

**THE DISAPPEARED CHILDREN OF
EL SALVADOR'S CIVIL WAR:
THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY AND TRUTH**

Honors Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the adopted children of El Salvador, who were taken from their parents at a young age and adopted by parents in the United States. This was due to a civil war that happened in El Salvador during the 1970's. It searches for an understanding of the different psychological effects that these children could have suffered through an examination of identity formation, acculturation, attachment theory, and social learning theory. The book "How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents" is used in this thesis to compare how the Garcia girls and the adopted children from El Salvador both went through similar situations while adapting to their new environments.

The disappeared Children of El Salvador's Civil War:

The Search for Identity and Truth

During the 1970s and 1980s El Salvador was going through some horrific times. The people of El Salvador were all fighting for reform and a civil war broke out. During the war El Salvadoran government forces were taking action against those fighting for reform. Some of those actions included mass killings where many Salvadorans were slaughtered as well as kidnapped. (McAndrews, pg10) In my research I want to focus on the kidnappings of those children who were brutally taken away from their families. In El Salvador there is an association by the name of "Pro-Busqueda" (Search for the missing children) this organization helps families in El Salvador find their missing children who are located all over the world.(Teiner, pg 6) I want to find out more information about this organization as well as the different psychological effects that the children have obtained due to their loss and adoption because of a brutal war. I am interested in this research because this is not just any type of child/parent separation this was done in a very brutal way. This research will give a perspective on how the children felt when they found out they were adopted and how their adoption impacted their search for identity.

My research will be a qualitative research. I will focus on doing interviews and talking to the adoptees myself. I am planning on traveling to El Salvador to conduct a part of my research and meet the members of Pro-Busqueda. I will do the interviews for

the adoptees in the United States, because there are some adoptees that were missing who currently live here. I plan on interviewing both Nelson and Suzanne, who were adopted during the civil war. During the interviews I will write notes, observe and record the participant's responses. I will use all of the data I collect to write a final document.

Psychology of the adopted child:

People go through many difficulties in their lives while trying to figure out who they are. Going through this process is already hard enough for people that do not have to deal with being bi-cultural or adopted. Imagine what people who are bicultural, adopted, and had family members murdered in a civil war. A civil war that left the people of their country looking for their loved ones had to deal with while searching for their identity.

An adopted child presents complications in both the emotional and the social parts of life. The ego of the adopted child has to compensate for losing its adopted mother. (Brisley, 1939) points out that the illegitimate baby (and this applies to the prospective candidate for adoption) is under abnormal pressure to "be good". This implies first being quiet and taking feeds well, and later accepting toilet training at an early age. This emphasis Brisley suggests is a "contributing factor to the insecurity and feeling of aloneness which seems characteristic of the illegitimate child". Observations also included outbursts toward the adoptive parents telling them they would not do as the parents say because they were not their real parents. He also goes on to say that adopted children suffer symptoms of depression, feelings of incompleteness, phobic

fear of abandonment, anxiety, aloofness and distancing of themselves which made close relationships impossible. He points out that on reaching adulthood, some children become obsessed with finding their real mother. They had revealed a feeling of never having been really attached to their adoptive family and never had the feeling of real belonging.

How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents: Julia Alvarez

The book “How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents” by Julia Alvarez is a book that will forever be engraved in my memory because it dealt with themes such as, the sense of displacement, immigration, assimilation, acculturation and the confusion of identity. In this book the Garcia girls travel to the United States from the Dominican Republic and find themselves thrown into a different culture. They had to assimilate to the ways of the people who live in the United States. After a few years of living in the United States they travel back to their country where they are now known as the “Americana’s” because they have assimilated to the culture of the U.S. Yolanda one of the sisters travels to Dominican Republic to assert her Dominican identity and connect to her culture and family roots. Which I think is a big reason why adopted children want to go back and find out about their family, about where they came from. They want to find a place to fit in. Wanting to find an identity a place where you belong, where others look and act like you is very important for people, because that makes them feel comfortable and accepted.

