

ETHNIC SOCIALISATION WITHIN INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS:

How much
influence do
adoptive
parents have?

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Background to the study

- Looking at the international literature on intercountry adoption:
- Since the 1970s, research has largely focused on the tran ethnically and transracially-adopted (TRA) child's ability to develop a positive racial, cultural or ethnic identity ...
- ... and how this influences the child's adjustment (usually with measures of self-esteem, self-concept, etc.)

Background to the study

- Most studies show that:
- The strongest influence on children's ethnic identification is *parental ethnic socialisation*
 - ✦ How parents assist their children to develop positive ethnic awareness and identification
- How parents perceive and ethnically describe their children influences how the children will subsequently identify themselves

Current Study

- The current study sought to examine these issues for children adopted into New Zealand
 - ✦ Where most children are from Russia or Romania...
 - ✦ making the adoptions *transcultural* but NOT *transracial*...
 - ✦ ...and therefore, less identifiably different from the adoptive parents

Background to the study

- More recent studies suggest the adoptees' ethnic socialisation may involve influences beyond the adoptive parents
- That ethnic interest and ethnic identification may be separate phenomena
- If this is the case, it may be possible for children adopted outside their birth culture to be interested in the birth culture, but not identify with it
- Or they may identify with the birth culture, but not show an interest in the cultural activities of it

Study's Questions

1. Is there a relationship between parents' and children's interest in the birth culture, and the children's ethnic identification?
2. Is there a relationship between parents' interest in the children's birth culture and the children's interest in the birth culture?
3. Can parents predict their children's interest in the birth culture or their children's ethnic identification?
4. What is the relationship between a child's exposure to the birth culture and a child's interest in and identification with the birth culture?

Demographics

Gender of children (n = 44)	
Male	45%
Female	55%
Countries of origin	
Russia	73%
Romania	27%
Current ages of children	
Mean	12.6 years
Standard deviation	1.9 years
Range	8–18 years
Child ages at placement	
Mean	4.2 years
Standard deviation	3.2 years
Range	1 month–13 years
Number of years with the adoptive family	
Mean	8.4 years
Standard deviation	3.1 years
Range	3–13 years
Time spent in an institution (n = 40)	
Mean	28.6 months
Standard deviation	22.0 months
Range	<1 month–7 years

Demographics

Gender of participating parent (n = 44)	
Male	42%
Female	58%
Age of parents	
Less than 40 years	4%
40–49 years	52%
50 years and over	44%
Education of parents	
Some secondary school; up to university entrance	39%
Polytechnic study or trade certificate	12%
University degree	27%
Post-graduate certificate, master's or PhD	22%
Region where families reside	
North Island	55%
South Island	45%

Child Measures

- Ethnic identity = Phinney Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)
- Cultural interest = Birth Culture Interest Scale (BCIS)
media/news + sports + food + clothing/costumes + music + dance + games/toys/dolls
- Cultural exposure = series of demographic items (over)

Parent Measures

- MEIM – as they felt their children would answer it
- Knowledge of birth culture + Ability to speak the language + Rating of importance that the child ethnically identify with the birth culture + Child's estimated degree of birth culture interest

Evidence of exposure to birth culture

Current ages of children	
Mean	12.6 years
Standard deviation	1.9 years
Range	8–18 years
Child ages at placement	
Mean	4.2 years
Standard deviation	3.2 years
Range	1 month–13 years
Number of years with the adoptive family	
Mean	8.4 years
Standard deviation	3.1 years
Range	3–13 years
Estimate of child's ability to speak birth language on arrival in New Zealand	
Fluently or very well	47%
Moderately well	2%
Knows many words/phrases	9%
Knows only a few words	14%
No ability to speak the language (Mean = 2.60; SD = 1.94)	28%
Estimate of people known to the children who are from the birth culture	
Mean	14.8
Standard deviation	13.7
Range	0–65
Region where families reside	
North Island	55%
South Island	45%

Means and SD of surveys & questions

Birth Culture Interest Scale (BCIS) (child scores)

Mean = 2.69; SD = .72

Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (child scores)

Mean = 2.6; SD = 0.57; Range = 1.29–3.64

Multi-Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (parents' predicted scores)

Mean = 2.3; SD = 0.58; Range = 1.14–3.50

Parents' knowledge of the child's birth culture

Mean = 3.20; SD = .98

Parents' ability to speak the child's birth language

Mean = 2.39; SD = .62

Parents' rating of importance that their child identifies with birth culture

Mean = 3.89; SD = .90

Parents' perception of degree of interest children have in their birth culture

Mean = 3.45; SD = 1.32

1. *Is there a relationship between parents' and children's interest in the birth culture, and the child's ethnic identification?*

None of the parents' birth culture interest items were correlated with the children's ethnic identification (MEIM) scores.

