International adoption

- A qualitative study concerning international adoptees’ ethnic identity in the context of social relationships

“Sometimes I feel like I’m both and sometimes I feel like I’m no one”.

Di Lin & Sony Talukder

2011

Examensarbete, kandidatnivå, 15 hp
Socialt arbete

Social work, Specialisation in International Social Work

Supervisor: Birgitta Wikander
Examinator: Dimitris Michailakis
Foreword

We want to give special thanks to all the interview participants who took the time to participate in this study and shared their stories and personal experiences. Many thanks to all of you! Without your participation, this study would undeniably been impossible to implement. We would also like to express our gratitude to our supervisor who provided and shared her words of wisdom, thanks for your support, Birgitta Wikander.

Gävle, May 2011
Di Lin & Sony Talukder
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate international adoptees ethnic identity’s developmental process in the context of social relationships. Another important focus was to examine in what ways the adoptees reflect on their own ethnic identity. In this research, it was to view what different factors were influencing the creation of their ethnic identity, what issues are high-lighted and which are not. The method chosen was from a qualitative approach. Through three semi-structured interviews and three email interviews (whereas one participant was taking part in both of them), the adoptees have shared their experiences of different life period. The results of the study were presented through 6 different themes. The empirical data have been interpreted through Jean Phinney’s model about ethnic identity, which is a model of three stages. The results showed that the adoptees’ ethnic identity was basically following the stage development and is also influenced by external factors. The interest and attitude towards the ethnic identity was also examined.

Keywords: International adoption, ethnic identity, social relationship, identity development
Table of contents

1. Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 Background ........................................................................................................ 1
   1.2 Aim and purpose .................................................................................................. 1
   1.3 The research question and reflective questions ............................................... 2
   1.4 Disposition ......................................................................................................... 2
   1.5 Central concepts and definitions ....................................................................... 2
      1.5.1 Ethnic identity ............................................................................................... 3
      1.5.2 International adoption ................................................................................. 3
   1.6 Connection to social work .................................................................................. 4

2. Earlier research .............................................................................................. 5
   2.1 The developmental stages of ethnic identity ....................................................... 6
   2.2 Factors that influence the ethnic identity formation ........................................... 7
   2.3 The individual interest and altitude of the ethnic identity ................................... 8

3. Theoretical perspectives ............................................................................. 9
   3.1 Erikson’s theory of ego identity development .................................................... 10
   3.2 Phinney’s model of ethnic identity formation .................................................... 11

4. Methodology ................................................................................................. 12
   4.1 Preliminary understanding ................................................................................. 12
   4.2 Research design ................................................................................................ 12
      4.2.1 The researchers’ position ............................................................................. 12
   4.3 Mode of procedure ............................................................................................ 13
      4.3.1 Choice of literature ...................................................................................... 13
      4.3.2 Selection of methods .................................................................................... 14
   4.3.3 Sampling ........................................................................................................ 15
   4.3.4 Investigation process ...................................................................................... 15
   4.4 Tools of analysis ............................................................................................... 19
   4.5 Reliability, validity and generalization ................................................................ 20
      4.5.1 Reliability .................................................................................................... 20
      4.5.2 Validity ........................................................................................................ 20
5. Results and analysis ........................................................................................................ 23

5.1 Presentations of results and analysis ........................................................................... 24

Theme 1: Factors that influence the creation of ethnic identity .................................................. 24

Theme 2: Recognition of ethnic identity ................................................................................... 25

Empiricism analysis for theme 1 & 2 ....................................................................................... 27

Theme 3: Identity conflicts ..................................................................................................... 27

Theme 4: Individual interest of searching their ethnic identity .................................................. 28

Empiricism analysis for theme 3 & 4 ....................................................................................... 29

Theme 5: Coping with their ethnic identity ............................................................................. 30

Theme 6: Attitude towards their ethnic identity .................................................................... 30

Empiricism analysis for theme 5 & 6 ....................................................................................... 31

5.2 Holistic analysis ............................................................................................................. 31

6. Discussion ....................................................................................................................... 32

6.1 Brief summary of the results ......................................................................................... 32

6.2 Comparison with earlier research ................................................................................. 34

6.3 Hypotheses and the comparison to the results .............................................................. 35

6.4 Alternative interpretations of the results ...................................................................... 36

6.5 Suggestions for future research .................................................................................... 37

References ............................................................................................................................ 38

Appendix ............................................................................................................................... 41
1. **Introduction**

1.1 **Background**

There exist a number of issues and limitations regarding today's adoption research, which makes it quite narrowed when trying to find possible preclusions and treatment for international adoptees. One issue this study shall investigate is how international adoptees and their ethnic identity is created in the context of social relations. The reason for choosing this viewpoint is because according to other adoption researchers, the area of international adoption is dimly illustrated in the Swedish and international research. Such knowledge is limited regarding to what happens when an adoptee comes to the adoptive family, and school, as well as to this double identity and how it is created in connection to social relations. The issue of ethnic identity has also been demonstrated as a vital important issue for individual's self-conception and self-esteem (Trolley, Wallin & Hansen, 1996). It is due to the fact that there are quite few studies which have followed adoptee's identity development over a specific time of period. The author further argues that there is a need for representative studies on whether international adoptees differ from non-adopted with regard to extension, education and identity development (Carlberg, & Nordin Jareno, 2007, pp. 12-13, 24).

International adoption, which is one type of adoption, refers to an adoptee that has a national of another country in contrast to his/her adoptive parents. Sweden is one of the largest countries to receive the most international adoptees with over 44,000 individual adoptees today (Lindblad, 2007, p. 11). Adoptions of foreign children to Sweden have occurred since the late 1950s. Each year about 800 individuals are adopted from abroad. Many of them come from countries such as China, India, South Korea and Colombia (http://mia.eu/).

Another reason for choosing this topic is of personal motivation. Earlier, one of us had done a project for orphans in Latvia, *Riga orphanage*, and that was where the interest was brought to life for wanting to adopt in the future.

1.2 **Aim and purpose**

The purpose of this study is that through a qualitative method examine and thus gain a deeper insight into how does the ethnic identity develop, and how the adult international adoptees have experienced or are experiencing their ethnic identity during this developmental process.
The overall aim is to investigate the creation process of their own ethnic identity in connection to social relations.

1.3 The research question and reflective questions

As the study shall observe the various factors of international adoptees when referring to their identity development, the research question is:

“In what ways is the international adoptees’ ethnic identity created and developed in the context of social relationships?”

Before going to the field, some questions were made, which might be that the ethnic identity development is following certain patterns or stages. In addition, among the external factors, parents are one of the most important elements. Regarding to international adoption, an impression was envisaged that in the Swedish society has held an open-minded attitude towards adoption. It is believed that, from a personal view, the international adoptees could have a sense of belonging with regard to their birth country and Sweden, to be exact, that their feelings of ethnic identity is a mixture.

1.4 Disposition

In the first section a brief introduction is given about international adoptees’ ethnic identity issues, the situation and existing problems were discussed. The research aim and question are raised and the goal is to discover the developmental process in relations to the social world. After that earlier research is discussed to lay a rich foundation for the study. In theoretical perspective part, Erikson’s theory of ego identity formation and Phinney’s ethnic identity development model are used together to give a clearer guide to the research. The process of design and conduct the research is described in the section of methodology. The results were presented and themes were analyzed two by two. And in final section, some reflective questions of the researches were made, and suggestions were given to further study.

1.5 Central concepts and definitions

Before continuing to proceed into the study it is by importance to define some central concepts, in order to maintain the clear pattern during the text of the study as well as regarding to what kind of definitions the context of the study is going to utilize.
1.5.1 Ethnic identity

The term *ethnicity* derives from the Greek “ethnos” which means people of their own place, nation or people (Lange & Westin, 1981, p. 245). It is sometimes viewed that ethnicity is primarily referred, because of the fact that international adoptees through their membership of Swedish families are to be considered as ethnic Swedes. For this study we choose as a consequence of determining that adoptees are ethnic Swedes and therefore not to use the concept of ethnicity other than when it is relate specifically to ethnic aspects of language, nationality and culture (Hübinette & Tigervall, 2008, p. 18).

Ethnic identity has been defined in different ways depending on the theoretical approach. According to a number of articles, ethnic identity can be defined as followed: “that part of an individual´s self – concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Phinney, 1990). The ethnic identity can be viewed from two aspects according to Lange & Westin (1981), as follows: *ethnic self-identification* and *external identification*. The first mentioned refers to the ethnicity of the adoptees that they identify themselves as. The external identification includes how others perceive the adoptee’s ethnicity. When these two aspects are unambiguous, the situation of the adoptee’s identity development is unproblematic. Nevertheless, if these two aspects are not interconnected, that is when it can become a problem. For instance, it can be when an international adoptee feels “Swedish” but is not being treated or perceived as a “Swedish” person, by others in the society (Carlberg & Nordin, 2007, p. 114).

