) explores the losses experienced by birth mothers and their wider family when they are separated from their children through adoption. She describes the grief of a woman who has lost a child through adoption as a unique experience that differs in fundamental ways from other grief experiences. For adopted people, Verrier (1993) and Lifton (1994) emphasis the perinatal attachment and losses experienced by adoptees who are separated from their mothers at birth. International adoptees have compounded loses of ethnic roots and cultural identity (Wilkinson, 1995). Additionally, adoptive parents experience the loss of the child they might have had or the loss of a biological connectedness (Treacher, 2001).

Since search and reunion focuses predominately on the adoptee and the birth mother, this chapter will examine their losses only. A brief examination of the theories on loss by Bowlby, Kubler-Ross, Worden and Doka will provide a theoretical framework to understand the pain experienced by adoptees and birth mothers. Since grief is the emotional response to loss, the grief of adoptees and birth mothers will be explored using Worden's series of tasks (Worden, 1991). Disenfranchised grief will also be examined.

Losses for Adoptees:

Most people recognise that adoption is inherently connected to loss but few realise the full extent of these losses (Brodzinsky, 2011). The most obvious loss is one associated with the birthparents, specifically the mother. Most couples who adopted in the past had assumed that new born babies came into their lives as a 'clean slate' however much research has shown that bonding between a mother and baby begins in utero and

continues throughout the post natal period. Verrier (1993) described the postnatal separation of a child from his/her mother as a primal wound, one which imprints an experience of loss and abandonment on the unconscious mind of the child. Smith and Brodzinsky (2002) argues that those adopted as babies seldom experience the loss of birthparents as traumatic as they had not formed any attachments to them. Their sense of loss emerges slowly around the age of 6 or 7 when they begin to understand the meaning of adoption. Nickman (1985) describes this type of loss that awakens as the child's understanding of adoption grows as a 'covert loss'. It represents the feelings of loss related to a relationship that could have been and is most often felt by early placed adoptees who have no memory of their original family.

For those adopted at an older age the loss of birthparents, siblings and extended family can be more acute as it involves the severing of known relationships (Brodzinsky, 2011). According to Fahlberg (1994) the age at placement and strength of previous relationships are the main factors that contribute to the experience of loss. Children who have experienced multiple separations cope by developing defence mechanisms such as remaining emotionally detached from their caregivers.

Westwood (1995) acknowledges the difficulties in identity formation for adopted people when they have no knowledge of their past. Triseliotis (1973) described this situation as 'genealogical bewilderment'. Cross-culturally and cross-racially adoptees are aware at a very young age that they look very different to their adoptive parents so their search for identity can be a difficult and life long process (Wilkinson, 1995). Issues of loss for inter country adoptees are exasperated by the additional losses of ethnic roots, cultural identity and belonging. The losses felt by intercountry adoptees appear to be acute if adoptive parents do not have a commitment to maintaining a positive sense of the child's racial identity (Armstrong and Slaytor, 2001).

While a lot of research on intercountry adoptees has concentrated on children and adolescents, Raible (2006) suggests that it is not until transracially adopted people reach middle age that they can they acknowledge and heal from the pain of isolation and alienation intrinsic in adoption. Oparah et al (2006) recognises the importance and value of the personal narratives of those who were adopted transracially. The stories told by many of the contributors describe profound losses with being adopted into a different race and culture; "The gap between one's self-definition and the identity attributed to one by others

has been at the heart of what I call my “cognitive dissonance” said one Korean adoptee (Hagland, 2006:, p. 41). Harris (2006) also emphasises the value of personal narratives .The writers discuss common themes such as racism, loss of ancestry and cultural disconnection.

Taft et al (2013) interviewed seven intercountry adoptees in Australia and they suggest that transnational identity and cultural difference may sideline adoption in discussions on identity. The sampling size was small and could be considered skewed as those who participated felt an impulse to tell their stories. In contrast to local adoptees who also participated in this study, the inter country adoptees spoke little about their loss concerning birth and adoption, rather, their stories were shaped by a search for ‘who they were’. They expressed ‘the indeterminacy of their identity, their sense of self as adult adoptees, and the complex, negotiated relationship between their feelings for their country of birth and their home and family in Australia’ (Taft et al, 2013, p. 8). Cherot (2008) studied vietnamese adoptees in the USA. She maintains that there is a possibility of trauma associated with missing pieces of past and memory as related to war in addition to the loss of homeland culture. The stories emerging from many of these studies reveal the difficulties and challenges adoptees experience while trying to negotiate and reclaim the ‘unknown’ part of their identity. They also speak to the diverse and complex ways in which identity is lived.

Losses for Birth Mothers:

Winker & van Keppel (1984) conducted a study of two hundred and thirteen women who had given their babies up for adoption and found that all of the women who participated reported a sense of loss that did not diminish over time. Their findings also revealed that half of the women reported an increase in the sense of loss over time. The loss experienced by these women also had two distinguishing features. Firstly it was felt as self-inflicted because the birth mother felt responsible for the relinquishment and this resulted in feelings of shame, guilt and powerlessness, secondly since the child still lived there was a lack of finality to the loss (Winkler & van Keppel, 1984). Robinson (2000) states that these two factors make resolution of the birth mother’s grief very difficult.

The women involved in the study conducted by Winker & van Keppel (1984) were volunteers who responded to requests in the media, therefore, there was bias built into this

sample. It could be said however that these women were at least willing to discuss their feelings and those who did not participate were still operating under the burden of silence and shame. A glimpse into the losses experienced by natural mothers who feel too stigmatized to speak out can be found on internet sites where a sense of anonymity grants them more freedom to speak out. Kim (2012, p. 291) comments that 'the intense feelings of pain draws birthmothers to the internet where they can unload the weight of secrecy and sorrow'.

Mourning and Disenfranchised grief:

Neimeyer (1999) states that grief and loss are central to all lives, where changes involve loss and all losses require change. While losses can take many forms, traditionally death was viewed as the only loss that validated a legitimate grief experience. Many theorists now recognise that other types of losses now require grieving.

Bowlby (1980) was one of the first theorist to make a significant contribution to the study of grief and loss. Following on from his studies on attachment theory, he described the grief response of adults who had experienced death as a form of separation anxiety, breaking the bonds of attachment (Bowlby, 1980). Bowlby identified four phases during the grieving process: numbing, yearning and searching, disorganisation and despair, and reorganisation. Bowlby departed from previous theorists such as Freud, by emphasising the relationship between the person experiencing the loss and the loss itself. His work formed the basis for future theorist such as Kubler-Ross and Worden who developed 'phases' of grief (Goldsworthy, 2005). Kubler-Ross (1970) provides a framework for identifying the stages of dying that a person passes through, namely, denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. While Kubler-Ross theory was widely regarded, Wordon (1991) criticised it's rigid and linear stages. The stages implies a certain passivity, something the mourner must pass through no matter what he or she might do (Wordon,1991).

Worden (2003) suggested that the mourning process could be viewed in terms of stages or tasks. Failure to complete these grief tasks can impair further growth and development (Worden, 2003). Worden's task model also encourages the griever to take an active approach in the grieving process thus giving the grieving person some sense of hope that he or she can actively do something (Worden, 2003). The four tasks of mourning

described by Worden (2003) are; to accept the reality of the loss; to work through the pain of grief; to adjust to an environment in which the person is deceased or missing; to emotionally relocate the deceased or missing person and move on with life. According to Worden (2003) grief is delayed or repressed when there is no opportunity to perform these tasks.

Robinson (2002) argues that in adoption there is no opportunity to perform these tasks because the grief is not recognised or supported by the community. Doka (1999) describes this grief as disenfranchised grief. According to Doka, grief is disenfranchised when the “grief experienced by those who incur a loss cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported” (Doka, 1999, p. 37). Society defines who has a legitimate right to grieve which usually corresponds to relationships that are socially recognised and sanctioned. Furthermore Doka (1999) states that in many cases of disenfranchised grief the relationship is not recognised, the loss is not recognised or the griever is not recognised. An examination of the grief experienced by adoptees and birth mothers will show how it fits the criteria of disenfranchised grief, thus interfering with the successful execution of wordons tasks.

