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International Korean Adoptees' Experiences with Global Overseas Adoptees' Link's
(G.O.A.'L) Birth Family Search Service

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Thesis Committee Chair: Dawn L. Comeau, PhD, MPH

An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Rollins School of Public Health of Emory
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Abstract

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South Korea has sent the most infants and children abroad to other countries to be adopted. This practice of Korean international adoption peaked in the 1980s, making the majority of international Korean adoptees adults now. Adoptees may engage in searching for their birth parents and relatives by contacting their Korean adoption agencies. The adoptee run organization Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (G.O.A.'L), which is located in Seoul, South Korea, provides a service to help adoptees search for birth family. This study examined G.O.A.'L's 63 search cases from 2016 and conducted in depth interviews with 10 adoptees who had utilized their service. Results of the cases revealed the number and frequency of a variety of birth family search factors and outcomes. From the interviews, participants shared their perceptions and experiences of searching with G.O.A.'L, the adoption agencies, and other adoptees. The recommendations from the results include continuing G.O.A.'L's First Trip Home program where adoptees go to Korea and search for family, considerations for needs assessments, awareness efforts to adoptees, and communication updates during the search process.

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List of Abbreviations

KAD: International Korean adoptee

BFS: Birth family search

G.O.A.'L: Global Overseas Adoptees' Link

KAS: Korean Adoption Services

FTH: G.O.A.'L's First Trip Home

Chapter 1: Introduction

Psychological research done on international placements of children has generally

shown positive results, however, there is a call for attention on the life process of the

adoptees at the different developmental phases of their experience, such as adulthood

(Lee, Yun, Yoo, & Nelson, 2010; Wilkinson, 1995). South Korea played a major role in

the development of international adoption and was a dominant source after the Korean

War. Korea subsequently continued to send the highest number of infants and children

for international adoption until its decrease in the 1990s (*Child Adoption: Trends and*

Policies, 2009).

While Korea, as well as 195 other countries, continue the practice of international

adoption, it is "...imperative that it is carried out with the vision of The Hague convention

[international policy in response to problems in intercountry adoption] and a

determination to press for more open adoptions in which a child can retain links with the

country of origin and, where possible, their birth family" (*Child Adoption: Trends and*

Policies, 2009; Selman, 2002, 2009). Post-adoption services provided by the Korean

adoption agencies that facilitated the adoption can assist with searches for birth family. In

addition, there is an adoptee run Korean organization that assists international Korean

adoptees with their birth family search, Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (G.O.A.'L).

While the only existing international framework for international adoption is a

legal one, there is a call for an overarching framework based on a socioecological

approach that incorporates health promotion (Fronek & Cuthbert, 2012; Selman, 2002).

Gaining insight into the experience of adoptees using post-adoption services can inform

future public health advocates in how and what services for this population are to be

improved, as well as what are their lived experiences and focus attention on their best interests. In addition, further public health attention to this topic can provide valuable insight into the improvement of international adoption practices as well as development of social welfare systems and family preservation, social needs of single-parent families, medical services, family planning, etc. in the sending countries (Fronek & Cuthbert, 2012; E. Kim, 2009).

In the context of the history and political history of adoption, it is vital that services offered to adoptees are available, accessible, and evaluated. G.O.A.'L provides this service to those who search where they may encounter various barriers to search. These services play a role in the current questions of, what are adoptees' experiences and perspectives with the search and what are their rights in regards to the information needed and actions taken to complete searches.

This evaluation research aimed to fill the gap of literature on one of the long-term consequences of adoption: the international birth family search experience. In addition, this research adds to previous literature that has begun to explore the practice of adoption from the adoptees' perspective as well as the exploration on international adoptees as adults. The goal was to explore the experiences international Korean adoptees have had with the birth family search and the institutions and factors that they perceive as facilitating and hindering their efforts. These experiences may be related to or complement research on adoptees' identity and mental health. This study aimed to investigate the following questions:

1. What are international Korean adoptees' experiences with G.O.A.'L's birth family search service?

2. What are their perceptions and feelings throughout the search?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Korean International Adoption

South Korea has sent over 160,000 infants and children for international adoption to various countries, with the majority of children received by the United States; this practice has been referred to as a migration or diaspora by several researchers (Hübinette, 2006; Lee et al., 2010; Ma, 2017). Korea's practice of international adoption has been recognized as the largest and longest program in the world, as Korea has sent more children to foreign countries than any other country and has continued with the practice for over 50 years (*Child Adoption: Trends and Policies*, 2009; D. S. Kim, 2007; Selman, 2002).

The practice began in the 1950s after the Korean War when there were many homeless or orphaned children from the aftermath of the war and thousands of mixed-race children from United States soldiers, Korean women, and prostitution (Hollingsworth, 2003; E. Kim, 2009; Ma, 2017). The lack of aid to and domestic adoption of the mixed-race children have been seen as a result from the stigma of children being born from miscegenation and prostitution, Korea's cultural emphasis on bloodline, and cultural view of the illegitimacy of mixed-race children (Hollingsworth, 2003; E. Kim, 2009). Afterward, international adoption increased and continued even though very few mix-raced children were put up for adoption (Selman, 2002).

The continued practice of and the establishment of international adoption happened simultaneously with the rapid economic development of Korea (J. W. Kim & Henderson, 2008). Korean adoption peaked in the mid-1980s with over 8,000 adoptions for several years (Ma, 2017; Selman, 2002). And the average fertility rate per woman

decreased greatly during this time, from 6.1 in 1960, 2.9 in 1980, to 1.2 in 2010 and the rapid economic progress of Korea has led to Korea having the 11th largest economy in the world (J. W. Kim & Henderson, 2008). Korea has followed the international adoption observation that sending countries are not the poorest or do not have the highest birth rates and the practice of sending children abroad continues long after the observed "crisis" that "caused" the need for international adoption (Selman, 2002).

As it is noted that the "…determinants of health affect not only individual and community health but also the capacity to care for one's children", there have been various factors that have been identified as contributors to Korea's initial and continued practice of international adoption, including religious, political, economic, and cultural factors (Fronek & Cuthbert, 2012). Key specific factors that have been identified as contributors to the separation of children from family and community in Korea have been the social stigma associated with their birth, poverty, income support, access to contraception, and family planning (Fronek & Cuthbert, 2012; Hollingsworth, 2003). The cultural context for Korea's preference for international adoption included great importance placed on the maintaining of familial ancestry, association of immorality with unmarried mothers, and lack of legal responsibility unmarried fathers have for out-of-wedlock children (Herrmann, 1992). As for the structural context, it has been identified that the lack of sufficient government support for orphaned or abandoned children was instead provided by the establishment of relief organizations and foreign missionaries. This led to a focus on social services being provided by private and institutional care (Ma, 2017).

It may be of interest to note that international adoption, as well as Korean international adoption, has been critiqued for various aspects. Critiques include that it does not address the underlying social conditions that lead to the abandonment of children; it may allow the sending countries to abdicate responsibility for enacting sociopolitical change to secure the well-being of all children; potentially exploits women and children; and is seen as a function of American imperialism and neocolonialism (Bergquist, 2004; Herrmann, 1992; Hübinette, 2004; McKee, 2016)

United States International Adoption

The United States has played a major role in facilitating Korean international adoption. The US has received the majority of internationally adopted Korean children and specifically, the majority of internationally Korean adoptees have been adopted by middle-class White American families (*Child Adoption: Trends and Policies*, 2009; Hübinette, 2006; Ma, 2017; Selman, 2002). It was an American who established the main international adoption agency in Korea in 1956, Holt International (Ma, 2017). This was highly publicized in the US media and may have been influential in the United States consistently receiving the majority of Korean infants and children (J. W. Kim & Henderson, 2008). Holt International is an established private Christian non-profit organization based in Eugene, Oregon with branches throughout the US and has an organization in Korea, known as Holt Children's Services. Holt self-describes themselves as having, "…pioneered international adoption 60 years ago and we remain the leaders today… providing world-class care to children waiting to come home…You can rest assured that we are doing adoption the right way" ("Korea Adoption," ; March, 1995).

Holt has added other countries to facilitate adoption from including China, Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines, India, Haiti, and Ethiopia. However, Holt promotes Korean adoption and asserts that its "Korea program continues to be one of our most stable and predictable adoption programs", and also emphasizes to adoptive parents the excellent medical information provided, Korea's nurturing foster families, and frequent updates on the child (Hespen, 2017). Holt also discloses that currently Korean adoption can cost between $38,785 - $53,980 ("Korea Adoption,").

Recognized factors that have led American families turning to international adoption includes increased infertility from later-age marriage and the decline of healthy white babies that are available in the US for domestic adoption (Hiromi Ishizawa, 2006; Jacobson, Nielsen, & Hardeman, 2012). The families social workers saw as eligible to adopt were white, middle-class heterosexuals and the focus on white babies for adoption is related to the opposition and controversy from white families adopting African American and Native American infants and children domestically in the past (Jacobson et al., 2012; E. Kim, 2009). The National Association of Black Social Workers petitioned for the preservation of the black identity of transracial domestic adoptees. Transracial adoption refers to when adoptive parents have a different race than the adopted child. There was debate over the "ability of White families to rear and socialize children of different ethnic, cultural, or racial backgrounds" (Jacobson et al., 2012).