1.5.2 International adoption

Different terms have been utilized in various scientific researches regarding to the issue of international adoption. For instance in American and English literature the term “transracial adoption” is widely used, which refers to the adoption of black children born within its own borders. However, it can also apply to children being adopted from other countries, as well. In European reports the term “intercountry adoption” is commonly found, and regarding the Nordic research it speaks frequently on “international adoption”, which this study’s introduction part has given a short definition about. In Sweden the term *ethnic identity* is widely utilized, which means that it include appearance, language and ethnic group affiliation (Irhammar, 1997, pp. 46-47).
Besides all this, as mentioned, there are other types of adoption that Irhammar (1997) addresses to, namely “visible” and “invisible” adoption. These types of adoption are quite simple to understand, namely, that visible adoption refers to when a child has another origin compared to the adoptive parents, while invisible refers to an adoption where the child is from the same country as adoptive parents (Irhammar, 1997, p. 17).

1.6 Connection to social work

According to the definition of IFSW (International Federation for Social Worker), international social work:

“...promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work…”
(http://www.ifsw.org/).

Scientific studies on severe psychiatric and social problems showed that it has gone well for the majority of international adoptees. However the risk of severe outcomes is higher in many areas of international adoptees, compared with those non-adopted. These areas include serious psychiatric and social problems and their way of adjustment. Other problems can be general social problems such as suicide, substance abuse, criminal acts, etc. (Lindblad, 2007, pp. 155-161, Lindblad, Hjern & Vinnerljung, 2007, p. 52-53). A Swedish registry study has also shown that there is a higher risk for adopted young people to be placed in institutional care, mainly due to severe behavioural problems. Worth mentioning is that these studies are however based on hospital admissions for psychiatric problems and suicide attempts (Carlberg, M. & Nordin Jareno, K. 2007, pp. 19, 21).

As international social workers, it is believed that “we should understand ethnicity as a social process, as the moving boundaries and identities which people, collectively and individually, draw around themselves in their social lives”. The social human relations are not regarded as a limited type, according to Fenton (1999), such as “ethnic” or “racial relations”. “They are social, economic and political relations which have an ethnic dimension, and this dimension is activated or concealed in a wide range of contexts (Fenton, 1999, p. 10). Other authors argue that ethnicity is as important as social class in social theory, since ethnic identity is a continually evolving social
process, therefore, to find a social belonging is necessary for understanding social behaviour (Romanucci-Ross, De Vos, & Tsuda, 2006, p. 2, 30). How are the adoptee’s experiences described and expressed by themselves and their surroundings, in accordance from their own perspective? What issues are high-lighted – what issues are not? As international social workers, it is of importance to see the significance of various factors, and in what ways these might affect their identity development. Such as the interaction with other people – adoptive parents, close friends and other influential factors.

If international adoptees are overrepresented in social problems such as addiction and criminal acts, there could be large chances for international social workers to work directly with these issues in certain authorities/agencies; however it would be beneficial to have basic knowledge about the subject before entering this unexplored area. Social workers can play an integral role in the area of these issues, especially when the social work profession refers to promote social change and problem solving in human relationships (see definition of IFSW). Family counselling is an important tool for their identity development, especially when family life has a big responsibility in order for international adoptees to become integrated into a new society, because family is one factor that may possibly influence the adoptee. Adolescent hood is particularly problematic for young adoptees of minority groups because of possible difficulties with what Erikson termed as “identity diffusion”, which this study shall give further details about, regarding the theoretical standpoint Romanucci-Ross, De Vos, & Tsuda, 2006, p. 20).

2. Earlier research

The ethnic identity has been emphasized as a crucial element of the adoptees’ self-concept, adjustment, and mental health (Baden & Wiley, 2007, p. 868). The issues around ethnic identity have been discussed from different angles by researchers, such as the ethnic identity formation process, the self-adjustment of ethnic identity, the family relations, etc (Selman, 2002; Huh & Reid, 2000, etc.). Since this study shall focus on the ethnic identity’s creation process and the social factors around, relevant studies about ethnic identity are chosen, not only the researches referring to Sweden but also those international studies. The themes are derived from earlier research and also by comparing it with the study’s empirical data.
2.1 The developmental stages of ethnic identity

“The ethnic identity formation is dynamic, changing over time and context” (Phinney, 1990, p. 502). The development process of ethnic identity has been widely recognized and discussed by many researchers, and accordingly, the ethnic identity was developed in the form of ‘stages’, (with the Eriksson’s theory as base). The Erikson’s classic theory of ego identity formation has been modified and applied to the context of ethnic identity development (ibid.). Even though not all research results fitted into the specific ages and stages that Eriksson have mentioned, these methods of categorization have benefited the researcher to efficiently identify this developmental process and factors influencing.

According to some research reports, the ethnic identity formation process start with the age of six, when children are getting more involved with social groups, students and classmates, in this context (Bernal, 1990), and different stages have different kind of features. Huh and Reid (2000) presented their research results and discussed that the formation process follows: 1) Recognizing and rejecting differences (age 4-6), during which stage the adoptees do not have a clear idea about what ethnicity is and what defines a country. Their recognition starts by identifying their difference of the appearance. 2) The beginning of ethnic identification (age 7-8). During this time the adoptees went to another group except for their family, they are merely ‘out of protection’ and can possibly become victims of bullying from other children. Certain external factors evoke certain altitude towards the ethnic identity. 3) Acceptance of difference versus ethnic dissonance (age 9-11), as the understanding of their ethnic identity, the adoptees grow an altitude of their birth country and culture, those who have more experience and knowledge of the ethnicity issue of their original country are more likely to grow a positive attitude towards their complicated ethnic identity while those who lack knowledge might feel upset about it. 4) Integrating the heritage and adoptive culture (age 12-14) the adoptees have a better understanding of their ethnic identity and can see it as a positive issue. Kim (1996) discussed that the “late adolescence and early adulthood” is a vital important stage for the ‘ethno-cultural identity formation’ (Kim, 1996, p. 147). The majority of the international adoptees, as they grow up, have developed a normal self-concept, the conflicts and the struggles are decreasing, most of them have identified themselves with the adoptive country’s culture, (such as Swedish or American) while they kept a thought of searching for their background, out of interest. Mostly, this kind of interest is not that strong (ibid. 1996).
2.2 Factors that influence the ethnic identity formation

Most of the relevant studies in the field have suggested that parents are the strongest influence on the development of children’s ethnic identity, such as, how do the parents perceive and express their opinion about children’s ethnic identity, if the parents have actively assisted children to familiarize with their original culture, etc. (for example, Carstens and Juliá, 2000; Huh and Reid, 2000; Scherman and Harre, 2010) According to researchers Feigelman and Silverman (1983) and Gross and Gross (1988), the adoptee’ perception of their ethnic identity usually coined with their adopted parents’ perception. When parents ignore or minimize the issues of ethnicity, the adoptees then have a major tendency to identify themselves with the adoptive country (often the ‘white culture’) more than their original one. Parents’ effort could be direct, such as talking or introducing the children to their original culture, having ethnic discussion within home; or indirect, such as invite friends/colleagues to talk to their children, take the children to ethnic groups’ activities like culture conferences, etc (Huh and Reid, 2000, p.76). According to the findings of the parents’ altitudes of helping the children to know their birth culture and ethnics, most of the parents are more or less encouraging the adoptive children to know their ethnic background. And also, those who are taking active part in these activities would have a tendency to form a mixed identity, like Swedish-Indian, or so (Feigelman and Silverman, 1983; Simon, et al, 2000). Except for the parents’ influence issue, the adoptees’ friends and schools could also influence their ethnic identity formation. Such kind of factors may even become a bigger role when children were going through their adolescent period, spending more time with friends instead of with parents (Huh and Reid, 2000, p.23).

Other important factors are also mentioned, such as, the ‘power’ of birth country/culture. According to Tajfel (1978), if one belongs to a low statues group then it might result in the individual low self regard and the refusal of certain kind of identity. For the international adoptees, if their birth country/culture are not that strong or even bear with negative remarks of the society, the adoptee prone to omit the ‘inferior ethnic identity’, and vice versa. Huh and Reid’s research about the Korean adoptees of America has indicated those adoptees that are proud of the Korean culture would more likely to describe their ethnic identity as ‘Korean-American’ (Huh and Reid, 2000, p.80). The religion could also be a very important issue if the adoptees are taking part in the religious practice especially for those white ethnic groups (Phinney, 1990, p.505).
2.3 The individual interest and altitude of the ethnic identity

Irhammar and Cederblad (2000) has conducted a research about the international adoptees’ interest in their ethnic origin and relevant issue of their ethnic identity formation, the research subjects are a group of youths from Asian and Latin America who are adopted and raised by Swedish families. The results have shown that almost 88% of the adoptees see themselves as Swedes rather than people from their biological country. They ‘simply feel this way’ because they thought themselves to be emerged in the Swedish context, and the ‘bondage’ between them and their original country are not too deep in order to change their perspectives of being a Swedish. Even though they consider themselves as Swedish, they are also interested in knowing more about their birth culture.

Other researches regarding this same topic have generated similar results, such as one research that focuses on the ethnic identity issue of Norwegian adoptees who are originally from Korea and Colombia (Brottveit, 1999). The results indicate that most of the objectives have expressed little interest with the birth culture and roots, at the same time they consider themselves as purely Norwegian. One study about the Canadian international adoptees (Westhues and Cohen, 1998) has also found out that nearly two-thirds of the participants were tending to choose the major trends of ethnic identity (the Canadian study), the researcher also found out that most of the participants were ‘comfortable’ or ‘very comfortable’ with their status of ethnic identity, did not feel it is hard or painful to cope with (ibid.1998).