Yolanda goes through the book writing about her encounter with a cat in her dreams. The cat represents the Dominican Republic. In her dreams the cat blames her for leaving. This can be seen as a psychological problem that Yolanda is having, it is something that is stressing her out and is causing problems in her life. Her search for an identity and for a lost culture might be the reason for her dreams. When we leave a place that gave us belonging, it will stay in our hearts forever. Being brought to another country has many effects on people, especially when they lose who they are to assimilate to the culture that others want them to assimilate to. They lose who they are, and soon after they might see that they do not quite fit in. They begin to notice that there are other parts of them that are undeniable, parts of them that would never fit with a certain culture. They should not deny who they are to others, especially to themselves. Like Yolanda denying who they are could be a traumatic experience because the path to finding an identity could become harder.

Theory Application

There are many psychologists that have made very important discoveries on childhood psychology; including the effects as well as challenges that children and adolescence go through while growing up. Whether it is trying to assimilate to a

different culture or trying to find themselves, children and adolescence are always going through situations which could affect them psychologically. The theories of identity formation by Erik Erikson, social learning theories by Albert Bandura, developmental theories, acculturation theory, and attachment theory all have one thing in common. They all focus on the adolescence and their journey of finding themselves. Through analyzing the theories as well as interviewing people who have been adopted during the civil war; We will find out how much the people were psychologically affected by their circumstances.

Psychological developments:

Attachment theory:

We all become attached to someone we really care about or need; it is one of those things that is inevitable. Attachment according to Ainsworth and Bowlby is a deep emotional bond that connects a person to another. Attachment does not have to be felt by the person one is attached to, it does not have to be reciprocal. The behaviors that people show when attached includes, wanting to be close to the person when one feels in danger. (Bowlby, 1969.) There are 4 stages of attachment which happen when the baby is up to 3 months of age, which is when most babies respond to any caregiver. After 4 months of age when the baby prefers certain people, after 7 months when the baby has a preference for a single attachment, and after 9 months when the baby becomes very independent and has multiple attachments. The two best known theories for attachment are learning behaviorist theory of attachment and evolutionary theory

of attachment. Learning behaviorist theory of attachment focuses on attachment being a learned behavior; (Dollard, Miller) and evolutionary theory of attachment states that children already come programmed into the world to form attachments with others.

(Bowlby 1969)

Identity formation:

When children are born they start to form identifications with the family around them, this ends once they reach adolescence. Once children reach adolescence they start to question everything. During this time adolescence would usually choose to associate and identify with their peers, rather than with family members and parents. Peers represent away to belong for adolescence, as well as opportunities to experiment with such things such as sexuality and authority. While the adolescence is with the group they end up identifying their own identity. The adolescence keeps some childhood identifications and leaves others while identifying and finally having their own unique identity. As we know not everything goes as planned while obtaining an identity, many things can go wrong.

According to Erickson, when an adolescent is unsuccessful in reaching their identity they sometimes go through something called foreclosure. Foreclosure happens when the adolescence stops the search for their identity before it completely forms. This happens when the adolescent accepts parental roles and does not go out to find their own by becoming part of other peer groups. Some adolescence that go through this stage turn out good, because they end up taking their parents values and in turn

form a good identity. A negative identity is formed when the adolescent cannot reach the expectations that society or their parents have. This leads to the adolescent developing opposite results of that of their parents and society. (Berger and Thompson 1991) Identity diffusion is when the adolescents do not have a lot of goals or values. These adolescents are usually indifferent about finding an identity. Moratorium happens when the adolescent tries out different identities without expecting to find their own identity. These adolescents need more time to find their identity.

