

South Korea's Adoption Reckoning | Frontline + AP

An independent discussion guide to help adoptees engage in dialogue regarding [The AP + Frontline PBS documentary](#)

Curated by Korean adoptee and clinical counselor [Cam Lee Small, MS, LPCC](#)

Part 1: Processing Initial Reactions

Recognizing Our Own Stories:

1. How do you describe your personal experience as an adoptee? Where do you typically start, what are some main essence points that stick out to you?
2. In what ways do you see adoption as part of your personal/family history?
3. Terms like loss, abandonment, grief, and adversity are sometimes associated with the lived experience of adoption. How do those resonate with you / what have been your experiences with those concepts?
4. What were some stories/narratives about adoption that you remember hearing or being told as a child and adolescent? Can you articulate the impact those had on you, if any?
5. Throughout your journey, have you discovered new truths about your personal story? How did you come to find those out, and what was that process like for you? Who was part of it, who wasn't, where and how did it come to be, what were the circumstances

leading up to it, etc. If it was through a season or multiple seasons, how do you describe that process?

Hearing from Others:

1. As you began watching the documentary, what came up for you, what initial feelings, thoughts, questions did you notice?
2. Were there any particular moments or testimonies that left a significant impression on you, and/or any parts that especially resonated or connected to something about your own story?
3. How did the documentary challenge or affirm what you knew about adoption?
4. Could you identify with any of the adoptees in the film as more of their stories were shared? For example, being wrongly labeled an orphan, or the complexities with searching for birth family, etc. Any specific emotions you could identify with?
5. What was it like for you to see adoption portrayed in this way? How did you react to various reports/interviews with agency staff members, officials, authorities involved within the systems of adoption, either past or currently, etc.?
6. What does the documentary have to say about “identity” overall and how does its commentary relate with how you’ve experienced that term/process?

Narrative Exploration:

1. How do you think the documentary did in terms of including testimonies from adoptees who engage in critical dialogue about institutionalized adoption practices?
2. What does the term “reclaiming my narrative” mean to you? Does it hold relevance to this current season of your life?
3. What have been challenges of sharing your adoption story with others? Benefits?
4. Who have you considered to be an ally an/or opponent in narratives related to the adoptee experience. It’s not either-or, simply allow those terms to spark self reflection.

Navigating Family Relationships

1. Right now, how would you describe your connection to your birth family? And how did the documentary shape any of that for you?
2. How would you describe the way the film portrayed birth family? What came up for you as the documentary followed [Robert Calabretta’s story of search and reunion](#)?
3. How did the documentary complicate or confirm your perspectives about various members of the adoption constellation (e.g., adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents, extended families, etc.)?
4. How might the stories represented in the film impact or influence your own experience of birth search and/or reunion, or your motivations, reservations, reflections, meanings related to that journey?

5. How has your worldview about the “search” process developed over the ages and stages of your life, how would you name any significant factors that played role in that development for you?

Part 2: Exploring Next Steps // Taking Action

Personal Empowerment

1. What resources have been especially helpful for you in your personal journey of adoptee consciousness and adoption literacy?
2. How have you explore what it looks like to create and establish boundary-setting in terms of relating with people/systems in your life who struggle to exercise empathy for the adoptee experience?
3. In what ways could this documentary serve as a catalyst for your own personal sense of healing (not that “healing” in full is an absolute/universal term for everyone), growth, and advocacy?
4. The documentary features scholar and activist Eleana Kim, who wrote about Korean adoption in depth in her book [Adopted Territory](#). For those who’ve read the book, what parallels did you observe between Kim’s book and the documentary?

Seeking Justice

1. How do you see the role of personal experience (e.g., the staff member from Holt who was interviewed) shaping systemic involvement in adoption practices? Some say that Holt’s role in the industrialization of adoption was downplayed and defended, while others may see it as a unfair to make sweeping statements about the way the Holt organization has operated as a global adoption agency. What do you make of that dynamic?
2. Are there any specific legal/legislative issues related to the adoptee experience that you feel particularly called to address or look further into now after seeing the documentary?
3. Explore groups like [Adoptees United](#) and [Adoptees for Justice](#), what are some effective, tangible legislative movements that communities could learn more about in order to cultivate more ethical and humane expressions of child and social welfare.
4. What do adult adoptees need more of throughout our lifespan in order to repair the injuries that documentaries like this bring to light?
5. Review these two articles published by ICAV (Lynelle Long), what resonates with you in terms of next steps to consider, individually and collectively?
 - A. [Lived Experience Suggestions for Responses to Illicit Adoptions](#)
 - B. [Victims of Illegal Intercountry Adoptions speak out at the UN](#)