Although numbers of earlier research from different countries have found out that most international adoptees are prone to identify their ethnic identity in the adoptive culture/environment, this does not equally suggest that the international adoptees take a refusal altitude towards their ethnic background. In fact, according to the researcher, the self-identification as the majority can co-exist with their interest and seek of the original ethnic background, the culture issue. The international adoptees still shows interest in their original country’s information, such as reading relevant books, watching Bollywood movies (Indian films), learning the language and visit (or plan to visit) the birth country (Westhues & Cohen, 1998; Irhammar & Cederblad, 2000).

3. Theoretical perspectives

As the earlier research has indicated, the ethnic identity is acknowledged as a constantly developing process, within which the individual may go through different
stages under the influence of different factors. For this study, in order to investigate and analyze the developmental patterns of ethnic identity as well as the vital important factors into the process, different theories that could give a clear guide is in need. The Erikson’s theory of ego identity formation was a classic work that interpreted the identity formation process that goes through the whole life span, which would offer a comparatively integrated idea about how the identity developed and the influential factors around it. Based on Erikson’s theory, Jean Phinney, a psychologist with particular interest in adolescent development and in ethnic identity formation has developed a framework of ethnic identity formation, which would be more relevant to this study.

3.1 Erikson’s theory of ego identity development

Erikson (1968) has defined the process of identity formation in a concise but rich way:

“...In psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all level of mental functioning by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them to types that have become relevant to him...”.

(Eriksson, 1968, p.22)

As stated above, Erikson’s psychosocial theory of development considers the external factors, such as the parents or society, to play important roles on personality development from childhood to adulthood. The individuals are constantly being stimulated by these external factors throughout the interactions. During this process, people internalize these feedbacks and program the experience within their mind. As Erikson has presented, ‘the former environments are forever in us’ (Erikson, 1968, p. 24). The accumulated experience then, affects people’s cognition and behaviors towards the external world. Through experiencing the external feedback and self-reflection, the individual grow the sense of self-concept, self-esteem, and also self-confusion. The feeling of having the personal identity is based on two simultaneous foundations: the perception of the developing self (the individuality) and the perception/awareness of the facts. During this process, the ‘significant others’ are of vital importance that could be different from different stage of lifespan and the social groups. The whole interaction and identity formation is a *mutual complementation* of ego synthesis and social organization (Erikson, 1968, p.53).
According to Erikson’s theory, every person must pass through eight interrelated stages over the entire life cycles, A key word is the ‘crisis’ during the stages, although it seems to be a negative word literally, according to Erikson (1968), the crisis is “a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth recovery and further differentiation” (Erikson, 1986, p.16). For this study, the Erikson’s theory has presented the developmental process of identity formation, which would offer a basic guideline to understand how does the individual internalize the external information and individualize them. In other words, how does the mutual complementation function; The concept of the “crisis” has inspired us to focus on the important events that have been most influential for the participants.

3.2 Phinney’s model of ethnic identity formation

It is well acknowledged that Erikson has given a quite broad and inclusive perspective of the identity development issue, while when it comes to the ethnic identity formation, a more focused view is in need. Several researchers such as Cross (1978), Kim (1981) have developed some specific models which offer more narrowed and focused scope on the ethnic issue. Based on Erikson’s and those researchers’ models, Phinney (1989) has proposed a three-stage progression of ethnic identity development which from our point of view would be suitable for the research. The stages are: unexamined ethnic identity; ethnic identity search; and achieved ethnic identity. And the details for each stage are as follows:

The first stage: unexamined ethnic identity, the individuals (the international adoptees) who are not exposed too much to the ethnic identity issues would have no clear idea of their ethnic identity. Two subtypes of status would emerge, one is the ‘diffusion’: individuals might simply not be interested in ethnic identity or they might not even notice if their ethnic identity are different from the majority of the society or not. Another is ‘foreclosure’: certain kind of preference might be guided by their closed person, such as the parents or friends; the individual might be quite open and easily absorbed the information that is given from the surroundings.

The second stage is the exploration of one’s own ethnic identity, when individuals are more into other social groups and are more aware of the ethnic issues. Some important events might occur during these stages that force the individuals to notice and think about his/her ethnic identity. Such as the bully experience regarding to the ethnic identity issue, the teasing of appearance, the skin colors, the discrimination
experience, etc. The individual might look out for sources that could offer information about their ethnic identity, such as reading books or take part in the culture events.

**The third stage,** the ethnic identity achievement or the internalization, is the stage where the individuals have gotten a deeper understanding and appreciation of their ethnicity, while the achievement does not necessary mean that one has already gotten a clear attitude towards the ethnic identity. In fact, the status of stage is changing from person to person; the individual’s feelings also vary from time to time. The last stage is more like ‘having a sense of confidence’ of the ethnic identity. And the search out process of ethnic identity does not necessarily stop (Phinney, 1989; Phinney, 1990). Similar to Erikson, Phinney took a further step on discussing the interaction between external factors, and she encouraged that the ecology idea should be borrowed to recognize the complex interaction of individual, context, and historical period (Phinney, 2004).

For this research which aims at investigating how their ethnic identity format while they are interacting with social factors. Erikson’s ego identity theory has laid a basis for the understanding of identity and identity formation. While on the other hand, Phinney’s identity developmental model would provide guidelines, specifically on the ethnic identity. These three stages could help us to locate the patterns that international adoptees might go through regarding to the development of ethnic identity.

One limitation of this model is that Phinney is focusing more on adolescence and the adulthood, and the first stage of this model, according to Phinney, is started from the early adolescence hood. While according to multiple researches of the international adoption issues, the childhood’s experience is also important on the ethnic identity and has also been included into the first stage of ethnic identity formation (Huh and Reid, 2000, p.80). The author Phinney has also admitted that it would be hard to draw distinct lines between the developmental stages. So in this research, the childhood experience of the interviewees were also asked and analyzed. The aim of applying the Phinney’s ethnic identity developmental model is to depict the ethnic identity and the relevant factors in a clear structure, but not be limited by it. As Phinney stated, even though she has described framework of ethnic identity in the form of three stages, she emphasized that “the approach is developmental over time with implied direction, not just stages” (Phinney, 2004, p.2).
4. Methodology

Methodology section begins with a brief description of our preliminary understanding, and after that comes a brief information about phenomenology and hermeneutic. The choice of methodology, selection, implementation and approaches are presented. In the end, validity, reliability and generalizability, and as well as statement of the ethical considerations that was made during the thesis period.

4.1 Preliminary understanding

Before the work took place, we considered our position as researchers about the subject, how the research process would evolve and what kind of factors that could influence the final product. At the first stage, all the knowledge was from the theories and earlier research. And some reflective questions were made. It was acknowledged that, as the subject is considered to be quite sensitive and while it concerns a person's ethnic identity and their adoption, it was therefore thought that we would have to be "extra" cautious and probably treat our interview subjects vigilantly.

4.2 Research design

One advantage of using an empirical study is that it would give direct information from the interviewees. Since the research aims at investigating the individual´s experience and feelings in regard to their ethnic identity formation, it would be beneficial to go to the field and ask questions personally instead of getting second-hand data from the literature study, which is why it was considered that a qualitative study would be more relevant for this study rather than choosing a literature study.

4.2.1 The researchers’ position

“Phenomenology is a term that points to an interest in understanding social phenomena from the actors’own perspectives and describing the world as experinced by the subjects, with the assumption that the important reality is what percieve it to be” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 26). This approach dedicated primarily to human experience but also has an interest in the social existence of basic conditions. Especially in how the social life is constructed by those involved in the phenomenon and the phenomenological ‘mission’ is to present experiences in a way that is faithful to the original. The advantages of applying this approach is that it scrapes over the social reality superficial aspects and is suitable for small-scale research projects.
(Denscombe, 2009, pp. 109-112, 120), which is a thesis at this level. As earlier mentioned, the aim is to understand the adoptee's own perspective and describe the world they live in and find out their opinions, attitudes and feelings about their ethnic identity; it was more suitable to take a phenomenological approach.

Among the disadvantages of phenomenology that were mentioned, one of the most particular ones is that it lacks scientific rigidity. The weight given to provide a detailed and accurate description of the events and experiences can also lead to accusations that the phenomenology does nothing but offer descriptions (ibid. 2009, p.121). However, this study cannot be considered merely offering descriptions, since the empirical analysis has been made and linked to previous research and consist of a theoretical framework. For example, the participants were asked about their experience and feelings of the social relations and social context, the impact of the external factors are aimed to be interpreted beyond the plain response. Therefore a hermeneutical approach focusing on deeper understanding of the text is also taken, especially when it comes to the data interpretation and analysis section (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 211). Following the hermeneutical circle, the data would be categorized into different themes and be analyzed ‘individually’, and the holistic analysis was based on the individual analysis of each part (ibid, 2009, p.51).