Forming an identity is important because to be intimate requires exchanging identities. If you know who you are and are certain about your identity, you are able to assert yourself and know what you want out of a relationship. Also having your own identity is important because it helps you learn to live independent from others because you do not depend on their identity. (Erickson)

Acculturation and psychological adaptation:

Many people find it difficult to find comfort and acceptance when having to adapt to a different environment or culture. Psychological adaptations as well as acculturation means learning new behaviors that are appropriate for the context. Acculturation could be difficult to accomplish because it depends on people leaving some of their identity behind and exchanging it for a new identity. Psychologically acculturation could take a toll on a person's health and psychological development, especially when they are adolescence and are starting to build an identity. Some people have harder times adapting to a new country or culture; because of this they experience

such things as psychopathy, which means that the changes in culture do not let the individual cope due to the difficulty of their coping strategy. This can lead to clinical depression and incapacitating anxiety. (Berry, Kim 1998; jayasuriya et. Al., 1992)

Adaptations happen do to the demands of the environment, (Beiser et, all., 1998)

Therefore it is not a person's choice to have to assimilate to their environment, but rather a response that they have to act upon due to the need to adapt and survive.

Culture and ethnicity together provide status they also provide social settings, living conditions, and personal experiences. (Page 15, adulthood and old age)

Nature versus Nurture:

The nurture Vs. Nature debate is a scientific, cultural and philosophical debate about whether human culture, behavior, and personality are caused primarily by nature or nurture.(Goodtherapy.org) Nature is usually the behavior that comes from genetics, while nurture is the behavior that stems from the environment and the experiences that individuals have. This debate is centered on the effects or impact that the environment and the person's genes have on their personalities. This debate is one that has gone on for years mainly because it seems that they both have an impact on people's personalities.

Social learning theory: Albert Bandura

The common view about personality is that depicted behavior is impelled by inner forces in the form of needs, or drives. So this might mean that we act according to what we need and the situation that we are in. We are able to change our personality

depending on the circumstances. The way we act is sometimes unconscious to us, or the drive that lets us act a certain way could also be unconscious to us. Traditional theories of learning depict behavior as the product of directly experienced direct consequence (Bandura, pg. 2) what we experience or the circumstances that we are act depict how we will act at the moment. It is interesting that emotional behavior can be developed by witnessing the reactions of others. The way you act or express certain emotions depends on how people around you depict those emotions. You could also learn by direct experience, by the punishment or reward you get when you make certain actions. Also motivational function of reinforcement is a theory that says that people will do certain things to get an outcome that they value. Learning through modeling is observing the people around you and your environment. Depending on the environment you are in that's how you will behave.

Open Adoption:

The Independent Open Adoption Center defines adoption as the legal act of permanently placing a child with someone other than the child's biological parents. Open adoptions can have many benefits. (Berry 1993) For example the birth parents have contact with their child as well as their child's adopted parents. The child's adopted parents are able to ask the birth parents certain biological questions. For example if the child is sick or has a type of health problem, it is good to contact the biological parents and ask if the health problem is something that occurs in their family. Also because the adopted parents know the birth parents they do not fear an unknown

figure or thinking that whoever they meet might be their child's parent. For the child open adoptions are good because they understand where they come from, therefore they will not have any identity problems. Also since they know who their biological parents are, they are able to know their health history as well as be culturally knowledgeable about where they came from.

Psychological issues in adoption: theory and practice:

Adoption has become very common in the United States as a way of forming new families. It is estimated that 1.5 million children in the United States live with an adopted family. It is legal for children to be adopted by families in other countries. Sometimes it happens because the parents want their kids to live in another country, and because it is easier to place black and biracial children overseas. Adoptive placements could be made by public social services department or private agencies. There are some states where independent adoptions are made in which only the families and a lawyer are involved. The adoption and family act was passed in 1997 which states that adoption is a preferred option for foster care when families cannot unite. There is also another act that was passed in 2000, which is The American inter-country act. This act specifies that the U.S government should monitor inter-country adoptions. The Hague convention of protection of children regarding inter-country adoption was established to prevent the abduction of children, the sale of children, or traffic in children. This resolution was passed in 1993.