Disenfranchised grief and mourning as experienced by birth mothers:

Although there are a large number of articles that validate the birthmothers experience of grief (Winkler et al, 1984; Logan, 1996; Henney et al, 2007; Aloj, 2009; De Simone, 1996) very few recognise the disenfranchisement of that grief. Robinson (2000) explores a birthmothers grief and maintains that the disenfranchisement of the grief prevents the birthmothers from achieving Worden’s tasks. Her findings are based on her own personal experience as a birth mother and from her work as a social worker in Australia where she counselled and supported hundreds of birth mothers. There are limitations to her research since all of the birth mothers were self-selected as they came to her looking for help. Most research however recognises the intense, long-lasting grief birth mothers experience over the loss of their child (De Simone, 1996; Henney et al, 2007; Aloj, 2009).

The first task described by Worden is to accept the reality of the loss. This is difficult for birthmothers to accept as they have no concrete focus for their grief (Robinson, 2000).

Aloj (2009) states that in many cases birth mothers have never seen or held their babies making it difficult to accept the loss. The fact that the child continues to live makes the loss

ambiguous and difficult to grieve (De Simone, 1996; Henney et al., 2007). Wordon's second task is to work through the pain of grief. Because birth mothers are viewed as voluntarily relinquishing their child, their loss is not acknowledged by society (Logan, 1996). This lack of recognition and social supports makes it very difficult for birth mothers to work through their pain. The third task requires an adjustment to the environment in which the person is deceased or missing. Robinson (2000) questions how a birth mother can adjust to a new environment without her child when the child was never given a place in her life at any time. Birth mothers were encouraged to move on with their lives as if nothing had happened and forget the birth of their child (Logan, 1996; De Simone, 1996; Robinson, 2002). The final task requires the mourner to relocate the missing person and move on with life. Many birth mothers report intense longing for their absent child (De Simone, 1996; Henney et al., 2007). It is very difficult for a birth mother to reinvest emotional energy in another relationship when the relationship with her child continues to be psychologically present (Robinson, 2000). There is also no finality to the loss as the baby has not died and many birthmothers often dream that their children will return to them.

None of Wordens tasks are achievable for birth mothers who are grieving because their grief is disenfranchised. Doka's (1989) first reason for this, happens, when the relationship between griever and the lost person is not recognised. Adoption is based on severing the legal relationship between mother and child. 'The mother who had given birth was expected to do the decent thing and disappear. Her silence was required. Her identity was concealed and her existence was often denied' (Kelly, 2005). The fact that the child is issued with a new birth cert and in many cases, a name change, denies the existence of the original mother (Robinson, 2000).

Doka(1989) states that disenfranchisement occurs when the loss is not recognised. The pregnancy is kept secret, there is no public announcement of the birth and the relinquishment is not even seen as a loss (Aloi, 2009). The loss is not acknowledged by society because the decision to relinquish the child is considered voluntary and the child does not die (Logan, 1996; Aloi, 2009). Finally Doka (1989) describes the third situation as one in which the griever is not recognised. Frequently mothers were told that they were doing the right thing, adoption was considered a positive event for the child so their loss was not acknowledge by others There were no rituals associated with the birth or loss of

their babies, mothers were disenfranchised and isolated in their grief (The Benevolent society, 2013).

Disenfranchised grief and mourning as experienced by Adoptees:

Adoptees have many obstacles that make it difficult to achieve the emotional healing that should follow mourning. Like birth mothers, adoptees find it difficult to perform Worden's first task, to accept the reality of the loss. For those who were adopted as babies they have no conscious memory of what they have lost, in terms of their birth mothers and culture (Robinson, 2000; Lifton, 1994; Verrier, 1993). They have lost the possibility of being raised by their birth family and within their own culture (Robinson, 2000). For those who may have memories of their birth family they know that their birthmother and family may still exist so the loss is not final. It is extremely common for adoptees to fantasise about meeting their birth family, making the resolution of their losses very difficult (Brodzinsky, 2011; Fineran, 2012). Worden's second task requires the adoptees to work through the pain. Intercountry adoption is often explained and legitimised by society through 'generalised narratives of salvation from poverty, disease, and the barbarianism of the Third World' (Eng, 2003, p. 9). This explanation of adoption can make adoptees feel they should be grateful for being 'rescued', thus silencing their sense of grief and loss (Willing, 2004). One adoptee felt that her culture and racial identity was something to be ashamed of because of this need to be rescued (Willing, 2004). These losses often go unrecognised by society when emphasis is placed on what is gained in adoption and not what is lost, leading to disenfranchised grief (Brodzinsky, 2011). Kauffman (2002) suggested that individuals can contribute to their own disenfranchisement by not acknowledging their own grief as being legitimate due to real or imagined input from others. This in turn can cause feelings of guilt or shame, making it difficult to seek out supports.

Worden's third task involves adjusting to the environment from which the lost person is missing. Verrier (2004) describes how adoptees adjust to their new environment by becoming acquiescent and compliant or by acting out. She describes this, as acting from a 'false self'. Willing (2004) also noted, during her life-history interviews with thirteen adult vietnamese adoptees, that their sense of identity was marked by feelings of lack of authenticity. Intercountry adoptees can struggle adjusting to the culture of their adopted home when they have no concept of their original home and yet are visibly different to their

peers in their adopted home. Yngvesson and Mahoney describe this contradiction when they argue that the intercountry adoptees they studied are more likely to be “denied a seamless origin story and struggle with the compelling discourse of authenticity visited upon them countless times in encounters with countless others” due to their visible difference and cultural hybridity (Yngvesson and Mahoney, 2000, p.101).

Wordons final task involves emotionally relocating the absent parent and proceeding with life tasks. Fineran (2012, p. 374) describes this as moving on from feelings of ‘longing and loss that are associated with accepting that the loved one is gone to a place in which one is able to value and hold the memory of the lost person in a way that allows life to move forward’. For many adoptees they have no memory of their birth parents so the task of relocating them is very difficult. (Lifton, 2009) describes a place called the ‘ghost kingdom’ where adoptees relocate their missing birth family, The ghost kingdom is the land of what might have been, visited in the adoptees daydreams and spun with fantasies. Lifton (2009) maintains that the only way that adoptees can get their ghosts to depart is through search and reunion. This takes the ghosts out of the darkness into the light of the real world.

Conclusion:

As the research conveys the experience of profound loss appears inherent for both the birth mothers and adoptees. Although the research may also reveal some shortcomings in attributing these conclusions to all adoptees and birth mothers. Almost all of the research has been conducted using self-selected samples of adoptees and birthmothers. That is, those who were in support groups for their loss or who had embarked on a search with an attempt to reunite with a birth relative. The experience of adoptees and birthmothers who appear well adjusted and show no interest in search and reunion has not been fully researched. Many would argue that their grief is repressed, because they have been given no opportunity to mourn. This is a question that requires further research but not the focus of this thesis.

The next two chapters will explore the experiences of those intercountry adoptees who do choose to embark on a search and reunion. An exploration of the losses felt by adoptees and birth mothers can provide a framework for understanding the significance of the journey of search and reunion. This journey is vitally important in providing birth mothers and adopted adults an avenue to connect to and process their grief.

Chapter 3

Who Searches and Why

Introduction:

While a lot of research has examined the experiences of domestic adoptees, there has been a paucity of research in relation to intercountry adoptees (ICA). This chapter will examine the context within which the practice of inter country adoption flourished from 1945 to 2005. This will be followed by an overview of our knowledge from research about the characteristics of adoptees who search. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of the reasons why adoptees search.

Setting the Context:

Young (2012) examined the history of Intercountry adoption (ICA) by focusing on the diverse range of factors contributing to its development. The study categorises ICA into distinct phases.

Phase one (1945-1975) was described as a humanitarian response to wars. After World War 2 large numbers of orphaned children were sent from war torn countries such as Germany to other European countries such as Denmark and the USA (Textor, 1991, cited in Young, 2012). During the Korean and Vietnam wars Asian countries became the main source for ICA into the USA (Young, 2012). At the end of the Vietnam war an evacuation known as Operation Babylift, airlifted 2500-3000 children from Vietnam to USA, Canada, Australia and Europe for adoption (Robati, 2012). For some in the West this offered the opportunity to rescue children from the war but, for others, it constituted kidnapping and evidence of Western imperialism (Strong-Boag and Bagga, 2009). Such ethical discourses among the public and professionals have continued following other conflicts and wars.