Other factors contributing to US families turning to international adoption also reflect the increased retention of babies by single mothers, availability of abortion, and family planning (Jacobson et al., 2012). In addition, the change in adoption practices in the US has also been attributed to American parents preferring "closed" adoptions

practiced in intercountry adoption to "open" adoptions often now practiced in US domestic adoption (Hiromi Ishizawa, 2006). International adoption offers a low risk of birth parent interference with the adoption (Hollingsworth, 2003).

Mental Health and Identity

A review of literature that compared the mental health of internationally and domestic internationally adopted adolescents found that most international adoptees were well-adjusted and had fewer behavior problems and fewer referrals to mental health services than domestic adoptees (Juffer & van, 2005). A slightly different review on mental health studies done in Europe and the US on international adopted adolescents found that while most are well adjusted, they did have more mental health problems than their non-adopted peers (Askeland et al., 2017). The authors suggest that the increased risk of mental health problems should be acknowledged for future prevention (Askeland et al., 2017). Current studies on the mental health of Korean adult adoptees appeared to be lacking in the literature.

There is a large amount of research on Korean adoptees, transracial adoptees, and international adoptees and their cultural and racial identity as well as the adoptive parents' perspectives and roles with their adopted children. Research on adoptive parents has examined their roles and how they can support healthy development for their internationally and transracially adopted children (Mohanty, Keokse, & Sales, 2006; Vonk, Lee, & Crolley-Simic, 2010; Yoon, 2004).

Research on the adolescents has recognized that because these international adoptees are adopted as well as a minority race in the receiving country, psychological difficulties about their adoption may be compounded by factors such as racial isolation,

discrimination, and identity conflicts (Godon, Green, & Ramsey, 2014). Previous concern has also included their inability to effectively cope with racism (Park & Green, 2000). Relatedly, Grotevant asserts that since the identity process becomes progressively more complex as layers of "differentness are added", then adopted persons face a typically more complex process than non-adopted persons (1997). For example, Korean adoptees raised by White families have an additional "developmental task of integrating their perceptions and experiences related to differences in physical appearance, loss of birth heritage, and assimilation into White majority culture into their overall sense of self and identity" (Song & Lee, 2009). The development of personal identity asks the questions: how am I unique and also how am I like others? These questions are said to be an ongoing negotiation within a person's psychological sense of self and their sociocultural context. This development entails "the self, the historical and cultural contexts of the self, and change over time" (Grotevant, 1997).

Identity achievement, compared to identity confusion, is seen as a major step to becoming an emotionally healthy and productive adult. It has been asserted that the primary assumption of researchers for adoptees, including domestic, transracial, and international adoptees, and identity is that "…loss—specifically of biological connections—is at the core of the adoption experience and is a key component in adoptees' understanding of adoption and formation of identity" (Baden, Gibbons, Wilson, & McGinnis, 2013).

Overall, a review of adoptees' ethnic identity research found that there is no one right way to resolve identity negotiation and adoptees' identity can range from assimilating to the dominant culture to identifying as bicultural, or to having a strong

heritage ethnic identity (Boivin & Hassan, 2015). Identity is seen as evolving over the lifetime and daily cultural circumstances and a focus on adulthood may be revealing since "…life transitions in adulthood can raise important adoption- and race-related questions about identity and belonging that were less explored during childhood and arguably were less relevant to earlier childhood adjustment" (Lee et al., 2010). Thus as adoptees enter adolescence and adulthood they may develop more autonomy and independence where they may desire and are able to further engage and increase self-initiated cultural experiences such as traveling to South Korea and searching for birth family (Song & Lee, 2009).

Searching for Birth Family

As international adoption has become a relatively common method of constructing a family in the United States (Hiromi Ishizawa, 2006), the adoption of infants and children into non-biological families has challenged and observed the disconnect of the traditional symbolization of kinship, birth, from its "usual cultural meaning of longevity, certainty, obligation, and enduring solidarity" (Jones, 2016). Those adopted are in a unique position, as are children produced through reproductive technology involving donor sperm or eggs, to have a non-biological kinship with their adoptive families who raised them as well as biological kinship with whom they may not have contact with or knowledge about. This has created the circumstance and development of birth family searches, where adoptees may search for their birth parent or other biological family members. However, throughout the history of adoption practice, there has been ambiguity and uncertainty regarding the nature of post-adoption

relationships and this uncertainty extends from the adopters, adoptees, and birth family, and also the adoption practitioners and policy-makers (Jones, 2016).

Adoptees can experience a range of desires and feelings towards searching for their birth families. The search has been identified as a natural and normative process of identity development, where there is an integration of past into the present and where they may be gaps in pre-adoptive history and a lack of knowledge about their birth parents. A period of searching can be either a literal search for birth parents or an internal search for a sense of self (Godon et al., 2014). It is recommended that parents, those working with international adoptees, and the adoptees see searching as "an expression of and a contributor to the normative process of identity development". (Godon et al., 2014). It has been noted that there is a continuum of search choices and searches: those who do not want to search, those who intend to search in the future, and those who have searched (Wrobel, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2004).

The birth family search includes searches for birth mother, birth father, full and half-siblings, foster mothers, and/or more information about the adoptee's file or birth circumstances. It also can include a confirmation of correct or incorrect information, e.g. confirmation on birthdate or if a birth parent is indeed dead. As this search encompasses a broad range of desires, it has also been referred to as information seeking. Information seeking is defined as "the gathering of information previously unknown to the adopted person about his or her adoption and birth family" (Wrobel, Grotevant, Samek, & Von Korff, 2013). Through anthropological research, it has also been seen as a process where adoptees are asserting control of past events that have been controlled and shaped by others. The adoptees' act of searching for birth family was thereby seen as an assertion of

agency as well as a construction of identities that can link their past, present, and future. The objects that are used for searches, such as birth certificates, photos, are used to investigate their past for re-connection and these objects simultaneously symbolize the breaks in kinship and discontinuity of their past (Carsten, 2000).

Factors that increase desires to search for birth family include external facilitators. Identification of external facilitators was associated with greater intensity of curiosity and more information seeking behavior. Such facilitators included having the necessary resources (e.g. money, initial information), and support of important individuals, (e.g. adoptive parents) (Wrobel et al., 2013). Another study found that experiencing discrimination from others about their adoptive family structure, increased their desire for more knowledge on their biological family. The authors viewed attempting to search as an attempt to neutralize the stigma by "acquiring information about biological kinship ties and thus gaining the sense of generational continuity that characterizes 'normals'" (March, 1995). They also found that adoptee's satisfaction with the reunions was more related to the amount of background information they discovered than continued contact with biological family. The author surmised that those with successful search outcomes do not remove the social stigma attached to their adoptive status and only perceive themselves as more socially acceptable from finding a more effective way to manage the stigma. However, they recommend openness in adoption and recognition of adoptee's need for detailed knowledge and the possible impact and pressures on adoptees from public attitudes (March, 1995).

For domestic adoptees who searched and were reunited, the majority of adoptees who contacted their birth mothers evaluated the experience positively. They found the

relationship important and were generally satisfied with the nature of the relationship (Müller, Gibbs, & Ariely, 2008). It has also been found that adoptees searching were not looking to replace their adoptive family, instead, they were bringing together two parts of themselves together to build a sense of self that felt complete to them. The adoptive parents and the birth parents' relationship to the adoptee does not compete, but both make up the adopted individual's identity (Campbell, 1991). Other specific reasons for searching has included to find a resolution of confusion or sense of emptiness, a need for self-understanding, and for medical history (Kowal, 1985).

In the US, the search movement by domestic adoptees has affected the institution of adoption in the US where efforts by search organizations have led to states changing their laws to allow adult adoptees access to their birth records (Müller et al., 2008). Furthermore, in the US the Office of Children's Issues, part of the Bureau of Consular Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, which carries out the responsibilities for intercountry adoption in the United States, sees disclosure of a child's information and history to adoptive parents as a legal responsibility and key to successful adoption. In its 2012 bulletin to child welfare professionals, it states that the "complete disclosure about a child's history benefits the child, the adoptive family, and the adoption agency or organization…" (Gateway, 2012). Specific benefits include that it allows for the adoptive child to have "full and accurate knowledge on their family, medical, and genetic history" and "it helps protect agencies and intermediaries from "wrongful adoption" lawsuits", where past agencies have been found guilty in court for intentionally misrepresenting, deliberately concealing, or negligently disclosing a child's background information to adoptive parents" (Gateway, 2012).

Korean adoptees may face challenges during their birth family search such as closed or missing records, the intricacies of international bureaucracies, and language and cultural barriers. However, even though many searches do not result with contact or reunions, the phase of searching or anticipation of it, has been identified as central to the searching process (Godon et al., 2014). For 2012-2015, 15% of Korean adoptees who had requested their documents from Korea Adoption Services (KAS) were able to reunite with their birth families (이다영, 2015).

For Korean adoptees, their birth files can include information about the birth parents, foster parents, circumstances of relinquishment, and medical record of birth if available. Korea Adoption Services (KAS), a governmental institution which operates under the Korean Ministry of Health & Welfare, explains that the "adoption information disclosure process" is legally based on various articles of the Special Adoption Act, enacted in 2012, and that an adult adoptee who is 18 years old, may petition for the disclosure of information from KAS or the adoption agency. A petition includes paperwork and confirmation of the adoptee's identity and can be submitted via email. KAS is able to attempt to verify the birth parent's locations and the adoption agencies have the adoptee's birth records. KAS explains that an adoptee can only receive the birth parents' information if the birth parents are able to be located, contacted and then consent to the disclosure of their personal information. Therefore according to the Act, a birth parent must give their consent for adoptees to access this information on their adoption files ("Adoption Information Disclosure Process,").

