Connections of Adoption Emotions to Close Relationship Development

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Background

- An adopted person develops a narrative or story to help make sense of his or her adoption. This narrative provides a window into how the adoptee understands the role of adoption in his or her life and articulates feelings and thoughts about it.
- While this narrative can be helpful to better understand the meaning of adoption in their life, less is known about how these narratives of one’s adoption impact other relationships later in life.
- Attachment research has repeatedly demonstrated a link between early attachment experiences and later relationships outside the family (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000; Grant-Marsney, Grotevant, & Sayer, 2014; Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007).

The current study sought to understand how emotion (affective valence and specific emotions), as identified in the adoption narratives related to qualities of their closest emerging adulthood relationships.

Hypothesis

- It was expected that reflections of early relationships and feelings about adoption would impact the current evaluation of relationships.
- Specific emotions of positive and negative affect were explored in this study and evaluated for their contribution to emerging adulthood relationship qualities.

Method

- The Minnesota/Texas Adoption Research Project (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998) has followed 190 adoptive kinship networks, with varying levels of openness in the adoption, from childhood to adulthood (4 waves).

Participants were recruited from families with at least one child adopted from a private agency (in the United States) before the first birthday. For the current study, Wave 2 and 3 are used:

Wave 2 (1996-2001): adolescence, ages 11-20 (M = 15.7)
Wave 3 (2005-2008): emerging adulthood, ages 21-30 (M = 25.0)

- Most adoptive parents were Caucasian (97%), middle to upper-middle class.

Procedure

Wave 2: Home interview, questionnaires, including interviews with the adolescents about their adoption
Wave 3: Questionnaires and interviews online

Results

(W2) Positive affect did not account for variance in the regression model. However, in the model of negative affect, (controlling for age, frequency of contact with birth parents, and relationship type) was statistically significant for anxiety and trend for avoiding. Negative affect in adolescence (β = -.22, p = .01) and the dummy variable for friend as closest relationship (β = .29, p = .004) were statistically significant predictors of anxious attachment style in emerging adulthood.

Discussion

- Negative affect seems to have more impact on relational outcomes.
- Specific emotions were modestly correlated to attachment style and relationship satisfaction.
- Results demonstrate mixed support for the expectations of associations between affect and relationship qualities.
- Relationship qualities of attachment style (avoidant and anxious) and relationship satisfaction were associated with affect, while intimacy maturity (commitment and concern) was not.
- The findings of this study will help to assist research and practitioners understand the application of the adoption narrative in their work, and the translation of adoptive identity in relationship concepts.
- Early relationships in the adoptive family are likely impacted by the adoption; both as an event and continued identity process.

Strengths and Limitations of Sample

- Varying levels of openness in adoption
- Longitudinal design
- Focusing on adoptees in adolescence and emerging adulthood

- Limited racial/ethnic diversity
- Adoptions were US(dominant), private, infant adoptions only

Measures

Family Story Collaborative Project (FSCP: Fiese et al., 1999): Positive and negative affect scales
The Experiences in Close Relationships questionnaire (ECR: Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998): Anxiety and avoidance in close relationships
Intimacy Interview (White, Speisman, Costos, Kelly, & Bartis, 1984): Intimacy maturity
Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI: Furman & Buhrmister, 1985): Relationship satisfaction

Discrete positive and negative emotions in the adoption narrative were analyzed for a sub-sample of 86 participants. The sub-sample represented participants who had no change in contact with their birth mother from Wave 1 to Wave 2.

References