Young (2012) describes phase two as a period of reciprocity (1976-1991). It is characterised by 'finding families for children' and 'finding children for families' (Lovelock, 2000, p. 908). This period saw not only a growth in the number of children been adopted

but also an escalation in the number of sending countries (Young, 2012). At least 170-180,000 children joined families in the Western world through ICA during the 1980's. Latin America began to emerge as a significant source for foreign adoptions into USA at this time. Rescink (1984) states that this increase was due to a number of factors in the sending countries which included industrialisation, poor socio-economic conditions and limited access and availability of services, especially for unmarried mothers.

Phase 2 ended with the fall of the Ceausescu regime in 1990 and the exodus of over 10,000 Romanian children who were adopted abroad between August 1990 and July 1991 (United Nations Children's Fund, 2007). This was a time of chaos with no legal framework on how to process adoptions to foreign nationals. As Westerners, Americans and Australians flocked to Romania to adopt children, a quid pro quo arrangement developed whereby a middleman or facilitator helped 'would be adopters' locate and adopt children for a certain sum of money (Nedelcu and Groza, 2012). While initially children were adopted from orphanages, the middlemen who helped facilitate the adoptions transformed into brokers who helped families sell their children to the highest bidder (Nedelcu and Groza, 2012). An unethical adoption practice had developed that some might consider child trafficking (Press and Smolin, 2006).

Phase three (1991-2005) was a period characterised by market forces of supply and demand in relation to supplying children to Western countries. In 1988 there were 3.3 families hoping to adopt for every successful placement. This number had risen to 6 families by 1995 (Clarke and Shute, 2001). This huge demand for adoptable children fuelled the changes in adoption services from a self regulated social services agency to a free market commercialisation of ICA. In 2000 the adoption industry generated 1.5 billion dollars in adoption spending, with adoptive parents spending up to 50,000 dollars to adopt transnationally (Nelson, 2006). In addition, the large demand for children in the Western nations has resulted in illegal child trafficking. Freundlich (2000) documents a number of incidents worldwide where children were bought or stolen from parents and sold abroad at a great profit. Countries that were in a state of political turmoil emerged as a main source of children for developed nations. When communism fell in China, their 'one child policy' resulted in high numbers of girls becoming available for adoption (Selman, 2000). The high cost of caring for abandoned children in institutions in Russia after the fall of communism contributed to the increase in the number of children placed through ICA. According to Selman (2002), inter country adoptions rose to 31,856 in the period 1997-1999. In light of

the growing concerns of child trafficking and other forms of child exploitations, the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (HCIA) was designed for the protection of children in ICA. The HCIA establishes safeguards to ensure that ICA takes place in the best interests of the child and with respect for his/her fundamental rights as recognised in international law (HCCH, 1993). It recognises the benefits of a permanent family environment, encourages consideration for the child's cultural and ethnic background and recommends adoption only after all efforts have been made for the child to remain in the birth family and country of origin. It also ensures that an adopted child should have access to information concerning the identity of his or her parents, only where it is permitted by the law of that state (Hague Conference on Private International Law, 1993).

While Young (2012) identifies different phases common themes are evident through each phase. Gibbons and Robati (2012) summaries these themes when they reported that poverty was cited by parents in originating countries as the overwhelming factor in their decision to allow their children to be adopted. When poverty was not a major factor, then coercive state policies created an environment in which parents felt that abandoning or relinquishing their children was their only option. The stigma of unmarried motherhood, while continuing to be a factor in countries such as Korea, played a small role in comparison to the economic and political pressures facing relinquishing families. This is the background that most adoptees face when embarking on their search and reunion.

Who Searches

Historically the rights of birthparents and their children were disregarded in adoption practice throughout the developed world. Once a child was adopted, contact was terminated with the birthparents and adoption records were sealed in order to protect all those involved from the stigma of illegitimacy and its remedy, adoption (Walton, 2012). During the 1970's and 1980's birthmothers challenged the 'clean-break' from the past concept that was the cornerstone of adoption and fought for their rights to access their adoption records (Walton, 2012). With the movement towards greater openness there has been a commensurate increase in search and reunion activities (Triseliotis et al, 2005; Docan-Morgan, 2014; Godon et al, 2014). Past researchers that have focused on domestic adoptions have called for more attention on the search interests of inter country

adoptees (Muller and Perry, 2001). During the past decade studies have begun to emerge addressing this issue (Docan-Morgan, 2014; Gordon et al, 2014; Tieman et al, 2008).

While most research on ICA has focused on the Korean community (Docan-Morgan, 2014; Gordon et al, 2014; Nelson et al, 2010; Jones, 2015; Wang et al, 2014), Tieman et al (2008) conducted their research with a diverse ethnic group. The study examined 1,417 international adoptees from childhood to adulthood aimed at establishing not only the number of adoptees interested in their origins but also the factors associated with their search for birth parents. Participants were recruited from the central adoption registry of the Dutch Ministry of Justice thus eliminating the bias inherent in most adoption research that uses self-selected samples (Gordon et al, 2014; Long, 2016; Nelson et al, 2010, Wang et al, 2014). Their study was the only longitudinal study that started in 1986 and continued over 3 phases until 2002, thus allowing the researchers to evaluate changes in the attitudes of the participants over time. However a limitation of this study is similar to much intercountry research is that it neglects the interest of adoptees beyond childhood and early adulthood. If this study continued to another phase then the voices of mature adoptees could provide valuable insight into the literature on ICA.

Tieman et al (2008) noted that 31.6% of adoptees were searching for their birth parents, while 32 % were interested in their origins. This number is lower than the estimates in Muller and Perry (2001), which calculated 40-50% of domestic adoptees searched. Tieman et al (2008) speculates that the lower search numbers may be explained by the greater difficulty inherent in an international search. Quartly et al (2013) similarly described the sheer impossibility of making connections in war-torn countries like Vietnam. Wang et al (2014, p.46) states in the case of China, that the 'obscurity of children's origins has long led to the assumption that locating birth parents was impossible'. Adoptees, however, from countries where searching was more difficult had a greater preoccupation with biological origins than adoptees from other countries. Therefore, the fact that some adoptees do not search does not mean that they do not wish to do so, it may indicate other factors restrict the possibility of a successful reunion.

Tierman et al (2008) indicated in their study that searchers interest in their biological origins was already present in adolescence, as was nonsearchers' lack of interest thus supporting the assumption that search is an internal process that begins in childhood. Most of the narrators in Long (2016) speak about always knowing that they would search

one day for their birth family. As one adoptee from India stated 'I have no clue as to what made me want to search. The desire started at an early age' (Long, 2016, p. 22). The tendency to search however is influenced by a number of factors such as adoptive parents divorce (Irhammer and Cederblad, 2000), or a move away from home to a more ethnically diverse environment (Jones, 2016; Crystal et al, 1996).

One of the main findings of Tieman et al (2008) was that although the majority of searchers were well-adjusted, they had more problems, mainly internalized problems, than uninterested searchers. More recent studies however, have revealed no difference across any of the search and contact group for overall well-being or psychological distress (Gordon et al, 2014). What is striking about Tiernan et al (2008) findings, is that in childhood, future searchers had higher levels of problems than future uninterested searchers. Tieman et al (2008) hypothesis that the loss involved in adoption may create stress for these searchers from childhood and they may try to cope with this by searching. Tieman et al (2008) also noted the difference in childhood between future reunited searchers and future searchers. Specifically, reunited searchers showed lower levels of problem behaviour, therefore may have had more resilience and coping skills than those who did not succeed in their search. Another interesting findings is that women had a greater interest in their birth families, although they were no more likely than males to search for their birth families (Irhammer and Cederblad, 2000; Tieman et al (2008).

However, a limitation of the Tieman et al (2008) study is that it provides limited information in relation to the methodology used in the study. The results of the study requires the authors on many occasions to hypothesis instead of relying on the data. For example, their study found that searchers and reunited searchers maintained less regular contact with their adoptive parents than those who were not interested in searching. Instead of hypothesising about why this may be so, semi-structured interviews would have allowed them to explore the reasons thus allowing the data to tell the full story. The study also reflects some bias and cultural assumptions. A large amount of research has explored how the adoptee's desire to protect the adoptive parents may impact their decision to search for birth families (Reynolds et al, 2016; Kirton et al, 2000). Kim (2010) suggests that adoptees often feel an anxiety about 'coming out' to their parents in the form of a birth-family search, returning to birth countries or criticizing the adoption system. Tiernan et al (2008) does not research this link and may assume that because parental openness about

adoption is high in the Netherlands there is unlikely to be a link between search and protecting the adoptive parents.

