



Daughters of China: An Examination of the Home, School, and Community Experiences of Adolescent and Young Adult Chinese Adoptees

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of adolescent and young adult Chinese adoptees raised in the United States. The focus was the development of identity, the experiences of academic life, and the quality of family, peer, and community relationships.

Previous research conducted with Chinese adoptees had predominantly relied upon the parents' perspectives; simply because most of the children had not been old enough to speak for themselves. As a result, the voices of these young women were missing from the research.

Using a multiple case study design, data were gathered from a sample of 11 cases. Each case consisted of three participants—one female Chinese adoptee between 16 and 21 years of age, one parent, and one educator who worked with the adoptee. The maximum variation sample of volunteers was recruited through networking methods and snowball sampling.

Qualitative analyses yielded nine overarching themes: good fortune and specialness, family bonding and appreciation, self-confidence, strong work ethic, Asian stereotypes, resilience, a sense of belonging, an interest in a variety of cultures, and a fluctuating appreciation of origins.

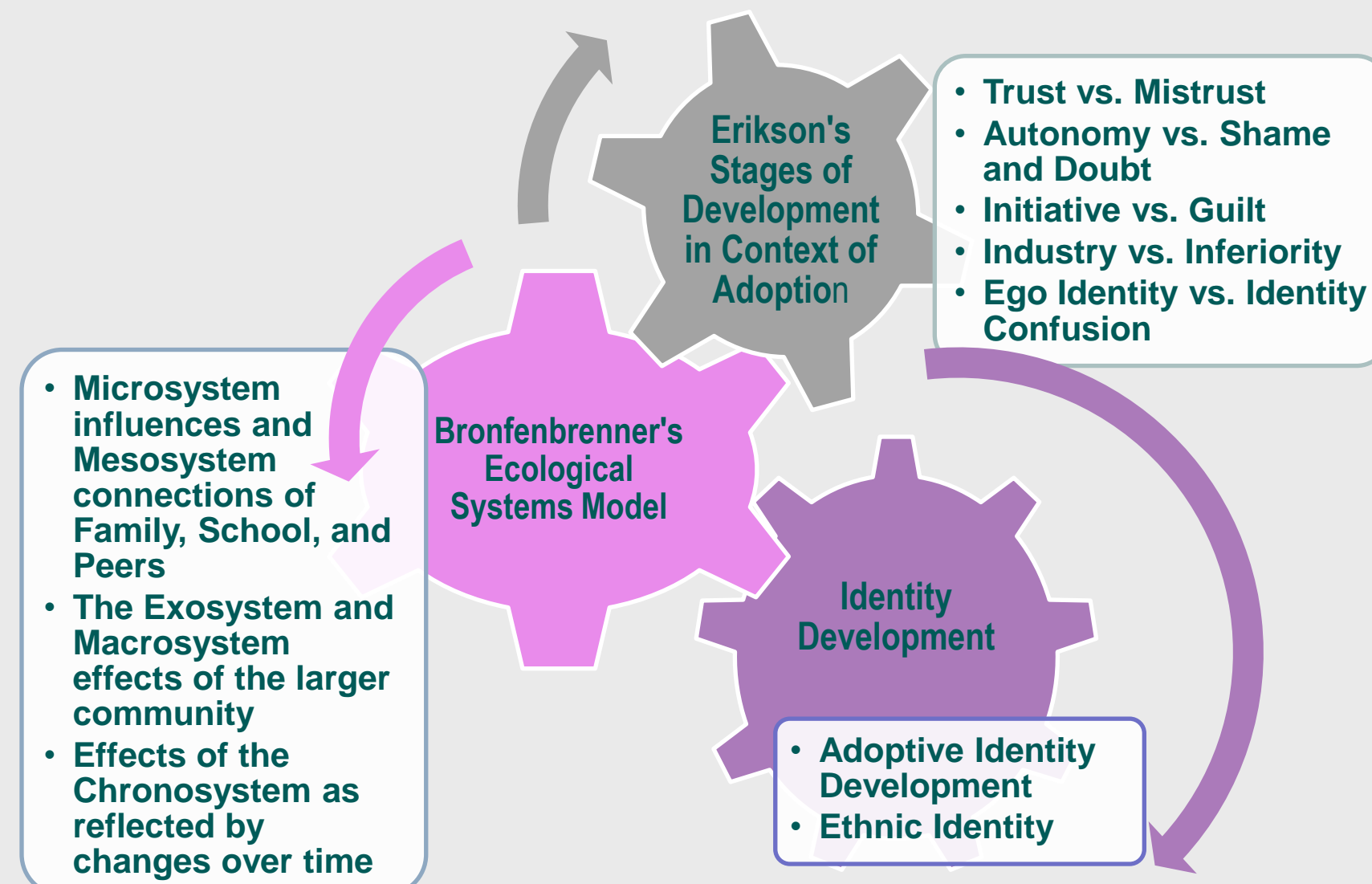
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UNDERLYING THEORY