4.3 Mode of procedure

4.3.1 Choice of literature

The books and articles were chosen in order to get a deeper understanding of ethnic identity and international adoption issue, and various studies in the field of international adoption were made, based on a number of criterions. As a starting point, consultation with each other and the supervisor was made about the choice of different articles, dissertations and books. A number of different relevant databases were found from the school database. For instance Sociological abstracts, PsycINFO, Sage, Social services abstracts, were used extensively. In addition, the Internet searching engine, www.google.com, was also used not only for inspiration, but also helped with finding more articles (often through any of the databases). The search words were "international adoption" and "ethnic identity". In addition to all the above, references were also a big part of our course literature, where it felt important to include, given that it, more or less was required and also significant, as these books was about a great variety of research methods.
4.3.2 Selection of methods

A scientific study may be of a qualitative or quantitative approach, but also combined of these two approaches. While it is possible to incorporate qualitative research activity into a quantitative study and vice versa, however the approach one finally select, must be guided by one´s purpose for conducting the study in the first place (Grinnell, 2009, p. 86). The key is to choose the method that could suit the problem that this thesis is focusing on. (Trost, 2005, p. 13). In this study a qualitative method is used since it is truly consistent with the study´s purpose of understanding their ethnic identity and aims at studying a social phenomenon within its natural context (Grinnell, 2001, p. 109). As researchers it is important to comprehend the descriptions that are given through the interviews. The method is used, for example, when a researcher is interested to understand people's way of thinking or reacting (ibid, 2005, p. 14) but also in understanding the world, which this study shall, from people's point of view and develop meaning from their experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 179).

In this case, it has been the adoptees´ perspective that has set the focus, as well as their experiences and ways of reasoning about their ethnic identity. The interviewee has an opportunity to develop their ideas and explain their views, which is important for data collection that is based on sensitive issues (Denscombe 2009, p. 233).

It is important to bear in mind that quantitative approach provides the necessary numerical data, while the other approach, qualitative provides the human depth that allows for the researcher to get a richer understanding of the numbers in their particular context. For instance trying to understand how their ethnic identity shapes, with regard to the external and internal factors, such as school, work or community, while the second term refers to themselves, their own perceptions, thoughts and experiences. In order to get deeper into their life stories, regarding to their ethnic background, a qualitative interview seeks to create a deeper and more complete understanding of the phenomenon that a researcher is studying (Holme & Solvang, 1997, p. 92).

4.3.3 Sampling

The intention has been to examine international adoptees, those who are adults today, women and men with the age range of 20-30 years. The reason for choosing age range is that it may be that one person has a distance to his/her childhood and that it have, more or less, become more confident of their ethnic identity. Adults may also find it easier to fully answer the questions that have been of interest to the investigation.
They also had more time to reflect on their adoption with regard to their ethnic identity. In the selection of the interview participants the snowball sampling has been utilized.

In the beginning it was planned to do interviews with professionals but due to lack of time from their side, it was unfortunately not possible. Therefore it was decided to only focus from the adoptee’s perspective, but then another problem aroused. No one gave feedback to our cover letter which was published on the Internet. Acquaintances were asked whether they knew of any suitable person to interview within the area of the boundary made. The contacted were asked if they in turn could give suggestions for people who would consider participating in the study. Reflections on whether snowball sampling was appropriate or not and concerns over its negative aspects were, of course, brought up, especially as researchers, who wants to use the best possible approach. It was presumed to interview six people in total, which would consist of equal numbers, the existing gender division, that is, three men and women, but due to inaccessibility and lack of time, it was not possible. “Snowball sampling is particularly useful when members of a population are difficult to identify and locate”. The strategy of this type of sampling is to locate a few individuals in the population of interest and ask them to identify other people in the same group. These people, in turn, are asked to identify other participants, which happen during this study. The cycle continues until an adequate sample size has been achieved (Grinnell, 2001, p.221). The study collected in total five participants, whereas two where from South Korea, other two from India and one from Bolivia. The gender division consisted of three men and two women. “As for the snowball sample, it must be acknowledged that researchers also be aware of the fact that it has been left the decision to each individual to determine who is the appropriate person to interview” (May, 2001, p. 161).

4.3.4 Investigation process

For the collection of empirical data, semi-structured interviews and email interviewed were utilized, which would be discussed in the followings. “A semi-structured life world interview attempts to understand themes of the lived everyday world from the subject’s own perspectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 27)”. This type of interview form seeks to obtain descriptions of the participants, with regard to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena. This may help to clarify and develop the answers given, because the interviewer follows a guideline but is also able to track current paths in the interview that may stray from the guide when it seems appropriate.
Not all questions were designed and phrased ahead of time. Some of the follow-up questions were created during the interview which allowed both the researchers and the interview participant the flexibility to go into details when needed (Robson, 2002, pp. 270-271).

**Semi structured interviews**

As mentioned earlier, only three consisted of semi structured interviews. In the beginning, the study essentially had six participants, but due to personal reasons, it could no longer continue with the sixth participant. All participants were from the following countries: Bolivia (1), South Korea (2), and India (2). Subsequently, the interviews were booked in accordance to their preferences; by means let the participants choose where they feel comfortable and convenient. Therefore the interviews were made in a variety of places, in one of the participant’s home or in a private room at their work.

Each interview lasted at least, a minimum of one hour, and was tape recorded, on two devices, in case either of them would have low battery during the interview. It was permitted from each participant to have the interview recorded, as it was stated before that it would only be of educational purpose and afterwards all the interview material would be eliminated. At the same time, their rights as interview participants were brought up, that is to say, the aim of the research study and that their identity would undeniably be guaranteed.

The interview consisted of 20 questions in total, excluding the brief background questions. In the construction of questions it is common to use pilot study, a pretest, which refers to, before entering the field, the questions are tested (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 117), but however, this study did not contain any pilot study. Questions were carefully selected so that it would not, in any way, degrade their background, especially when they have chosen to participate in the study and speak about their lives and expose themselves, for certain persons whom they do not know well.

The whole interview process was distributed to one of us, who would lead the interview while the other would observe and write down any notes, if needed. Evidently it was allowed for the one who wrote the notes to also come with our own issues that surfaced during the interview. The reason we chose to do so, was because one of us was familiar with the interviewees, therefore out of ethical and personal causes, we felt it was suitable when writing a thesis on a professional level.
During the interviews, only open-ended questions were utilized, as this study seeks to understand the thick descriptions of each story and merely avoid answers like "Yes" and "No". The main job is to get the participant to talk freely and openly while to make sure you get the in-depth information on what you are researching (Robson, 2000). The interview form has been applied in a way, for example, to deepen the contents, further questions have compiled from the answers given. By having control over the questions, this could be guided by the so called follow-up questions, because the participant, who at times did not understand, hence, different formulations of a specific question were utilized, as repeating significant words of an answer and also sentences can lead to further elaboration (ibid.2000).

This type of interview method was used, mostly because it allows the participants to answer questions in their own terms (May, 2001, p. 151). The arrangement has been on the questions that changed over time and certain questions that were not destined to have come up during the interview. For example a question asked could lead to another question, depending on what the participants responded to the question raised.

Consideration was given to whether there was any question, when the participants did not wish to answer; in this case, they needed not to do it. There was never any such situation. Finally, it had been so that, before and after the interviews, some chat was done, something that may have done the situation more relaxing for both interviewers and participants.

Email interviews
Regarding the collection of five participants, whereas two of them were through email interview, the email subjects were first contacted and were informed about the objective of the study and that their participation would be valuable to the authors. They were also informed that their participation was confidential. All this was done by a missive letter, however, that these persons were, more or less familiar to one of us, the actual first contact was made two months before the thesis work process took place.

After the email participants had been contacted and given their approval to participate in the study, a time for the email interview was settled.

In connection with the interview questions were sent to all participants, it was recommended to follow the instructions, for example, that they would respond as fully as possible with very rich information and data, and express themselves emotionally; with sad or happy emoticons, when answering the questions, as it was not possible to do a face to face interview, this was certainly of high importance.
It was also declared that it would be good if they answered the questions at the same time as this may affect the reliability and validity, which could either benefit or disadvantage the study. Furthermore, it was asked if it was OK for them to reply in English. It justified our argument that the answers may be more credible when it is expressed in the relevant language, as the study would be written in English. They had one week to send the answers back, and it was also said that if they had any thoughts concerning the questions, they were welcome to get in touch with us.

After receiving their responses, the answers were checked. At times it was so that the answers were too poor in details. A number of responses were thereby sent back to the participants for completion, until it felt that the study received sufficient information.

The advantage for using an impersonal interview method (however Kvale & Brinkmann refer it as computer–assisted interviews) is that it is a relatively cheaper method compared with other methods (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 147). It is carried out via email which provides a high degree of anonymity for participants that in turn have time to think about their answers and/or consult other sources (Frankfort, Grinnell, 2001, p. 208?). One advantage which Kvale brings up is that the method is self-transcribing in the sense that the written text itself is the medium through which researcher and participants express themselves, in short, the text is thus ready for analysis the minute it has been typed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 149).

**Email interview vs. semi-structured interview – “special case”**

After the very first interview was completed, we thanked the participant for the interview, and when the participant mentioned that she really was better at expressing herself through writing, as this person is planning on to write an autobiography about her adoption. We pondered a bit and then asked if it was okay if the participant was able to set up for an email interview. The person agreed to this, and a few days later, the response was received, and afterwards, the interview materials were compared. The reason for taking this decision on different methods was because it was aimed to get as much rich data as possible. In addition, it was believed that she was actually better at expressing herself through writing, and this could possibly also strengthen the study.
4.4 Tools of analysis

In this qualitative research, three semi–structured interviews and the two email interviews were taken with same interview questions. And both of these process would be introduced here, to show the process of how the analysis “turns the data into findings” (Patton, 2004, p. 432).

