



National Authority for Child Care-Regional Alternative Child Care Office (NACC-RACCO CARAGA)

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ABSTRACT

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Adoption telling the disclosure of adoptive status to children is a relational-cultural process that shapes trust, belonging, identity coherence, and stigma reduction. While global research emphasizes early and open disclosure, most findings come from Western contexts. This study addresses the gap in collectivist societies like the Philippines, where indigenous values such as kapwa, hiya, and pakikiramdam influence disclosure practices. The Caraga Region provides a unique socio-cultural setting for this investigation. A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was employed. Quantitative phase: Surveys with 350–400 respondents tested direct effects of disclosure practices (timing, openness, narrative coherence) on identity outcomes. Qualitative phase: 36–48 purposively selected parents participated in interviews exploring cultural orientations, relational climates, and community support. Data analysis included regression, mediation, and moderation models, complemented by thematic coding of qualitative



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data. Ethical approval was secured from the IRB of Caraga State University (Protocol No. CSU-IRB-2025-014). Disclosure practices significantly predicted identity outcomes (trust, belonging, coherence, stigma reduction). Relational climate mediated disclosure effects, cultural orientations moderated outcomes, and community support enhanced belonging and reduced stigma. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings validated adoption telling as both empirically measurable and culturally embedded, leading to the development of the Relational–Cultural Disclosure Theory (RCDT). Early, open, and coherent disclosure strengthens adoptees’ identity and reduces stigma when supported by a positive relational climate and community networks. RCDT situates adoption disclosure within Filipino indigenous psychology and communal traditions, contributing to global adoption scholarship.

INTRODUCTION

Adoption telling—the disclosure of adoptive status to children—has long been recognized as a critical practice in shaping the psychosocial development of adoptees. It is not simply a matter of factual openness but a relational act that influences trust, belonging, coherence, and stigma reduction (Boyatzis & Rochford, 2020; Naseer et al., 2024). For adoptees, disclosure becomes part of their life story, shaping how they understand themselves, their families, and their place in society (Brown & Shelton, 2024; Moroney et al., 2025).

Global scholarship has consistently emphasized the importance of early and open disclosure for secure attachment and identity development (Berman et al., 2025; Dylan et al., 2022; Egan, et al., 2022; Horstman & Colaner, 2022). Yet these findings are largely drawn from Western contexts, where individualism and openness are prioritized. In collectivist societies such as the Philippines, disclosure unfolds within relational-cultural environments where values such as *kapwa* (shared personhood), *pakikiramdam* (empathic sensitivity), and *hiya* (social propriety) guide family interactions and community acceptance (Enriquez, 1992; Tarroja, 2020).

The Caraga Region of Northern Mindanao provides a unique socio-cultural context for examining adoption telling. With diverse indigenous traditions and evolving child welfare policies under Republic Act No. 11642, Caraga represents both challenges and opportunities for disclosure practices. Despite the growing number of adoptive families, empirical research on adoption telling in Caraga remains scarce. This study addresses that gap by employing a sequential explanatory mixed methods design to investigate disclosure practices and their impact on identity outcomes. Ultimately, it proposes the Relational-Cultural

Disclosure Theory (RCDT), a framework that situates adoption telling within Filipino relational and communal realities while contributing to global adoption scholarship.

FRAMEWORK

Anchored on System Theory (Heil, 2016), this study views disclosure practices as relational processes embedded in family systems, cultural orientations, and community networks. RCDT integrates Western psychological theories (Attachment Theory, Narrative Identity Theory, Communication Privacy Management), Asian perspectives (Filial Piety), and Filipino indigenous psychology (*kapwa*, *hiya*, *pakikiramdam*).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The literature review systematically establishes six hypotheses (H1–H6) that guide the investigation into the complex process of adoption disclosure, moving from universal principles to a culturally grounded theoretical proposition. The review first confirms the global consensus that disclosure practices—specifically timing, openness, and narrative coherence—have a significant direct effect (H1) on positive identity outcomes like trust, belonging, coherence, and stigma reduction (Berman et al., 2025; Brown & Shelton, 2024). This direct link is qualified by the finding that relational climate mediates disclosure effects (H2), meaning the positive outcomes are only realized when the discourse is embedded in a supportive family climate of empathy, trust, and openness (Boyatzis & Rochford, 2020; Dylan et al., 2022). Cultural orientations (*kapwa*, *hiya*, *pakikiramdam*) moderate disclosure outcomes (H3), shaping the effectiveness and direction of disclosure (Xu et al., 2021). Community support (kinship networks and *compadrazgo*) enhances disclosure's positive impact (H4), integrating adoptees into communal identities and strengthening belonging while reducing stigma (Achusi, 2025). Convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings (H5) validates adoption telling as both empirically measurable and culturally embedded. This synthesis leads to the Theory Proposition (H6): the integration of all findings yields the Relational-Cultural Disclosure Theory (RCDT).