This study sought to describe the unique identity development of Chinese adopted adolescents using a combination of developmental and ecological systems perspectives. Erikson (1968) described identity development across the life span as progressing through eight stages of conflict called the psychosocial stages of development (Erikson, 1980).

For internationally adopted children, it was also fitting to consider identity development within the context of the systems surrounding them. Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory supports the need for and benefit of examining adopted children in the home, school, social groups, community, and larger society. Identity does not develop in a void; it develops within the contexts of the person's environment throughout the lifespan. The figure below provides a visualization of the blend of the two theories of Erik Erikson's (1968) stages of psychosocial identity development and Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems model.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do adolescent and young adult Chinese adoptees perceive their experiences in different sociological contexts: at home, with peers, at school, and in the community?
2. Retrospectively, how do Chinese adoptees perceive their life experiences at different stages of development: during childhood, during adolescence, and at present?
3. How do parents view their child's family, social, and academic experiences?
4. How do educators who work with the adoptees view their academic progress and overall adjustment?
5. How do the perspectives of the adoptees compare to those of their parents and educators?

RESEARCH DESIGN

A multiple case study, qualitative research design was utilized in this study. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) define a multi-case study as involving two or more participants in order to provide a detailed examination of a particular event. The researcher desired to study the characteristics of Chinese adoptees between 16 and 21 years of age. The unit of analysis was the adoptee. Each case consisted of the adoptee, one parent, and one educator. The voices of the adoptees were critical to answering the research questions.

METHODOLOGY

Recruitment & Sampling

The researcher purposefully selected a sample of volunteers representing different ages, family forms, religious affiliations, and community settings. Participants were recruited through networking, posting announcements in adoption-related newsletters, on adoption Listservs and websites, and through snowball sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). A total of 11 cases participated in the study with the following demographics

Participants

Adoptees

- 16-20 years old ($M = 17.4$), all female
- Age at adoption ranged from 3 months to 4 years
- 6 from the Northeast, 3 from the Southeast, 1 from the Mid-Atlantic, and 1 from the Midwest

Parents

- 50-73 years old ($M = 60$)
- 10 mothers, 1 father
- All Caucasian
- 7 married, 2 single, 1 divorced, 1 widowed

Educators

- $M = 20.9$ years experience in education
- 9 female, 2 male
- 9 Caucasian, 2 African American
- Educators included a combination of classroom teachers, coaches, advisors or counselors, and one administrator.

Instrumentation

Adoptees completed a demographic survey, participated in a personal interview, and completed the PASCI self-concept instrument (Fleming, 2007). Parent and educator participants completed a demographic survey and participated in a personal interview. Surveys and interview protocols were developed by the researcher. Interviews were conducted either in-person or via Skype™.

