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**Author(s):** Koskinen, Maarit G.; Böök, Marja Leena

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## Abstract

In this case study, five international adoptees from Finland were interviewed about their search and reunion experiences to find out what meanings they ascribed to their identities and family relations. The thematic analysis yielded three themes: *search and reunion in significant periods of life, meaning of reunion for identity* and *belonging and relatedness within family*. The first theme was characterized by the changing interest in birth family from the inability in childhood to fully understand the meaning of adoption and the growing interest in adolescence to adulthood where participants' own parenthood intensified their interest. The second theme was characterized by the sense of coherence and sense of continuity that the adoptees, despite the conflicting emotions of reunion, felt they had achieved through reunion. In the third theme, reunion with their birth family appeared significant, even though belonging to a family was interpreted more as an outcome of attachment and nurture than biology. Particular for all themes was the meaning of communicating about adoption-related issues for the adoptee–adoptive parent relationship. Future research is needed to concentrate in more detail on the broad themes and to investigate how the meanings of the birth family for adoptive identity change over life courses.

Keywords: International adoption, birth family, search, reunion, identity,

## Searching for the self: Adult international adoptees'

narratives of their search for and reunion with their birth families

Adoptees' identity work and family exploration in 21st century Finland as well as in other Western countries is undertaken within a wide variety of family configurations, following the diversification in the concept of the family that has been taking place since the 1990s (Jallinoja & Widmer, 2011). International adoption, which began gradually in Finland in the mid-1970s, represents today one remarkable form of these family diversifications. International adoption began to increase in Finland after the passage of the first international adoption law in 1985 (Adoption Act, 1985) and started to challenge traditional thinking about kinship and identity.

After the peak year of 2005 when almost 300 children were adopted internationally in Finland, the number of international adoptions has gradually decreased in Finland such that in 2017 around 100 children were adopted internationally in Finland (Official Statistics of Finland (OFS)), a trend that is in line with the development in other Western countries (Selman, 2009). Currently, the Finnish population of 5.5 million includes around 5000 international adoptees. China (23 %), Russia (19 %), Thailand (15 %), Colombia (12 %), South Africa (10 %), Ethiopia (7 %), Philippines (5 %), and India (4 %) represent the most common adoptive countries in Finland, whereas Estonia, Vietnam, Romania, Sri Lanka and some other single countries make up the remaining portion of countries (5 %) (OFS; Valvira). At present, approximately 1500 international adoptees have reached adulthood (OFS), which means that today and in the near future there will be thousands of adolescents and young adults that negotiate their identity and kinship in the context of two families. Additionally, as internet searches, social media (Partanen, 2014; Siegel, 2012) and DNA tests increase the possibility for reunions, we suggest that there is an urgent need to add understanding of the meaning of the birth family search and reunion for adoptees' identity.

Openness in adoption is understood to be a benefit for all parties of adoption and as adoptees' right to know their origin (Adoption Act, 1985). However, the tradition of secrecy

dominated domestic adoption in Finland for decades (Partanen, 2014), and persisted in international adoption in its early years. Even though domestic adoptions are nowadays mainly structurally open adoptions, meaning that some form of contact is maintained between the birth and adoptive family (Siegel, 2012), international adoptions are mostly closed adoptions, meaning that the adoptees lack contact with their birth families or even have no knowledge about. It has been suggested that adoptees' identity is particularly affected by the communicative openness in the adoptive family (e.g., Brodzinsky, 2006; Mendenhall, Berge, Wrobel, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2004; Von Korff & Grotevant, 2011), which refers to the way adoption-related issues are discussed in the adoptive family. However, the lack of knowledge of the birth family may hinder communicative openness (Brodzinsky, 2006). Additionally, the openness may be hindered by the exclusive family understanding of Western countries reflecting the idea that family can include only one "real" set of parents (Högbacka, 2017).

The adoptee's process of gaining a coherent identity and life narrative is particularly seen to include a consideration of what it means to be connected to both an adoptive family and a birth family, how and where they belong within them, and how this fits into their understanding of self, family and culture (Grotevant, 1997; Von Korff & Grotevant, 2011). That is to say, the birth family is considered an entity that should be integrated into an adopted individual's identity and construction of family (Wrobel & Dillon, 2009). This integration process has been suggested to be one of the most unique identity tasks of adopted individuals (Brodzinsky, Schecther, & Henig, 1992) and to occur often as adoptees' search for and reunion with their birth family (March, 1995).

The idea of identity is tied to the conception of narrative, which means that the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and to outsiders construct our sense of who we are and how we are related to others (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001). Narratives, in particular, are seen as a way in which individuals are able to construct a sense of meaning and continuity in life and to gain coherence especially in those life stories in which incoherence is felt (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

For adoptees whose lack of knowledge of their birth family often means that their life stories may feel incoherent (Yngvesson & Mahoney, 2000)—a situation that has been described as “narrative rupture” (Dorow, 2006)—narratives serve as a way for them to integrate their birth family into their sense of identity and the construction of family, thereby establishing their individual and family identities (Galvin, 2006; Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Esau 2000; Langellier & Peterson, 2006). Thus, in order to understand adoptive identity, it should be viewed through the narratives that adopted individuals tell about adoption and themselves (Von Korff & Grotevant, 2011). This is important because the coherent adoptive narratives are seen to prevent adoptees’ from psychological distress (Grotevant, 1997).

Narrative approaches and other qualitative research have mainly concentrated on domestic adoptees’ experiences of their search and reunion (e.g., Affleck & Steed 2001; March, 2014; Scharp, 2013; Scharp & Steuber, 2014). To date, the research on international adoptees’ search and reunion has mainly been quantitative (e.g., Brodzinsky & Goldberg, 2017; Tieman, van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2008; Wrobel & Grotevant, 2018) and only a few qualitative studies have focused on search and reunion from the perspective of international adoptees. Additionally, these studies have concentrated mainly on search motives, certain situations of reunion such as rituals and outcomes of reconnection and alternative lives (e.g., Docan-Morgan, 2014, 2016; Lindgren & Nelson, 2013; Wang, Ponte & Ollen, 2015, Ruohio, 2016), and they overlook adoptees’ stories of their search and reunion as a whole. In the present study, we contribute to addressing this qualitative research gap by examining narratives produced by international adoptees about their search and reunion. Our aim is to identify the broad themes that characterize their narratives and thereby better understand the meanings their search and reunion have for their identity and family relations.

