

CHILDREN’S CONCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES ABOUT FAMILY AND FAMILY DIVERSITY: COMPARATIVE VISUAL STUDIES BETWEEN SPAIN AND THE USA

CONCEPCIONES Y EXPERIENCIAS DE LOS NIÑOS Y LAS NIÑAS SOBRE LA FAMILIA Y LA DIVERSIDAD FAMILIAR: ESTUDIOS VISUALES COMPARATIVOS ENTRE ESPAÑA Y EEUU

2. OBJECTIVES

This research project explores children’s concepts of family and children’s family experiences in Madrid (Spain) and Chicago (USA) under various situations of family diversity. The project brings together different lines of work developed by each research team and the experience accumulated in different strategies of visual analysis. In *Northeastern Illinois University* this work is led by Saba Ayman-Nolley and in Madrid by the UAM Research group 'Contemporary Childhood' coordinated by David Poveda.

The work plan includes two comparative studies between child populations in Madrid and Chicago that will explore the concept of family in children of a large, heterogeneous and socio-culturally diverse sample of children in two geographical contexts. Similarly, the development of these two studies will respond to different issues that have come up in research around the notion of family during childhood, potentially generating significant advances in our current knowledge in this area of study.

The first study (STUDY 1), which explores the concept of family in primary school children in Chicago and Madrid (see methodological justification below), has the following empirical objectives:

- (1) To identify and define the concept of family developed during childhood using drawings as a source of information of children’s social knowledge.
- (2) To examine changes in the concept of family and the elements that make up the concept of family between 6 and 12 years of age.
- (3) Examine the role of gender on the construction of the concept of family and the elements that make up the concept of family in primary school children.
- (4) Explore and evaluate cultural and national differences in the concept of family and the elements that make up the concept of family in primary school children.
- (5) Examine and assess the possible interactions between age, gender and nationality in the concept of family and the elements that make up the concept of family in primary school children.

The second study (STUDY 2), focused on the construction of family experiences in adoptive families in Chicago and Madrid (see methodological justification below), has the following empirical objectives:

- (6) Examine the construction of a family model in parents and children of adoptive families through photographic interviews and analysis of family photographic

archives.

- (7) To identify variations in the way in which family experiences are built in a heterogeneous sample of adoptive families.
- (8) To evaluate the interrelationship between variations in the construction of family experiences and the diversity of configurations present in the participating adoptive families, such as nationality (USA or Spain), family type (single or bi-parental, homo-parental or hetero-parental) or adoption process (national, international, open, closed, etc.).
- (9) To evaluate transnational differences in the relevance of different social support spaces in the configuration of adoptive family experiences, such as peer support networks among adoptive families, whether virtual (forums, web resources, etc.) or face-to-face (associations of adoptive families, meetings between adoptive families, personal networks / friendship between adoptive families, etc.).
- (10) To assess transnational differences in the relevance of different institutional spaces in the configuration of adoptive family experiences, such as the role of adoption agencies, public authorities during the process of adoption or expert discourses in the field of adoption.

Finally, both studies share a methodological concerns which also form part of the overall objectives of the project:

- (11) To design and validate a protocol for coding and analyzing children's drawings which may be useful for developmental and cross-cultural research on the concept of family. This protocol will be formalized in a coding manual valid for future collaborative projects between the teams at NEIU and UAM, as well as other research developed in each institution or elsewhere.
- (12) To develop further strategies for qualitative visual analysis using family photographs, alongside other sources of data such as interviews and observation. To validate these strategies for developmental and cross-cultural research with children and families.

3 METHODOLOGY AND WORK PLAN

Data for both studies will be collected during the 2013-14 school-year (approximately covering in both countries September 2013-June 2014.) The two summer periods at the beginning and at the end of the school year will be used for planning, coordination and discussion of progress of the project. Each research team in each institution will be responsible for the collection of data from its context and will have the advice and cooperation of the international team for the development of the collection and analysis of the data.

The coordination between the two studies will be led by the research team with more experience in the proposed methodology. Thus, the NEIU team will lead the design and development of Study 1 which involves building on a line of work widely developed by this research team (e.g. Liu, Ayman and Ayman-Nolley, 2012; Ayman-Nolley and Ayman, 2004). The UAM team will lead the design and development of Study 2 given their

greater experience with the methodological approach it draws from (e.g. Alonso, 2012; Poveda, Jociles y Rivas, 2011; Poveda, Morgade y González-Patiño, 2012). This coordination, as described in the schedule and budget, will be achieved through short stays of each team in Madrid and Chicago and the use of different technological platforms to hold virtual meetings, share materials, combine the tasks of analysis and development of the project. The goal of this coordination, which will be carefully monitored throughout the project, is to have a research design and a data collection process as similar as possible in each city, so that each study could be considered composed of two transnational replicas. For this reason, the research plan will be the same for each of the national contexts in each of the two studies.

STUDY 1 (S1)

Study 1 will take place in primary education public schools in Madrid (Spain) and Chicago (USA). The schools will be selected for their willingness to collaborate in the study and we will attempt to have schools that are representative of the socio-economic and ethnic diversity that characterizes the school population of both cities. We will attempt to contact two schools from each city, building a sample in each city with a minimum of 300 children and up to 600 participants per city.