However, the child BCIS scores were positively correlated with the MEIM scores: $r = .55$, $n = 44$, $p < .001$ (2-tailed).



2. *Is there a relationship between parents' interest in the child's birth culture and their children's interest in the birth culture?*

To measure this, parents' birth culture interest items were correlated with the children's BCIS scores. Two of the three parent items had significant correlations:

(1) the parent's knowledge of the birth culture ($r_s = .32, n = 44, p < .05, 2\text{-tailed}$)

(2) the importance to parents that the children identify with the birth culture ($r_s = .41, n = 44, p < .01, 2\text{-tailed}$).



3. *Can parents predict their children's interest in the birth culture and their children's ethnic identification?*

Parents' perceptions of the children's interest in birth culture and the children's BCIS score were correlated. This was significant ($r_s = .37, n = 44, p < .05, 2\text{-tailed}$).

On the other hand, parents could not predict how their children would answer the MEIM ($r = .08$).



4. *What is the relationship between the child's exposure to birth culture and child's interest in, and identification with, the birth culture?*

To measure this, the children's MEIM and BCIS scores were correlated with the demographic items (slide 10) evidencing exposure to the birth culture.

When considered in relation to the BCIS, all variables were significantly related in the direction expected, except child's current age.

In relation to the MEIM, only number of years with the adoptive family was significant.



Relationship between BCIS and exposure to birth culture

- Current ages of children = (rs = .02, ns)
 - Ages at placement = (rs = .43, p < .01)
 - Number of years with adoptive family = (rs = -.38, p < .01)
- Estimate of child's ability to speak b'language on arrival in New Zealand = (rs = .49, p < .01)
- Estimate of people known to the children who are from the b'country = (rs = .31, p < .01)
 - Region in NZ where families live = (t = 3.045, p < .01)

Relationship between MEIM and exposure to birth culture

- Current ages of children = (ns)
 - Ages at placement = (ns)
 - Number of years with adoptive family = ($r_s = -.38, p < .05$)
- Estimate of child's ability to speak b'language on arrival in New Zealand = (ns)
- Estimate of people known to children who are from the b'country = (ns)
 - Region in NZ where families live = (ns)

Specific Conclusions

- Children's interest and identification scores strongly correlated with each other, yet no relationship was found between the parents' interest in their children's birth culture and the children's identification with that culture.
- Regarding the relationship between parent and child birth culture interest, two of the three parent indices correlated with the child interest scores.
- Finally, parents appeared to have some ability to predict the children's interest in the birth culture, but no significant ability to predict the children's identification with their birth culture.

General Conclusions - Parents

- Results tentatively suggest that parents may play a role in the development of their child's birth culture interest...
- ...but have little to do with the development of ethnic identification.
 - ✦ This is quite in contrast to the literature, which has long asserted that the parental ethnic socialisation has the greatest influence on the children's ethnic self-identification
- As this is one of the first studies to investigate ethnic socialisation within a racially congruent population, there is no way to know if these findings are related to the racial congruity of the current adoptive families or some other factors.

General Conclusions – cultural interest

- Birth culture interest was related to increased exposure to the birth culture...
 - ✦ ...either via one's parents' active interest in the culture
 - ✦ or via non-parental factors, such as
 - increased time spent in the birth country prior to placement
 - or post-placement exposure to people, activities and events associated with the birth culture within New Zealand.

General Conclusions – cultural identification

- Identification with birth culture appears to be quite a different phenomenon
- It was related to *interest* (at least on the part of the children) but was not related to ...
 - ✦ ...parental interest in the birth culture
 - ✦ or to most of the measures of cultural exposure (the only exception being years in the home, which was negatively correlated with the children's MEIM scores)
- Finding that parents could not predict identification also suggests it may be a more internal and complex construct.

Ethnic identification and Belongingness

- Adoption studies have suggested that adoptees' desire for belongingness may cause them shun that which sets them apart from the adoptive family.
- Being biologically—and ethnically—different from the adoptive family may be the very factors that increase a child's desire to identify with the adoptive parents' dominant culture
- None of this precludes developing an *interest* in the birth culture.

Ethnic Identification and Ethnic Interest

- Taking an interest in the birth culture...
 - ✦ learning the language,
 - ✦ engaging with people from the country,
 - ✦ reading the books and stories,
 - ✦ visiting the birth country ...
- ... are all features that have been cited as indicative of a positive ethnic identification.
- Perhaps they are better viewed as indices of interest in—rather than identification with—the birth culture, and as such can be encouraged without threatening the adoptee's possible identification with the adoptive parents.

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