Adoption Agencies

There appears to be a lack of literature on the various agencies based in Korea that facilitate Korea's international adoption; information on the adoption agencies would be beneficial as they serve various important roles and it is now recognized that agencies' roles do not end at placement, but continue as adoptees age (Henney, McRoy, Ayers-Lopez, & Grotevant, 2003).

Agencies can provide frameworks for individuals to understand the purpose of post-adoption contact as well as consider the different points of views from adoptive parents, the adoptees, and the birth parents. The agencies can also play a role in the success of establishing and sustaining contact between the adoptive families and birth family including specific actions such as arranging or facilitating the contact meetings, offering emotional or practical support, writing letters or making phone calls on behalf of one party to another, etc. Such support has generally been found to be highly valued by those receiving it (Neil, 2002). Over the decades, Korea has had as many as seven agencies facilitating international adoption such as Seventh Day Adventists, Child Placement Service, Catholic Relief Service, Holt Children's Services, Korea Social Service, Welcome House, and Eastern Child Welfare Society (Hübinette, 2004).

Agencies that facilitated domestic adoptions in the UK were found to have a wide range of practices for initiating contact between the adoptive family and birth family (Neil, 2002). Some agencies displayed excellent practice and support in such a way that the chances of successful contact were maximized. Other agencies were found to hinder the sustainability of contact from their absence of support and have controlling practices that sent negative messages to the adoptive family about contact or the birth family.

These characteristics seemed to reflect an ambivalence about contact by the agencies' professionals; it was also considered that limited resources may be a reason for low post-adoption support (Neil, 2002). In addition, agencies could facilitate communication and understanding for contact to all parties, including birth relatives; it was recommended that the agencies can provide more than just emotional support, but support and help for all on how to think and develop a framework for understanding the dynamics of adoption (Neil, 2002). Relevantly, it was noted that at times, agencies had particular difficulties with arranging post-adoption contact with birth relatives of Asian families: "in these situations the cultural background was such that pregnancy outside of marriage was stigmatised, and so the adoption took place with some level of secrecy" (Neil, 2002).

Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (G.O.A.'L)

Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (G.O.A.'L) is a non-profit organization based in Mapo-Gu, Seoul, South Korea. It aims to "first and foremost serve the Korean adoptee community – those living here [in Korea] and those abroad"("About G.O.A.'L," 2017). G.O.A.'L was founded in 1997 by international Korean adoptees (KADs) and has continued to serve adoptees and be run by adoptees throughout the years. G.O.A.'L also utilizes volunteers who do not have to be adoptees.

The organization provides a variety of services for KADs. It hosts an annual event called First Trip Home (FTH), which is an 11-day event with the focus of "helping adoptees reconnect with their origin in a meaningful way with a special focus on birth family search" ("Global Overseas Adoptees' Link First Trip Home 2018," 2018). While FTH is only once a year, G.O.A.'L has a Birth Family Search (BFS) Department that operates year round. G.O.A.'L calls the BFS Department the cornerstone of their

services. KADs can contact the department via email or phone in order to receive guidance and support during their search process. In order to be eligible to apply for FTH or use the BFS service, KADs must be current G.O.A.'L members. Membership is an annual $80 fee ("Birth Family Search Outline of Steps," 2017).

G.O.A.'L also provides immigration services to assist KADs with obtaining or renewing F4 visas, a residential visa available for overseas Koreans, or dual citizenship, as KADs can recover their Korean Citizenship ("About G.O.A.'L," 2017). Other services include translating letters and other forms of communication between birth relatives and KADs as well as providing in-person interpreters for KADs to use when they meet birth family. In addition, the organization also facilitates Korean language scholarship distribution at universities in Seoul for KADs and partners with local organizations to offer discounted mental health services ("Counseling Service for Members," 2018).

G.O.A.'L collaborates and maintains ties with various organizations including police stations, the adoption agencies, other adoptee focused organizations, and Korea Adoption Services (KAS), which operates under the Korean Ministry of Health & Welfare. Police stations assist with DNA testing as well as filing missing persons reports, in which the KAD is the missing person. The police contact G.O.A.'L if there is a development regarding the DNA testing or missing persons reports. The adoption agencies issue adoption certificates for F-4/Dual citizenship processes and also help with information when doing BFS.

G.O.A.'L is funded through KAS via the Ministry of Health & Welfare, yearly membership fees, and private donations. The total budget for 2016 was about $168,000 (₩187,443,941). The staff consists of one full-time worker, six to seven part-time

workers, and numerous volunteers. The majority of the staff are KADs and the office manager and volunteers are mostly non-adopted Korean individuals. The staff is multilingual from the diversity of the KADs and volunteers with fluency usually in English, Danish, French, German, and Korean.

G.O.A.'L's Birth Family Department and Service

The organization's BFS service is run by one or two BFS mentors, who are KADs and part-time workers. The mentors are assisted by a network of volunteers and volunteer translators, who can be of any nationality and are often Korean university students who are fluent in English and Korean. KADs may contact a BFS mentor through email and asking for assistance with their birth family search. The KADs are first asked to send in their adoption documents and records as well as details on their past search efforts to the mentor. The mentor will look over everything and then may continue communicating via email or may have a consultation with the KAD over the phone, video chat, or in person at the office. During the consultation, the mentor will tell the KAD the steps they think can be taken and the KAD may share their goals with the search and how they want to proceed.

G.O.A.'L's ability for searches can include: contacting the adoption agency or local police station, visiting or contacting relevant sites to the birth search, such as the address the KAD was found, orphanage, hospital, etc., and utilizing Korean media/press. G.O.A.'L discloses that the BFS process varies greatly and is highly dependent on each individual case. After searching, this department can also complete DNA tests to confirm relationships if reunited ("Birth Family Search Outline of Steps," 2017).

Visiting relevant sites to the search are completed by a KAD who is escorted by a volunteer. Such a trip is called an "active birth family search" by G.O.A.'L. The mentors make a route on a map that includes the relevant sites for the KAD and volunteer to visit. The volunteer agrees to escort the KAD for up to four hours for an active search where they are knowledgeable about how to navigate and serve as a translator, and the KAD pays for their travel and meals. Additional efforts in an active birth search can also include putting up flyers in the city of interest, including places like a local community center and senior centers. G.O.A.'L can create personal flyers of the KADs that include their birthday, Korean name, and their baby and adult pictures and other information about their adoption, to put up in the areas of interests. The intention of flyers is to provide information about the KAD and publicly ask anyone who may know anything about the KAD or be a possible birth relative to contact G.O.A.'L.

KADs may also use the BFS service by participating in First Trip Home (FTH). FTH is an annual 11-day program for KADs who have yet to return to Korea. The trip mainly focuses on the participants' BFS while also including travel and cultural activities. FTH occurs in August or September and for 2017, 15 KADs participated. It is partially funded by the government and G.O.A.'L; therefore, program costs are minimal for the participants. However, KADs that wish to participate must be able to cover the cost of their airfare to Korea. During FTH, G.O.A.'L organizes meetings for the KADs with the adoption agencies, has the KADs visit their areas of interest (the orphanage, area where they were found, birth city, etc.), seeks media opportunities to share the KADs background stories, and can put up flyers like those used in the active birth search.

Chapter 3: Methods

Study Design

The study site was in Seoul, South Korea at G.O.A.'L's office. This mixed methods study utilized quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data was collected and extracted from G.O.A.'L's database of its birth family searches and recorded files. By analyzing the descriptive data of the BFS service and qualitative experiences of the individuals using the service, a more comprehensive picture of KADs' experiences with the BFS was obtained. The collection of quantitative data, recruitment process, and interviews of took place between May and August 2017. The study was submitted to Emory University's institutional review board (IRB), where it was deemed exempt from IRB review and approval, as it was seen as a minimal risk study.

The qualitative methods aimed to gain a detailed understanding of the phenomenon, the birth family search, as well as the context in which the phenomenon occurs (Hennink, 2011). One-on-one, in-depth interviews were used to investigate KAD's experiences with the BFS, including their feelings and thoughts throughout the process. This study aimed to investigate the following questions:

1. What are international Korean adoptees' experiences with G.O.A.'L's birth family search service?

2. What are their perceptions and feelings throughout the search?

Study Participants

Individuals who were over 18, self-identified as an international Korean adoptee, fluent in English, and had used G.O.A.'L's birth family search service were eligible for this study. Additionally, participants had to either be in Seoul, South Korea and capable

of meeting in person or have access to an electronic device with internet in order to video chat and complete the interview.

Sampling and Procedures

The quantitative data was extracted from G.O.A.'L's files and online database, CiviCRM. G.O.A.'L utilizes a computer program called CiviCRM, a customer relationship management tool, to serve as a database where G.O.A.'L can document each case, the actions taken, and the results of each. When there is a new case, the mentors create a unique entry in CiviCRM and then consequently add summaries and updates whenever an action is taken or for any new developments for that case. Each case on CiviCRM contains the demographic information of the KADs, their adoptions records, additional comments from the KAD on their adoption, other relevant adoption documents, and the dated actions and developments of their BFS process.