Sample and design:

We will carry out a cross-sectional study collecting data of at least one school class from each school throughout each year of primary education (1st - 6th grades in Spain and 1st - 8th grades in the U.S.), which approximately covers the 6-14 years of age range. The task will be proposed collectively to the classroom and participation in the study will be voluntary (although previous experiences suggest that virtually all children accept collaborating in the task). Therefore, we expected to achieve a balanced sample in terms of sex and with the expected range of variability in other socio-demographic dimensions in each school environment.

Procedure:

For the task each child clears their table of all the materials used in the classroom and the research team provides each child with: (a) a white sheet of paper - size A4 in Spain and *letter* in the U.S.; (b) an A2 pencil; (c) a color pencil box - which will be as similar as possible, if not exactly the same, for each country (for example, using as a reference the 12 colors of the Crayola school package). With these materials, children will receive the following instruction: "with the materials you have, draw a family doing something". This prompt will be presented verbally and written on the blackboard during the development of the task.

Children must perform the task individually, taking care not to speak among themselves, during the designated time to do it (normally maximum a school period of 45-50 minutes, though it usually does not take more than 30 minutes per child task complete). During the task the research team will remain in the classroom available for the children who require them. If children ask questions, researchers will repeat the instruction and will invite the children to draw what they think is a family and will help children not to focus on their drawing ability. Members of the research team will avoid suggesting

possible responses, show any indication or evaluation of the drawings and also will share these strategies with other adults present in the classroom (teachers, assistants, etc.).

When each child indicates that she/he is done, she/he turns the drawing, completes the demographic information and is asked to: (a) write two sentences describing their drawing; (b) identify each figure in the drawing.

Coding:

The coding of the drawings will be based on a manual created and developed for this study from the coding procedures already developed by Saba Ayman-Nolley in her laboratory at NEIU. Initial coding of drawings of each context will be done by the research team responsible for the collection of data and then will be re-coded by the research team of the other country. This second cross-coding will be used to validate the initial coding, refining the analytical procedure, and explore in depth the most significant discrepant cases.

STUDY 2 (S2)

Sample and design:

Study 2 involves families with at least one adopted child residing in the metropolitan areas of Chicago (USA) and Madrid (Spain). Families will be selected through the network of contacts in the field of adoption which each research team can generate (through personal relations, organizations of adoptive families, agencies and professional organizations in the field of adoption, etc.) in their geographical area (expected total = 4 families per region / 8 families in total). The goal is to generate a collection of family cases in each of the study sites that reflects the diverse "realities" and circumstances that make up adoptive families in each of the contexts under investigation. Thus, the criteria will be to build an "ecologically valid" sample in the area under study rather than a comparable sample in relation to a set of predetermined variables (e.g. adoptions from the same geographical area, have a similar composition, etc.). The two practical criteria established to include a family in the study are: (a) that the adoption of the child under study took place a minimum of 2 years previously to data collection and (b) that the adopted child under study is at least 5 years of age.

The sample will be treated as a collection of case studies and we will generate groupings and analytically relevant comparisons based on the features and variables that finally characterize the set of participating families (e.g. type of adoption, region of origin of the / as children, family composition, etc.) and emerge as relevant in the analysis.

Procedure:

The main data collection technique will be semi-structured photo-interviews developed from a selection of photographs of the "family" album, portfolio, or "scrapbook" and especially, if this is available, the album or part of the album focused on the early stages of adoption. Building on these materials each family will go through the same process:

- 1) A first meeting with the whole family in which the general research goals of the study

are introduced (pointing to the comparative nature of the study), and we invite families to show their family albums (and other relevant materials) on the adoption. Here we also obtain basic information about the composition of the family. During this first meeting the participating children will be asked to make a drawing of a family with the same materials and instructions as in Study 1.

In this first meeting the next interview sessions are planned and families are given the following instruction for each of the family members who will participate in the study: "from the photo album/scrapbook that you showed me/us we/I would like that you choose 10 photographs that you particularly like because they reflect who is your family and how your family experience is". This instruction is presented to all members collectively (or separately if it is more practical) but we stress that each member should do it separately: parents (as a couple if it is a two-parent family) and children (each sibling separately if more than one participates in the study). They can talk among themselves, comment or ask for advice but in the end they should provide an individual selection for each part of the family (adults vs. children).

(2) Based on this selection of photographs we will conduct separate semi-structured interviews with parents and children in which we will attempt to build a story about the adoption process, the composition of the family, the most important milestones in the configuration of the family (marked by the selection of photographs) and, particularly, in the case of adults and older children we will ask about the role of different networks of social and institutional support in relation to their adoptive family life.

Coding and analysis:

Photographs and interviews will be analyzed from a variety of qualitative visual analysis strategies and ways of working with photo-interviews developed in different studies of the 'Contemporary Childhood' research group at UAM. The collection and analysis of data will be relatively parallel in each geographical area, so there will be constant coordination to adapt work plans, share protocols of data collection and initial analysis throughout the research process.