Immigration, acculturation and adaptation:

Cross-cultural psychology has found important links between cultural context and individual behavioral development. Cross-cultural psychology has investigated the effects that starting out in one cultural and then having to begin living in different culture has on individuals. Psychological adaptations as well as acculturation means learning new behaviors that are appropriate for the context.

Depending on what state you are living in, you will have to adapt by learning the language they speak, the food they eat, as well as the schools they attend. While learning to adapt to a new culture people usually leave behind some of their culture, which is not seen as appropriate by others in the place where they are living at the time. Some individuals may experience culture shock, which is when they cannot easily change the way they act to fit in with main stream society. Some people have harder times adapting to a new country or culture because of this they experience such things as psychopathy, which means that the changes in culture do not let the individual cope due to the difficulty of their coping strategy. This can lead to clinical depression and incapacitating anxiety.(Berry, Kim 1998; jayasuriya et. Al., 1992)

Their story:

Nelsons Story:

Nelson De Witt was removed from El Salvador when he was two years old. His father as well as his mother were revolutionaries who were fighting for the rights of the people with a group called Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front. His father was a bodyguard, and his mother recruited people and supplies for the insurgents. Nelson was

born on May 22nd 1991 and was given the name of Roberto Alfredo Coto, which than changed to Nelson De Witt on August 25th 1981.

Nelsons father is still alive and lives in Panama, his mother died while he was a baby in a police raid where she and others from the FMLN held a man captive for ransom. Nelsons grandmother was the main reason for his search; she looked for the help of Pro-Busqueda to help her find her grandson. Soon they did find him, and Nelson was able to meet his family which included his sister Eva and brother Ernesto as well as his grandmother and father. His grandmother was able to save both Eva and Ernesto because she took refuge in Costa Rica before the war started. Nelson on the other hand was not able to take refuge with his grandmother in Costa Rica because he was born during the war. When his biological mother died in the police raid he was taken to an orphanage, and then adopted by his North American parents. (Macia, 2011)

Suzanne's story:

Before going to El Salvador Suzanne's life was a typical life in America. She felt that she was different than her friends in Wilmington, the town where she lived for most of her childhood. Suzanne found out she was adopted through her parents when she was 8 years old.

When Suzanne found out she was adopted she had no idea of the place she was born in. she began feeling disappointed; she did not understand why her parents gave her up, why they did not want to stay with her. After listening to this new discovery, Suzanne soon kept going on with her life without any curiosity about her history. When

she enrolled at Salem State University to pursue social work; she became interested in a humanitarian trip that professor MacAndrew's was to embark in with other Salem State students.

Suzanne was able to travel to El Salvador; she confessed to professor McAndrews a short while before the trip her reasons of why she wanted to go to El Salvador. Her classmates on the other hand did not find out until they were in El Salvador, one of them made a statement about her likeness to a guy they had passed by. On the last day of the trip they went to the cathedral, and there they met members of Pro-Busqueda. Professor McAndrews was able to facilitate a meeting with both Pro-Busqueda and Suzanne in which she provided information about her birth. A year later she was contacted by Pro-Busqueda members and they told that her family was found. When she got the news that her family was found Suzanne returned to El Salvador, this time she was nervous because she was about to meet her family. Finally while seeing her family she was able to see people that looked like her, who she could relate to. She could now have those answers she wanted to ask when she was 8 years old and was wondering why her family left her.

Interview Schedule:

1. How do you define your identity?
2. How does being bi-cultural affect your identity?
3. Do you like or accept being bi-cultural?
4. When you were growing up how did being bi-cultural affect your social life?