### **Adoptive identity within the family and social world contexts**

Identity is associated with our attempts to define who we are and what our place in the world is (Erikson, 1968). Erikson (1968) has suggested that identity normally becomes a central

issue during adolescence when young people start to explore their goals, values, beliefs and identifications. Later, identity concerns are reflected further during different phases of adulthood when identity formation is characterized by the individual's aim to synthesize the past beliefs and values as a unique whole that provides a sense of continuity with the past and the future (Marcia, 1993). Grotevant (1997) clarifies this with three particular aspects of identity: first, *self-definition*, which refers to characteristics of the self felt by the individual and recognized by others in certain personal, social, and historical contexts; second, *sense of coherence*, which refers to how the various aspects of identity are integrated together; and third, *sense of continuity*, which refers to the linking of past, present, and future across multiple contexts. Because identity is psychosocial in nature, it also involves an understanding of how one fits into society (Marcia, 1980) and an awareness of one's membership in a social group, "with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 2010, p. 2).

For adoptees, identity development is more complicated in that while there are several domains of identity over which the individual has some degree of choice (Marcia, 1993), adoption is related to major issues (e.g., being first relinquished and then adopted) that the individual has not chosen. That is, being adopted is something that adoptees have to integrate into their overall sense of self and with other domains of identity to gain coherence and continuity in their lives (Grotevant, 1997). This integration process renders the identity development of adoptees more challenging and it also extends into adulthood (Grotevant, Lo, Florenzo, & Dunbar, 2017; Kalus, 2016). Adopted individuals may face special challenges in their identity construction because the information about their birth family and the reasons for their relinquishment may be unknown as a result of the closed adoption practices, and this lack complicates the construction of a coherent narrative linking past, present, and future (Grotevant et al., 2017).

The self as a family member is a salient dimension of identity for adoptees that needs to be considered in relation to both their adoptive and birth families and to the society into which they

have been adopted. According to Grotevant et al. (2000), these dimensions interact with each other and operate on the intrapsychic level, which means an individual sense of oneself constructed by symbolic representations and memories about oneself (Forgas & Williams, 2014), as well as about family relationship and social world levels. At the intrapsychic and family levels, identity work may start with exploring the fit between self and family. Among transracial adoptees, whose appearance differs from that of their adoptive family, identity work may include consideration of their ethnic (Baden, Treweek, & Alhuwalia, 2012) as well as family identities. Essential for adoptees' identity development in the family level is communication in the adoptive family (e.g., Brodzinsky, 2006; Mendenhall et al., 2004; Von Korff & Grotevant, 2011), because the way adoption is handled in the adoptive family may either facilitate or hinder adoptees in integrating their birth family and other unknown parts of their life narrative into their identities (Mendenhall et al., 2004).

At the family and social world levels, identity work is contextualized by the social context, such as the culture of the adoptee's adoptive country (Grotevant et al., 2000). In today's postmodern societies, adopted individuals' identity development occurs in globalized and individualized societies. Even though postmodernity has led to family diversification (Jallinoja & Widmer, 2011), incoherent identity narratives (Kraus, 2007), and hybrid identities—what Smith (2008) has called an iterative negotiation of the self with many different identities—the quest for coherent narratives and stable identities remains a societal imperative (Kraus, 2007). For adoptees, this means their identity is further contextualized by narratives that define family and identity primarily through biological ties (Homans, 2013; Yngvesson & Mahoney, 2000). Accordingly, adoption research often suggest adoptees to be “genealogically bewildered” and sees searching for the birth family as the only way that these individuals can achieve a coherent identity (e.g., Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig, 1992; Lifton, 1994).

Yet the view that “genealogical bewilderment” necessarily harms adoptees’ identity construction and that knowledge of their birth origin automatically provides coherence for their identity has been challenged. Instead, it has been suggested that adoptees’ identity is constructed, like everyone else’s, by biology, social contexts, and multiple family configurations (Patton, 2000; Yngvesson, 2003). However, most adoptees seem to long for a sense of connection with their birth families. This is supported by quantitative findings showing that most international adoptees are interested in searching for their birth family (Godon, Green, & Ramsey, 2014; Hawkins et al., 2007; Tieman, van der Ende, & Verhulst, 2008; Wrobel & Dillon, 2009). Presumably, the need to search for and reunion with birth families is a hybrid of adoptees’ normative identity task and the aim to cope in a society that emphasizes the genetic ties in kinship (see Müller & Perry, 2001).

#### **Adoptees’ search and reunion revealed through qualitative research**

Most of the qualitative research to date on both domestic and international adoption has focused on the stories told by adoptive parents (e.g., Baxter, Norwood, Asbury, & Scharp, 2014; Chatman-Carpenter, 2012; Harrigan, 2010). According to these studies, adoptive parents construct entrance narratives, which aim to help adopted children understand their identities within their dual family contexts. As the children mature, the initial entrance stories are felt to be incomplete to serve as a coherent resource for identity (Baxter, Norwood, Asbury, Jannusch & Scharp, 2012; Seligmann, 2013). This means that adoptees’ own narratives and their meaning makings of adoption become central (Wrobel & Dillon, 2009).

Qualitative studies from the view of adoptees’ themselves reflect the different meanings of search and reunion for adoptees’ identity and family understanding. In her observation and interview study with domestic adoptees, March (1995) found that being characterized as different by society because of the non-normative kinship relations creates a perception of adoption as a social stigma for adoptees. In particular, the secrecy about their biological kinships seem to strengthen adoptees’ sense of stigma, which they aim to neutralize by gaining generational



continuity through search with and reunion with their birth family (March, 1995). Similarly, in their narrative study of domestic and international adoptees, Yngvesson and Mahoney (2000) found a tension between the cultural narratives of authentic identity and family through biological ties and adoptees' desire for a sense of coherence.

The main motives for search and reunion, most of which are shared by international and domestic adoptees (e.g., Kalus, 2016; Patton, 2000; Wang et al., 2015), are found to be knowing the story of their relinquishment, knowing the destiny of their birth parents, the existence of possible siblings, needing to find someone who resembles them in appearance (e.g., Docan-Morgan, 2014; Godon et al., 2014; Ruohio, 2016; Seligmann, 2013; Wrobel & Dillon, 2009), and knowing their medical and health history (Wrobel & Grotevant, 2018). These motives indicate a need for developing the meaning of adoption to include achieving continuity with the past and a more coherent identity (Alvarado, Rho, & Lambert, 2014; Patton, 2000).

Previous research has concentrated on the creation of a relationship between adoptee and birth family. The complex nature of the reconnection with birth family was manifested in Scharp's (2013) study of domestic adoptees' narratives, where the meaning of reunion was reflected by two contradictory discourses of reunion: a romanticized versus pragmatic reconnection. The discourse of romanticized reconnection was characterized by a desire for physical resemblance and immediate connection with the birth family. The discourse of pragmatic reconnection consisted of experiencing the birth family as strangers and the desire for health information, and where the connection with birth family was not guaranteed.