Mental Health Considerations

1. What does the documentary have to say about adoptee community?
2. How have you experienced degrees of support in the wake of documentaries like this (and [ruptures overall as described in the Adoptee Consciousness Model](#))
3. What practices can you keep in mind in order to acknowledge the depth and breadth of your personal reactions to the documentary (and the content / realities represented therein) and preserve a sense of health and wellness as you continue to engage with your present-day relationships, roles, and responsibilities?
4. Who do you have in your life to walk through this season of discovery and advocacy with you?
5. If you were to give the next film or documentary a title, what would/should it be? What aspect of this documentary needs to be plumbed further, or fleshed out with more clarity or explanation?

The purpose of this guide is to help facilitate discussion in the context of safe, brave, soft, tender, nuanced atmospheres, where adoptee experiences are seen and held with care, where mutual empathy and growth-fostering relationships are prioritized not at the expense of adoptee voices but through our active moving toward and considering them significant.

This is clearly not an exhaustive or comprehensive guide meant to teach about the history and complexities of adoption, nor does it suffice as a therapeutic support to replace professional treatment/counseling. Please take care to use it as an entry point for those interested in processing personal and group reactions to The AP + Frontline documentary South Korea's Adoption Reckoning.

That being said, thank you for inviting me in to serve your community (even your personal journey) in this way. While this is a first version of thoughts/reactions just days after the screening of the film, please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or ideas you'd like to add to a second edition.

-Cam

Additional Resources

[Cam's TEDx Talk on Adoption Literacy](#)

[Interview with CBS Minnesota](#)

Cam's Service Options

1. [Adoptee Career Workshop](#)
2. [Adoption Literacy & Wellbeing Summit for Adult Adoptees](#)
3. [Online Community for Teen Adoptees](#)
4. [Cam's Signature 12-Week Adoptive Parenting Consultation Group](#)
5. [Schedule Cam for Keynotes, Workshops, Trainings](#)
6. [Free General Resources & Discussion Guides](#)
7. [10 Facts About Adoptees](#)
8. [20 Ways Spouses Can Support Adoptees](#)

[Community Mental Health Resources](#)

Communities for/by Adult Adoptees

1. [Adoptee Mentoring Society](#)
2. [Adoptee Open Mic](#)
3. [Adoptee Bridge](#)
4. [Adopteen](#)
5. [Adoptee Hub](#)
6. [Adoptees of South America](#)
7. [Adoptees United](#)
8. [Adoption Mosaic](#)
9. [AIRE Roots](#)
10. [Also Known As](#)
11. [Bastard Nation](#)
12. [BIPOC Adoptees](#)
13. [Boston Korean Adoptees](#)
14. [Chinese Adoptee Alliance](#)
15. [IAmAdoptee](#)
16. [Identity Learning](#)
17. [Inclusion Initiative](#)
18. [Korean Adoptee Adoptive Family Network](#)
19. [Lost Daughters](#)
20. [Society of Adoptee Professionals of Color in Adoption](#)

Cam Lee Small, author, clinician in private practice, and dynamic advocate for mental health and Adoption Literacy, brings lived experience and professional expertise to the forefront of his mission. His work has been featured by [TEDx Minneapolis](#), CBS Minnesota, [National Council for Adoption](#), [Christianity Today](#), University of Minnesota School of Social Work, and [Center for Adoption Support and Education](#).

Cam is both an alum and training facilitator for the cohort-based Permanency and Adoption Competency Certificate, which includes over 70 hours of continued education delivered through University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare - to increase the number of qualified permanency and adoption mental health and child welfare professionals across MN who are able to work in collaborative, cross-disciplinary, and multicultural contexts.

Cam's community-based vision for adoptee-informed advocacy is evident through his 1:1 counseling services, live workshops and support groups, Masterclass trainings, and his unique blend of content creation/collaboration across digital and grassroots platforms. His book **The Adoptee's Journey: From Loss and Trauma to Healing and Empowerment** addresses the intersection of adoption, mental health, and social responsibility. Cam's personal insight stands honestly next to his professional acumen, making him a transformative force within the adoptee community and throughout the fields of advocacy and mental health.