One important thing that would be mentioned here first is that, in the research as well as the analysis part, the approach taken was the *deductive analysis*. That is, before going to the field, both of the authors have read a number of relevant earlier research and theories, made certain hypotheses and design interview questions accordingly, and have settled on the theoretical model that would be utilized to analyze the data. As Patton has suggested, the beginning of analysis might have already started before the researcher went to the fields (ibid. 2004, p. 453, pp. 436-437). After getting the sound track of data, the materials were transcribed word by word by both of the authors. The transcribing process was not only about the words but also about the emotional changes (like hesitation, sigh, laugh, etc) and the intonation of the interviewees in order to help understand the text deeper and ensure the interviewees’ perspectives were correctly understood. The notes taken during the interviews were also checked and compared with the material while transcribing. After finishing transcription of data, the data was read through by authors in order to get the initial understanding of the data (ibid. 2004, p. 441).

Since the interview questions were designed according to the existing framework, the process of categorization was more like putting the text under each themes that has already be settled other than the inductive way of generating themes and categories from the data. During the categorization process, the authors were also highlighting the key words and key sentences of each question in order to reduce the volume of raw information and identify the most significant patterns (ibid. 2004, p. 432). For the email interview materials, the interviewees gave precise and short response comparing to the face to face interviewees so most of the information in email interview material were saved. The themes followed Phinney’s framework of ethnic identity development which has described the process into three stages in an age sequence, two themes were chosen for each stages and there were six themes in total.
4.5 Reliability, validity and generalization

4.5.1 Reliability

*Reliability* is about the research result’s consistency and reliability. The issue is whether the result can be reproduced at other times and by other researchers but also if the participants are going to change their responses to different interviewers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 263).

As for reliability, one must observe it against its background of the unique situation prevailing at the time of the study. For example, in our study, a participant that was interviewed several times and being asked the same questions but gave different answers, it does not always indicate a sign of low reliability. As researchers it is believed that in some specific cases if a question manages to capture the uniqueness of a situation and that it is reflected by how the responses vary, it might be more important than receiving the same answer (Patel & Davidson, 2003, p. 103). Since the study is concerning from the adoptee’s perspective, that is, from their own individual life stories, it can be difficult to raise a discussion about reliability. By this, it is argued that the social human being is not static, because a person’s perception of the outside world and itself is dynamic, which would suggest that the answers given by them had been varied according to when in their life the questions were addressed, and moreover when a phenomenon like ethnic identity is taking different forms (Trost, 2005, p. 112). In order to increase the reliability, the interview questions were modified in such a way so that the study would get the richest description from each interview person. Regarding the email interviews, it was declared before the questions were sent to them, that they would write down as much as possible and also make different emoticons, if they felt happy or upset when writing down the answer. Regarding the semi structured interviews, one of the interviewees told afterwards that she was much better at expressing herself through writing. As researchers, it is important to get the most relevant answers, so for this reason, we asked the interviewee if she wanted to set up and write down their answers.

4.5.2 Validity

*Validity* is, according to Grinnell (2001) the research method’s goal. A social work researcher ought to seek to develop an accurate understanding of empirical reality, by conducting studies which shall lead to valid knowledge about the world (Grinnell, 2001, p. 35). Validity is the strength of the study’s conclusions; “a measuring instrument is valid when it does what it is intended to do” (ibid.). As for the validity of
qualitative interview data can be difficult to verify the credibility when there is no “absolute” way to verify what an interview person have spoke about, regarding their thoughts and feelings (Denscombe, 2009, p. 265). In the case of interview responses, an interviewee may avoid speaking the whole story, but the statement may still express the truth about the person's perception of himself (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, page. 270). However, there are some check-up that can help researchers to better trust the data that the interviewer has given. For example, in this study, as authors it was agreed on doing the transcription and analysis separately first, then exchange the materials, comparing and discussing with each other in order to identify the interpretation. Also, the chosen literatures and methods have been rethought and examined to ensure that the interview materials could answer the research questions and purpose. As well as the material during the work and interview period have been related to the purpose and research question of the study.

4.5.3 Generalizability

The question of a study's results is possible to generalize is always to the interview study and a challenge to interview research is that there are too few participants to be able to generalize the results (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 280). In this study, a total of five adult adoptees were interviewed, three of them via e-mail interview, which of course makes it difficult to draw conclusions and make generalizations about the entire group of internationally adopted. However, what emerges in the study may still be something that many adoptees feel again, when they share similar experiences, such as having an identity confusion, during teen age period or feeling insecure with their ethnic identity on different occasions. The fact that every person is unique does not prevent from sharing experiences with groups or individuals; in this case, it is referred to internationally adoptees.

4.6 Ethical considerations

“Ethical considerations must be taken into account for any research situation” Grinnell (2001). As this study’s research subjects were adult adoptees, due to the fact that they might accept that they are adopted and that they consequently are aware of what they want to share with us, during the interviews. By means there might be less chance of our role as social work researcher to violate the interview person’s integrity by the interview questions. All the participants were informed in writing, first by a cover letter through email, and the second time was before the interview took place, in case
they had forgotten the details about our study. It is of importance to reiterate the purpose of the study and assure that their anonymity will be guaranteed (Grinnell, 2001, p. 295). It was, in addition, of the cover letter stated that the material which was given through the interviews shall only be preceded by the authors of this study and not made available for anyone else. The processed material shall then be utilized strictly for the thesis.

As international social workers, it is very important to abide by clearly defined ethical principles in both their practice and research activities. According to Grinnell (2001) social workers must follow the guidelines where it state that the participants are fully informed, which the study´s participants were, and that they freely agreed to participate. All the participants were also found competent to consent, because all of them are adults and aware of their life situation. Adequate information was also given before the permission of participation was asked, and if they had any questions regarding the study, they were free to ask, or if any of them wished to skip the interview, since it was assured before that the participation was voluntary. It was repeated that their identity would be protected and that this study was only an educational purpose. Even thought it was felt that some of the interviews already “knew” their rights as participant, it was nevertheless explained to them, in order to make them understand the importance of being a volunteer participant (Grinnell, 2001, pp. 55-65).

4.7 Limitations

“Every study is judged on how well it fulfills its own purpose: and one of the purposes of a qualitative study is usually to understand the experiences of the research participants in depth, including experiences that are unique to them” (Frankfort-N. Chava & N. David. 2008, p. 430). Before the interviews were conducted, the participants were informed about that the interview would more likely be held in English. However it was asked before, what the participants preferred to use, and it was noticed that some of the participants preferred the interviews to be held in Swedish. Nevertheless due to the circumstances of that the thesis would be in English, therefore utilizing English during the interview would be more relevant, in that sense that the words would be given in their actual meanings, while translation might “eliminate” the importance of their unique life story. As Kvale & Brinkmann states “oral speech and written texts entail different language games and also different cultures (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 178).
It was planned to do five semi-structured interviews, but, two of the participants did not have time to take part in personal interviews. So, in total, there are five interviews whereas two of them were email interviews. The disadvantage by this type of interview is that it is quite hard to interpret what they were actually meaning, during the interviews; at the same time, the interviewers were not in the leading positions where a face to face interview might achieve. The disadvantages of this type of interview are that the questions require being simple and easily understood. As researcher it cannot be controlled of who is actually filling out the interview questions and the response rates are low (Grinnell, 2001, p. 208).

In the preparation process, it was planned to do interviews with some professionals such as psychotherapist and social worker. Unfortunately, there were no responses from their side, which made this thesis lack some important and relevant information. If this study would have gotten the possibility to do the interviews, it might enhance the strength of our chosen subject and its central focus.

It was observed that during the interviews, some questions were more or less “ignored” in an indirect way, for instance some of the participants would talk about something else and avoid the articulated question. The follow-up questions were utilized in order to get the richest data, and repetitive questions were raised, due to the fact that some of the participants could not understand the question. Due to the time and economic problems, it was only five interviews established.

5. Results and analysis

As we stated before, there are 5 interviewees in total asked to take part into the semi-structured interviews and the email interviews. One of them took both the semi-structured and the email interview, two of the rest performed only the face-to-face interviews and the other two took only the email interview. Before the results part is presented, it is a necessity to give some brief introductions of the interviewees’ background first. And in order to guarantee the confidentiality the names of the participants are replaced with simple letters by time sequences of the interviews.

**Participant A:** is a female, who was adopted from South Korea at the age of 4 months, her current occupation is student. Her father is a priest and the mother works with children.
Participant B: is a male, who was adopted from India at the age of 10 months, he is a student who is aiming to become a priest. His mother is a nurse and the father is a chef in the hospital.

Participant C: is a male, who was adopted from Bolivia at the age of 1 year old, he is a full-time worker in a fast food restaurant. Both of the parents are teachers in university.

Participant D: is a female, who was adopted from India at the age of 8 months, her current occupation is student. And her parents are senior citizens.

Participant E: is a male, who was adopted from South Korea at the age of 5, his current occupation is designer. His father is a farmer and the mother is a nurse.