The researcher used a computer at G.O.A.'L's office to access CiviCRM and quantified the actions taken and the information from the files and entered them into an Excel file. Since the database contained over 750 cases, the number of cases to be analyzed was limited to only cases in 2016 for feasibility. This was done by only searching for cases in CIVI where the latest action on the case took place between January 1, 2016, and December 31, 2016. Sixty-three cases and their information was entered and compiled into the Excel sheet. The excel sheet does not include the KADs' names. The information collected from the cases and their accompanying files included over 30 variables, such as name of adoption agency, use of a DNA test, circumstance of relinquishment, age of birth mother, reunited with birth family, etc.

For the qualitative interviews, purposive sampling was used to recruit participants (Hennink, 2011). Participants were recruited by emailing G.O.A.'L's list of contact emails that had used their service in the past four years. The email contained a brief introduction of the researcher, the study, and asking those who were interested in participating to reply to the email. Of G.O.A.'L's total record of 765 cases, 545 included email addresses. Over 200 cases did not have email addresses in their profiles and over 50 were duplicates or could not be sent due to delivery failure. There were 503 emails that were successfully sent and over the course of a week and 20 individuals responded. Their responses ranged from an interest in participating, asking for more information about the study, and inquiries about the BFS. This method resulted in 10 interviews.

Another method for recruitment was used after there were no more responses from the email recruitment: posting the study information and requesting for participants on Korean Adoptee Facebook groups. Specifically, the Korean Adoptees page with over 3,500+ members and the Korean American Adoptees page with over 4,300+ members at the time. These pages were selected because they had the highest number of members among the groups that were explicitly for Korean Adoptees. This method garnered one respondent, totaling the number of interviews completed to 11.

Individuals responding to the email or post would be asked whether they would prefer video calls (FaceTime or Skype) or if they would like to meet in person if they were or would be in Seoul. If conducted in person, the location would be in Seoul at a place that the participant suggested. Each participant was sent the consent form via email, they would sign it and send it back via email. All of the interviews were conducted in English. A structured interview guide was used for each interview and can be referenced

to in Appendix 1: Interview Guide. The interview guide was developed by the researcher and used open-ended questions to explore the KAD's experiences with the BFS, G.O.A.'L's BFS service, barriers to searching, and feelings resulting from and towards the search. A pilot interview with a G.O.A.'L staff member was done to test the interview guide. Demographics were collected at the beginning of each interview and included variables such as age, date of birth, gender, location of birth, and location adopted to. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 80 minutes and no compensation was given to participants.

Interviews were audio recorded using the researcher's phone or on the researcher's computer using QuickTime Player. Interview recordings were saved on the computer and imported to InqScribe, a transcribing program. The researcher transcribed the interviews verbatim and the transcriptions were de-identified during the transcription process and stored on the researcher's password protected computer. Each participant was given a pseudonym by the researcher.

Data Analysis

SPSS was used to analyze the data extracted from G.O.A.'L's database. The excel file with the 63 cases was uploaded onto SPSS and the values were subsequently entered. The frequencies and descriptive outputs were used to produce the quantitative results of the continuous and categorical variables.

Ten individuals were interviewed from the email recruitment and one individual was interviewed from the Facebook recruitment. One audio recording was unusable due to recording playback errors, therefore ten interviews were analyzed. After the 10 interviews were transcribed by the researcher, they were uploaded to MAXQDA.

Inductive coding was used and codebooks were created. After the interviews were coded,

the codes were conceptualized with categorization strategies (Hennink, 2011).

Chapter 4: Results

The quantitative data extracted from the 63 cases yielded the frequencies of search efforts, the demographics of the KADs who used the service, the characteristics of the birth parents, and the outcomes of contacting birth relatives. The thematic analysis from the in-depth interviews resulted in four major themes as well as the demographics of the 10 participants. The major themes included: searching efforts, staff impressions, emotional impact, and perceived barriers during their searches.

Data and Demographics of G.O.A.'L's Cases in 2016

There were 63 cases that had their last action recorded in 2016 in G.O.A.'L's database CIVI. The data was recorded by G.O.A.'L staff to document steps taken and results of searches. The data documented information about the KAD and what occurred and resulted from the searches. Compiling the data from the 2016 cases shows who G.O.A.'L has been working with as well as the variety of outcomes that come from their searches.

Table 1 shows the demographics of G.O.A.'L's cases in 2016. The ages of KADs ranged from 20 to 64 with an average age of 37 (SD=8). The vast majority, 70% (44/63), were female. G.O.A.'L served KADs from every major Korean agency. Holt Korea and Eastern Social Welfare Services represented the majority of KADs, with 40% (25/63) and 32% (20/63) respectively. In addition, G.O.A.'L served KADs from 10 different countries, with a large majority from the United States at 61% (39/63). France followed the United States at 14% (9/63) and then Denmark at 6% (4/63). Only one to three KADs were from the various other countries: Norway, Germany, Australia, Canada, Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Nine (14%) were documented as having

gone on FTH. 14% (9/63) were reunited with birth family from using G.O.A.'L's

services and two (3%) had previously been reunited or had obtained information on their

birth parents from their adoption agencies and were using G.O.A.'L to find their other

birth parent and/or siblings.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of G.O.A.'L's Cases in 2016

Characteristic	N (%) n=63
Gender	
Female	44 (70%)
Male	19 (30%)
Age (n=62)	37 (SD=8)
FTH	9 (14%)
Reunited	
Reunited with family member/s	9 (14%)
Already reunited/have info, looking for other parent or sibling	2 (3%)
Agency	
Holt Korea	25 (40%)
Eastern Social Welfare Services	20 (32%)
Korean Social Services	6 (10%)
Not Specified	5 (8%)
Social Welfare Services	4 (6%)
Private Adoption	3 (5%)
Country Adopted To	
United States	39 (62%)
France	9 (14%)
Denmark	4 (6%)
Norway	3 (5%)
Germany	2 (3%)
Australia	2 (3%)
Canada	1 (2%)
Netherlands	1 (2%)
Sweden	1 (2%)
United Kingdom	1 (2%)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

The variety of actions G.O.A.'L took can be seen in *Table 2*. The most common

effort utilized was a police search with 25% (16/63) of cases using a police search. Less

frequently utilized were flyers (19%; 12/63), active BFS (19%; 12/63), the DNA tests

(17%; 11/63), and going on FTH (14%; 9/63). For a small portion of the cases, G.O.A.'L

was able to contact the birth parent's relatives and have the KAD appear on TV or in the

newspaper to share their stories, 11% (7/63) and 6% (4/63) respectively.

Table 2. Search Efforts Used

Search Effort	N (%) n=63
Used Agency to Search before using G.O.A.'L	19 (30%)
Police Search	16 (25%)
Post Flyer	12 (19%)
Active BFS	12 (19%)
DNA Test	11 (17%)
Went on FTH	9 (14%)
Relative Contacted	7 (11%)
TV/Newspaper	4 (6%)

The characteristics of the birth parents show the diversity of their demographics,

situations, and responses to the searches and can be seen in *Table 3*. It may be important

to note that the ages of the birth parents presented are their Korean documented age. In

Korea when a person is born they are considered one-year-old and a year of age is added

when it is the new year as opposed to being considered 0 months old when born and

adding a year of age on a birthday. Therefore, the birth parent's age could be one or two

years younger if their age were translated into Western age. Overall, birth mothers were

about five years younger than the birth fathers. Birth mothers had a mean age of 24 years

old (SD=6), with a range of 16-38, and birth fathers had a mean age of 29 years old

(SD=10), with a range of 15-59. Only two (3%) of the birth fathers were documented as

from the United States Army.

The person or persons who gave the child up for adoption or the circumstance that

was documented as to why the child was put up for adoption varied. In addition, the

disclosure of this information was not specified or unknown 21% (13/63) of the time. For

41% (26/63) of cases, the birth mother gave up the child for adoption. The other most common reason, that the KAD was found, came up 22% (14/63) of the time. Additional scenarios for why or how the KAD was given up for adoption included: given up by a relative, the birth father, or the birth father and birth mother, the birth mother ran away, and lastly, both the birth parents passed away.

The majority of cases ended with no reunions from the searches, as the birth mother and birth father were often not found, 75% (47/63) and 86% (54/63) respectively. Those that were found and then agreed to meet the KAD included 5% (3/63) of birth mothers and 3% (2/63) of birth fathers. Other than reunions or not being found, there were still a small variety of outcomes and findings could come from the searches of the birth mother and father: found and contacted, but does want to reunite; found, but is not told; and discovery that they are deceased. Several other outcomes were noted for birth mothers that were not noted outcomes for birth fathers: the birth parent is presumably located, but then it is discovered they no longer live there; the police claim that too many people of the same name came up to do the search; and denies being the birth mother.