Why Search

While the search for the lost mother is central to many domestic adoptees, this may not always be the central theme for ICA's, due in large part to the sheer impossibility of making this connection (Quartly et al, 2013). ICA's search may be more focused on learning about their birth country and culture and less about their birth family and adoption (Gordon et al, 2016; Oparah et al, 2006). For example, Gordon et al (2014) explored the search motivations of 123 transracially adopted adults (TRA's) using Muller and Perry's (2001) three theoretical models. These models define searching in the context of sociocultural norms, as a normative process and motivated by psychopathological issues. Although 15 different birth countries were represented in this study, 76.1 % of participants were from South Korea. The preponderance of participants from South Korea poses questions in regard to the generalisation of the results to all ethnic groups.

The results found that almost all TRA's in the searching group came from predominately White communities (Gordon et al, 2014). Growing up feeling and looking physical dissimilar to their adoptive parents and community seems to provide a strong impetus to search (Jones, 2015; Brodzinsky, 2011; Reynolds et al, 2016; Harris, 2006). In contrast more members of the 'thinking about searching' group came from a multi-cultured community. Gordon et al (2014) suggests that exposure to a wider range of ethnicities during childhood while generating an interest in one's birth country may also satisfy some of the needs that would be met by doing a search. While Tieman et al (2008) also found that searchers had more problems with their dissimilarity to their adoptive parents than uninterested non searchers, it was the intellectual and psychological differences that mattered, not the physical differences. Further research from different countries where adoptees grow up may shed light on how different cultures impacts on the way adoptees view their dissimilarities to their adoptive parents.

Gordon et al (2014) found that the different searching and contact groups vary in their ethnic identity development. This study used the the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (Phinney, 1992), to explore the normative process of identity development. MEIM is a scale for use with adolescents and young adults from diverse groups. The

measurement comprises of two factors, ethnic identity search and affirmation, belonging and commitment (Phinney, 1992). The ICA's in the 'contact' and 'search' groups scored higher than the 'no interest' and 'thinking' groups on the exploration subscale of the MEIM, as searching is a form of exploration (Gordon et al, 2014). This would suggest that searching and contact has a strong connection to identity formation.

Recent studies show no real difference across the contact/search groups regarding psychological distress and well-being (Gordon et al, 2014; Wrobel et al., 2004). Gordon et al (2014) noted that although searching was not associated with psychological distress, adoptees' motives to search are complicated and may embody both negative and positive emotional experiences. Three of the adoptees who searched in Wang et al (2014), did so because of a feelings of emotional loss. Several adoptees in different studies reported feeling like 'outsiders' and fragmented as they negotiated between different groups, however they did not necessarily connect these feelings to searching (Gordon et al, 2014; Long, 2016). This may be because in many cases they viewed their adoption as positive, as they had negative assumptions about their lives if they had grown up with their birth families. An interesting finding by Gordon et al (2014) was that those who had no interest in searching had grim images of their lives had they lived with their birth parents while interviewees in other search/contact groups spoke about the poverty and lack of opportunity in their birth countries and were more moderate in their tone. This finding has implications for the manner in which adoptive parents, professionals and society in general portrays the countries of origin.

Conclusion

While research is in its infancy on ICA's, the results of the available studies show that more ICA's are beginning to search as society begins to accept search and reunions as a normative part of an adoptee's life. For many adoptees the desire to search has always been with them while for others various external factors such as the divorce or death of adoptive parents can trigger the desire to search. It is important to note that the impediments to performing a search are important factors that influence an adoptees' searching behaviour. For ICA's, searching is highly related to the process of forming an ethnic identity which moves beyond focusing on birth families to learning their birth language, joining cultural clubs and visiting their birth countries.

Chapter 4

Search and Reunion

Introduction:

One of the key issues for ICA'S is the difficulty and challenges of accessing information on their lives before adoption. This chapter will explore how ICA's conduct searches and the obstacles they have to overcome. It will examine the results of these searches including how adoptees handle 'dead ends' and what to expect when a reunion does happen. Finally, it will look at the challenges of connecting with both birth families and their new culture, and how ICA's integrate them into their lives.

The Search Process:

Walton (2012) argues that the dominant discourse around best interest of the child in adoption often overlooks the consideration of adoptees as adults, thus neglecting the interests of adoptees beyond childhood. The neglect is evident in the post adoption services of receiving countries which focuses primarily on the needs of adoptive parents and their children during the early stages (Walton, 2012). Adoption is now recognised as a process as distinct from an advent (Paveo, 2005). The gathering of accurate and comprehensive information surrounding an adoption was overlooked when the aim was to speed up the process rather than investigate it (Lovelock, 2000). For many adult adoptees now embarking on a search this has meant they start out with little, incomplete and often inaccurate information on their lives before adoption.

Most research involving birth family/country search has been done within the Korean adoptee community (Reynolds et al, 2016; Walton, 2012; Jones, 2015; Nelson et al, 2013). While most of these studies examine the reason why adoptees search and the outcomes, very little is written about the actual search. Nelson et al (2013) noted in a survey completed at the Gathering of Korean International Adoptees that, of the 64 adoptees who disclosed their method of search, the majority (64%), had used their adoption agencies in order to facilitate their search, while 8% used public media and 24% used other methods.

Kupel (2012) describes the frustration many adoptees feel as they try to obtain copies of their adoption paperwork. Some have found that the information held by the American adoption agency does not match that held by the adoption agency in Korea. Walton (2012, p. 449) states that 'For adoptees, the journey to discover more about their life in South Korea before they were adopted is often riddled with frustration, a lack of information and dead ends'.

Not only do ICA's have to contend with the geographic distance, many adoptees have cited language and cultural differences as obstacles to their search (Long, 2016; Wang et al, 2014; Kupel, 2010). Post adoption services that are adoptee driven have been an invaluable support for adoptees while they try to navigate their way through the system (Walton, 2012). Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (G.O.A.'L), the largest and longest-running support group in Korea provides resources such as lodging, translators, guides, birth search departments and other supports to Korean adoptees returning to Korea (Nafzger, 2006). The decision to search and return to a birth country can be emotionally and psychologically stressful (Kupel, 2010; Reynolds et al, 2016). Having the support of an organisation such as G.O.A.'L or other adoptees who have been through the same experience can make the search less daunting (Nafzger, 2006).

While certain aspects of the Korean experience may be generalisable to other ICA's, the cultural, historical and socio-political context of adoption for each country may also make the search experience very different for adoptees. ICA's reached its height during the 1990's, therefore very little research has been done on the search experiences of adoptees from different countries. Wang et al (2014) examined the experiences of seven families with adopted children from China who searched and were re-united with their birth families. Although the sample was very small, the families were recruited from three different countries, giving an international perspective. The search was conducted by the adoptive parents as the children were too young to do their own search. All international adoptions from China are closed making a search for birth parents very difficult. The adoptive parents in this study used different methods to locate the birth parents. Three of the families used a local searcher and two families contacted a Chinese friend to start the search process. One family put up posters in the local area with their daughters photo and information, while the last family used the internet to find a Chinese volunteer organisation that helps lost and missing children (Wang et al, 2014). While this study showed the

different ways searches can be conducted in China, it does not indicate the success rate of searches, as the study only included families that were successful in their search.

Long (2016) recorded the stories of 40 adoptees from 14 sending countries into 10 receiving countries. It is impossible to guarantee that the voices of these adoptees are a representative sample as the participants are volunteers, who have an interest in adoptee support groups. Adoptees who are more isolated from other adoptees and who are not part of a support group may have a different perspective. The diversity however, offers a good perspective into the different search experiences of adoptees from different countries. Given the range of sending countries, many with primitive or fragmented record keeping services, many adoptees spoke about the uncertainty in who to turn to begin their search. They sought information from their adoption agencies, engaged private investigators, used online groups and social media, contacted government departments or social agencies in sending and receiving countries, volunteered as guests on TV television stations dedicated to finding lost families, took DNA tests and engaged the help of friends and fellow adoptees from inter-country adoption support groups (Long, 2016).