The meaning of expectations and reunion outcomes for adoptee–birth family relationships was addressed in Affleck and Steed's (2001) interview study on domestic adult adoptees and their birth mothers. They observed that reunion outcomes were satisfying for both parties if the expectations were similar and vice versa. In March's (1997) interview study with domestic adoptees and their birth mother, the fear of rejection and a sense of dissatisfaction were related to weakened

relationship between the adoptee and the birth mother. Moreover, the meaning of cultural differences in the adoptee–birth family relationship appeared in Docan-Morgan's (2016) study on the narratives of adult Korean adoptees in that it affected adoptees' sense of relatedness to their birth families, which varied from estrangement to a strong sense of belonging. Additionally, Docan-Morgan's (2014) study on adult Korean adoptees' showed how experiencing different kinds of rituals and learning their birth culture during reunion served as strategies to contribute to a sense of personal identity and family identity. Affleck and Steed (2001) have also suggested that reunion as a process of personal growth for the adoptee and satisfaction with reunion relationships is affected by the support of the adoption organization and the adopting family and by the slow development of the relationship.

The communication about adoption between adoptees and birth families has also been suggested to affect the adoptee–birth family relationship. Scharp and Steuber (2014) studied the negotiation of communication preferences in potential adoption reunions among domestic adoptees and found the tension adoptees feel between learning information about their past and protecting themselves from negative or unwanted information. In their study, they found an expectation that the birth mother would serve as information guardian who reveals desired information and conceals unwanted information. It is assumed that when both parties have similar expectations for information preferences, the reunions might be less stressful.

The above studies on adoptees' processes of reunion revealed their struggle to belong as well as to obtain knowledge on their individual and familial identities. While adoptees reflected on the significance of knowing their birth history, they at the same time also challenged the dominant perception of kinship (e.g., Wang et al., 2015). Despite the adoptees' satisfaction with reunion, their narratives were also associated with their experiences of being abandoned by their birth parents (Docan-Morgan, 2014) Additionally, it has been suggested that search and reunion may strengthen

the adoptive parent–child bond, and that in late adolescence the concept of family means the adoptive family rather than the birth family (Kalus, 2016).

Despite the significance of reunion with the birth family for adoptees' identity, it varies among individuals and phases of life. Lindgren and Nelson (2013) examined the meanings international adoptees ascribed to their background and identified two narratives of time and space in which adoptees moved during their life course. In the *here-and-now* narrative, which focused on the adoptee's life today, neither adoption nor roots were perceived as crucial. Yet in the *there-and-then* narrative, both abandonment and adoption were perceived as key in the adoptees' lives. This reflects the changing nature of search and reunion processes and their iterative meaning for adoptive identity.

As reviewed above, adoption narratives are devices for meaning making by adoptees. However, other narratives that function as a sense-making device, particularly for international adoptees, should also be investigated. Furthermore, focusing simultaneously on the narratives of search and reunion could offer a more comprehensive picture of the meaning they have for adoptees' identity. The aim of the present study was to identify the broad themes that characterize the search and reunion narratives of young adult international adoptees, and the meanings they ascribe to their identity and family relationships in these themes as well as to capture the meaning of search and reunion for different phases and contexts of life

### **Methods**

The data are drawn from a larger study in which 17 adoptees were interviewed by the first author about their adoption experiences in general. Participants were recruited via advertisements sent to the websites of Finnish adoption organizations and by snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted face to face in a place chosen by the interviewees and lasted approximately 60 to 120 minutes each. Finally, to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, five interviewees who had experienced reunion with their birth families were selected for the present

study because they have essential knowledge of the issue. The five participants comprised two men and three women, ranging from 21 to 33 years old. Their continents of birth were Asia (3), Africa (1) and South America (1). At the time of adoption, participants ranged in age from 11 months to 9 years. Three subjects were married, one was separated and one was single. Four participants had biological children. In three cases, participants' adoptive families included siblings, who were either adopted siblings or the adoptive parents' biological children, and both adoptive mothers and adoptive fathers. In one case, the adoptive family included only the adoptee and his adoptive mother. In three cases, the reunited birth family included a birth mother, a birth father and birth siblings. In two cases, the reunited birth family included birth siblings and either a birth mother or birth father. In three cases, participants also reunited with extended family members, such as stepmother, nephews, nieces and cousins. The time between reunion and interview varied from 8 months to one year. To protect participants' confidentiality, all information that could help reveal their identities was removed, including birth country, search and reunion details, and specific information on the adoptive and birth families. Additionally, participants were given pseudonyms.

The data were gathered through unstructured and narrative interviews, for which it is typical that, regardless of a few key questions formulated in advance, there were no precise prearranged questions (Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 2008) The questions were as open as possible and they were based mainly on the interviewee's responses. Because narrativity is an essential method in biography and identity research (Hyvärinen, 2008), it appeared in the interviews by orientating the interviewees to narrate their life histories concerning their experiences as adoptees.

The key questions discussed in the interviews included the adoptees' stories of their adoption, including their pre-adoption history and birth family, their feelings and thoughts about their birth family before and after reunion, details of their search for and reunion with their birth relatives and communicating about adoption-related issues in their adoptive family. The aim of discussing these broad topics was to allow the adoptees to talk about the experiences that they

considered the most significant, and according to the nature of narrative inquiry, to facilitate the development of narrative accounts and actively construct meaning (Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 2008). When studying sensitive research topics such as the topic of the present study, the listener's role is important for the narrator's meaning-making processes (McAdams & Mclean, 2013). Therefore, special attention was paid to conducting the interview in ways that would encourage the participants to produce personally elaborated narratives.

In this study, we applied the thematic analysis which, according to Braun and Clarke (2006, 83), is a method of choice when the research topic is under-researched or when the views of the participants are not known, as is the case in international adoptees' search for and reunion with their birth family (Brodzinsky & Goldberg, 2017). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is an appropriate way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked about and of making sense of those commonalities. Thus, in the present study we analyzed adoptees' narratives with the aim of identifying common thematic themes that describe the varied meanings the adoptees' attributed to their search for and reunion with their birth family.

The analysis was conducted according to the six different steps introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. These were not linear steps but instead progressed as a cycle that involved several times of reviewing of the data in the light of new analytical ideas that appeared during the analysis process and hence produced a deepening understanding of the topic.

In the first step, the first author transcribed the interviews verbatim and started familiarizing herself with the data. To identify divergent interpretations of the data, another investigator participated in the analysis, a practice known as investigator triangulation (Flick, 2004). In the second step, both investigators independently read each interview several times to determine its overall structure, and then inductively coded the data to identify the important themes, partly based

on the knowledge on literature on the field as well. In the third and the fourth step, they compared codes, searched for themes and revised these until consensus was reached. In the fifth step, the themes were grouped under three broad headings summarizing the meanings attributed by the interviewees to their experiences. In this stage, excerpts relating to the three broad themes were extracted from the transcripts of each case. Finally, in the sixth step, to report a coherent narrative of the interview data, the themes were connected meaningfully to each other in the order of the presentation. Figure 1 presents a thematic map that demonstrates the broad main themes and their constitution.