Table 3. Birth Parent Characteristics

Characteristic	N (%) n=63
Mother's Age at Adoption (n=28)	24 (SD=6)*
Father's Age at Adoption (n=21)	29 (SD=10)*
Army Parent	2 (3%)
Given up by	
Mother	26 (41%)
Found	14 (22%)
Unknown/not specified	13 (21%)
Father	3 (5%)
Relative	2 (3%)
Mother ran away	2 (3%)
Mother and Father	2 (3%)
Parents passed away	1 (2%)

Birth Mother Outcomes	
Not found	47 (75%)
Agreed to meet	3 (5%)
Located but no longer there	3 (5%)
Deceased	2 (2%)
Too many names for police	2 (3%)
Already have info/reunited	2 (3%)
Located but not told	1 (2%)
Denies being parent	1 (2%)
Does not want to reunite	1 (2%)
Already knew deceased	1 (2%)
Birth Father Outcomes	
Not found	54 (86%)
Already knew deceased	3 (5%)
Agreed to meet	2 (3%)
Located but not told	1 (2%)
Does not want to reunite	1 (2%)
Deceased	1 (2%)
Already have info/reunited	1 (2%)

*The age of parents was documented in Korean age, therefore their age in the United States would be one or two years younger
Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

Demographics of Interview Participants

From June to August 2017, ten KADs participated in the qualitative study. These individuals had searched for birth family and at one point used G.O.A.'L's BFS service. The participant demographics can be seen in *Table 4*. Their ages ranged from 30 to 50 years old with an average age of 37. Seven of the participants were adopted to the United States, one participant was adopted to Denmark, one participant was adopted to Germany, and one participant was adopted to Korea (and is an American citizen). Participants had high education levels, as all of the participants had at least some college, with 40% (4/10) attending graduate school. Eight identified their gender as female and

two identified as male. The majority identified as heterosexual, two identified as queer or bisexual, and four of the participants were married.

The vast majority of the group, 90% (9/10) had been to Korea. Four of the participants had gone on FTH to Korea, three had independently traveled to Korea, two resided in Korea at the time of the interview, and one had never been to Korea. Two of the participants had children and one of the participants had adopted a child from the agency they were adopted from in South Korea. The Korean adoption agencies that facilitated their adoptions were: Holt Korea (60%; 6/10), Eastern Social Welfare Services (20%; 2/10), and Social Welfare Services (20%; 2/10). Two participants were reunited with birth family from using G.O.A.'L's services. And two had previously been reunited or had obtained information on their birth parents from their adoption agencies and were using G.O.A.'L to find their other birth parent and/or siblings.

Table 4. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristic	N (%) n=10
Age (n=10)	37 (SD=7)
Gender Identity	
Female	8 (80%)
Male	2 (20%)
Married	4 (40%)
Education Level	
Some College	1 (10%)
College	5 (50%)
Graduate School	4 (40%)
Sexual Orientation	
Heterosexual	8 (80%)
Queer or Bisexual	2 (20%)
FTH	4 (40%)
Reunited	
Reunited with family member/s	2 (20%)
Already reunited/have info, looking for other parent or sibling	2 (20%)
Agency	
Holt Korea	6 (60%)

Eastern Social Welfare Services	2 (20%)
Social Welfare Services	2 (20%)
Country Adopted To	
United States	7 (70%)
Denmark	1 (10%)
Germany	1 (10%)
Korea	1 (10%)

Interview Themes

Four main themes emerged from the qualitative data: searching efforts, staff impression, emotional impact, and perceived barriers during their searches. *Table 5* summarizes the themes with a description of the theme, a sample supporting quote from the transcripts and a brief context on the participant who shared the quote.

Table 5. Themes

Theme	Description	Sample Quote	Context
Searching Efforts	KADs shared many attempts and actions exhausted to find family and information while using G.O.A.'L and in addition to using G.O.A.'L	"It's sort of like this flexible moving target, for the search sometimes… every time I go [to Korea], I find new information, but there's never been an instance… where I felt that someone has had the best available information to share. It's this idea where you have to be your own advocate and being physically in Korea makes a difference too."	Participant had attended G.O.A.'L's FTH and was not reunited with birth family
Staff Impression	KADs developed a range of feelings and made conclusions about the staff of G.O.A.'L and the agencies through their interactions with them in person and over email	"…I felt much more like… G.O.A.'L was more for adoptees than for like making money [laugh] whereas like the agencies felt much more like a business that y'know their main export - import I guess was children and that's kinda what it felt like… Whereas G.O.A.'L felt like people… weren't.. motivated by.. anything other than wanting to help and wanting to make things easier."	Participant had traveled to Korea and was not reunited with birth family

		"Yeah it's a pretty terrible process. I think - it's kind of a funny thing… I wish every adoptee knew this, that it's like - the emotional rollercoaster isn't waiting for your omma [Korean word for mother] or learning anything, it's more of like the stupid paperwork email exchange [laugh] y'know it's like that [laugh] that's gonna be the stress, not the actually finding your family [laugh]."	
Emotional Impact	Many emotions were experienced during their searches. Emotions stemmed from various aspects of the search such as the process, the results, or the support from others		Participant had not been to Korea and was not reunited with birth family
Perceived Barriers	Throughout their searches, KADs perceived a number of barriers they thought were hindering or completely preventing their ability to reunite with family or obtain information	"I just feel like that's a huge barrier: not being in Korea. And being able to like have a sit down with someone face to face, not sure what kind of, leg work they would do for me in Korea like are they really gonna say they're gonna go - if they say something are they really gonna follow through with that, are they gonna explore the avenues that I would explore if I was in Korea? What other options are there? Just not knowing. The barrier too is just not knowing what to do and look for."	Participant had traveled to Korea and was not reunited with birth family

Searching Efforts

Contact G.O.A.'L and Agencies

The participants engaged in an array of efforts to start or continue their birth family searches. Participants varied largely in the length of their efforts for the search, ranging from months to over 10 years. As all of the participants in this study used G.O.A.'L, they also all engaged in efforts and interacted with their adoption agencies. Interactions with the adoption agencies consisted of contacting them via email and/or

going in-person to the Korean office to complete a file review, where they go through the original adoption records with a staff member. These interactions could be arranged by the KAD themselves or by G.O.A.'L if they went on FTH. KADs who had first utilized efforts to search with their agencies turned to G.O.A.'L when they did not make progress in the search with their agencies. One KAD describes this as:

> "I forwarded the [email] message to G.O.A.'L, saying … the agency in the US was called New Beginnings and I was from Eastern [Korean Adoption Agency] and I can't - y'know I've hit dead ends with them so I was wondering if like there was anything else you could do that they can't do".

In addition, the KADs who did not contact their agencies, subsequently would interact with them since G.O.A.'L communicates and works with the agencies during searches and updates the KADs on what actions and information come from the agencies. Therefore, KADs' experiences with G.O.A.'L were also closely intertwined with their experiences with the adoption agencies, as often times these experiences were occurring simultaneously. The simultaneous actions experienced were recounted by one KAD as:

> "I had actually already started doing my own BFS before applying for FTH … so by the time FTH happened, SWS [Korean Adoption Agency] were able to locate my birth father… so I had let G.O.A.'L know that things were already in motion for my BFS…Once I got to FTH I was kind of coordinating with G.O.A.'L to help arrange for my reunion."

While some KADs described taking action prior to G.O.A.'L, many participants acknowledged that they were unsure of how to proceed or what actions were even possible for their searches for their birth families. The efforts and process to do the

search, as well as its length, were unexpected as described by one KAD,

"I guess I just didn't realize that it'd be so difficult like taking so many steps, maybe I thought it would be like 'oh we have to find someone to go check out this or that' and then 'oh we have one more step but then we'll find them' kind of thing, maybe not as prolonged, maybe just a few intermediate steps, not like years of searching".

Therefore, this recognition that KADs themselves did not know what the search entailed, was given as a reason for their desire to use G.O.A.'L, where they viewed G.O.A.'L as a tool that would know what to do, be knowledgeable about Korea, and facilitate the search for them. The first direct impression of G.O.A.'L was from their website where they would then email them or apply for FTH on the website. Email allowed correspondence to begin and continue searches while they were outside of Korea and trips to Korea enabled the KADs to have access to many other methods to search. Consistently, the participants described efforts included email exchanges and paperwork with prolonged correspondence that would last months to years, mostly with updates of the search progress, questions, paperwork, and waiting for such replies. A KAD who did not travel to Korea described the prolonged emailing process as,

"It [the process with G.O.A.'L] was 8 months… It's usually a few weeks between emails, but sometimes it's like two months. One time it's three months. So [laugh]. But by this point - I was totally used to it and I cringe when I look back at these emails cause I'm like trying to be really nice in all of these even though I'm really angry [laugh]. At this point I was totally used to it because Holt is so terrible to work with, but this was like 'okay I can deal with it' [laugh]."

Much of the KADs' time for their search efforts consisted of more passive action and inquiry if primarily done through email. Other than email, many also traveled in their efforts to search for their birth family.

Travel to Korea

Nine of the KADs had been to Korea and four of the KADs' trips to search in Korea were through G.O.A.'L's program FTH. Through FTH, the KADs went on an organized trip to their adoption agency and did file reviews with the agency's caseworkers. KADs also had the opportunity to visit the towns they were born in and put up flyers. Flyers had information and pictures of the KAD and would ask people to contact G.O.A.'L if they thought they were related to them. In addition, one KAD was able to appear on Korean TV and share details about themselves and their birth mother. Several KADs participated in DNA tests to confirm the biological relationship to the reunited birth parent or to keep at the police station in case a DNA match ever occurs. Two KADs traveled to Korea independently and during their trip, they met with a G.O.A.'L staff person to discuss their search. Overall, the variety of search efforts utilized increased when KADs went to Korea and then much more so when they went on G.O.A.'L's FTH.