DATA ANALYSES

The researcher analyzed the data from the interview transcripts and PASCI self-concept inventory by performing the following steps:

1. Reviewed and edited professionally transcribed interviews and pre-coded by hand (Saldaña, 2009).
2. Created a provisional start list of 39 codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2009).
3. Performed 1st cycle of coding with NVivo 9 (QSR International, 2011) using "descriptive", "values", and "in-vivo" coding methods (Saldaña, 2009).
4. Performed 2nd cycle of coding using NVivo 9 both within and across cases.
5. Hierarchically reorganized, reviewed, and examined the code list for relevance to research questions.
6. Themes emerged inductively from patterns in the data analyses (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; King & Horrocks, 2010).
7. Compared high and low PASCI scores to the themes.
8. Maintained coding memos, code book, and reflexivity journal throughout.
9. Performed a confirmability audit to validate the trustworthiness of results, resulting in a 97.6% agreement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

RESULTS

Using an inductive, grounded theory approach, themes were derived empirically from the data in the 33 interview transcripts (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). As a result of the data analyses described above, the following nine overarching themes emerged:

1. **Good fortune and specialness.** Adoptees described a sense of feeling fortunate and/or being special, unique, or different from others and standing out in a positive way.
2. **Family bonding and appreciation.** Adoptees expressed being close with their families and/or appreciative of what their parent(s) had done for them.
3. **Self-confidence.** Adoptees were viewed by parents and educators as confident, outgoing, mature and exhibited evidence of positive self-concept.
4. **Strong work ethic.** Adoptees did well in school, some of them excelling, exhibiting high levels of motivation, determination, and tenacity; many recognized the value of an education. Adoptees also participated in numerous sports and extracurricular activities.
5. **Asian stereotypes.** Adoptees felt they did not fit the Asian stereotype of being good at or liking math or science.
6. **Resilience.** Parents and educators perceived traits of resilience in the adoptees. CAs exhibited adaptive behaviors that enabled them to be academically successful and well-adjusted socially and emotionally.
7. **Sense of belonging.** Adoptees tended to find a means by which to identify themselves as belonging to a particular group.
8. **Interest in a variety of cultures.** Adoptees articulated an interest in being exposed to diverse cultures. Many enjoyed traveling, learning about other cultures, and learning foreign languages.
9. **Fluctuating appreciation of origins.** Adoptees articulated a fluctuation in their level of interest in Chinese culture over time. As they grew older, adoptees were beginning to make choices about their futures based upon their experiences of being Chinese and/or adopted.

RESULTS (CONT.)

The first two research questions attempted to describe how the Chinese adoptees perceived their experiences in different contexts of their lives and over time. The third and fourth research questions informed how the parents and educators viewed the adoptee's family, social, and academic progress. The final research question compared the perspectives of the three sources. A summary of the themes related to the research questions is presented below:

Adoptees' Perceptions	
RQ1: How do CAs perceive their experiences in different sociological contexts?	RQ2: Retrospectively, how do CAs perceive their life experiences at different stages of development?
Theme 1: Good fortune and specialness	Theme 1: Good fortune and specialness
Theme 2: Family bonding and appreciation	Theme 8: Interest in a variety of cultures
Theme 3: Self-confidence	Theme 9: Fluctuating appreciation of origins
Theme 5: Asian stereotypes	
Theme 7: Sense of belonging	
Theme 8: Interest in a variety of cultures	
Parents' Perceptions	
RQ3: How do parents view the CAs family, social, and academic experiences?	Educators' Perceptions
Theme 2: Family bonding and appreciation	RQ4: How do educators who work with the CAs view their academic progress and adjustment?
Theme 3: Self-confidence	Theme 2: Family bonding and appreciation
Theme 4: Strong work ethic	Theme 3: Self-confidence
Theme 6: Resilience	Theme 4: Strong work ethic
	Theme 6: Resilience
Comparison of Perceptions	
RQ5: How do the perceptions of the CAs compare to those of their parents and educators?	
Theme 2: Family bonding and appreciation	
Theme 3: Self-confidence	
Theme 4: Strong work ethic	
Theme 5: Asian stereotypes	
Theme 6: Resilience	
Theme 7: Sense of belonging	

LIMITATIONS

The following are possible limitations to the truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality of the study, according to Guba (1981):

- voluntary sampling;
- lack of prolonged field experience;
- the use of remote interviewing technology;
- lack of generalizability to all Chinese adoptees or other groups of adoptees;
- self-reported data;
- expansive scope of the topics; and
- possible researcher bias.

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