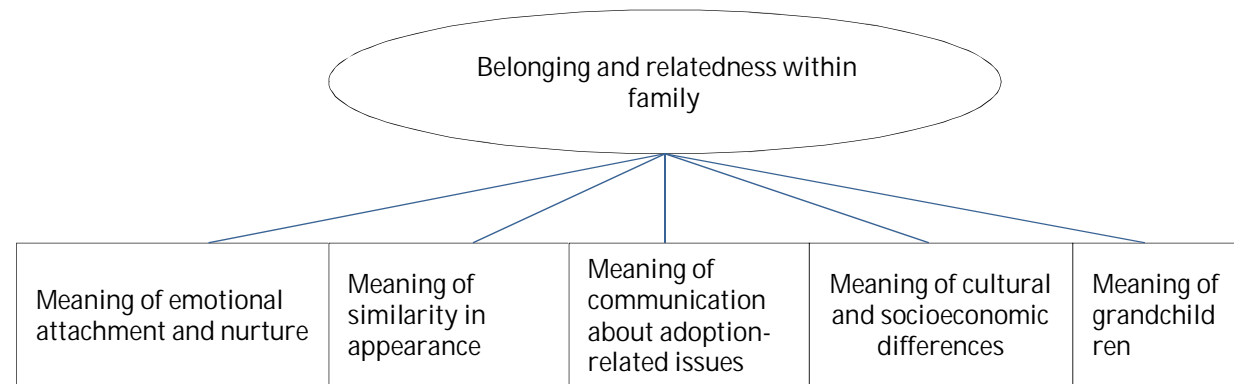
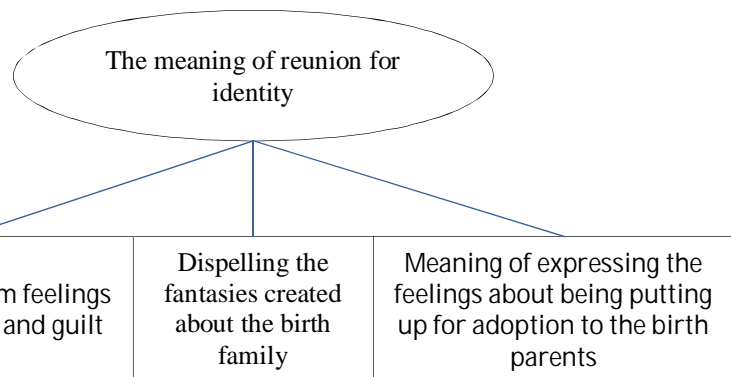
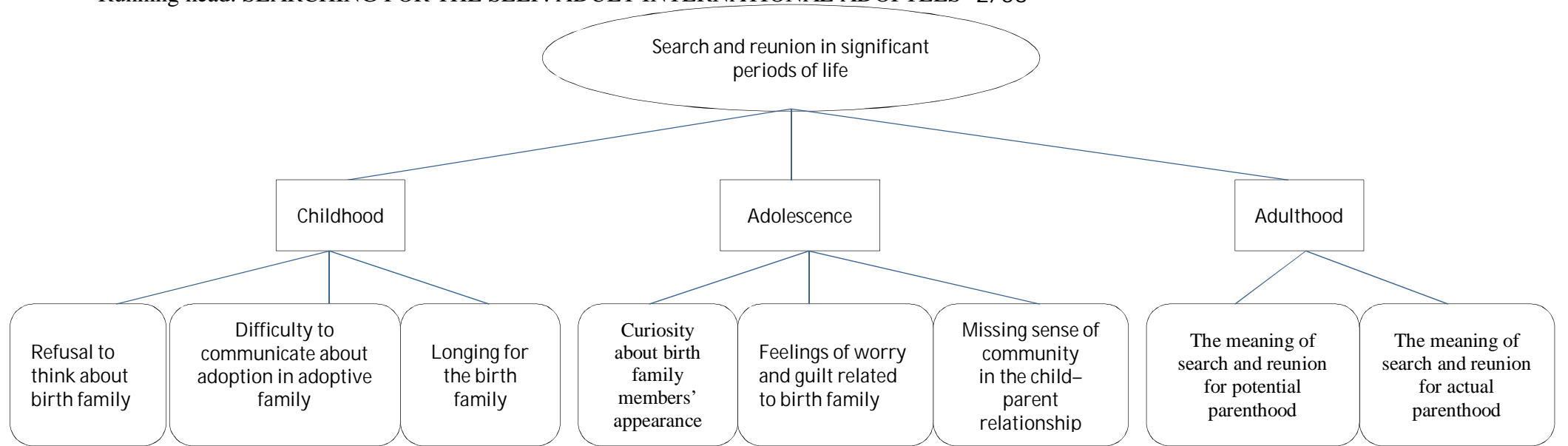


Figure 1. Thematic map of the three broad themes of the narratives of international adoptees' search and reunion

## Findings

### Search and reunion in significant periods of life

This theme was characterized by the narrators' descriptions of their developing and changing interest in their birth family at different stages of life, such as in childhood, in adolescence, and in adulthood. Additionally, the theme captured the diverse contexts and situations that attracted interest in birth family and the issues in the birth family that were of particular interest.

In their narratives, participants recalled the thoughts and feelings that they had of their birth families in their childhood and which ranged from no interest or a refusal to contemplate the birth family to a deep longing for them. Mia, who was adopted at the school age and had hazy memories of her pre-adoption time and of her birth mother, told that though she was encouraged by her adoptive mother to discuss adoption-related issues, she tried to refuse to think about it. However, at times certain events prompted memories and caused distress. She recalled:

I had a slight memory of my birth mother saying: "Whenever you look at the sky, remember that I'll be protecting you." And when I was a little and looked up at the moon I used to cry. And I didn't want to speak or hear songs in my [first language], but when I heard the songs sung in it I felt very sad.

The difficulty to discuss openly about adoption in adoptive families arose in narratives when participants recalled thoughts of their birth family in childhood. Lea, who was adopted when she was a toddler, said that the knowledge she had until adulthood about her adoption was based only the "messy and contradictory information" she had been told by her adoptive parents. According to her, this "secrecy and hiding" hindered understanding of the meaning of adoption. She recalled: "I only knew I was adopted because that was impossible for them to deny. As a child I always told people I'm adopted though I didn't understand what it meant." Similarly, Caj, who was adopted as



a toddler, reported that adoption was a “taboo that was not discussed openly” in his adoptive family. This secrecy, despite his loving adoptive family, made him feel, as an adoptee, “a bit lonely in Finland.” Similarly, Eva, who was adopted as a baby, said she did not think much about her birth family as a child because she knew instinctively that there was something hurtful in adoption and thus she did not want to bother her adoptive parents with the topic.

