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**SEARCH AND REUNION: THE EXPERIENCES OF
NEW ZEALAND ADULT ADOPTEES.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
in Psychology at Massey University.

Sylvia Anne Alexander

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ABSTRACT

This thesis concerns the experiences of adult adoptees in New Zealand who have instigated a search for and established contact with members of their birth families. A qualitative research method, specifically that of grounded theory, was used for the collection and analysis of data. Data was gathered through in depth interviews and a study of the existing literature on search and adoption reunions. The present study focuses on the reasons for and expectations regarding searching and the psychological process involved for adult adoptees who have searched and contacted members of their birth families. The findings of the present study indicate that adult adoptee's search for their birth families in response to a life long need for personal identity. The actual psychological process of search can be seen as a series of stages, incorporating elements of of adventure, cure and growth. Over time, the nature of the relationships established with birth relatives undergo changes and become less intense. Regardless of the current relationship with birth relatives, all the adoptees found that the process of search and reunion was beneficial and increased their sense of identity.