

« My past has been just one big question that needs answering »  
**ADULT INTERNATIONAL ADOPTEES' NARRATIVES OF REUNION  
 WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES**

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**BACKGROUND**

- Adoption is a non-normative experience that creates a narrative rupture in an adopted individual's life course because knowledge of one's birth origin is absent (Dorow, 2006).
- The birth family is an entity that needs to be integrated into an adoptive individual's identity (Wrobel & Dillon, 2009).
- The development of an adoptive individual's identity is defined as "how the individual constructs meaning about his/her adoption" (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Esau, 2000).
- Contact and reunion with one's birth family is an attempt to harmonize the narrative rupture and attain a more cohesive identity.



"Can you imagine that, after reunion, these big questions just disappeared".

**THE AIM OF THE STUDY**

- To investigate how adoptees make sense of their life disruption when they narrate reunion with birth relatives?
  - What sense of meanings do adoptees ascribe to their birth origin?
  - What sense of meanings do adoptees attach to the idea of a family?
  - How do adoptees construct their identities within a dual family context (birth and adoptive)?
  - How do adoptees comply and/or resist the dominant narrative that uses biogenetic ties as the basis of the family and identity?

**METHODS**

- 16 adult international adoptees were interviewed 2008–2013 about their adoption experiences as whole.
- 4 adoptees were selected for this case study on the basis of their reunion with birth relatives.
- The adoptees consisted of 3 female and 1 male, aged 21–34 years, and their birth countries were Taiwan (2), Ethiopia (1), Russia (1).
- In 2014, a second semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted focusing on reunions, post-reunion relationships, and conversations with adoptive parents about the search and reunion.
- The data were analyzed with a narrative approach with the aim of identifying how the adoptees individually make sense of their life disruption and construct their identities within a dual family context.

**PRELIMINARY RESULTS:  
 Three broad narratives**

**Narratives of desire and loss** justify the adoptees' various needs for search and reunion with birth relatives and reflect their need to integrate their birth origin in to their identities. One interviewee stated:

*"I was so unsure because I didn't know any clear reason why I was put up for adoption. So this uncertainty may have been the reason I started to find out [about my birth family]. So there have just been these blank spots that I've wanted to fill in."*

**Narratives of belonging to a family** were characterized by various meanings being attributed to similarity, care and relationships within adoptive and birth families. Additionally, these narratives were characterized by consideration of what makes a family. One participant reflected:

*"I think that the relationship in which you have grown up is ultimately what makes a family. However, in some way I try to include them [birth parents] in to my family. So, this family also has some kind of important meaning. However, it is difficult to describe what the meaning is."*

**Narratives of harmonizing a narrative rupture** describe the different meanings of finding one's birth origin. These narratives were characterized by the relief of finding one's birth origin and its meaning for a more coherent identity. One interviewee explained:

*"I discovered an enormous amount of information about myself which led to terrible exhaustion. But at the same time I felt a sort of inner peace. You see, I don't need to be distressed anymore, because my mysterious past has come out. Somehow, everything now feels self-evident or clear."*

**CONCLUSION**

- The narratives showed how uncertainty about birth origin led the interviewed adoptees to experience uncertainty about themselves.
- Reunion with their birth families gave the adoptees the opportunity to fill the information gap regarding their birth origin as well as to gain a more coherent identity.
- The narratives both complied with and countered the dominant narrative that uses biogenetic ties as the basis of the family and identity.
- The narratives included adoptees' moral evaluation of family loyalties to one's adoptive family as well to the birth family.

**References**

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