The deep longing for the birth family and birth culture characterized one narrative. Jan, who was adopted at school age, had memories of his pre-adoption time and knowledge of the reasons he was put up for adoption. He reported that he missed his birth mother “every single second after adoption.” After realizing he had finally lost her, to protect himself “from more pain,” he gave up another significant part of his identity, his first language. In his words: “Imagine that you have to give up everything except your first name. Your previous life becomes a memory “and you miss it enormously.” Additionally, awareness of the socioeconomic differences between his birth and adoptive homes complicated his adjustment to his adoptive family. He reflected on the meaning of these differences: “We had property, my [adoptive] family was educated but I separated myself from them and spent time with children who were a bit marginalized and more similar to me.”

In the narratives, adolescence was a life phase where interest in the birth family started to be more active and new interests in it emerged. For example, curiosity about birth members’ appearance aroused interest in some participants in this phase of life. Mia said how she, as a teenager, became more conscious of her physical differentness from her adoptive kin and started to desire someone who resembled her: “It was important to me because I was trying to figure out who I am. I wanted so terribly to see if she [birth mother] looks like me.” Similarly, although Caj said he did not reflect much on his adoption or birth family in his teens, he sometimes pondered “where do I come from? Where do my appearance and genes come from?”

In adolescence, participants also started to contemplate the circumstances and faith of their birth families, provoked by a concerns such as “how my birth parents are doing,” as Caj stated. Mia,

who had obscure memories of her worry about birth mother's weak psychological state and poverty already before adoption, said that this concern arose anew in her in teenage years. In tandem, she also experienced feelings of guilt because she thought that she "wasn't a good child" because she had been relinquished by her birth mother. She stated:

My distress about my [birth] mother arose especially when I became a teenager. How is she doing? Is she a beggar, or even worse, because of poverty? And the distress I felt because I remembered she wasn't quite normal.

Similarly, Jan worried about the poverty of his birth family and struggled with feelings of guilt because of the material privilege he had gained through adoption without being able to help his birth relatives. As he recalled: "I knew they didn't always have food on their table or they couldn't afford new clothes. All through my childhood I wanted to send money to them, and because I couldn't I felt selfish."

One significant interest that started to emerge in participants, except for in Jan, was the desire to know the reasons that had led to the participants' relinquishment and adoption. Eva, for example, said how this missing information from her life narrative provoked "huge questions" in her and left her identity incomplete: "The question I grew up with was related to who they were and why I was put up for adoption. Somehow, my rootlessness has always been connected with these special questions." Similarly, Mia described the missing information as the "blind spots" in her life that she needed to fill.

In the narratives, adolescence appeared as the phase of life where the desire to talk more openly about adoption in the adoptive family grew. Eva, for example, said she would have liked to discuss her adoption with her adoptive mother, but to protect the latter's feelings she avoided the topic: "We didn't communicate about it because I still had a sense that it would be hurtful to her." The desire for openness led her to reflect on the meaning of a biological connection for a child-parent relationship:

I was missing a sense of community, an obvious tie between me and my parents, and I wondered would it have been different with my biological mother, would it have been more open if we'd had a biological tie between us.

In the narratives, adulthood was a phase of life that reflected the meaning of missing information about the birth family for establishing a family and being a parent. Mia justified her search particularly by referring to her potential future life-transition to parenthood. Acquiring information about her pre-adoption life was an issue that she needed to resolve before being a mother herself. She thought that the gaps in her life narrative might erode her sense of identity, in turn affecting her parenting: "It might be a bad thing for the child if I had some kind of mysterious and unaccountable issues in my past." Similarly, Jan recalled how he, because of his problems with identity caused by adoption, hesitated to marry and start a family:

I told my wife that there will be always a crack in my heart, and if you can't live with it we can't get married. And when she wanted to have children I tried to resist it because I worried about how I could take care of others if I had problems with my identity.

For Jan, to get to know the fate of his birth mother and to be able to tell her "that adoption wasn't good for me and I missed her desperately" were issues that he called "the heavy stones of my life" and fundamental for the continuity of his life. He clarified what he meant by this:

You can't stop searching before you know what happened. You can't go on with your life before you have completed this chapter in your life. It wasn't important whether she was dead or alive. If she was dead I'd live with it, and if she was alive I'd tell her my feelings.

Becoming a parent was the life transition that activated participants to contemplate their birth family, roots and the meaning of genetic tie in kinship and biological continuity. For Caj, being a father to his first child was a life transition that meant a genetic connection with another person and offered him "a solid foundation for moving forward in life." With parenthood, he also started to reflect on the similarities between himself, his baby, and his birth family:

When I had my first child it was my first proper genetic tie with some other person in Finland. It was amazing because my child was the only one in my family who looked like me, and I started to wonder what characteristics my child had inherited from my biological parents.

Being a parent also activated participants to contemplate the pre-adoption time. In the narratives, this appeared by reflecting on their own babyhood phases compared to their own children's development. Eva remembered how she was touched by her vulnerability at that time:

When my child was three months old I thought, oh my god, I was only that age when I was given up and taken to the orphanage. And when he was seven months old I thought, oh my god, I was about the same age when I came to Finland to my adoptive parents!

Caj similarly followed his first child's development, and he also felt anger: "When my child was 1 year old I thought that was the age I was abandoned and as a father it's difficult to accept that. I was bitter because I was abandoned when I was little and helpless." Later, he started to search for his pre-adoption time, and the reasons for "why my birth mother couldn't cope with me." For Lea, a stronger interest in her birth family arose as well along with being a parent and her thoughts particularly dwelt on her birth mother, possible siblings, and whether there was anyone who resembled her in appearance. At that time, she tried to discuss her adoption with her adoptive parents, "but they were like there's no point digging through all that old stuff."

### **The meanings of reunion for identity**

This theme was characterized by the participants' reflections on the meaning of their reunion with their birth families for their identity. In the narratives, reunion and the information gained through it regarding their pre-adoption life and the reasons for their relinquishment revealed different meanings, particularly related to their sense of continuity and sense of coherence.

The narratives revealed how the worry and guilt about their birth family disappeared. Mia explained how the worry about her birth mother's faith and the guilt of being relinquished

disappeared due to reunion: "I was so relieved that she was alive [because] I was prepared to find out that if she's alive she's really poor or a prostitute. And then it was a huge relief to hear about all that had happened and that the adoption was not my fault." Mia's reflection shows how, by acquiring this information, "the blind spots" in her life were filled in and the secrecy surrounding her adoption was dispelled, enabling continuity in her life and unifying her sense of identity:

I felt peace. It's nice to know where you come from and what has happened, so it won't occupy you anymore. I don't need to be distressed anymore, because my mysterious past is no longer a mystery. As a matter of fact, I'm more familiar with myself than before.

Similarly, reunion relieved Jan from his feelings of guilt over not being able to help his relatives financially. Along with reunion, he realized it might have put them in an unequal interdependence with each other. He further justified his position by arguing that it was not his responsibility, and that sending money would not ultimately resolve his birth family's poverty but instead cause them even more problems in their neighborhood.