5. What was the hardest part about meeting your biological family?
6. Do you feel a connection with your biological family?
7. How old were you when you first came to the United States?
8. Do you ever wonder how life would be if you lived with your biological parents?
9. Did you ever try to hide who you are, or where you came from? Why?
10. What psychological effects did you experience due to your adoption?
11. What major change happened in your life when you met your biological parents/family?
12. Do you blame your biological parents or adopted parents for your situation?
13. Have you ever had problems making friends or getting close to people?
14. Did you ever feel like you did not belong? Is that why you wanted to search your biological parents?
15. Did you ever feel abandoned?

Interview Analysis:

Suzanne's Interview:

When Suzanne was growing up she did not identify as being bi-cultural. She felt that she was treated like and felt like her adopted family. She assimilated to the North American culture. She did not see any differences between her and her family. When it came to her physical characteristics, they were mostly noticed at social gatherings. Instead of her noticing her physical differences in comparison to her family, people started noticing the differences for her.

She found out she was adopted when she was 8 years old. Her mother told her that her parents did not have the means to bring her up. Suzanne's mother did not have

knowledge of what really happened to Suzanne's parents when she adopted her and this is the reason of why she answered her in the way she did. Suzanne felt conflicted and confused because she did not know how to feel. She was young and she said she simply continued playing when her mother told her she was adopted.

Suzanne did not have any connections to her biological parents and as she told me "I would have liked to have assimilated more to the culture of my biological parents". She did not know where she came from. This led her to use sarcasm when people asked her about her Salvadoran background.

She told me a story of when she was in school and her classmates confused her with one of her North American friends. Back then she did not see it as being anything important she simply saw it as being annoying. I asked her if being confused with a North American girl reinforced the idea that she looked like her peers. Even though she did not like it, unconsciously it might have done something good for her because it was a way for her to know she fit in. She responded by saying that she did not think of it that way before, but that unconsciously that could have been the case. A time when she noticed she looked different was when in one of her classes a friend of hers mentioned that her nose was much wider than most of her classmates.

At home her family would tell her that she looked different but that it was good because she was beautiful, her mother would tell her she was unique and that she liked that Suzanne was unique and different. During her teenage years she did not care about being unique and different, she wanted to look like her family members; she wanted to

fit in and to be like them. She told me that her teenage years were a huge emotional struggle; she did not know what to do, or how to deal with the fact that she was different than her family members.

When she was finally able to go to El Salvador she felt that she had a better, deeper understanding of herself and of her history. In her own words she said that being able to go to El Salvador was like “Putting on a pair of glasses and seeing clear, seeing the bigger picture” She could finally connect her features and characteristics with people, she could identify with people that she looked like. She said that she “No longer has to guess where her traits came from” Language is a huge barrier between her and the family she has in El Salvador. She is not able to speak to her mother because her mother only knows Spanish and she does not know the language very well.

While talking to Suzanne she told me that when she went to El Salvador she experienced the theory of Nurture vs. Nature. She explained to me that one day she was sitting talking to someone and they looked at her and told her that while she was smiling, sitting and talking she looked just like her adopted mom. Their mannerisms were very similar. Then she went to El Salvador and saw her niece on a swing and she told me that her niece looked just like her when she was younger. That even her nieces’ mechanisms were similar to hers.

Before going on her journey to El Salvador Suzanne knew that she was El Salvadoran, therefore when people asked her where she was from she would tell them she was El Salvadoran. When people asked her about El Salvador she had no idea what

to say because she did not know about the culture. She was not able to talk about the food or the forests of El Salvador. She did not like when people asked her about El Salvador because she did not know anything about her country, it made her feel embarrassed. Whereas now she feels a lot better and is prepared to answer questions of her country because she had visited El Salvador and knows a little more of the history. She is well equipped with the information she needs. Sometimes when people ask her where she is from she asks them why they would like to know. She would sometimes say she was born in El Salvador, but is American. She has a bi-cultural identity that she embraces now because she knows about it; before she did not know about the Salvadoran culture therefore she did not like to mention it. Now she is able to turn around and say "I know who I am"

