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**Mechanism Underlying the Influence of Family Travel on  
Adolescent Self-Differentiation: A Social Learning Theory  
Perspective**

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# Mechanism Underlying the Influence of Family Travel on Adolescent Self-Differentiation: A Social Learning Theory Perspective

## Abstract

Most tourism studies have investigated adolescent experiences and their subjective feelings toward family travel. However, the research regarding how family travel influences adolescent mental development is still fragmented. To fill this research gap, this study used social learning theory and a grounded theory approach to explore the identity development and self-growth of twelve adolescents from families in China with family travel experiences. Taking a child-centered and participatory approach, the adolescents, and their parents (one per family) were interviewed. The data indicated that the away-from-home of family travel could lead adolescents to undergo internalization-based learning as a stress response; such learning could increase adolescents' self-differentiation by improving their self-efficacy and enable behavioral growth and achievement. This study developed a new theory for social learning, that is environment–cognition–stress response–behavior, and the mechanisms underlying the influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation emerged. This study provides theoretical contributions useful in the development of family travel experiences and products.

## Keywords

Self-differentiation, child-centeredness, self-efficacy, family travel, social learning theory, grounded theory

## 1. Introduction

Young parents traveling with children have led to the emergence and expansion of a new tourism market, which is being catalyzed and facing a boom (Wang et al., 2018). For instance, family tourism has accounted for 34% of China's total outbound tourism market (Meadin, 2019). The family tourism market is growing into a major constituent of the global tourism market, which has aroused scholars' attention to family travel (Fu et al., 2022; Miyakawa & Oguchi, 2022). As family structures have shifted toward small and nuclear families, family relationships have transformed. Family awareness, family education, and psychological complexes of children have become increasingly prominent (Wu, Kirillova, & Lehto, 2021). Chinese parents are eager for their children to succeed and are increasingly emphasizing their education and overall well-being. Many Chinese parents have realized the value of family travel and regarded it as an excellent opportunity for children's informal learning (Park, Pan, & Ahn, 2020). Child psychology and pedagogy scholars have become increasingly interested in how tourism shapes the personalities of family tourists, particularly children and adolescents, and catalyzes psychological change (Liao et al., 2022; Pan & Shang, 2023; Xu, Li, Lin, & Feng, 2022).

Adolescence is the period in which an individual's self-differentiation is most prominent (Amani & Shariatipour, 2021). In adolescence (defined as aged ten-nineteen years according to the WHO's definition), adolescents transition from their identity within the family unit to an identity within society. Through self-

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4 differentiation, a person separates themselves psychologically and physically from their family and may achieve  
5 psychological maturity and independence while maintaining the ability to keep in touch with others emotionally  
6 (Finklestein et al., 2020). Family vacation can provide a supportive environment for adolescents to understand  
7 the relationships with themselves, their families and their cultures, facilitating a sense of belonging and identity,  
8 and increasing their level of self-differentiation (Hilbrecht et al., 2008). However, few systematic studies have  
9 investigated the influence of family tourism on adolescent self-differentiation in away- from- home environments  
10 and how family travel encourages adolescent psychological development.

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13 The significant value of this study is to address above-mentioned research gap. Namely, this study applied  
14 social learning theory (SLT) as its foundation to understand the mechanism of family travel on adolescent self-  
15 differentiation because SLT focuses on the role of observational learning and self-regulation in triggering human  
16 behavior. This research aims to achieve the following three objectives: (1) to identify how adapting to away-  
17 from-home environments influences adolescent self-differentiation; (2) to reveal how internalization-based  
18 learning triggers the mechanism of family travel influencing adolescent self-differentiation; (3) to investigate  
19 how self-efficacy affects adolescents' self-differentiation during a family travel. Therefore, this study offers  
20 theoretical insights that can aid in the development of family travel experiences and products.

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23 This research employed a grounded theory approach by interviewing twenty-four individuals, constituted of  
24 twelve parents and one of their adolescent children. Including the adolescents in the research meant that a child-  
25 centered and participatory approach was used in an area of life where their voices are often neglected (Canosa et  
26 al., 2022). In addition, coding analysis was performed using Nvivo 12 qualitative analysis software, which  
27 afforded exploration mechanism of the influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation. This study  
28 expanded the application of the theory of self-differentiation and improved understandings of the educational  
29 value of family tourism.