Narratives also indicated how meeting their birth family and acquiring information about their pre-adoption life and the reasons for relinquishment dispelled the fantasies they had created of their relinquishment and birth family. Eva stated how "the most important in reunion was just to spend time with them [birth family members] and notice that they weren't exactly what I had expected." Although, she felt this reunion was "emotionally charged," it also confirmed her identity:

Somehow everything now seems more self-evident, and the feeling of rootlessness has disappeared. I feel that I've become more in harmony with myself but not because of what they told me but because I was able see them.

For Caj, who experienced reunion as an "exceptional possibility" to finally gain more detailed answers about his unknown past, the most satisfying thing was to learn the reasons for his relinquishment. This was the case despite how, he explained, "it also included a lot of

disappointments because the information turned upside down all my ideas about them and the reasons for my relinquishment.” Although the reasons were difficult to accept, he tried to explain them by reference to cultural and social factors and spoke about the advantage of being adopted. He pondered the meaning of this information: “It was important to find out how your life started so you don’t have to fantasize about what has happened. And it was important to see them because they weren’t at all what I had imagined.” Although he still found it difficult to accept that he had been abandoned, his statement reveals how reunion helped him gain a coherent sense of identity and continuity in his life:

This has been a kind of finding of the final piece of the puzzle. Without this experience something would have been lacking in my life. I might say that now I’m whole, and I’m finally starting to realize my life that I lived over thirty years.

For Lea, knowledge of her relinquishment came as a shock and was something she could have never imagined. This information led her to ponder her survival from the viewpoint of her own children: “How clear-headed I’ve managed to be despite those kinds of experiences. I wouldn’t want my children to experience anything like that.” Lea described the meaning of learning about her life history and finding her birth family to her identity: “I’ve been used to always having hundreds of projects around me but now I don’t have the same compulsion to act and I can relax. I have tried through performance to get something, I don’t know what, maybe a kind of life.”

The meaning of the possibility to express the feelings of being relinquished and put up for adoption for the sense coherence and sense of continuity appeared in Jan’s case. Because he remembered his birth family and had knowledge of why he was put up for adoption, the most important thing in reunion was that he finally had a possibility to complete the task of expressing his feelings, this desperate need he had experienced before reunion, which he called “the heavy stones of my life,” to his birth mother. Jan recalled this event and its meaning for his identity:

I told her that I had longed for her every single second after she had relinquished me, and that I didn't have a better life in Finland without her, and that I still loved her. And when I had told her this it made me whole. If I hadn't been able to say these things, I'd have thought about them till the day I die. There's a need to complete a certain chapter in your life, and when you have done so, you find peace to live your life. After I had said these things I was ready to have children and move on.

### **Belonging and relatedness within the family**

This theme was characterized by the varied meanings participants gave to their sense of belonging to their birth family and to their adoptive family and their justifications for these senses. The meaning of emotional attachment appeared in narratives when participants brought out the sense of birth family as a stranger. Mia brought out the meaning of attachment: "Meeting birth mother was a shock because she didn't feel like a mother. I can't treat her as my mom because she never devoted herself to me. We never had the kind of attachment that I have with my adoptive mother." Additionally, her talk about her relationship with a birth sibling revealed the effect on attachment of the loss of time: "It's hard to imagine that we could ever be close, because so many years have passed." Her statement reflects the meaning of nurture and the iterative nature of family relations:

At first it was incredible but later I realized it's better to stay friends with them and get acquainted more slowly. I used to think I have another family somewhere, but when the secret was discovered I found that they were strangers who never took care of me.

Eva also described her first reunion with her birth sibling as a "meeting of two strangers." Although finding a birth sibling was important to her, a distance continued to remain between them after a few meetings. She spoke about the emotional attachment she felt regarding this: "This relationship isn't so emotional that it would be important to meet very often." Similarly, Eva felt other birth family members as "new and strange people who were nice to meet but aren't my real

family.” However, her birth family remained important to her: “Somehow I’m trying to integrate them into my family. They hold some special meaning, though it’s difficult to describe.”

When Jan was reunited with his enormously missed birth family he felt at first that he still had feelings left for his birth mother, younger sibling and the latter’s children whom he regarded “almost as my own children and whom I wanted to save.” However, he gave up the idea later after realizing that “they did not feel like my family anymore.” His justification of a sense of unfamiliarity with his birth family reflects again the iterative nature of family belonging and the meanings of attachment and biology in kinship:

I have a mother in [birth country] I’m not attached to and don’t long for anymore. And it’s crazy to say it, but I don’t even love her anymore. Finally, it’s not important who gave birth to me. It’s the same thing with my siblings; I don’t miss them either.

Unlike for other participants, for Lea, reunion with her birth family was an experience through which she felt, she “finally got a real family,” the one she had missed because of her difficulties in communicating with her adoptive family. The attention and care Lea received from her birth family, and especially from her birth father, gave rise to her sense of belonging to her birth family. Lea justified her sense of belongingness to her birth family by the strong emotional bond she felt and compared it to her feelings for her adoptive family:

My birth father and his new family are my real family. The connection between us was formed so quickly, as if we had always known each other. I could see how they cared about me and loved me. It’s so different from the family that I’ve lived with for so many years. And although you don’t know them well yet, it feels good knowing that they exist.

Considering her adoptive family as a “real family” was justified in her narrative by emotional attachment and nurture, by the same characteristics used to justify the lack the unfamiliarity with her birth family. Eva stated: “The family I have grown up in and that has taken care of me I’m emotionally in touch with. I don’t have this kind of relationship with my birth family as with my



[adoptive] family. The meaning of nurture and common every day history as a basis for a “real family” was manifested also in Mia’s resistance to the idea that biology fully defines relatedness:

She’s [adoptive mother] my real mother. She’s the one who has taken care of me. And we have such a long history together. And though this motherhood has been socially constructed it’s as important as biological motherhood. I get very irritated when someone says that the biology is the most important in kinship.

The sense of adoptive family as a “real family” appeared also in expressions of loyalty to adoptive parents. While Caj talked about his plan for a new reunion with his birth family, he described his adoptive parents both as his “real” parents and as his children’s “real” grandparents: “Whatever happens they’ll be always my real parents. This [reunion] doesn’t mean changing parents but having new relatives.” Similarly, the sense of loyalty to adoptive parents is manifested in Eva’s justification of her adoptive parents’ presence in the reunion: “They might have felt like outsiders, as if I had gone to see my parents, even though I consider them as my real parents.”

The meaning of the similarity in appearance with birth family members appeared in participants’ thoughts regarding their relatedness to their birth family. Mia described the meaning of finding similarity in appearance with her birth mother: “Imagine how it felt to see another person who is just like you but older. It was like a fairy tale, though the attachment between us didn’t exist anymore.” Furthermore, the comparison between adoptee and birth family members reflected the meaning of appearance for relatedness. Lea compared herself, her birth father and other birth family members and was satisfied with finding that she resembled her birth father in appearance:

It was so interesting that of all his other children I was the one who most resembled him in appearance but none one of my other relatives resembled me. I only resembled my father, although he was twenty centimeters shorter than me.

