



CROSS-CULTURAL EXAMINATION OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL EXPERIENCES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES USING THE *EMERGING ADULTHOOD* THEORY

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The purpose of this research is to further understand cross-cultural developmental issues affecting the psychosocial health status of emerging adults in the United States, China, and South Korea. Understanding the social and cultural factors that contribute to youth development will help identify effective and culturally appropriate programs that promote mental health in U.S. public educational institutions.

Dr. Jeffrey Arnett's *Emerging Adulthood* (EA) theory focuses on the emerging adult population, ages 18-29, and identifies the developmental trajectory of emerging adults as they encounter identity exploration, self-focusing, feeling-in-between, instability, and possibility.

Our cross-cultural study will apply the EA developmental theory to analyze the qualitative data gathered from interviews with college students in the United States and later examine the responses with those already collected by Dr. Yi's research team in China and South Korea.

For the U.S. portion, we recruited and interviewed 34 undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Utah, all between 18-29 years old. The one-hour audio-recorded interviews consisted of a series of questions about past and current life experiences including struggles, successes, decision-making, career, romantic relationships and future plans. Unique to our sample population, the majority of our participants were ethnic minority students and/or first-generation college students.

From my qualitative data analysis of two interview transcripts, the themes of dual identity conflict – the clash between heritage and dominant culture, autonomy vs. dependence, and social justice were prevalent. Going beyond mental health, our participants suggested policies that focused on social justice issues and identified that an effective social justice program needed a more inclusive and inter-departmental collaboration at the university level.