Several KADs on FTH wanted to visit Korea and not necessarily search for family, but because G.O.A.'L's trip focused on the search, the KADs participated in the search too. These KADs' shared that their searching efforts were not largely intended and were more of a by-product of attending G.O.A.'L's FTH. In addition, one KAD who shared this thought process was then reunited with a birth parent:

"So honestly I have never really thought too much about looking for my birth

family, but once I decided to do this FTH, I was really excited about the travel

part but I figured I should probably show some enthusiasm for reuniting with my

birth family… so I decided to write to Holt a few months before I went on the trip

and they said that my birth mom had come looking for me a few years ago so they

had all her information right there and everything."

Novel Efforts

Unorthodox and novel searching efforts were exerted or considered at times by

the participants to make progress with searches. Covertly peeking at the file to obtain the

birth parent's name during a file review with the agency caseworker was successful:

"…They [the agency] did have my mother's name which I got well I kinda wasn't

supposed to get but I did get… because they didn't want me to see it but she didn't

know that I can read Korean so she kinda was just skimming through it, but I was

able to like pick out her name. So even if there was a way to have found that out

some other way, other than like me having to like peek over and take the

information."

 Another KAD expressed that they had the ability to show up at the address they knew

where the birth family lived to find them, but was not going to:

"I do admit I have thought about - cause I have the birth mom's address and she

lives with the daughter… I have thought about going to that house… but y'know

I'm never gonna do it because I don't wanna break any law."

And one KAD was considering using a lawyer through a legal approach to see if they

could obtain more information, the KAD believed there may be a possibility to get access

to information about birth parents if approached with the help of a lawyer:

"…[Lawyer] can help me find a legal way to work, as the last step if they're [agency] not doing anything so that I can go straightforward by law. But it's also, I think, an expensive way because I think you need to pay a lawyer here, so I want to avoid it right [laugh]".

All these efforts shared were recognized by the KADs as unique pathways for their searches.

A unique situation for two KADs' search efforts was when they reunited with birth parent/s they still searched for or thought about potentially searching for other birth family i.e. the other birth parent or siblings. In these cases, the birth parent/s were the gatekeepers to the information needed to be able to meet additional birth family members. For these KADs the birth parent/s did not desire to reunite the KAD with the other family members. One KAD described their perceptions of why their birth parents did want them to reunite with their siblings as:

"I've given the birth parents time to tell them [the siblings] and they're just being stupid and selfish y'know - they're just like 'we don't wanna damage our reputation'…they did apologize to me a couple times, they were like 'yeah we're very sorry, we're very bad people'… I'm not trying to be egotistical or whatever the word is, but the way I feel, they owe me, at least that much…letting the siblings know about me… At this point, I don't even wanna meet them. I just want them to know about me."

For these novel search efforts, one KAD decided to wait to ask for more information again, while the other KAD spent more time thinking of other possible ways to meet birth family members.

Staff Impressions

G.O.A.'L Staff Impressions

KADs were consistently interacting with the staff of G.O.A.'L or the agencies for their searches. Various assumptions and impressions of staffs' motives and competency were reported by the KADs and participants who had gone on FTH had more positive impressions of staff compared to those who did not. The staff was perceived to care about the outcomes of searches and were motivated to help them. An example of such feelings described by a KAD includes:

> "I always felt like they [G.O.A.'L staff] were very sympathetic and very compassionate… very like patient y'know and I never felt like I was bothering them… I never felt any of that. I was like 'oh okay they wanna help, they'll do what they can to help'."

KADs valued experiences with staff when they felt staff listened to them and their decisions and when staff would explain things they did not previously know about searching. It was appreciated that they did not perceive that G.O.A.'L staff had ulterior motives. These positive impressions were largely driven by the fact that G.O.A.'L was not an adoption agency and was run by KADs. A description of how their trust was related to their perception of the presence of other KADs at the organization, "I was much more inclined to like actually trust them [G.O.A.'L] as opposed to like the agency where there were none, there were no adoptees there at all." However, one KAD, who only contacted G.O.A.'L through email and did have a positive impression with G.O.A.'L staff, did not know G.O.A.'L was run by KADs.

Several participants viewed G.O.A.'L as having the potential to do more in regards to the search if they had more staff or funding and therefore the capacity to do so. And the few KADs who had unhelpful experiences with G.O.A.'L staff contributed it to the busyness of a small staff, poor preparation for meetings, or lack of professionalism. Whether interacting with G.O.A.'L only through email, in-person meetings, or on FTH, G.O.A.'L staff was perceived to have a high workload. One KAD described their unhelpful experience with G.O.A.'L as:

"So I feel sorta bad saying this but nothing happened…but I think it was just kinda an administrative thing where the person [staff] wasn't reading the information I had given him, so it was just like going around in circles cause… I was like, 'if you refer back to my first email I said that already'. So it seemed like they were really understaffed or the guy was so busy that he couldn't read what I had given him."

Adoption Agency Staff Impressions

Impressions about the adoption agencies' staff varied from impressions of G.O.A.'L staff. Working with the agencies lead to questions about their motives and structure, with various perceptions about what their priorities are, such as being a "business" that focuses on money. Such an impression was described by a KAD as:

"I think the adoption agency has conflicting interests to supporting adoptees and post adoption services… If you're not receiving income as a business to provide post adoption services, how much of a priority is it going to be in your business model?... Where do post adoption services fit within the scope of services?"

In addition, KADs also had impressions that the agencies were impersonal and did not

want to help and therefore only assisted in the search because they were "obligated" to.

One participant described feelings of potential resistance in regards to getting assistance

from the agency during their search:

> "I also feel like there was a lot of - I don't know wanna say resistance - well
>
> maybe, like on the part of the agency, like I always felt like they weren't really as
>
> willing to help search and help do things…as they say they are."

A unique perspective on adoption agency staff was one participant whose first

impression of adoption agency staff was when they adopted a child through the agency.

They felt welcomed and wanted by the agency when adopting through the agency, but

then felt unwelcome and intrusive and when they came back to search for their own

parents. They describe it as,

> "…When we adopted my daughter it was great and then coming back five years
>
> later to review my file, I felt like it was a totally different song and dance they
>
> gave me…before it was like 'oh we're so glad you're here'… and then for my file
>
> review, I felt like it was a totally like 'hush hush, we're not gonna give you any
>
> information, we really don't even want you here'. It felt so - just different…"

And such an impression of the agency then contributed to their appreciation of G.O.A.'L,

as they saw it was a valuable organization since it was a service that was outside of the

agencies.

Variety of Quality in Staff Impression

There was recognition that staff at G.O.A.'L and the adoption agencies could

either lead to a positive or negative experience and that it simply depended on the staff

person you happened to work with. One KAD referred to this observation as a "Russian

roulette", where you could not predict if you would be working with a quality staff person or not:

"I mean it's sort of like Russian roulette I think… at a post adoption staff. Sometimes there's someone really great and really helpful and sometimes there's someone who just y'know is not as...The delivery and communication style within those meetings [between an adoptee and staff person] are important. And that [adoption agency] worker… I think lacked training."

Overall, incompetence was associated with G.O.A.'L staff when there were negative experiences, whereas questionable intentions and incompetence were associated with adoption agency staff during neutral and negative experiences.

Emotional Impact

Exciting Experience

Searching was seen as an exciting experience, especially by those who found information and had gone on G.O.A.'L's FTH, where they were in Korea and were searching alongside other KADs. FTH was seen as an emotionally intense experience and KADs were thankful for relaxing and unrelated search activities during their time in Korea. The participants found the supportive environment of G.O.A.'L staff comforting and appreciated the structured format of the trip, where search efforts and activities were planned for them. The term "camaraderie" was used by multiple KADs to describe the feeling and experience of searching with G.O.A.'L or going on FTH. An example of this feeling by one KAD was largely from being around other KADs on FTH:

"…Supporting each other in all the different outcomes was a really tremendous experience. [On FTH] we just felt really happy… for anyone who did locate

family… there's sense of camaraderie or brotherhood or sisterhood, I don't know

if that's the right word, but there's something within our community that if

something good happens to another Korean adoptee, you're really happy for

them."

In addition, it was also seen as exciting and rewarding if they discovered new

information about their birth history or birth parent, e.g. a new birthday or birthplace. The

excitement and emotional fulfillment from finding new information about a birth mother

was described as:

"… Even though it [the search] is terrible [laugh]…it's still been amazing to learn

about her life... I didn't even know she was alive… so now the things that I do

know… that's like really exciting and totally like a sustainable happy emotions for

life… I learned… she had me, she was 22 and it's just like um 'oh I'm 30 and

she's just 22' [laugh] it's like whoa, that's amazing."

Frustrating Experience

A more common experience than excitement was frustration. It stemmed from

many different aspects of the search, including the common communication method:

email. The communication with email would entail questions KADs had about the search,

exchanging paperwork and forms, receiving instructions or updates on their searches, etc.

The gaps in between email correspondence with agencies and G.O.A.'L led to frustration

since KADs felt like they did not know what was going on or were not involved with

what was happening. Gaps in communication were commonly experienced ranging from

weeks to 6 months. From experiencing longer gaps or no response in communication

with the agencies prior to using G.O.A.'L, some KADs were thankful that G.O.A.'L

would just respond to their email, even if they did not progress anywhere with their search. Overall, the act of searching was deemed frustrating within itself to several KADs, as it was unexpected that communicating with the organizations and agencies would be that level of difficulty or prolonged.