The searches ranged in time from a few days to many years, and in almost all cases were emotionally charged. Most adoptees spoke about the importance of the support they received from their adoptive parents and support groups during their search. For many the search involved a return to the country of their birth which in itself invoked strong emotions. Reynolds et al (2016, p. 243) noted that for Korean adoptees the 'decision to return to Korea is often emotionally charged, eliciting strong reactions from the individual's community and impacting her or his sense of commitment to the adoptive parents and culture, sometimes years or decades in the making'. For some adoptees the emotions raised by the prospect and the reality of a return to the land of their birth is often present in their reluctance to return (Quartly, 2013). Returning home may be psychologically stressful but may also play a large part in the adoptees's development of their racial identity (Long, 2016; Wilson & Summerhill-Coleman, 2013). One German narrator spoke about identifying as a proud German-Peruvian after spending time in her birth country, Peru (Long, 2016).

The Unsuccessful search?

There are no official statistics on the number of unsuccessful searches for ICA's. Nelson et al (2013) suggested that of those surveyed during the 2010 Gathering of Korean Adoptees, 53% had found family members. This number is extremely high given that the Overseas Korean Foundation, estimates that 8.3% of adoptees who searched for their Korean family between 2000 and 2005 had found relatives (Hong, 2006). This large discrepancy may be due to the fact that those Korean adoptees who attended the gathering identified strongly as Korean adoptees and were willing to travel to Korea to search (Nelson et al, 2013). A survey completed during the first Gathering of Korean Adoptees in 1999 showed that only 7% of respondents were in contact with their birth families (Nelson et al, 2013). This would suggest that adoptees are becoming more successful in re-uniting with their birth families. This success may be due to the work of the Korean adoptee community who have demanded more information about their histories and adoption processes from agencies and governments. It could also be argued that reunions have become more acceptable and are a culturally recognised ritual in Korea (Docan-Morgan, 2015). The numbers, however, are still very low and would indicate a large number of International Adoptees continue to have unsuccessful searches.

The research that explores the search and reunion of ICA's has, in the most part, failed to examine the experiences of those who have been unsuccessful in reuniting with their birth families. Long (2016) does give a voice to such adoptees, when eleven of the forty narrators describe their experience of coming to a 'dead end' in their search. These adoptees came from South Korea, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and India. Although all of them expressed grief and pain with finding nothing at the end of their search, none of them regretted having taken their journey. Most of their stories speak of growth and personal transformation that they experienced from facing their losses. Three of the ICA's used their experiences to create and become part of support groups that helps others going through the same experiences (Long, 2016). Global Overseas Adoptees Link (G.O.A.'L) was set up by a Korean adoptee, who, after seven years of searching, decided to turn her energy into something constructive (Naftzer, 2006). Other adoptees talk about their search opening them up to the issues involved in adoption. One adoptee said 'Now I am becoming more educated about adoption and also educating others, my relationship with my parents has become more honest and a bit challenging' (Long, 2016, p. 72). Other adoptees expressed feelings of satisfaction at having attempted a search (Long,

2016; Nafzger, 2006). Another theme that emerges is one where the search has thought them a lot about themselves and other people (Long, 2016; Nafzger, 2006). Many reported becoming stronger as a result of their search. One adoptee who's search had ended in the discovery that his birth mother had died reported that, 'Prior to my search, I was a young, silent, small frightened boy and through this journey, I have become a leader with an important mission' (Long, 2016, p.69).

One adoptee did report that her sense of self was shaken and the conflict in information she received left her more abandoned and incomplete (Long, 2016). Reynolds et al (2016) also described similar feelings from a participant who experienced an unsuccessful birth family search. 'To experience the loss associated with being an adoptee throughout one's life can be at least distressing and at worst, crippling: but to experience another loss such as reaching a "dead end" in the family birth search can be overwhelming and destructive to one's sense of self and understanding of one's place in the world' (Reynolds et al, 2016, p. 244). It is difficult to ascertain if these adoptees had just come to the end in their search and were grieving their loss, or if they were unable to move through the grieving process. There is a large deficit in research on the long term outcomes of searches that do not lead to reunions. Longitudinal studies would be useful in understanding the ways in which adoptees cope and adjust over time. Such studies could also explore why some adoptees grow and become stronger following an unsuccessful search while others struggle with their sense of loss.

The Initial Reunion

Many of the studies on adoption and reunion challenge the simplistic fairy tale images of what it is like for adoptees and birth families to reunite (Docan-Morgan, 2014; Docan-Morgan, 2015; Long, 2016; Mila, 2014; Reynolds et al, 2016; Wang et al, 2014). Mila (2014) argues that the adoption and reunion stories are romanticised because of the dominant narrative in adoption culture that continues to idealise the act of adoption. Programs such as 'Long lost families' do not educate the public on the full story of search and reunion, which is a complex lifetime process that evolves and changes over time and is fraught with complex emotions (Long, 2016; Docan-Morgan, 2015; M, 2006; Reynolds et al, 2016).

While the existing body of research on reunions sheds light on the adoptees evaluations of the reunion and focuses on the factors leading to a 'successful' reunion, Docan-Morgan (2014) provides deep insight into the specific interactions that take place during the initial reunion and what these interactions mean to the adoptees. The study uses Galvin's (2006) framework of boundary management to examine how, if at all, a sense of birth family identity is (re)constructed during initial reunions. The participants were Korean adoptees, therefore it is difficult to ascertain if other international adoptees would have similar experiences. The sample size was small, 19 adult Korean adoptees which included 15 women and 4 men. The participants were chosen from Korean adoptee organisations, so consequently, may not be representative of the wider Korean adoptee community. Semistructured, in-dept interviews were conducted which allowed sufficient flexibility to explore the participants response and the meaning they made of the experience. In order to ensure the validity of the data, the author attended a panel that featured adult Korean adoptees who discussed their birth family reunion experience. The author then verified the panelists stories against the study's findings.

The most prominent message that adoptees reported was that the birth family should not feel guilt about the adoption. Even adoptees who struggled with loss, identity and/or racism throughout their lives attempted to ease their birth parents' burdens rather than attribute blame. This seems to imply that adoptees feel compelled to compensate for their parents' loss of a child, complicating the reunion process for adoptees (Docan-Morgan, 2014). Adoptees also came to the reunion wanting to know their background story as to why they were given up for adoption. This finding supports other research that reflects the commonality of this type of question (Wang et al, 2014; Jones, 2016;). The narrative process around their stories also appeared to play an important part in contributing to the adoptees' personal identity. Docan-Morgan (2014) reported that while the birth families did answer the 'Why' question, some participants reported feeling confused about the information they received. The confusion in their adoption stories can serve to create greater uncertainty surrounding their identities (Palmer, 2011; Long, 2016). Docan-Morgan (2014) also reported that the adoptees looked to their birth families for medical history and an understanding of where their own physical and personality characteristics came from. Those who found similarities were pleased and reassured whereas those who did not see similarities expressed disappointment, This finding resonates with many stories and studies on reunions (Crystal et al, 1996; Traynor, 2010; Jones, 2016; Wang et al, 2014).

Birth family messages reflected several themes including apologies, expressions of love, expressions of gratitude towards the adoptive parents and advice (Docan-Morgan, 2014). The birth families narratives included explanations of the circumstances that surrounded the participants adoptions, which in many cases included themes of poverty, illness and infidelity (Docan-Morgan, 2014). These narratives however were not universally comforting and in some cases were incoherent and confusing to participants. One participant felt that the missing pieces in her story had just led her to more questions while other participants reacted with anger when faced with the actual content of their birth families narrative (Docan-Morgan, 2014). Most participants in the study recalled the rituals that both the adoptees and birth families engaged in during the initial reunion. These included extended touches with great intensity, exchanging gifts, outings, exchanging culture and symbolic family activities. 'The emotionality of these symbolic family rituals highlights that adoption carves deep losses in both adoptees and birth families' (Docan-Morgan, 2014, p. 366).