Similarly, Eva’s detailed description of the appearance of her birth family members and the comparison of herself with them without finding any similarities, demonstrates the importance of

likeness for generating familiarity and relatedness: "I was very surprised that none of my birth family, if they are now my family, looked like me. I found this a bit strange."

The difficulty to communicate about reasons for adoption appeared a distancing reason between adoptee and birth family. Though, Caj felt that his birth family members were friendly, he reported how they "felt strange and didn't feel immediately familiar". He felt interaction with them was complicated because of the difficulty of discussing his abandonment: "I think it was because they were ashamed that I was sent away from the family." Meanwhile, he felt that keeping in touch with his extended birth family members, such as birth cousins was more relaxed, owing to their outsider position regarding his relinquishment. His need to deal his relinquishment with his birth family shows that reunion is an iterative process: "It will require several reunions, but I believe we will all receive salvation from this one day."

The meaning of reunion for communicating about adoption-related issues in adoptive family and for the relations in adoptive family also emerged in the narratives. Mia highlighted how reunion had confirmed her relation to her adoptive mother: "She is my mother now in a deeper way." Eva emphasized how "the most important thing was to make this reunion journey together, because it enabled all of us to better understand the meaning of adoption." Jan said how his sense of belonging to his adoptive family increased with the more open communication. Particularly, adoptive mother's regret over the pain adoption had caused for Jan was meaningful in drawing them closer. He stated: "She admitted that if they had known about all the pain adoption caused me they wouldn't have adopted me".

However, the more open communication did not appear in all the narratives. Caj reported how adoption remained a "taboo" in his adoptive family and how especially his adoptive mother "wished that everything could be as it used to be." Lea's relationship with her adoptive family remained ruptured, and she thought that it was too late to improve it anymore. She explained this as

the outcome of their communication difficulties: "I've tried to discuss things, but they don't want to. And as I always feel so bad in their company I just don't want to be with them."

The meaning of cultural and socioeconomic differences between the adoptee and the birth family for their relation also appeared in narratives. The lack of a common language was particular challenge in all the participants' relationships with their birth family, and using an interpreter and Google Translate "caused a lot of misunderstandings." Additionally, the cultural conflicts and their obstacles hindered relationship between adoptee and birth family. Mia stated:

My birth mother is religious and would never understand my Western values. And my [birth] father thought I'd accept him with open arms, although he left me when I was a baby. And he lives in a culture where men are more respected than women, which I can't tolerate. Finally, I don't want to make a closer acquaintance with him because it's easier for me in this way.

In the case of Jan, particularly, the socioeconomic differences challenged his communion with his birth family. He explained:

It came out, for example, in Facebook. Whereas they had bought a toy for their children, I had bought a new car. For them I looked like a millionaire. And what made me even more successful in their eyes was my marriage with a white woman because slum children don't marry and have children with whites. After this, I stopped sharing these kinds of updates.

In the narratives the different meanings of grandchildren for relatedness to the birth family appeared. Caj reported how the presence of his children during reunion facilitated the relationship between him and his birth family: They "acted as ice-breakers between us and made my birth parents really happy and proud of their new grandchildren." As for Lea, her sense of relatedness to her birth family was underlined by the relationship between her birth father and Lea's child: "They liked each other and were together all the time. He doesn't have any other grandchildren so it was great for him. And for my child he's now a 'new grandpa who lives far away.'" On the other hand,

Mia who had wanted to reunite with her birth family because of her own future motherhood pondered that even being a mother herself “wouldn’t strengthen my ties to them.”

*Figure 1 somewhere here*

### **Discussion**

On the basis of our thematic analysis three broad themes were found – search and reunion in significant periods of life, meaning of reunion for identity, and belonging and relatedness within family. The theme of search and reunion in significant periods of life reflected the participants’ interest in their birth family from childhood to young adulthood. In childhood, participants’ interest varied from no interest and refusal to think about their past to a deep longing for the birth family. In adolescence, participants’ interest activated, particularly in areas such as the adoptees’ need to find the reasons for their relinquishment, their desire for physical resemblance with someone (Docan-Morgan, 2014; Godon et al., 2014; Ruohio, 2016; Wrobel & Dillon, 2009) and concern about their birth family’s life situation. These reflected the adolescent’s intensified identity work (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980) as well as their ability to create a more realistic understanding of the adoption (Brodzinsky, 2011). Within both periods of life, participants’ search was characterized by the closed communication about adoption in their adoptive family, reflecting both the lack of information about their life history and communicative difficulties in their adoptive family (see Brodzinsky, 2006). The difficulty to discuss openly about adoption may reflect the tradition of secrecy that dominated the earlier decades of adoption in Finland (Partanen, 2014). Consequently, it may have hindered the adoptive parents in supporting participants in integrating the birth family into their identities (see Mendenhall et al., 2004) and contribute to the narrative rupture in their life (Dorow, 2006; Yngvesson & Mahoney, 2000). Though the identity work might be most intensive during adolescence (Erikson, 1968), the special identity challenges faced by adoptees extends this work into adulthood (Grotevant et al., 2017). In the narratives, this appeared by intensifying reflection on the meaning of missing information of their life history for establishing a family and

being a parent, reflecting the idea that identity work in adulthood is activated through new social situations and relationships (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1993). Resolving the reasons for their relinquishment was felt to be significant for the readiness for transition to parenthood. Additionally, becoming a parent motivated participants to contemplate their birth family, roots, and the meaning of genetic ties in kinship and biological continuity.

The theme of the meaning of reunion for identity reflected the individual meanings reunion had for participants' sense of coherence and sense of continuity. Having gained information about their birth families, pre-adoption life, and the reasons for their relinquishment, their imaginings about their birth families disappeared, causing them to feel certain kind of relief. Moreover, reunion offered a possibility to be relieved of their feelings of guilt over their relinquishment and being put up for adoption. For some adoptees, it was important to express their harmful experience of adoption with their birth parents, while for others it was still too sensitive a topic to discuss with the birth family. Despite the emotional burden, reunion seemed to help these adoptees gain an increased sense of coherence and continuity in their life, a result in line with previous findings that adoptees may experience a sense of integrity after reunion (e.g., March, 1995). However, it runs counter to other research findings that reunion may lead to even more incoherence in adoptees' identities (Docan-Morgan, 2014; Palmer, 2011; Yngvesson, 2003). It is possible that the present five cases represent individuals who have explored the meaning of their adoption in depth and were thus able to produce narratives that demonstrated personal coherence, because it has been suggested that individuals who have processed their experiences of loss and who are able to articulate them in detail tend to show greater psychological maturity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Though the meanings gained by search and reunion are retrospectively constructed and the past cannot be retrieved as something is (Homans, 2013), we argue that narrating search and reunion may help in integrating the relinquishment and birth family into identity, and as McAdams and Mclean (2013) suggest, support the construction of a sense of meaning and continuity in life.