And while finding new information was exciting, the process could also be frustrating since it was interpreted as information that existed that was kept from them or as information intentionally given to them as a way to "pacify their efforts". The experience of finding new information was also described as:

> "With Holt and KAS… so they would tell me a little bit of stuff and then I would find more… felt really deceptive and misleading cause it felt like why don't you just say everything upfront, it's almost sort of like it seemed like a method of trying to… pacify my efforts, 'oh well we have this fact and this fact and this fact'."

In addition to the process of finding new information, the content of the information found influenced the emotional impact, as one KAD was frustrated with the new information they were given by the agency, as it was shared that their birth parent was deceased.

KADs also felt frustration when they reflected on what could be possible if they could be given access to information that they knew was held by the agency, such as names, addresses, or additional information. And this realization and conclusion that there was information about them that existed, that they could not access, was frustrating. One KAD described this frustration with a metaphor,

"Uh I hate it [laughs]. It's just so frustrating, that so much information isn't available to us… so there's this lack of understanding from a lot of people who aren't adopted… it is like where your life is a book but the whole first chapter is missing and it doesn't mean that like the book isn't good… but you'll never have a complete story if you don't have that first chapter. And it's frustrating to never, to like know that you might never ever be able to get that… and that you kind of just have to deal with not having it."

Skepticism and Disappointment

Other emotions that the participants shared was skepticism and disappointment. The majority of the KADs shared skepticism or distrust at different parts of the searching process. This skepticism was projected toward a range of processes or persons, including: the validity of information given to them, the motives and training of the individual staff member, the motives of the G.O.A.'L or the agency or how they use money, and whether G.O.A.'L or the agency actually do the actions they say they are going to do to the KAD. One participant's uncertainty of action being taken for the search was related to telegrams:

"I roll my eyes [laugh] when I say it because it's like it never felt like it was 100% true. So what they [adoption agency] told me was they sent a telegram to the last known address [of the birth parent]… but like I don't know if they actually did that. And I wouldn't be surprised if like that never actually happened."

Disappointment from hitting dead ends and not finding information also occurred for the majority of KADs. Disappointment could result directly from nothing coming

from the email exchanges, the in-person file reviews, or from negative experiences with staff. One KAD's management of their disappointment was described as:

"I need to stop saying it's [reuniting with birth family] not going to happen, that I should just try but…I'm a pessimist so I kinda look at things more negatively and more realistically cause that way then if I decide to… try again I won't be as disappointed. [If I] say 'oh yay it's going to work this time' and then it doesn't, I'm going to be so sad."

Several KADs had expected G.O.A.'L to be helpful given the positivity they had heard about them from other KADs or from seeing G.O.A.'L's homepage having a picture of a reunited KAD with a birth parent on it and then faced disappointment when using G.O.A.'L did not lead to anything. Expectations were sometimes higher when using G.O.A.'L to search, since KADs had previous unhelpful experiences with their agency, so they then considered G.O.A.'L as a new avenue to continue the search:

"I feel like on their [G.O.A.'L's] home page… is like a son who's reunited with his birth mother and it was just like… as an adoptee it like pulls on your heart [laugh]… So, initially I thought they'd be able to help, but I think also maybe somebody else can help me."

Perhaps also consequentially from using other efforts before G.O.A.'L, participants shared a sense of comfort or conclusion where they can say they tried everything when they look back at their efforts of searching, as one KAD summarized it:

"I'm going to keep trying [searching]. I'm not gonna give up. Even if it amounts to nothing, I want to keep trying until every stone is turned over. So that way I can look back on this experience and say hey it didn't work out but I tried."

Perceived Barriers

Korean Privacy Laws and Culture

KADs perceived various barriers that were hindering their searches ranging from language to caseworkers, to the birth parents themselves. The majority of KADs noted the privacy laws of Korea, that are seen as not allowing the release of the birth parents' information to them, as a barrier. One KAD summarized it similarly to the other KADs as,

> "I mean a big one [barrier]… I feel really conflicted about it, but how much protection the birth mother gets in terms of her identity. It's like soo secretive y'know. So, I mean that's a huge barrier cause it's like for me, at least, they have all my birth mother's information, know where she is, and all this stuff, but it's just like I can't get it, just because of, I guess, the privacy laws in Korea."

It was hypothesized by one participant that because the birth parents are Korean, Korea's privacy laws are made in the best interest of the Korean parent, protecting their privacy, as opposed to the interest of the international adopted Korean child, access to information.

While reflecting on their lack of access to information, the participants also acknowledged that there may be cultural reasons for a birth parent not wanting to be found. Several KADs elaborated that a birth parent may not want to be affiliated with the act of adoption:

> "I think also there's a…cultural aspect as well obviously, of not wanting to be affiliated with adoption and not wanting to have that kind of hanging over, so that certainly makes it a big barrier. If someone [a birth parent] doesn't even want to

be known as someone who had to have done that in their life."

None of the KADs seemed to have had in-depth discussions about potential cultural norms that may impact the birth parent preferences on privacy or the specific content of relevant legal and privacy laws with G.O.A.'L or the agencies.

Age

Two of the adoptees born in the 1970s perceived that their ages impacted their ability to find information. They believed that since they were adopted during the earlier time period of adoption, that the information recorded about their birth parents was limited and not as rigorously documented as more recent adoptions. They believed that KADs who were adopted later had more information recorded about their birth parents and history, and therefore had better chances of finding information or being reunited. And consequently these individuals had the lowest expectations of being reunited or finding information compared to the other KADs. One described their perception of how a KAD's age impacts the feasibility of the search as:

> "I think for younger people it's much better situation nowadays… So the chance to find my parents, I think for me it's hopeless. I say I want to do now all the steps… Because I want not to say later when I may be old, I never gave up. That's the only reason why I go ahead. I know that my thing is hopeless…Because of all the circumstances during my time when I was adopted."

While they noted this as a barrier to their searches, it did not seem to deter either of them from still searching.

G.O.A.'L's Barriers

Barriers associated with G.O.A.'L included their capacity in staff. KADs held

perceptions that G.O.A.'L was understaffed to serve all the KADs. One KAD compared the number of KADs there are and the size of G.O.A.'L's staff and reasoned this was why communication and service were slow:

"You expect if you mail something that maybe after one or two weeks you get an answer, but…I could understand after I saw that only four people [at G.O.A.'L] are working on their computer, so I compare, I think 200,000 were adopted by US from Korea, with something like that, so I say okay then that's too much, then I understand why your response is not that fast."

Another barrier that many identified for their own searches was that they were not in Korea and did not have much knowledge on searching, so they believed that G.O.A.'L overcame these barriers since it is in Korea and experienced in searches. However, also when reflecting on the barriers they faced for the search, such as privacy laws or limited access to information, several KADs perceived that these barriers were outside of G.O.A.'L's ability to impact or change. This perception was elaborated as:

"[To improve G.O.A.'L's search service] It's like not what G.O.A.'L can do, I feel a lot of it is like beyond their control and more in the macro sense of the like the country and the government and stuff."

Chapter 5: Discussion

This evaluation research study interviewed ten adult international Korean adoptees to explore their experiences using the birth family search service with the Korean adoptee run organization, G.O.A.'L. The study explored G.O.A.'L's services by compiling and quantifying the factors, characteristics, and outcomes of 63 cases of birth family searches from 2016. This evaluation data may reveal ways to improve the search process for the intermediaries facilitating birth family searches as well as the various other parties involved with adoption and its practices. In addition, four main themes emerged from the in-depth interviews: searching efforts, staff impression, emotional impact, and perceived barriers that provide context for the quantitative evaluation data.

The participants interviewed are a specific set of KADs who were actively searching for their birth families. Categorization of adoptees regarding searching has previously included: those who do not want to search, those who intend to search in the future, and those who have searched (Wrobel et al., 2004). Consistent with past literature that asserts adoption as a lifelong process, the participants in this study were adoptees from those in their 20s to 60s with varying lengths of searches from months to over a decade (Henney et al., 2003; Wilkinson, 1995). The individuals who search when they are older could reflect the autonomy and independence that may be necessary to facilitate a search in Korea, nevertheless, future comparisons between the ages of domestic and international adoptees may be required to illuminate more on adoptee's age and their searching engagement (Song & Lee, 2009).

Overall the efforts expressed by the KADs demonstrated that they were trying not only to be reunited with birth family but to also learn new information about their birth

family and histories as well as to confirm information that they have been given. The participants' searches were consistent with past studies that characterize searching as the broader term of "information seeking", where their desires included obtaining previously unknown details about their adoption and birth family (Wrobel et al., 2013). The participants' specific goals and objectives for their search were described as a desire to reunite with birth parents as well as confirming information, finding siblings or foster family, or finding any new information about themselves, birth parents and context of their birth history. This is similar to Carsten's findings, where adoptees' stories suggested an immense concern with recovering a lost biography. Carsten also described the search and reunion experienced by adoptees as accompanied by pain and upheaval and similarly this study found that searching was frequently experienced with various emotions, commonly frustration and at times, excitement (Carsten, 2000).

G.O.A.'L's 2016 cases of being reunited, 14%, are consistent with the Korean Adoption Services (KAS) 2012-2015 reunited statistics where 15% of Korean adoptees who had requested their documents from KAS were able to reunite with their birth families (이다영, 2015). It may also be of interest as to the frequency of finding new

information, however, this information has not been recorded and was not measured in this study either. The frequency of finding new information would include documentation and tracking of the occurrences that KADs find new information about themselves or birth history, e.g. finding a new birthday, the reason why they were relinquished, or other information that was previously unknown, as opposed to only documenting if there was a reunion with a birth relative.