Wang et al (2014) noted that the recurrent theme that emerged from all the interviewees was that of adoptees not feeling emotionally prepared for the reality of reuniting with their Chinese birth parents. While the children's young ages in this study may have compounded the emotional nature of the reunion, other studies also reflect this finding (Reynolds et al, 2016; Gordon et al, 2014; Quartly et al, 2013; Long, 2016; Crystal et al, 1996; Mila, 2014). One Nepalese adoptee whose initial reunion with her birth family lasted two weeks described her experience as a 'roller-coaster of emotions, incredible, exciting, distressing, frustrating, a ridiculously incredibly hard thing to do' (Quartly et al, 2013, p.22). Initial meetings produced a perplexing mixture of positive and negative emotions. Crystal et al (1996) describes falling into her mother's arms crying, her heart aching as a deep wound released through the tears. Different emotions overcame another adoptee who recalled feelings of anger and repressed memories as she met her birth family for the first time (Wang et al, 2014). A Korean adoptee who met his birth father for the first time recalled how his birth father was overcome with emotions while he felt nothing (Long, 2016). Mila (2014) explains that even in the most ideal circumstances reunion precipitates complex pain and new grief. Robinson (2000) believes that grieving often begins at the time of reunion if there has previously been no recognition of the need to grieve. While adoptees and birth parents may sometimes feel that the reunion has made them sad and confused, Robinson (2000) maintains that reunion has just allowed them to experience the grief that they have suppressed since their original separation. Such grief can be very

confusing for adoptees to understand. As one adoptee explained, 'to grieve for someone I have no memory of was profoundly confusing for me and impossible to explain' (Long, 2016, p. 8). Preparations which include professional counselling and peer support groups can be invaluable tools in helping adoptees prepare for reunions (Robinson, 2000; Long, 2016)

Life after Reunion

There are no official statistics on the percentage of ICA's who continue a relationship with their birth family after the initial reunion. Nelson et al (2013) estimated that of those at the 2010 Gathering of Korean Adoptees who had found family members, 89% had maintained some kind of relationship with a birth family member or members. Long (2016) and Docan-Morgan (2015) both indicate that at least 80% ICA's continue to maintain contact with their birth families. It is very difficult to ascertain how representative this may be of the general ICA community as these studies have a large number of Korean adoptees most of whom were drawn from Adoptee organisations. None of the studies examined how lost of contact affected the lives of adoptees.

Many studies have shed light on the challenges domestic adoptees face with negotiating the terms of relationships with birth family members (Kirton et al, 2000; Modell, 1997). Kirton et al (2000) explored reunions between transracially adoptees and their birth families and found that transracially adoptees were less likely (23%) than same race adoptees (54%) to feel 'at home' with their birth families. It would seem that while race and ethnicity were strong motivators to search, cultural difference caused many challenges. Palmer (2011) also indicated that participants in his study found that cultural differences inhibited them from developing close relationships with their birth families. Docan-Morgan (2015) study set out to exam what cultural differences Korean adoptees experienced when reuniting with birth families and what impact this has on the adoptees' sense of belonging with the birth family.

Docan-Morgan (2015) recruited 19 Korean adoptees from the United States and Denmark. The validity of the results were checked by discussing the results with adoption scholars and Korean adoptees who had reunited with their birth families. Like almost all other studies on ICA's this only included Korean adoptees therefore the generalizability of the results is limited. The results corroborate findings from Palmer (2011) which suggests that

Korean adoptees cultural and national identities contrast with their racial identities (Docan-Morgan, 2015). The Korean adoptees who were Korean by genetics and appearance, held values, expectations and behaviours that reflected their adoptive countries, thus creating the possibility of confusion and estrangement for both adoptees and birth families. Female participants reported experiencing either implicit or explicit pressure to adhere to Korean standards of beauty. Many participants also reported been asked personal questions by their birth families and/or offered unsolicited advice. Other research, for example (McDermott, (2006); Long (2016)) similarly reflect these findings. McDermott (2006) who was adopted from South America followed the family norms of supporting his birth family whenever possible as this was expected within his birth family's culture. A participant who was adopted from the Philippines spoke of the 'strained' relationship she has with her birth parents due to their expectation that she should be more family orientated and contribute financially to them (Long, 2016).

In light of these cultural differences adoptees reported different feelings with regard to belonging to their birth families (Docan-Morgan, 2015). Some ICA's felt a strong sense of belonging with their birth families (Docan-Morgan, 2010; Crystal et al, 1996; Long, 2016; Traynor, 2010). One participant who was adopted from Peru described how she was German before her reunion but now also identifies as Peruvian (Long, 2016). The positive experiences of adoptees during search and reunions have played an important role in the adoptees relationship with their birth country and family (Reynolds et al, 2016). Other adoptees found little connection to their birth families (Docan-Morgan, 2015; Long, 2016). All of the participants who felt no connection perceived cultural difference to be significant and seemed uncertain about their future relationships (Docan-Morgan, 2015). They also expressed a new heightened awareness of identifying with their adoptive countries.

Most participants in all the studies indicated that their relationships with their birth parents were dynamic and/or evolving (Docan-Morgan, 2015; Docan-Morgan, 2014; Long, 2016; Wang et al, 2014; Mila, 2014). This was particularly true for adoptees who had maintained relationships with their birth families for over three years. Many had reported that their sense of belonging had fluctuated over time and there had been, at times, cultural conflicts. They also believed that understanding cultural differences and navigating birth family relationships can take many years. Future research could examine why some adoptees persevere and maintain their long distance relationships with birth families while others give up.

Language and geographical distance was cited by Long(2016), as major obstacles in maintaining a relationship with birth families. Some adoptees used social media to maintain some basic communication while others used friends from their birth countries to translate letters (Kupel, 2010; Long, 2016). Many of the adoptees have spoken about the lack of understanding from the wider community on adoption and reunion. Mila (2014) defines this as 'adoption reunion dissonance', 'the disparity that adoptees in reunion experience between how others perceive our stories and how we experience our realities post-reunion' . For example, M (who maintained his anonymity by not disclosing his surname) (2006) described the hardest part of his adopted life as been the loneliness that it induced and the lack of people who have understood it. Long (2016) maintains that many people do not understand the complex nature of adoption, making the search and reunion a very isolating process. For many adoptees, connecting with other adult adoptees who share their experience has been life saving (Long, 2016; M, 2006). Most adoptees also spoke about the valued support of their adoptive parents during their search and reunion (Wang et al, 2014; Long, 2016).

Whatever the outcome from their search and reunion, adoptees almost always express satisfaction that they have taken the journey. The vast majority of adoptees felt that the contact with their birth parents had a positive effect on their lives (Tieman et al, 2008; Traynor, 2010; Long, 2016, Muller & Perry, 2001; Mila, 2014). Traynor (2010, p.15) explains this as 'connecting to a part of yourself that you did not know, part of yourself that might have been left in the dark'. While many adoptees went into their search and reunion hoping to find resolution to their conflicting identity, they found instead, a space between their birth family and family of adoption where where they could make of themselves what they wished (Quartly, 2013, Long, 2016). It is important to note however, that positive search outcomes do not ensure psychological well-being. Some adoptees who enter into their search with feelings of loneliness and isolation continue to feel this way after a successful reunion (Gordon et al, 2014; Long, 2016). This finding emphasises how each search experience is unique in terms of its effect on individual adoptees.

Conclusion

The findings that emerge from research and narratives indicate that care should be taken not to homogenise the adoptee experience. The search and reunion journey varies

immensely for ICA'S. Some have a smooth ride, finding their birth families and integrating with ease while others encounter obstacles at every step of their journey calling on their resilience and determination to overcome the barriers. Despite the misconception in mainstream media, reunion is not the end for adoptees in these studies, just another step in the adoptees life that requires recognition, validation and support through readily accessible and available professional services.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Implications for Social Work Policy and Practice

Introduction

The literature on search and reunion discussed so far has provided us with an understanding of the experiences of intercountry adoptees who embark on a search and reunion with their families of origin. We have gained insights into their world and the obstacles they must overcome, in order to succeed. The knowledge gained from research could help Ireland's intercountry adoption population who are now coming of age and are considering searching. This chapter will address the research questions by outlining the key findings. It will conclude by offering recommendations for Irish Social work Policy and Practice.

Key Findings and Lessons for Irish intercountry adoptees

Question one: Losses for Adoptees and Birth mothers.