Nelson:

Nelson is a person who loves to travel and likes to experience the different parts of his identity. He knows that identity is very complex and that there is not one thing that makes up who a person is but many. I think that this is the reason why he is so comfortable exploring the El Salvadoran culture and accepting it as part of who he is. When talking to him he said "I feel connected to different parts of the country" when he said this he meant El Salvador. Even though he had spent most of his life in the United States he explained that he felt very connected to the people from El Salvador. He also mentioned that he feels as if he "Flows between" which means that he feels that he is both American and Salvadoran.

Nature vs. Nurture: When I asked Nelson if he felt that the theory of Nature Vs. Nurture connects to some parts of his life. He answered by saying that yes it does. He explained to me about his El Salvadoran brothers and how they have a similar walk to his, that he had never seen anyone walk as he does until he came to El Salvador and saw others walking. He mentioned having the same mannerisms as his adoptive parents by the way that he dealt with situations and made decisions. He says he does both of them just the way his adoptive parents do.

Even though Nelson was a baby when he was separated from his parents, he said that the violent separation had a very bad impact on him and he grew to be very sad throughout the years when he was younger. Nelson mentioned feeling like something was missing in his life when he was younger, but not knowing what it was, and having that feeling fade as he got older. He also mentioned not being able to strongly adjust to being El Salvadoran because of his lack of knowledge of the culture. Also he did not have any attachment to the place where he was born from do to not knowing who his parents were and not being able to be immersed in the culture.

When he learned about his grandmother who was searching for him by his parents who were contacted by Pro-Busqueda, he was able to travel to El Salvador soon after and get acquainted with a life he left behind as a baby. Traveling to El Salvador was life changing for him because he was able to meet his family members, and get to know his culture. As well as visit the memory wall where his as well as his parents' names are written. While looking at the memory wall he looked around and noticed that there

were many other El Salvadorans around the memory wall and he felt very connected to them.

In the book how the Garcia Girls lost their accents when the girls were in the United States people saw them as being Dominican and they did not feel they fit into the culture, but when they finally got a chance to travel to the Dominican Republic where they thought they would feel at home, people there identified them as being “Americanas” or American. This to them made them feel as if they did not belong anywhere because when they wanted to identify with the people in the U.S they were too Dominican, but when they tried to identify with people from Dominican Republic they were too Americanized for them. A similar situation happened to Nelson when some of his white friends identified him as being Puerto Rican, while the Puerto Ricans identified him as being white.

Nelson saw this as not being white enough to be considered white, or Puerto Rican enough to be Puerto Rican to his Puerto Rican friends. Even though he was neither of those, he was floating between both of them while people could not figure out what he really was because neither culture accepted him as being either. Also Nelson told me of times when he would go through costumes and they would ask him where he was going and he would say “Home”, they would not understand him because they assumed the United States is not his home because of his skin color. This would make him feel mad because he identifies the United States as being home.

When Nelson was sixteen he wanted to find people that looked like him. He began to form his identity and wanted to have people around him that identified with his features as well. None of his peers looked like him, and according to Erickson during this time adolescence want to identify with their peers. It was important for Nelson to find someone he could identify with. Also when Nelson went to summer camp at a young age he had an encounter with some children who thought he was dirty because of his skin color. He has always noticed the differences between himself and his parents but they never really bothered him. He likes to poke fun of judgments others make of him. Perhaps even though he says that not being able to identify physically with his parents never bothered him, possibly it did, he just never stopped to recognize what it was doing to him. Probably poking fun of the judgments others make of him is a way for him to cope with those judgments.

While being in El Salvador he put the pieces to the puzzle together and began finding a piece of himself that he did not completely know about before. He met his brothers, family members and was able to see another part of who he is, and of his country. A part of him that was lost but that little by little he began to seek. Like he said he “Began to put the pieces of the puzzle together” and learned that his identity is not fixed, but it is very complex made of many different parts.

