

Factors within the Construct of Contact in Adoption over Time

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Background

- Contact** has been connected to intimacy and to openness in adoption (e.g. Berschied, et al., 1989)
- Two Categories** of contact in adoption have been identified (Cushman et al., 1997): 1-way contact and 2-way contact
- A minority of adoptions maintain contact over time but **increase contact** in *both* categories (e.g. Crea & Barth, 2009)
- These changes may be due to **motivation** for contact (Gross, 1997) or changes in **roles and responsibilities** (Dunbar, et al., 2006)

Current Study

Combining contact with social role theory

Different roles have different expected behaviors. Birth and adoptive mothers are typically the main contacts within the adoption kinship network until the adopted child reaches adolescence.

Hypothesis

We hypothesize 1- and 2-way contact factors will be found with variation in items loading on each showing **greater** involvement for birth and adoptive mothers and **less** for birth and adoptive fathers.

Sample

The Early Growth and Development Study (EGDS)

- A prospective longitudinal study in two cohorts (N=561 sets)
- Domestic, non-special needs, infant adoptions
- Analysis sample:** N = 361 (Cohort I) adoption-linked birth mothers, birth fathers, adoptive mothers, and adoptive fathers.

Measures & assessment timing post-adoption

placement:

- 8-item measures of contact frequency on a 5 point scale were administered to birth and adoptive parents
- Birth parents were interviewed at 4.5, 12, 18, 22, & 48 months
- Adoptive parents were interviewed at 9, 12, 18, 22, 27 & 54 months

Results:

Factor analyses conducted separately by assessment wave gave six factors:

- Single (all items loaded on a single factor)
- Receive (items about receiving)
- 1-way (consisting of receiving and giving items)
- 2-way (phone and/or visits)
- Sentimental (collection of items suggest sentimentality)
- Intimacy (collection of items suggests intimacy)

Respondent	4.5 Months	9 Months	12 Months	18 Months	22Months	27 Months	48 Months	54 Months
Birth Mother Contact with Adoptive Parents	Single 1 photos from 2 Letters from 3 phone 4 face-to-face		1-Way 1 photos from 2 Letters from 6 sent letters 7 sent photos	1-Way 1 photos from 2 Letters from 6 sent letters 7 sent photos	1-Way 1 photos from 2 Letters from 5 sent presents 6 sent letters 7 sent photos		1-Way 1 photos from 2 Letters from 6 sent letters 7 sent photos	
			Intimacy 3 phone 4 face-to-face 5 sent presents 8 face-to-face C	Intimacy 3 phone 4 face-to-face 5 sent presents 8 face-to-face C	Intimacy 3 phone 4 face-to-face 5 sent presents 8 face-to-face C		Intimacy 3 phone 4 face-to-face 5 sent presents 8 face-to-face C	
Birth Father Contact with Adoptive Parents	Single 1 photos from 2 Letters from 3 phone 4 face-to-face		1-Way 1 photos from 2 Letters from 6 sent letters	1-Way 1 photos from 2 Letters from 3 phone 5 sent presents	Single 1 photos from 2 Letters from 3 phone		Single 1 photos from 2 Letters from 3 phone	
			2-Way 3 phone 4 face-to-face 5 sent presents	2-Way 6 sent letters 7 sent photos	2-Way 3 phone 4 face-to-face 5 sent presents		2-Way 3 phone 4 face-to-face 5 sent presents	
Adoptive Mother Contact with Birth Mother	Single 1 sent photos 2 sent letters 3 phone 4 face-to-face 5 presents from 6 letters from		Intimacy 3 phone 4 face-to-face	Intimacy 3 phone 4 face-to-face	Intimacy 3 phone 4 face-to-face		Intimacy 3 phone 4 face-to-face	
			Single 5 presents from 8 face-to-face C	Intimacy 1 sent photos 3 phone 4 face-to-face	Intimacy 3 phone 4 face-to-face		Intimacy 3 phone 4 face-to-face	
			2-Way 1 sent photos 2 sent letters 3 phone 6 letters from	2-Way 5 presents from 8 face-to-face C	2-Way 5 presents from 8 face-to-face C		2-Way 5 presents from 8 face-to-face C	
Adoptive Mother Contact with Birth Father	Single 1 sent photos 2 sent letters 3 phone 4 face-to-face 5 presents from 6 letters from 7 photos from		1-Way 1 sent photos 2 sent letters 6 letters from 7 photos from	2-Way 1 sent photos 2 sent letters 3 phone 4 face-to-face 5 presents from 8 face-to-face C	Single 1 sent photos 2 sent letters 3 phone		Single 1 sent photos 2 sent letters 3 phone	
			Receive 5 presents from 6 letters from 7 photos from	Receive 6 letters from 7 photos from	Receive 6 letters from 7 photos from		Receive 6 letters from 7 photos from	

Note. At 4.5 mo and 9 mo for birth and adoptive parents fewer items were presented. Adoptive father results were not presented due to space.

Interpretation & Discussion

- The number and type of factors at each assessment generally match between birth and adoptive parents **increasing the believability** of the emergent factors
- Emergent factors **did not indicate** that adoptive fathers were less involved than adoptive mothers
- Emergent factors **did suggest** birth mothers are more intimate with the adoptive family than birth fathers
- Other analyses using this sample show:
 - Birth mothers have **more contact** with the adoptive family than birth fathers
 - Peak contact** in this sample comes at **22 months**
- At **22 months** our contact factors **stabilize**
- Reasons** for these coinciding events at 22 months:
 - Role responsibilities in the adoption kinship network are unclear but contact **helps clarify** them
 - Contact peaks because the **adopted child** is walking, talking & showing independence by 22 months
 - This combination of child development and contact frequency helps birth and adoptive parents **stabilize their expectations** for their network relationships
- Practitioners can use this information to help network members **anticipate** upcoming events

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