Loss experienced by adoptees and birth mothers have featured extensively in adoption literature (Brodzinsky, 2011; De Simone, 1996; Henney et al, 2007; Aloï, 2009; Robinson, 2000; Verrier, 1993; Long, 2016; Treacher 2001; Wilkinson and Kaslow, 1995). For Intercountry adoptees (ICA's) their loss not only involves the birth family but also involves additional losses of ethnic roots, cultural identity and belonging (Wilkinson, 1995; Taft et al, 2013; Cherot, 2008). This research found that there were disagreements on the nature of the loss for adoptees. Nickman (1985) describes the loss of children adopted as babies as a 'covert loss', one that emerges slowly around the age of 6 or 7 and represents the feelings of loss related to a relationship that could have been. Verrier (1993) however believes that loss, which she described as a primal wound, is imprinted on the unconscious mind of the baby after postnatal separation. For those adopted at an older age the loss of birth family can be more acute as it involves the severing of known relationships (Brodzinsky, 2011). For birth mothers, Winker & van Keppel (1984) found that

their sense of loss did not diminish over time and in fact half of the women who participated in their study reported an increase in their sense of loss. While a large number of articles validated the losses of both birth mothers and adoptees very few recognised their grief as disenfranchised grief (Brodzinsky, 2011; Winkler et al, 1984; Logan, 1996; Henney et al, 2007; Aloï, 2009; De Simone, 1996). The grief for birth mothers and adoptees, which normally follows a loss, was examined and found to fit the criteria of disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1999). This made resolution of the grief for both adoptees and birth mothers very difficult. Understanding the nature of these losses can provide a framework for adoptees to understand their feelings of grief and loss that often emerges during search and reunion.

Question two: Who searches and Why?

This research shows that adoptees that came from countries where they believed it would be impossible to find their family of origin were less likely to search (Tieman et al, 2008; Quartly, 2013; Long, 2016; Wang et al 2014). The desire to search is an internal process that begins in childhood (Long, 2016; Tieman et al 2008), however the tendency to search is often influenced by a number of factors such as adoptive parents divorce or a move away from home to a more ethnically diverse environment (Irhammer and Cederblad, 2000; Jones, 2016; Crystal et al, 1996). Psychological distress and well-being were not factors associated with searching (Gordon et al, 2014; Wrobel et al, 2004), however Tieman et al (2008) found that searchers had more internalized problems than non-searchers. While Tieman et al (2008) failed to explore the link between adoptees desire to protect their adoptive parents and their decision to search, other research has shown a strong connection (Reynolds et al, 2016; Kirton et al, 2000; Kim, 2010).

For Intercountry adoptees (ICA's) searching is highly related to the process of forming an ethnic identity which can move beyond focusing on birth families to learning about their birth culture and country (Gordon et al, 2014; Gordon et al, 2016; Long; 2016; Jones 2015; Quartly et al, 2013). Growing up feeling and looking physically dissimilar to their adoptive parents and community seems to provide a strong impetus to search (Jones, 2015; Brodzinsky, 2011; Reynolds et al, 2016; Harris, 2016). Gordon et al (2014) reported that adoptees who felt like 'outsiders' and fragmented, as they negotiated between different groups, did not necessarily connect these feelings to searching. Gordon et al (2014) hypothesised that this may be because they viewed their adoption as positive and had

negative assumptions about their lives had they grown up with their birth families. This requires further research as having a negative view of one's origins may effect the way adoptees feel about themselves.

Question three: How do Intercountry adoptees perform a search and what effect does an unsuccessful search have on the adoptee

This literature review noted that most of the research on search and reunion has been done within the Korean adoptee community (Reynolds et al, 2016; Walton, 2012; Jones, 2015; Nelson et al 2010). It is difficult ,therefore, to ascertain, how much the Korean experience may be generalisable to Irish ICA's. The cultural, historical and socio-political context of adoption for each country may make the search and reunion experience different for adoptees. Further research is needed into the search and reunion experiences of adoptees from different countries.

When adoptees begin their search they are reliant on the information that their adoption agency have on their file. The socio-political and cultural context of the country from which the adoptions took place can have a large impact on the quality of information on an adoptees file. Many adoptees, in this research, found their information to be minimal, sometimes incorrect and full of dead ends (Long, 2016; Wang et al, 2014; Kupel, 2010; Reynolds et al, 2016). It could be argued therefore that Irish ICA's should view their own files with caution and not take their accuracy for granted. This is particularly true when adoptions took place in a context of war and unstable political and economic structure. Adoptees as a result need to be prepared for anything and expect the unexpected.

A review of literature on adoptees who do search revealed that in many cases the search elicits strong emotions, impacts on the adoptees's sense of commitment to their culture, loyalty to their adoptive parents and can be years in the making (Reynolds et al, 2016; Long, 2016; Wilson & Summerhill-Coleman, 2013; Quartly, 2013). Not only do ICA's have to contend with the geographical distance, many adoptees cited language and cultural differences as obstacles to their search (Long, 2016; Wang et al, 2014; Kupel, 2010). Once in their country of birth adoptees spoke about the uncertainty in who to turn to begin their search. If their adoption agencies could not provide them with information to do their search then they used whatever source possible to find their families of origin (Long, 2016; Wang et al, 2014). Most adoptees spoke about the importance of the support they

received from their adoptive parents, friends and fellow adoptees during their search. For some the search ended in a 'dead end' where they were unable to reunite with their family. While this research found a deficit in studies that examine the experiences of ICA's who are unsuccessful in reuniting with their birth families, Long (2016) did offer a view into their world. Although all of them expressed grief and pain with finding nothing at the end of their search, none of them regretted having taken their journey. Most of their stories spoke of growth and personal transformation that they experienced from facing their losses (Long, 2016; Naftzer, 2006).

This literature review shows that Irish ICA's who embark on their search can expect their journey to be one filled with emotions, challenges and perhaps unexpected surprises. Having the support of friends, family and fellow adoptees who have already made the journey can be of great benefit. Since the search can elicit strong emotions which can be confusing to the adoptee it may be advisable to get professional help, where motives and expectations can be explored. This research also shows that language and cultural barriers are seen as two major obstacles during the search process. Support groups, mediators, and language support services are vital supports during the search process. In the case of Irish ICA's who do not have sufficient information on their adoption file that would allow them to find their birth families, this research indicates that ICA's in similar situations have used many different methods to find their families. For those who do find family members, this research suggests that the search itself can provide important benefits. While coming to a 'dead end' can be painful and full of grief, it also provide an opportunity for personal growth and transformation that can come from facing one's losses.

Question four: What might adoptees expect during the initial reunion and how does the relationship with the birth family develop after reunion?

One of the most striking finding of this literature review has been the recurrent theme of adoptees feeling emotionally unprepared for the reality of reuniting with their birth parents (Wang et al, 2014; Reynolds et al, 2016; Gordon et al, 2014; Quartly et al, 2013; Long, 2016; Crystal et al, 1996; Mila, 2014). Initial meetings with birth families produced a perplexing mixture of positive and negative emotions for adoptees (Crystal et al, 1996; Long, 2016; Wang et al, 2014; Docam-Morgan, 2014). Adoptees also went into their reunion wanting to know their background story as to why they were given up for adoption

(Docan-Morgan, 2014; Wang et al, 2014; Long, 2016). While parents did answer the 'Why' question, some participants reported feeling confused about the information they received. The birth families narratives while including explanations of the circumstances surrounding the participants adoptions, were not universally comforting and in some cases were incoherent and confusing (Docan-Morgan, 2014; Long, 2016; Wang et al, 2014). Irish ICA's would be well served by examining their expectations before the initial reunion. Entering the reunion with an open mind and an understanding that it may not provide answers may help to ensure a better outcome. Since this research shows that initial reunions are extremely emotional, preparations which include professional counselling and family or peer support during the reunion may benefit the adoptee.

This literature review also examined life after reunion and noted that while race and ethnicity were strong motivations to search, cultural difference often inhibited ICA's from developing close relationships with their families (Palmer, 2011; Docan-Morgan, 2015). ICA's although connected to their birth family and country of origin by appearance and genetics, hold values, expectations and behaviours that reflect their adoptive country, thus creating the possibility of confusion and estrangement for both adoptee and birth family (Docan-Morgan, 2015). This confusion could be minimised by Irish ICA's if they become familiar with their birth country's culture, and educate themselves on the values and customs of their birth countries. This research shows that relationships with birth parents were dynamic and/or evolving (Docan-Morgan, 2015; Docan-Morgan, 2014; Long, 2016; Wang et al,2014; Mila, 2014). Many had reported that their sense of belonging had fluctuated over time and there had been, at times, cultural conflicts. They also believed that understanding cultural differences and navigating birth family relationships can take years. The Korean Adoptee Community in this research has shown that engaging the support of other adoptees who are going through the same experience can minimise the sense of loneliness and isolation felt by adoptees as they try to make sense of their experience(Long, 2016; Nafzger, 2006; Jones, 2014; Nelson et al, 2013). Finally for those Irish ICA's who are afraid of what they might find by searching, this research concluded that whatever the outcome, adoptees almost always expressed satisfaction that they had taken the journey. They also felt that contact with their birth parents had a positive effect on their lives (Tieman et al, 2008; Traynor, 2010; Long, 2016, Muller & Perry, 2001; Mila, 2014).

