

Activities that promote ethnic identity development in transnational adoptees

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Transnational adoption is a common practice in the United States, with American families adopting hundreds of thousands of children born in other countries over the last 50 years. Most of these adoptions represent transcultural and transracial adoptions, and both families and adoptees frequently engage in cultural and identity exploration activities, such as adoption camps, birth country travel, education classes, holiday celebrations, promoting friendships with other adoptees, and birth country language learning.

This dissertation sought to explore the impact that these different exploration strategies had on ethnic identity resolution of adoptees. Following a Multiple Article Path (MAP) format, this dissertation utilized data from three separate studies to explore this question. Chapter 2 incorporated mixed methods research with 22 adopted Chinese teens attending an adoption camp. Chapter 3 was a qualitative study with 10 adult adoptees from a variety of different birth countries exploring their perspectives on different identity exploration activities. Chapter 4 was a quantitative study of adult adoptees, looking for correlations between a resolved sense of ethnic identity and birth country travel, language learning, and friendship with other adoptees.

Key findings from these studies include (a) adoptees value adoption camp, and that friendships with other adoptees are important; (b) travel to one's birth country is important to many adoptees, and the meaning and value of travel can vary over time; and (c) birth country language learning is positively correlated with resolved ethnic identity.