In order to clearly present the results, six themes were chosen according to Phinney’s model of identity development for the convenience of the following analysis and discussion. Each two themes fitted into one single stage of Phinney’s model, and after presenting each two themes, one analysis followed.

5.1 Presentations of results and analysis

![Framework of results and analysis]

**Theme 1: Factors that influence the creation of ethnic identity**

At the initial stage of the international adoptees’ ethnic identity formation, one of the most important influential factors that were mentioned by all the participants is the parents. The parents were playing the most important roles as the introducers of the ethnic identity issue. The parents’ attitude could also influence the children’s perspectives towards the ethnic identity issue. According to the participants, the parents, especially the mothers, were more or less encouraging the children to take
part into some cultural activities such as the ethnic group conference, and that were the initial occasions that the international adoptees started to meet the people from their birth country cultural. But different parents encourage them to different extent. For example, B was taken to some immigrants families which shared different cultures than the Caucasian Swedish families. C’s parents, especially the mother, have been encouraging him on a quite active level to study the dance and the language of the biological country. Both B and C, as later on will be discussed, has developed a clear and positive attitude towards their ethnic identity issue. While the participant A, who is a shy girl from personality was not encouraged and her parents are not enthusiastic about this ethnic issue. During the daily life there were also encouragement and introduction of the ethnic issues, such as when they were watching TV and the parents would stop on the channel which has related program. It is after the parents’ behavior that the adoptee starts to do research about their ethnic identity by themselves (A).

Regarding to the issues of friends and teachers, the data indicated that the friends are not playing an important role as much as the parents did. The issues of ethnic identity are not so frequently mentioned among the participants and friends. Like the participant A has said, “I think that they see me as who I am”. But participant B has mentioned that even though he did not have any negative experiences, the children could at times be evil and hurtful, “When you are little you cannot really know things” (B’s words). None of the participants have said anything negative about the teachers. The teacher did not judge or be any extent of racism according to the adoptees.

When asked about if there are any societal factors such as the discrimination, the participants claimed that they have not suffered from the discrimination, while when they were asked if they had any kind of experience of being treated differently, they admitted that they actually have certain negative experiences, such as participant A found it hard to look for a job, B and C have similar experienced to be language assaulted during their teenage period by drunk Swedish strangers. But they did not take that as a real discrimination, because they did not feel that discriminated. From participant D’s point of view, she has experienced a quite good childhood, where her family and friends have given her love and understanding for her background. She further states that: “I had a wonderful childhood when I was a kid. I was loved, taking care of; I felt very secure. I have a great relationship with my parents; my mom is my best friend”. Her closest friends were as well, adopted as her, and she declared that her non-adopted friends accepted her background and never had any issues regarding that. That she had received a social acceptance may also have influenced her way of viewing her ethnic identity since she has gotten decent experiences during her life.
According to participant E, he felt that his neighbourhood influenced his ethnic identity. “Where I was raised, I think that’s probably one of the most important aspects. I was living in a small village, small school with two more adopted children in the same class as me from the first grade”. But for him, it was not a big of a deal, as the other children were raised by Swedish values.

**Theme 2: Recognition of ethnic identity**

One of the participants replied that they did not feel so much different from other Swedish children, while some participants (B) stated that they felt different when they were younger. If there were any differences, it was only due to dissimilar appearance, and the different appearance seemed not to be that disturbing. Like the participant C has stated, “I may look different, but I didn’t feel different”.

The issue of adoption was told by their parents when they were quite young, while most of them did not get much idea of what adoption is, and what the background of their ethnic identity. Both A and B stated that they did not have a specific time, regarding the disclosure of when they first found out about their adoption. As participant A stated: “...Hmm...I don’t know, like, it’s been there forever. I don’t know the age”. Participant C was told about the truth of adoption when he was at the age of seven when he started to go to school. But even though they got the idea of adoption and some differences, their ethnic identity have not been given so many thoughts when they were facing the childhood period. Like C stated about the biological country: “It is like the other side of the planet. When you are seven years old, it is far away. Like Stockholm is far away. Then you go to the other side of the world, you can’t even grasp for that. But, wow it is really so far away”. Participant D did not think so much about her ethnic identity like the society expects her to do, just because she is adopted. She does not perceive that she know what her ethnic identity is, than what she already knows, “My thoughts is that I am born in India but I grew up in Sweden, I was just a baby when I came to Sweden so of course I am mostly Swedish. I don’t have so much thoughts about my ethnic identity, it doesn’t define me as a person”. D might feel that her life situation is not surrounded by her ethnic background, that she must define and recognize it in harder ways when people ask her questions concerning her background. She further means that her Swedish environment made her the person she is today. However participant E could not quite explain about the recognition of his ethnic identity, as he states: “Yes and no, I felt Swedish but saw something else in the mirror. That is the best way I can explain it”. E
further declares that he had a tough time when he was younger, and that could have influenced him in a negative way, of seeing his ethnic identity.

**Empiricism analysis for theme 1 & 2** – According to Phinney’s ethnic development model, the first stage of ethnic identity formation is in an unexamined phase, which could be observed in the results part, that some of the participants cannot have a clear idea of their ethnic identity, they have not such a clear idea of what is different except for their different appearance, as it was stated by one participant that “I may look different but I didn’t feel different”. Some of them simply “followed” other people’s perception regarding to this issue, by means to people around them, such as family members and friends. If the information about their ethnic background is not accessible or not shared so much, the ethnic identity may not be an interesting area for them to seek into, the situation could be that their parents are not encouraging them to search about their ethnic background or certain topic were rarely mentioned. That could, to some extent, lead to the confusion or refusal of the adoptees, they might also get lost, when they are trying to recognise their ethnic identity during the initial stage.

**Theme 3: Identity conflicts**
When they grew up and developed further knowledge of the ethnic issue and their adoptive backgrounds, the participants have agreed on that there are some problems with their ethnic identity, but the problems are because of different reasons. Some participants thought that the ethnic identity problem is a big issue during that time, especially with their different appearances but feeling like a Swedish, just as B has declared, “…Your look is like the minority of the society but you don’t identify yourself with them, you identify yourself as the ‘not look like’ group from the white majority, they have my culture, my set of thinking, my history”, while some participants thought that it was normal to have certain kind of feeling during the adolescent hood, because that period is such a special stage that may consist of other problems, and (ethnic) identity conflicts is merely one of them. Like C stated, “I guess everyone question themselves…I only question myself a little”. Participant D thought that it was sometimes very irritating when random people would try to speak Hindi with her, just because her appearance revealed that she looked Indian. She claims that she never had any identity conflicts, because she was surrounded by loving people, but sometimes the thought would hit her, when people in general believe that all adoptees feel and think the same, “Yeah sometimes…People have assumptions about how it feels to be
adopted but we are not a group we are actually individuals with different experiences”.

When a certain question about discriminatory behavior was raised, D responded as following: “I remember one time when I talked with a girl about adoption and she said that it was not good to be adopted and she was going on and said a lot of stuff that I thought it was not true, I was so angry with her because how could she talk about it in that way without knowing how it felt?? I had a friend in my class when I was little who said that my parents was not my real parents, and I got really hurt but had friends who defended me. It’s hard to realize that there are people out there who doesn’t think my parents are not my real parents”. It can clearly be viewed that D had issues in relation to the social world, by this it is stated that even though she might be sure about her background, the social environment might not, as it had own view of her ethnic background, which can also be referred as prejudices and attitude towards adopted people as a group, rather than an individual. Even in E’s case, one can see a clear pattern indicating that his surroundings had prejudices and attitudes towards adoptees, “Yes, people tend to be simpleminded, put everyone in predefined stereotypes. So, for sure, it has been conflicts, both good and bad, but simply because people make presumptions. Say like a muscle builder, people tend to think they don’t have a brain. Same goes with Asians, people tend to think they are smart, are short etc”.

Theme 4: Individual interest of searching their ethnic identity

All the participants show that they are willing to search for the ethnic identity origins; they were interested of their birth culture but not that much. Participant C started to find for his family at the age of 17, and when it comes to the interest of Bolivian’s culture, he said that the reason drove him to go back to Bolivia is: “For the fact that everyone will look basically like me. That is the only reason I actually go there. But, that the bond is not that strong”. Participant B said: “It’s not like that I’m dying to get information, but just like, it would be a fun, I would learn something, go there and I would like to visit there.” The searching process of biological parents is not important from their perspective. Participant A raised an example about the interest, “I talk about it, when they are asking me”. Participant D said that she had always been interesting in India and the history of it, but not over interested, this might only be that she is curious but not in that sense that she feels that it is her duty to love her biological country, just because she is in a position of doing so. Although her interest
level is solid, she presents herself as both Indian and Swedish. This may be the case that if she was in reality presenting herself as such, this may suggest that she actually wants people to see her like she does, and that people in the later stage may be interested in knowing more about her background. In E’s case, he does not really have so much of an interest of knowing more about his background. He states: “Not really, nothing more than I enjoy Korean food. I have never tried with any events or something like that to explore my background”. However he explains that even if he is interested in visiting his home country and biological parents, it would not be possible. By stating this, he further means: “If I had the possibility I would consider it, but as the circumstances are they can’t be found. I was found alone on a park bench with just a note with my age (no birth date) and name, and with one of the most common surnames in a city with 3 millions it’s impossible”.