Finding new information about their history or reuniting with their birth parents may impact adoptees' identity, as the primary assumption of researchers on adoptees and identity is that "…loss—specifically of biological connections—is at the core of the adoption experience and is a key component in adoptees' understanding of adoption and formation of identity" (Baden et al., 2013). If this is so, then the adoptees in this study have observed several barriers in regards to their search and, in extent, to their efforts in identity formation.

Overall this study explored adult international Korean adoptees' experiences with the birth family search who used G.O.A.'L's birth family search service. KADs described various emotions, differing staff impressions, and perceived barriers as they navigated a variety of searches efforts. Their experiences indicate that G.O.A.'L may be providing an important and unique service. This study and its findings may support a previous assertion that there is a need for long-term planning with post-adoption needs as agencies address the needs of adoptees and that the agencies' roles "do not end at placement and that the staff should be prepared to be involved now more than ever in the life-long process of adoption" (Henney et al., 2003). Adoption agencies as well as non-agency organizations, like G.O.A.'L, could expect to continually be utilized by adult adoptees who decide to search for birth family and information.

Recommendations

As the existence and function of post-adoption services have evolved over time from serving the adoptive parents to their adopted children, it may be important for the services to further adapt to the needs and desires of adult KADs. From the findings of the participants and quantitative data from G.O.A.'L, several recommendations could be

considered by G.O.A.'L or other organizations and agencies in regards to birth family search services.

First Trip Home (FTH)

G.O.A.'L may be encouraged to continue FTH as a BFS service for KADs, given the positivity and meaning experienced by participants who went on FTH in past years. This annual service is unique as it facilitates and focuses on the search for family and information and at the same time, it is also a 10-day experience in Korea, incorporating an educational and cultural experience. This trip also allows the participants to do so alongside about a dozen other KADs, which may be a valuable component as this study's participants had meaningful experiences when searching alongside other KADs.

Needs Assessment

Agencies and various organizations offer heritage and culture camps as a way to connect adoptees to their past, and G.O.A.'L's practice of combining a trip to Korea with a birth family search may be beneficial to adult adoptees as a hybrid of the camps and a search service. However, while camps and trips accommodating KADs have grown and developed over time, conducting a needs assessment for adult KADs may be beneficial. This may provide evidence as to what the adult adoptees want to see and need from organizations' camps and trips, and therefore these events and services may be accurately tailored to their documented needs.

Awareness and Communication Updates

Awareness or educational efforts as to what the birth family search entails, the outcomes and the regulations around it may be beneficial for adoptees. As G.O.A.'L already documents the outcomes and actions taken for each case, it may be beneficial to

share this aggregated and anonymized data publicly with adoptees before they begin their search efforts with G.O.A.'L. Adoptees may be unaware of the wide variety of possible steps and outcomes and their frequency.

In addition, given the lack of adoptees' comprehensive awareness and understanding of privacy laws in Korea, G.O.A.'L may have an opportunity to educate KADs as to exactly what the laws cover and how such laws can impact them, as KADs in this study shared perceptions that privacy laws likely hindered their access to information about their birth parents. Overall, more awareness and knowledge of what outcomes and barriers that are likely to be encountered during searches may be useful as KADs make decisions in their searching activity and may impact KADs' expectations.

Adoptees may also appreciate updates in regards to their searches, especially those who only communicate via email and do not plan to travel to Korea. In this study, large gaps in communication sometimes lead to frustration and therefore regular updates as to the status of their search may be preferred by some KADs. Updates or disclosure as to when there may be a long gap in communication (e.g. several months), may be appreciated and help adoptees feel knowledgeable and involved with their searches.

It was found that some birth parents refuse to meet or deny being the birth parent and their perspectives may be important to understand. Birth parent preferences on if or how to be contacted or preferred methods of approaching them may be helpful to understand as organizations are using various methods to try to locate and contact birth parents.

Future Research

Future research may focus on the various parties and groups involved with birth family searches. This can include exploring the actions and outcomes with searches with the Korean adoption agencies, domestic agencies, the police, and DNA tests. The various other perspectives of those involved with searches may help garner a more comprehensive understanding of birth family searches.

In regard to staff members, the impressions of staff for this study included perceptions that G.O.A.'L staff were busy with high caseloads and had frequent turnover. This may reflect the fact that the vast majority of the staff are part-time which may have less job stability than a full-time job. However, the staff facilitating and assisting KADs in their searches were not interviewed. Their perspectives and experiences may reveal important components of the birth family searches, since they may have a unique perspective and work with numerous cases. Therefore, future evaluation could consider interviewing the staff and stakeholders at G.O.A.'L to explore their perceptions of organizational strengths and weaknesses.

Limitations

Language likely limited the scope of the project. The researcher is only fluent in English and therefore had to rely on coworkers and volunteers to interpret the paperwork that was written in Korean or other languages. In addition, the interviews could only be conducted in English, therefore KADs who were not fluent in English were unable to be recruited for this study. During the coding process of the interviews, a second coder was not used and thus this study did not use inter-coder agreement. This is a limitation and may have impacted the consistency of the codes.

The demographics of the participants were somewhat homogenous as it consisted mostly of American women and individuals with high educational attainment. It is possible that there was a sample bias, where only those with positive experiences were interested in being interviewed. Similarly, 9 of the 10 participants who were interviewed had traveled to or lived in Korea. It is possible this sample only consisted of those who were very interested in searching and financially able to travel to Korea.

The quantitative data extracted from G.O.A.'L's database was a sample of 63 cases and only examined the time period of January-December 2016, which is a small portion of the cases in the database. In the future, it would be beneficial to analyze the complete database of records. A limitation of the in-depth interviews was the small recruitment size of 10 participants. The desired sample size of 20 was not achieved.

The staff at G.O.A.'L suggested that KADs might not be willing to be interviewed because they may feel overburdened or have received frequent other research requests on the topic of international adoption. Staff also suggested there may be less interest to participate due to the personal nature of the topic as some KADs may not want to discuss their private act of searching with a stranger, the researcher.

The lack of compensation for participation may have also been a factor for the low recruitment. In the future, it would be beneficial to offer incentives to interview participants to ensure a larger sample of diverse experiences with G.O.A.'L.

Conclusion

This mixed methods study examined the documented birth family search cases of G.O.A.'L from 2016 and explored the experiences of 10 international Korean adoptees who used G.O.A.'L to search for birth family. The findings reveal that G.O.A.'L assisted

adoptees with a variety of search efforts as they sought to be reunited with family as well as learn any new information about themselves and their past. During their searches, adoptees engaged with the staff of G.O.A.'L and the adoption agencies, identified barriers they perceived to impact their ability to move forward with their searches, and experienced various emotions. The experiences and perspectives of adult adoptees as well as the roles of organizations and post-adoption services should continue to be investigated. Such findings on the long-term impacts of international Korean adoption on adult adoptees may be valuable for Korean adoption services as well as other country's adoption services.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Interview # :   Date: Interview Location:

1. Age & DOB: 6. Adoption City, (State), Country:

2. Gender: 7. Education:

3. Sexual Orientation: 8. Occupation:

4. Age at adoption: 9. Currently live:

5. City of birth: 10. Korean Adoption Agency

Opening Questions:

1. Describe where you grew up.

    a. Probe: Community, demographics

2. Tell me about your family.

    a. Probe: Parents, siblings, adopted siblings, other relatives, children,
        spouse/partner

3. How did you come to know about G.O.A'L?

    a. Probe: Through Internet, friend, family, adoption agency

Questions about birth family search service (BFS)

1. What were your expectations for the BFS?

    a. Probe: Did they change as the process progressed?

2. How did you decide to use G.O.A'L?

    a. Probe: How long had you been searching before contacting G.O.A.'L?

3. What happened when you started contacting G.O.A.'L?

4. What actions did G.O.A.'L do that were helpful?

5. What actions do you wish G.O.A.'L had done?

    a. Probe: Actions you wish G.O.A.'L *could have done*? Actions you wish
        they *had not done*?

6. What was it like communicating with G.O.A.'L?

    a. Probe: Transparent? Confusing? Time? Amount of information? Trust?

7. What method of communication went well when using G.O.A.'L?

    a. Probe: Is there a method you would have preferred? Email, phone, in-person, video chat?

8. Tell me about any positive emotions you felt during G.O.A.'L's BFS.

9. Tell me about any negative emotions you felt during G.O.A.'L's BFS.

    a. Probe: Scared? Hesitant?

10. Tell me about the emotions that surprised you.

11. Where did you receive the most support during the BFS?

12. What did you like about the process?

13. What did you dislike about the process?

    a. Probe: Anything stressful?

14. What barriers did you see or experience throughout the birth family search process?

    a. Probe: Language? Cultural differences? GOAL helpful with these? GOAL perpetuates these? Costs?

15. What could GOAL have told you before you started the BFS?

16. How did your experience with G.O.A.'L differ with your experience with your adoption agency?

    a. Probe: Similar? Telegrams sent by agency?

    b. Probe: GOAL is by adoptees?

Closing Questions

1. Going forward, what should G.O.A.'L do to improve their BFS service?

2. After your experience with this process, how do you feel about the BFS?

3. What advice would you have for other adoptees who are about to start the BFS?

4. What are your hopes for the future adoptees who use G.O.A.'L's BFS service?

5. What else about your experience with the BFS would you like to share with me today?