Across ASEAN, adoption telling is consistently shaped by collectivist values, kinship networks, and institutional frameworks. Vietnam and Cambodia emphasize secrecy and stigma, Thailand highlights legal-cultural safeguards, and Indonesia situates disclosure within family law and communal values. Together, these perspectives reinforce your RCDT proposition: disclosure is not merely

factual but relational-cultural, requiring sensitivity to indigenous values, family climates, and community support. This regional grounding situates Caraga’s findings within a broader Southeast Asian discourse, strengthening the theory’s applicability beyond the Philippines.

Figure 1
Relational–Cultural Disclosure Theory (RCDT): Pathways and Conditions

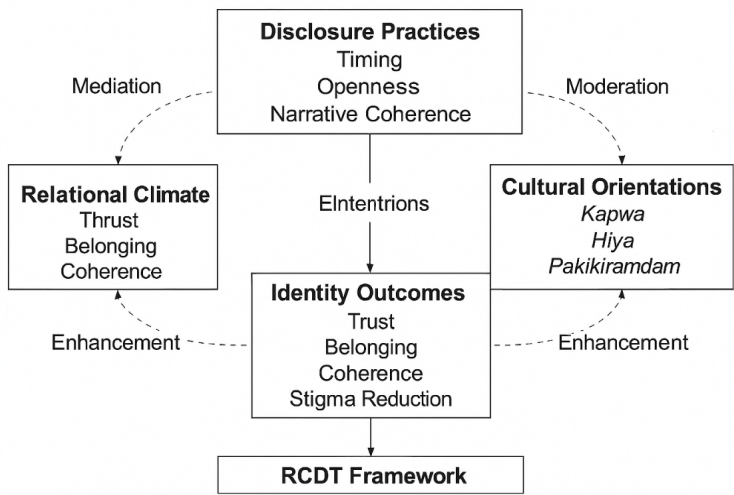


Figure 1. Relational–Cultural Disclosure Theory (RCDT): Pathways and Conditions.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed methods design to comprehensively examine adoption disclosure practices in the Caraga Region. The research was conducted in two phases:

Quantitative Phase:

The first phase tested the direct effects of disclosure practices—specifically timing, openness, and narrative coherence—on identity outcomes such as trust, belonging, coherence, and stigma reduction. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure diversity across provinces, disclosure timing, child age groups, and levels of openness. Approximately 350–400 respondents participated in this phase. Data were analyzed using regression models, as well as mediation and moderation analyses to identify relational and cultural influences on disclosure outcomes.

Qualitative Phase:

The second phase explored deeper cultural and relational dynamics through semi-structured interviews with 36–48 purposively selected adoptive parents. This phase focused on cultural orientations (e.g., *kapwa*, *hiya*, *pakikiramdam*), relational climates, and community support systems. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding, allowing for the identification of patterns and themes that contextualize quantitative findings.

Integration of Findings:

Results from both phases were integrated to validate adoption telling as both empirically measurable and culturally embedded, leading to the development of the Relational–Cultural Disclosure Theory (RCDT).

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical standards for research involving human participants. Approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Informed consent was secured from all participants, ensuring confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any stage. Data were anonymized and stored securely in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was employed. The quantitative phase tested direct effects of disclosure practices on identity outcomes, while the qualitative phase explored cultural orientations, relational climates, and community support. Stratified random sampling ensured diversity across provinces, disclosure timing, child age bands, and openness levels. Approximately 350–400 respondents participated in the quantitative phase, while 36–48 parents were purposively selected for qualitative interviews. Data were analyzed using regression, mediation, and moderation models, with qualitative data coded thematically.

Artificial intelligence tools were employed only to support language refinement, reference verification, and formatting in accordance with APA 7th edition guidelines. AI was not used to generate, alter, or fabricate empirical data, nor did it replace the researcher's critical analysis and

interpretation. All findings, theoretical propositions, and conclusions remain the responsibility of the author. The use of AI was conducted transparently, responsibly, and in alignment with ethical standards to ensure integrity, accuracy, and accountability in scholarly work.