Empiricism analysis for theme 3 & 4 – During the stage of exploration of their ethnic identity, the participants began to interact with the social world and get to know more perspectives of others regarding to the ethnic identity issues. And as it could be seen from the results, the situation of discrimination and prejudices exist, which would speed up the process of ethnic identity formation by compelling the participants to rethink and internalize the feedback (for example, the discrimination against them). It was acknowledged that the way they were treated may have made them feel insecure and confused about their ethnic background. Differences and conflicts between their own perceptions of their ethnic identity with the society’s perception might be the barriers to come across. Also, the self-questioning is constantly happening during this stage, such as two participants described their feeling of difference when looking into the mirror--being inner Swedish without having a Swedish appearance.

For the exploration stage, most of them were more or less searching for sources of their ethnic background. While this process is not always filled with interest and enthusiastic, the process varies from person to person. As the self-recognition of the ethnic identity became clearer and clearer, the urge of exploration is no longer due to the difference and the conflicts, but the clearer recognition they have by the ethnic identity, the easier it might be to choose whether to know more about their ethnic background.
Theme 5: Coping with their ethnic identity

What is interesting is that the international adoptees, facing the pressure (if there are any) they choose special ways to express it. Such as participant A, choose to write down her thoughts, and express her feelings of ethnic identity by writing an autobiography and C chose to recognize his ethnic identity from a religious perspective. He is Christian and sees the world from a very broad perspective towards the ethnic issue, “before I became Christian, I am Swedish and I fight for it, but when I met Jesus Christ, my life has just gotten a new perspective, and I saw the world in a new perspective, when I see the immigrants, I no longer see them as a threat, they are just my fellow citizen people, even if they are from different religions, I see them as brothers and sisters.” Participant D consider herself to be both Indian and Swedish, and she gives the information of having foreign boyfriends. She only thinks it is a coincidence that she has only had non-Swedish boyfriends. She explains that she was able to start with a coping strategy in high school, “I don’t remember actually but finish high school was great....I could look more into myself...So much things happened in my life after high school”. It could be that she felt more secure and mature to understand what her life was really about, and that her ethnic background was just a part of it, rather than a central part of her life. Concerning participant E, he feels that as he is raised by Swedish values and culture, he feels like a pure Swedish. His specific thought is as following: “I was born in Korea and raised in Sweden. So I feel Swedish, and enjoy meatballs!” It might be that the only thing that reminds him of his ethnic background is his appearance, otherwise he feels only Swedish, in heart.

Theme 6: Attitude towards their ethnic identity

When being asked about what kind of ethnic identity they thought they have now, the participants have different attitudes towards their own ethnic identity. Most of them have given a quite concrete and certain response towards the ethnic identity - both B, C and regard themselves as purely Swedish, instead of their birth countries or the combination (e.g. Swedish-Indian), when they interact with other. Participants B and C have given the answers without any hesitations. B stated that even if he goes for a visit to India: “I would feel more Swedish, I don’t eat like them and I don’t think like them. If I go to India, people would think that I’m different, that I’m 99% Swedish”.

On the other hand, participant A has expressed her feelings of confusion and the hardness of identifying herself as a person, “sometimes I feel like I am no one, you know, I am either Swedish or Korean. I am no one. Yes, I am both but still nothing”.
What is remarkable is the difference from other participants, because participant A showed that she enjoyed being with Asian people, as she stated: “I kind of felt like them, one of them. I haven’t felt like that before, because when I grew up, there were not many Asian people”.

And feelings of ethnic identity are also relevant with different situation. Participant B and C were quite certain with identifying their ethnic identity as Swedish, and if one put them back into their biological country, or the group that have the similar appearance (such as immigrants), “I will feel more Swedish” (B’s statement). While participant A thought that her identity is changeable and mixed, when she goes to school with other Swedish students, she felt Swedish, whereas sometimes when she felt alone or with Asian people, she felt confused and lost. Participant D mention her as being both Indian and Swedish, so it might be that it is a case of 50-50%. Participant E feels that he is a Swedish person but only walking with a South Korean face and body, but his soul is of a Swedish origin.

**Empiricism analysis for theme 5 & 6** – After the adoptees have gotten deeper understanding of their ethnic identity in the context of social relationships, the stage of achievement is possibly gained, but not so clear for everyone. The patterns could be observed in the results that even though the participants shared the same background as international adoptees, they figured out different ways of accepting and internalizing their ethnic identity. It is worth mentioning that their feelings and attitudes towards ethnic identity are based upon the personal perceptions, others cannot say what the stage of achievement is, but merely describe the stage as having a sense of confidence and certainty.

**5.2 Holistic analysis**

As it has been stated before, the deductive method of analysis is applied, and the themes have been designed before the analysis started instead of the inductive way of finding the themes after going through the data. After the results were categorized, Phinney’s model of three stages can be identified and applied to analyze the results as it has been discussed above. From the unexamined state in childhood and earlier adolescent hood, the identity exploration in later adolescent hood, and the identity achievement in the later on life (adulthood).
Generally for the results, the international adoptees’ ethnic identity development process is following the stages framework, and different stages’ features matched the experience that were shared by the participants as it has been analyzed above. While some problems also occurred, that the time sphere were not that clear for the participants. According to Phinney (1989), this might be due to the reason that, firstly, the individuals cannot identify his/her development of ethnic identity in a clear way; secondly, the individual experiences are different and not everyone could come across the ‘important events’ or acknowledged them in the ways as Erikson has described.

While regarding to the external factors and its influences, as it has been discussed by Erikson (1968) about how the internalization works. The participants were first consistently “programming” the information from their past experiences, and then internalizing and expressing it. This process is not only one-way but also mutually complementary. As one can see from the results, the participants’ perspectives towards ethnic identity can be that they accept the influences from the Swedish culture, or to some extent, from the people around them who “carry” the Swedish culture.

According to the internal factors, their individual perception of the ethnic identity may sometimes collide against the social world’s perception, by this, it is implied that their surroundings might question their background even though the adoptees have built their internal perception of ethnic issues. One of the internal factors could be the religion, as one of our participants has indicated, that it could be a way of coping to these collisions from the inner social world.

6. Discussion

6.1 Brief summary of the results

The purpose of this study was to examine how international adoptees perceive their "ethnic identity" in the context of social relationships. By interviewing the adoptees, they have shared their own stories about the issue, from childhood, adolescent hood and present period. The results highlight that the adoptee's perception of their own "ethnic identity" was developing in a sequent turns, and such kind of development was based on different contexts such as their personal beliefs, identity in relation to family
and friends, identity in relation to others, and identity in relation to the internal and external search of the origin.

The results showed that there was a variation in how participants perceived their national membership. The majority of our participants perceived themselves to be Swedish. But factors such as visits to their birth country could be a turning point in strengthen their view of the ethnic identity. Also, the personal opinion of "ethnic identity" is changing in time and changing in the personal life course. Regarding the perception of their appearance, it was only one participant who had understood the appearance as problematic and something that they wanted to control during their upbringing. Their life stories show that there was a strong link between the self-perception of the participant and social interaction with the environment.

On rare occasions, it was noted that some of them responded very uncertain on a number of the questions. This was however adjusted in the sense that we repeatedly asked if they could develop their answers and justify their arguments on why they felt in a certain way about their ethnic identity, with regard to different factors.

Even if this had been approved before, the participants were surveyed again during the interview if it was OK, that the interview was recorded. As mentioned earlier, this study is based from a phenomenological approach and at such research; the data collection tends to be dependent on the tape recorded interviews (Denscombe, 2009, p. 117).

The experience of interview situations is that there have been no problems with the participants, it has been perceived as quite good. No one has found it difficult to discuss the subject raised or to respond to the questions asked. At times it has been necessary to “motivate” the interviewees, and sometimes the questions had to be explained, which was done by utilizing follow-up questions and inspire them, by raising different formulations of a question.

Reflections on advantages and disadvantages have been considered and that it may have, to some extent, influenced the research. The advantage is that participants can possibly find that it feels easier to open up and tell things to someone they know. However, this can also be negative; they may feel that it is uncomfortable to discuss the subject and some sensitive parts, for someone they know, than what it had been with a person who had been a stranger to them. It could make them `hide` the information that they otherwise would have been if they had known it was a person they would meet again. It is not possible to see that the study have received neither more nor less of the participants who were familiar than the ones we did not know. Nor has it been through the interviews, where the participant had known who we are,
that it was richer than the others. This might be due to the fact that we do not know the participants well.

The biggest disadvantage of e-mail interview must be that as researchers you cannot read the body language of the email subjects and observe how the interviewee responds to a certain question, as a physical presence provides access to non-linguistic information as gestures and facial expressions (ibid. 2009, p.165).

Regarding to the developmental issue, even though the age and year distinction is not that clear, it has been investigated that the ethnic identity formation process can be viewed in the form of the stages. And the different external factors are strongly correlated to the formation during the different spheres. Some of the participants claimed to have gotten a cogent understanding of their ethnic identity, and they were satisfied about who they were. This developmental stage is nonetheless, a never ending project.

6.2 Comparison with earlier research

Compared to the earlier research, some similarities as well as differences were found and are presented here separately.