In the theme of belonging and relatedness within the family, the adoptees' narratives revealed not only the differences in how they relate to their birth families and adoptive families, but also manifested the process of integrating these two families into their lives (see Wrobel & Dillon, 2009). This can be seen in their attempts to justify, name, and legitimize (see Galvin, 2006) their sense of family belonging and in their understanding of family. Such attempts thus reflect the way individuals attribute values and emotional significance to the institutions (Tajfel, 2010) they are part of—the family being one example of such an institution—and construct a sense of how they are related to others (see Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001). Although finding biological knowledge was felt to be significant, the meaning of family was interpreted more in terms of attachment and nurture, and the genetic ties was resisted as the sole basis of a family. Thus, the family was seen primarily as a social and psychological construction, which is parallel with previous research on domestic adoptees (e.g., Kalus, 2016). Care, love, and emotional bond as criteria for seeing a family as a “true family” were also present in the case where the adoptee felt the birth family was the “real” family. This theme also revealed how reunion served as a way to contribute to more open communication within the adoptive family and strengthen the adoptee's sense of belonging to the adoptive family, maybe owing to the fact that gaining concrete information of the birth family may contribute to communicative openness in the adoptive family (see Brodzinsky, 2006). Again, this theme reflected the life-long nature of the search and reunion process where cultural and socioeconomic differences, life transitions and different expectations of interaction can play a key role in facilitating or hindering contact with the birth family (Brodzinsky & Goldberg, 2017; Docan-Morgan, 2016; Farr, Grant-Marsney, Musante Grotevant, & Wrobel, 2014).

In order to understand adoptive identity adoptees' narratives should be reflected on within interaction between the self, birth family, and adoptive family and the cultural level (Grotevant et al., 2000). In addition to the interaction between participants' birth and adoptive family

relationships, the meaning of the cultural context appeared in the context of postmodernity.

Despite how the diverse family configurations and hybrid identity narratives form the context of identity construction for today's adoptees (Kraus, 2007; Smith, 2008), coherent identities continue to be defined through biological ties by society (Kraus, 2007; Yngvesson & Mahoney, 2000). The challenge this presents to adoptees revealed in the narratives such that participants both legitimized their need to both search for their birth parents and expressed their belonging and loyalty to their adoptive families (see Patton, 2000; Yngvesson & Mahoney, 2000). Additionally, the rise and progression of postmodernity generates a question: if postmodern family figurations and identity narratives become the norm in the future and loosen the imperatives for coherent narratives and stable identities, will this change have an affect on international adoptees' self and familial identity narratives?

While the three broad themes were a synthesis of the participants' narratives, their content varied by case, reflecting the individual and unique meanings the informants attributed to their search and reunion. Consequently, this study suggests that the significant periods of life, adoptees' individual adoption narratives and the nature of their adoptive family relationships within certain cultural and social contexts form the base on which they construct the meaning of their birth family for their personal and family identities. Additionally, adoptive identity is multidimensional and occurs in processes, contexts and within different identity domains and is constantly changing.

The present findings suggest that adoption professionals need to be better aware of the variety of ways in which lack of knowledge about the circumstances of their relinquishment and birth family is experienced among international adoptees and how this can challenge their coherent identity construction. Because it seems that reunion with birth families is increasing with the help of Internet, social media (e.g. Partanen, 2014; Siegel, 2012) and DNA tests, we suggest that there is an urgent need to develop the preparation and support of international adoptees as well as of their birth and adoptive families. In short, the whole adoption triad should receive support in the search and

reunion processes. Learning from adoptees' own experiences should be utilized when developing support. In addition, in order to facilitate more open communication in adoptive families as well as to facilitate international adoptees to more easily be in contact in the future with their birth families, the current practice in international adoption should be changed in favor of more open adoptions.

The limitations and strengths of this study are reflected through credibility, authenticity, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility and authenticity both refer to the way in which the researcher expresses the experiences of participants truthfully (Polit & Beck, 2012). These were enhanced through rigorous description of the research and rich quotes from the participants that allow the reader to critique the credibility. However, as this study lacked the member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), a critical question could be asked: would the findings be different if they had been verified with the participants? To ensure dependability, which refers to the constancy of the data over similar conditions (Polit & Beck, 2012), the research process was reported in detail so that the reader can assess the effectiveness of the methods and future research can repeat the work. However, it is not possible to gain the same findings because of the situational nature of qualitative research. Transferability refers to findings that can be applied to another situations and is dependent on the generalizations about the phenomenon being studied (Sandelowski, 1986). As this study emphasized the individual meanings of the participants in a particular situation, the transferability criterion may not be relevant. Yet the key point is the representativeness of the informants for that particular group. To ensure this, sufficient information on the informants and the research context were presented.

The first author is an adoptive mother and has an understanding of the research phenomena. The pre-existing knowledge was seen as an advantage for this study because it enabled the researcher to understand the psychological and cultural meanings of the research topic and to obtain a more authentic understanding of the phenomenon (see Chavez, 2008). Yet we understand that



this kind of an insider role may be seen as a challenge to the objectivity and weaken the study's confirmability (Polit & Beck, 2012). To avoid the bias, the first author was careful to not project her views onto the research process. Additionally, to strengthen the confirmability and to identify divergent interpretations of the data another investigator participated in the analysis, a practice known as investigator triangulation (Flick, 2004). Because after thorough analysis process no new themes were identified, and no issues arose regarding a category of data we assume that the theoretical saturation was obtained in the study (see Strauss and Corbin, 1990). However, one limitation comes from the short time span between the reunions and interviews, and thus the present findings only refer to the adoptees' feelings at the time of the interview and do not capture the ongoing process or long-term meanings they attribute to their reunion with their birth family.

Reunion with birth family is not a final point but the beginning of something new (Yngvesson, 2003). Neither are adoptive identity narratives stable but iterative and socially constructed devices for constructing self and familial identity narratives (Grotevant et.al., 2000; Langellier & Peterson, 2006; McAdams & McLean, 2013) along with a sense of meaning and continuity in life. For this reason, qualitative research is needed on how the meanings adoptees give to their search and reunion projects change over time and contexts. Moreover, because the search for the birth family is not restricted to achieving reunion alone, and because not all adoptees are interested in initiating a search, research on the thoughts and feelings of adoptees who do not have the possibility or desire to reunite with their birth family is also needed to find out how they integrate their birth family into their identity and understanding of family. Finally, as the three themes identified in the present study were broad, we suggest that future research should study each of the themes separately and in more depth to better understand the meaning that search and reunion have for adoptees' identity and family understanding. One particular area for further study would be the meaning of search and reunion within adult international adoptees' transition to parenthood.

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