One of Nelsons most memorable moments while being in El Salvador was when he read a statue that said “Welcome back brothers and sisters from afar” He asked someone why that statue had that written on it, and they told him that the statue

represents the many family members who do not live in the country and who have left to live in many other countries, or are lost due to the instability of El Salvador. To him this meant that being Salvadoran meant to be broken, having family spread out all over the world.

Conclusion:

Summary:

When both Suzanne and Nelson were with their biological parents as babies in El Salvador they began to build their identities. They had time to recognize who their parents were and where they felt safe. Even though they might have not remembered everything consciously, unconsciously some of their actions said otherwise. For example Nelson and Suzanne rebelling when they were teenagers, they both said that every teenager rebels for different reasons. One of the reasons they now acknowledge of why they rebelled had to do with their adoption. As well as having people tell them who they are because of how they look, and assuming they know about the country they came from. When in reality they had no idea, like in the case of Suzanne.

Assimilation:

Both Nelson and Suzanne had to assimilate to the culture where their biological parents are from. When they were younger they did not have a hard time coming to the United States and assimilating to the culture. Mainly because they were babies and did not have enough time in their country to assimilate to the El Salvadoran culture.

Therefore their primary culture could be said to be the North American culture because this is where they grew up. They had to assimilate to the culture where they were born from and this had to be hard. Going to the place that was their first home, and not knowing what they would find. Not being able to answer your teacher the question of “How the Jungles are in El Salvador” because you do not even know if there are jungles in El Salvador. This can make a person feel uncomfortable, which is something that happened with Suzanne when she was younger.

Conclusion:

Being able to interview both Nelson and Suzanne gave me an insight on everything that they had to go through due to their adoption. They both said they had very caring and loving parents. The fact that their parents loved them and cared for them, did not keep them from wanting to find out more about where they came from and about their biological parents. They still had a thirst that needed to be quenched, a thirst to find out about the identity that they left behind as baby's.

Wanting to find out about whom we are is a natural urge that we all have, an urge to find out where we came from and what makes us who we are. Identity in itself is a very important factor in how we live our lives. According to Erick Erickson adolescence can form a negative identity and when this happens they usually tend to not set many goals for themselves or have many values to live by, this is called identity diffusion. Identity is important because it is a way to show others who we are, it is how others perceive us and what we believe ourselves to be.

For both Nelson and Suzanne it was hard to live with the realization that there was a country out there that gave birth to them to which they had no contact with. Part of who they are was lost in a place they had never visited before; lost with people they had never known and family members who they had no knowledge of. Their identity as Salvadorans is part of who they are, and they could not have denied that to themselves. Doing this could have been similar to ignoring half of their identity. This could have been one of the reasons of why they were so avid in wanting to travel to their birth country, and get acquainted with the people and family members they left behind.

Finding out who they are by finding a place in the country where they were born was very important for them. Adapting to the culture was a different story though. Suzanne told me about how the Spanish language was her primary language when she was born. Now she cannot speak the language anymore and this interfered with her being able to speak with her biological mother who she would call once in a while. She wants to learn the Spanish language so that she could become closer to the culture and to her biological family.

Psychologically being adopted in their circumstance affected them in many ways. They felt as if they did not look like their adopted parents at times and this could have made them uncomfortable. Like in the case of Suzanne who did not like it when her parents would mention that she was unique because she was different from them. Suzanne did not want to be different from her parents or family members because she wanted to fit in. According to the theory of identity formation when children are born

they start to identify with the people around them, this ends once they reach adolescence. This means that between the ages of birth until 12 years old children are looking to identify with their parents and people who they are most close to. Attachment as well as acculturation and psychological adaptations have a lot to do with everything that Nelson, Suzanne and many other adoptees had to go through while growing up and searching for their identity.

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