Similarities: one of the similarities is, as the earlier researches have indicated that, the ethnic identity is changing over time sphere, with most of whose sphere start at the age of 6 after going to school (Huh and Rein, 2000). And the adolescence and early adulthood period is very important as Kim (1996) has described, during which period the self-definition is growing, both physical and mental states were becoming more mature, and they had developed a way to face and understand their identity. When it comes to the influential factors, as it has been discussed in most early researches and as it has been hypothesized, parents are the most important, regard to issues of ethnic identity formation. The parents’ actively encouragement would benefit adoptees to “remove the vein” of their ethnic identity and start to learn instead of staying in confusion (Feigelman and Silverman, 1983). And different age stages have different influential issues, that might be relevant to what kind of social groups and experiences the individual would have, such as the neighbors, the school, friends, the religion, etc.

When it comes to the self recognition of ethnic issue, most of the international adoptees identified themselves as a Swedish, or in another word, see themselves belong to the “major culture”, as most of the earlier researches indicated, they chose purely Swedish as their main country and cultural background instead of a mixture,
nor changeable for different situations (Irhammar and Cederblad, 2000). The country’s influence can also be a factor as it was discussed the earlier research and was also found in this study. During this research the feeling proud’ as a Swedish can be identified to some extent and the attitude towards their origin country varies from countries to countries. For one participant who found Indian culture interesting, enjoyed the movies, music and food, while another participant has showed the concern that he was not willing to get to know the country (Bolivia) because the culture is not particularly obvious, and it is hard for him to identify or admire (Tajfel, 1978). Also, as it has been discussed in the earlier research, the attitude of regarding oneself as a Swedish did not equally mean that they are supposed to have a resistant attitude to the birth country’s culture. These two issues are not contradictory. The participants show that they have certain positive attitudes towards their birth ethnic background to some extent, they would do some activities like reading relevant books, listening to music or at least grasp information from their birth country (Westhues & Cohen, 1998; Irhammar & Cederblad, 2000).

Differences: The authors Huh and Rein (2000) have done a deep research among 40 Korean children and their parents during a period of one year. It has offered a clear age pattern about the ethnic identity formation. Concerning the different feelings of ethnic identity, the age gap was two years at a time, for instance the children of 4-6 years, has different feelings compare to those who were 7-8 years old. While the results we got were not as detailed and clear as that research did, even though it fit into the theoretical framework that was chosen for our study. Another difference was about the parents’ influence. Although in our research, it can be observed that the active introductions from the parents would help the children to face the ethnic issues, it does not equally indicate, as in some earlier researches did, that the ignorance attitude of the parents would be an obstacle for the further recognition of the ethnic (different from the opinion of Gross and Gross, 1999). After a short period of “following the idea of parents”, the individuals’ opinions about the ethnic identity were more independent from parents no matter what kind of attitudes parents hold (Huh and Reid, 2000).

6.3 Questions and the comparison to the results

In our research the deductive approach has been chosen to investigate the problem, so before we got into the field the earlier researches and theories were read and selected. Accordingly, certain questions have been made. Some of our questions have been
proved by the results. Such as, the results have indicated that the ethnic identity formation process is a dynamic process with external factors. And parents, as it was assumed before, have played an important role in the creation and development of ethnic identity. Regarding to the questions of the Swedish society’s attitude, hasty generalisation could not be made towards the whole society. Whilst as the results showed, the Swedish families seemed to be open-minded, warm and encouraging. In the reflective questions, it is assumed that the international adoptee might have a mixture of ethnic identity with Sweden and their origin country, while the fact is most of the participants responded that they felt pure Swedish.

In this study, the age of the participants were from 20-30 years old, which means that even though they remembered the issue from the childhood and adolescent hood, the memory could be vague and the exact situation and age might not be recalled during the interview. At the same time, as we see from many research towards the adoptees’ issue (for example, the Huh and Reid’s research, 2000), one can find, that the parents are interviewed as a ‘cross check’, because they might remember better about the early life story of the adoptees. In order to investigate the whole process of ethnic identity formation, it might be a good idea that we could have chosen from different age group, for instance, ask adoptees under the age of 12 about their childhood experience, and ask the teenagers about their feelings of the ethnic identity, etc. And it might also be a good idea to interview the parents and the professional social workers to share their experience of living or staying with the international adoptees, which could be a double check. It might further validate our research. Due to lack of time and resources, only semi-structured and email interviews have been conducted. During the interviews it is observed that the participants might not reveal their experiences. It is hoped that rich, deep data and real personal experiences could be generated from the interview.

6.4 Alternative interpretations of the results

Applying other theories: the Bronfenbrenner’s social ecology theory was actually considered as consultation with the supervisor, while if this theory is applied, it would be more relevant to ask the questions from other levels, such as the on macro level-society’s attitude; meso level, - such as the working place and school; micro level-the individual interest. The interpretation of the results might be more focused on the interactions, not only between the individual and other factors, but also between different levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Another theory might be the empowerment
theory which refers to strengthen the individuals and groups, from this theoretical lens, the international adoptees could be seen as a misunderstood group, such as they were faced with discrimination, and the critic against their ethnic identity from the outer social world. As a way to prevent this issue and encourage the international adoptees to identify their ethnic background in a comprehensive way, the empowerment theory could be applied (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

When it comes to the methodology part, the quantitative study with its positivism standpoint could have been used. Then surveys or questionnaires would be designed to ask, for instance, how many times has the feeling of disappointment of ethnic identity occurred? While in a qualitative study, the question would merely be, “In what ways did you feel disappointed, regard to your ethnic identity”? Thus by applying the quantitative method, the results would differ.

6.5 Suggestions for future research

In this study, the international adoptees’ ethnic identity was examined in the context of social relationships. The central point was from their perspective. And according to our results, whether the ethnic identity development is really following certain age stages, has been vague. Therefore the suggestions could be that further researches which contain large number of sample or long-term research period to be conducted to explore this undefined area. Regarding to the ethnic identity issues, a comparative research which examine the similarities and difference between the immigrants group and the international adoptees, for example, how the society distinguish these two groups. Another possible area of the research area is, as for adoption, whether the international adoption can be a good type for the children, especially when it comes to the adjustment issues under the different ethnic situation. If the international adoption could be a good way to help the children, then what kinds of measurements are in need? Moreover, some topic concerning the detailed issues like family could be researched. For instance, if the adoptees’ ethnic background could influence their future choice of starting a family, would they consider adopting or would they want to have biological children? What reasons are lying behind their decision-making? This could be a relevant area to explore especially under the case that the Sweden is one of the biggest countries to receive international adoptees, and the concept of family may change in the following years (Lindblad, 2004).
References

Books and articles:


Website:

Appendix

Interview guide

Background questions:
- Gender
- Age
- Adoption country
- Age at adoption
- Adoptive parents’ age and occupation
- Their own occupation

Interest of the identity:
1. Have you explored or are you exploring your ethnic identity? To what extent (take part in the cultural event, watch relevant TV program, know the history and information about the biological country)
2. Do you have any interest in knowing your biological parents, wish to meet them or have you already met them?
3. Have you questioned yourself, regarding your adoption?
4. Do you find that there are some conflicts between your own perceptions of the ethnic identity in relationship to the social world? (If there are no conflicts, have you experience some positive experience?)

Developmental stages and the influential factors:

Early childhood (unexamined ethnic identity/pre-encounter)
5. When did you begin to feel different from other Swedish children?
6. Have you ever wondered your difference compared to your adoptive parents?
   When and how did you understand that you were adopted? Who told you about your biological background? What thoughts did you have at that certain point?
   How did you cope with this (your feelings of facing the truth about yourself)?
7. How would you describe your relationship with your family, parents and relatives, if any, siblings? During your childhood? Today?
8. Did your adoptive family encourage you to know more about your background/culture, such as attending different events, activities (meeting people from different relations, e.g. the association of a specific country)?
Later childhood and early adolescence (ethnic identity search/immersion)

9. Do you think you have a good relationship with your friends regarding to your ethnic background?

10. Have you experienced that you have been bullied because of your background? In your school/colleague, (kindergarten, elementary school, secondary school, high school, university)

11. Relationship with others - being teased by your appearance? Prone to have friends sharing the similarities?

12. Did your teachers treat you differently as a student regarding your ethnic background?

13. Do you find it difficult to recognize your ethnic identity? Is there any conflicts?

Later adolescence and early adulthood (the identity achieved state clear, confident sense of own ethnic identity…they are on their way):

14. What do you consider yourself to be now? Swedish, non-Swedish, or changeable depending on the situation? Why do you feel that? (Describe in details, please).

15. What are your feelings when you talk about the ethnic identity nowadays?

16. How do you interact with other ethnic groups, such as immigrants (in your age)?

17. Do you think the society has portrayed the word 'ethnic identity' in a negative way?

18. Have you felt that you have been exposed to discriminatory behavior from others? Positive and/or negative? How did you experience this? In what ways did you cope with it?

19. Do you feel that there are other factors which we have not brought up that influence your ethnic identity?

20. A timeline about the development of the ethnic identity, put yourself in the line from whereas the left means that you are not yet familiar with your identity, and middle means that you are on your way of knowing it, and last, to the right which means that you know where your identity is, (after the interviewees have located their identity) Could you tell us about the most important events during this development process?