Implications for Social Work Policy and Practice in the Republic of Ireland

Arising from the findings of this literature review there are a number of recommendations that could inform social policies. These include the following:

- As part of the home study to approve adoptive parents, the assessment should examine the adoptive parents ability to understand the needs of the adoptee as they begin to explore their ethnic identity and roots. The adoptive parents attitudes towards the adoptees birth country and birth family should also be examined. The assessment should also give due weight to the awareness and commitment of the adoptive parents regarding search and reunion.
- At the time of the adoption, every effort should be made to gather all the information regarding the circumstances surrounding the adoption, including hand written notes and original records that are vital to the adoptees connection to their past. If this cannot be done then an explanation as to why such information might not be provided should be sought.
- Tusla needs to fund and support and an adoptee-led resource centre where all ICA's can access information and support on search and reunion. These supports should include counselling by professionals who are specifically trained in addressing intercountry adoptees issues. Indeed Article 9c of the Hague Convention adds impetus to such a service as it states that every Adoption Authority should promote 'the development of adoption counselling and post adoption services' (HCCH, 1993, P. 191). Other important supports identified in this research include language translation services, mediation services and information on the actual search and reunion process in the birth country. Tusla should also support and finance the development of an adoptee-led website that provides information and support to ICA's on search and reunion.
- Adoption Authority of Ireland should work closely with the central authority in the sending countries to ensure that the processes of Intercountry adoption are legal and ethical. It should also work with the sending country to ensure that practical supports are available for adoptees who return to their country of origin to search.

- This literature review has identified the importance of peer support groups for ICA's during search and reunion. Tusla should support and work alongside ICA's to set up and help facilitate support groups. Forums should be identified in which ICA's can share their experience and reduce feelings of isolation.

This literature review underscores the importance of social workers engaging directly with those directly affected by international adoption to seek their views and perspectives. This is particularly important in search and reunion as Ireland's young ICA's come of age and begin their search. At the heart of search and reunion is the adoptees right to information about their origins. Such rights are enshrined in Article 8 of the United Nations on the Rights of the Child (United Nation Human Rights, 1990). Social justice and human rights are at the core of the social work profession and as such it is incumbent upon social workers to advocate for ICA's right to information about their origins. This advocacy should start at the time of the adoption when the child is too young to have a voice in what is happening. While it is important to note that the onus for supplying information about the child's origin lies with the sending country, social workers in the receiving country should be pro-active in procuring accurate information about the child's origins. Hollingsworth (2003) maintains that social workers should advocate for more socially just policies in both the sending and receiving countries. The rights of adoptees to accurate and comprehensive information about their origins should not be overlooked in adoption practice.

CORU's Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics for Social Work states that our practice should benefit and not harm others (CORU, 2011). Giving Ireland's unique history in the area of adoption, where injustice and inequality was at the heart of adoption (Philomena, 2013; Kelly, 2005), adoption professionals should strive to 'do no harm'. A key finding in this research is attitudes towards countries of origin. Social workers should examine not only the attitudes of prospective adoptive parents, but also their own attitudes towards birth countries and birth parents based on principles of equality and rights. Do we hold beliefs that the countries where adoptees come from are inferior and lacking when compared to the Western world?. Adoptee's countries are often described as lands of orphanages and poverty, while the Western world holds wealth and opportunities. Willing (2006, p. 261) warns that this 'complex form of cultural discrimination, exclusion and separation are often masked by simplistic representations of their transformation from rags to riches'. This literature review revealed that for some adoptees searching for birth

families held no interest for them because of the grim images they had of their lives had they lived with their birth parents (Gordon et al, 2014). Social workers need to challenge this all too common view of birth countries so that adoptees can acknowledge the beauty and civility that exists in their country of origin. Taking a human rights perspective, social workers should also strive to give attention to the voices of birthmothers who are often marginalised.

Conclusion

Search and reunion is a personal, emotional and in many cases difficult journey for adoptees to undertake. This literature review has shown that the search and reunion journey for adoptees varies immensely, some find their birth families with ease, while others have to call on their resilience and determination to continue on the journey. A key finding in this research has been the importance of post adoption services. The rise of the adult Korean adoptee movement shows the necessity of adoption practices to recognise the life long impact of adoption and to provide supports and services that accommodate this. Adoptees had no control over their adoption, so their ability to assert ownership over their own journeys is at the heart of the Korean movement. Irish professionals should recognise that Irish intercountry adoptees are experts on their own lives and work alongside them, supporting and advocating with them. Our support however should extend beyond this to studies and research that considers openness in intercountry adoption. If Irish contemporary adoption practice recognises the importance of identity and have adopted a more open approach, then it is incumbent on our profession to consider ways in which openness can be adopted. Intercountry adoption does come with numerous natural barriers to openness including language, geographical distance, bureaucratic hurdles, cultural differences, limited record keeping and poverty. However we are at a point in our history in adoption where we need to examine and further expand our definition of openness in adoption. Working with adoptees and enlightened adoptive parents who value both the birth culture and birth family, our profession can look at new ways in which openness can be achieved in intercountry adoption.

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Research Proposal

Research objective:

This literature review has identified large research gaps in many areas on search and reunion for Intercountry adoptees. While most of the research in this subject has been done with the experiences of the Korean Adoptee community, much less is known about intercountry adoptees from other countries. This research will explore the experiences of Irish intercountry adoptees who have chosen to search for their birthparents. Whittaker (2012) warns against a research question that is so broad, it becomes unrealistic to answer, or so narrow that it lacks sufficient substance. This research proposal therefore will explore three main areas that will also help to identify the kinds of support services that would be most helpful to ICA's:

- Why did participants choose to search and how did they conduct that search?.
- What obstacles did they have to overcome and what helped them along the way?.
- what was the reunion like, and what helped or hindered them in developing a relationship with their family of origin?.

Methodology:

Mixed method approach utilizing both a qualitative and quantitative approach. The findings of the quantitative research will be used to develop the qualitative phase (Darlington and Scott, 2002). A questionnaire examining the experiences and attitudes of intercountry adoptees in relation to search and reunion will be sent to all intercountry adoptees who are over the age of eighteen through their adoptions agencies. The second part of this study will involve in-depth interviews with adoptees who have initiated a search for their birth family. Semi-structured interviews will also allow for the understanding of each participant's subjective search and reunion experience (Darlington and Scott, 2002; Whittaker, 2012). All interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.

Sampling:

ICA's in Ireland are just coming of age therefore there may not be a large population to choose from. This research will attempt to contact all ICA's over 18 in Ireland through their respective adoption agencies.

Analysis of Data:

The Quantitative data will be analysed using SPSS software. The semi-structured interviews will be analysed using a thematic analysis. Bryman (2012) describes this as the most commonly used methods for analysing qualitative data. It will be analysed for themes using procedures from Braun and Clarke (2006) to ensure reliability and validity. The results of this research will be presented at a group meeting of ICA's to ensure the credibility of the results.

Ethical Considerations:

This research has shown that search and reunion evokes strong emotions therefore steps should be taken to ensure participants are supported during and after the interviews. When formulating the questions for the interview, the emotive nature of the subject should always be considered. The researcher should also consider having a counsellor available for the participants. Written information will also be provided to participants regarding anonymising the data. Informed consent will be sought. Confidentiality and its limits will be applied and the data will be stored in the Social Work Department of University College Dublin.

Study Limitations:

It is possible that the study sample may be small as many Irish intercountry adoptees will have relevantly recently become adults. The results therefore may not reflect the experiences of intercountry adoptee's who choose to search when they are older. Furthermore this research has shown that relationships with birth parents are dynamic and constantly evolving. (Docan-Morgan, 2015; Docan-Morgan, 2014; Long, 2016; Wang et al, 2014; Mila, 2014). Given their young age, participants in this research may not have the experience of a long relationship therefore the results will not give us insight into evolving family relationships. Finally, given the context in which intercountry adoptions took place in Ireland, most of the intercountry adoptee's coming of age now came from specific countries such as Romania, therefore the generalizability of the results may be limited.

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