Table 1
Evidence Summary for H1–H6

Hypothesis	Description	Evidence from the Quantitative Phase	Evidence from the Qualitative Phase	Conclusion
H1	Disclosure practices (timing, openness, narrative coherence) have a direct effect on identity outcomes.	Regression analysis showed significant positive effects on trust, belonging, coherence, and stigma reduction.	Interviews confirmed that early and open disclosure fosters identity integration.	Supported
H2	Relational climate mediates disclosure effects.	Mediation analysis indicated that relational climate significantly mediates disclosure–outcome relationships.	Themes revealed that empathy and trust within families amplify disclosure benefits.	Supported
H3	Cultural orientations (kapwa, hiya, pakikiramdam) moderate disclosure outcomes.	Moderation models showed cultural values influence disclosure effectiveness.	Participants emphasized cultural norms shaping openness and timing.	Supported
H4	Community support enhances disclosure’s positive impact.	Statistical results linked kinship networks and compadrazgo to improved belonging and reduced stigma.	Narratives highlighted community acceptance as critical for identity formation.	Supported
H5	Convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings validates adoption telling as measurable and culturally embedded.	Integrated analysis confirmed consistency across phases.	Qualitative insights contextualized quantitative patterns.	Supported
H6	Integration of findings yields the Relational–Cultural Disclosure Theory (RCDT).	Combined results informed theoretical model development.	Cultural and relational themes shaped RCDT framework.	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings confirmed that disclosure practices significantly predict identity outcomes. Relational climate mediated disclosure effects, cultural orientations moderated outcomes, and community support enhanced belonging and stigma reduction (Naseer et al., 2024; Achusi, 2025). Convergence of quantitative and

qualitative findings validated adoption telling as a relational-cultural process. Integration of these findings yielded RCDT, a culturally grounded model situating disclosure within Filipino indigenous psychology and communal traditions.

The findings of this study confirm that adoption disclosure is not merely a factual act but a relational-cultural process deeply embedded in Filipino family and community dynamics. Quantitative results demonstrated that disclosure practices—timing, openness, and narrative coherence—significantly predict identity outcomes such as trust, belonging, coherence, and stigma reduction. These findings align with global literature emphasizing early and open disclosure for positive psychosocial development (Horstman & Colaner, 2022; Egan et al., 2022; Berman et al., 2025; Moroney et al., 2025). However, this study extends existing scholarship by situating disclosure within the collectivist and relational context of the Philippines.

The mediating role of relational climate underscores that disclosure outcomes depend on the quality of family interactions. Families characterized by empathy, trust, and openness enable adoptees to integrate adoption narratives into their identity more effectively (Boyatzis & Rochford, 2020). This supports relational communication theories and highlights the importance of nurturing supportive family environments during disclosure.

The moderating influence of cultural orientations—*kapwa*, *hiya*, and *pakikiramdam*—reveals that disclosure practices are shaped by indigenous values. For instance, *kapwa* fosters shared personhood and communal belonging, while *hiya* and *pakikiramdam* influence timing and openness to maintain social propriety and harmony (Xu et al., 2021). These cultural factors explain why disclosure strategies in the Philippines differ from Western norms, where individual autonomy and transparency are prioritized.

Community support emerged as an enhancer of disclosure's positive impact. Kinship networks and *compadrazgo* systems provide social validation and reduce stigma, reinforcing adoptees' sense of belonging (Achusi, 2025). This finding emphasizes the role of extended family and community in identity formation, consistent with collectivist cultural frameworks.

The convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings validates adoption telling as both empirically measurable and culturally embedded (Brown & Shelton, 2024). This integration led to the development of the Relational-Cultural Disclosure Theory (RCDT), which situates disclosure within Filipino indigenous psychology and communal traditions while contributing to global adoption scholarship. RCDT offers a culturally grounded model that can inform practice, policy, and future research.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into adoption disclosure practices, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample was limited to the Caraga Region, which may affect generalizability to other cultural contexts. Second, self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias. Third, longitudinal effects were not examined, limiting causal inference. Future research should address these limitations through broader sampling and longitudinal designs.

Future Directions

Longitudinal mixed methods studies should test causal mediation pathways between disclosure practices, relational climate, and identity coherence. Comparative research across diverse cultural regions should validate and refine RCDT, ensuring its applicability beyond the Caraga Region and the Philippines.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

This study offers practical tools for adoptive parents, counselors, and social workers in the Philippines. Training programs can be developed to guide culturally sensitive disclosure, while community awareness campaigns may help normalize adoption and reduce stigma. Policymakers can integrate RCDT into the implementation of Republic Act No. 11642, ensuring that disclosure practices are both legally sound and culturally responsive. Regionally, the findings support child welfare development in Caraga by aligning disclosure strategies with indigenous values and communal norms.

ETHICAL AND ORIGINALITY STATEMENT

This article is original, has not been submitted elsewhere, and complies with JPAIR ethical standards on authorship, transparency, and research integrity. No human subjects were directly involved; all data are secondary. The author declares no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions: Emily A. Sanogal — Conceptualization: Identify who conceptualized the study idea or research focus. Methodology: Indicate who designed the research methods. Investigation: Specify who carried out the experiments or data collection. Data Curation: List the individuals responsible for organizing and managing the data. Formal Analysis: Name those who performed the data analysis. Writing—Original Draft: Identify the

primary authors of the initial draft. Writing—Review & Editing: Mention who revised and edited the manuscript. Supervision: State who supervised the project or study; National Authority for Child Care Supervision— State who supervised the project or study.

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Data Availability Statement: Data available in the National Authority for Child Care regional office.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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