## 30 31 32 **2. Theoretical framework and literature review**

### 33 34 ***2.1. Theoretical framework***

35 As mentioned before, the interactions of environmental, cognitive, and behavioral factors underly social learning  
36 theory, which emphasizes how environments and society influence and constrain cognition and behavior.  
37 Specifically, human behavior is the result of the combined influences of subjective awareness and external  
38 constraints. However, behavior is independent of and influences environment and cognition itself; behavior,  
39 environment, and cognition are thus interdependent (Bandura, 1977). Family members, especially parents,  
40 considerably influence children's perception of their social surroundings as well as their inner cognition and daily  
41 behavior (Bandura, 1977). A family trip creates a microsocial environment within the already away-from home  
42 aspect associated with travel. On family trips, family members' needs interweave and interact (Kim, Tanford, &  
43 Choi, 2020).

### 44 45 46 47 48 ***2.2. Family travel***

49 Family travel is one of the most important segments in the global tourism market (Lehto et al., 2009) and can be  
50 beneficial to family well-being (Miyakawa & Oguchi, 2022). Vada et al. (2022) found that people who travel  
51 with their spouse or partner, children, and other family members are happier than those who travel alone. The  
52 renewal of relationships with family during travel contributes to an increase in happiness and meaningfulness of  
53 travel. Generally, family-oriented leisure activities are conducive to positive interactions between family  
54 members (Lehto et al., 2009), enhance family cohesion (Lehto et al., 2012), and strengthen psychological  
55 development in adolescents (Orthner & Mancini, 1990). Family travel with adolescents is a subfield of family  
56 tourism research, which continues to grow (Wu et al., 2019). Scholars have analyzed the subjects, forms, and  
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4 requirements of such travel (Liu, Zhao, & Chen, 2016). In family travel, children and their parents are the  
5 traveling subjects. The general aims of such travel are to enhance parent–child relationships, children’s  
6 knowledge and skills, and physical and mental health (Gong, Liu, & Ma, 2020).  
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8 In family travel, the educational value of the activities must be considered without overlooking parents’  
9 tourism needs for entertainment and for improving their communication with children (Park, Pan, & Ahn, 2020;  
10 Zhong et al., 2020; Zhong et al., 2020). From a parent’s perspective, family travel with adolescents is an effective  
11 means of education and of improving the quality and harmony of family and marital relationships, which is in  
12 line with the social constructs of “good children,” “good parents,” and “good families” (Lyu et al., 2020).  
13 However, few scholars have considered the influence and value of family travel from a child’s perspective (Gao,  
14 Havitz, & Potwarka, 2020). Therefore, a child-centered and participatory approach is needed here.  
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### 18 *2.2.1. Family travel in China*

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21 In the context of Chinese culture, the family is not only an environment for nurturing and fostering personal  
22 growth and learning, but also a spiritual and emotional anchor for individuals. Therefore, Chinese society  
23 emphasizes the presence and spiritual value of "family" (Kai & Guo-qun, 2011). Hsu & Huang (2016) proposed  
24 that instrumental values, terminal values, and interpersonal values in traditional Chinese cultural values,  
25 including courtesy, morality, horizon broadening/novelty, knowledge and education, and family  
26 orientation/kinship, can influence the behavior of tourists. Lin et al. (2021) analyzed the impact of social,  
27 economic, and psychological factors on family travel consumption based on Chinese family data, indicating that  
28 family travel decisions are influenced by the overall opinions and attitudes of family members. Wu et al. (2021)  
29 developed a Chinese youth family travel learning outcome scale composed of four dimensions: family awareness,  
30 personal abilities, destination knowledge, and self-reflection, indicating that family awareness is the strongest  
31 predictor of adolescent travel happiness. The core concept of the Chinese-style "family" emphasizes the overall  
32 development of the family, individual respect for the family, with children as the core of the family. Lehto et al.  
33 (2017) revealed the benefits of Chinese family travel in a pyramid structure, with satisfying children's needs  
34 (experiential learning for children) at the top, meeting the needs of the entire family (communication &  
35 togetherness, shared exploration) in the middle, and meeting individual needs (escape & relaxation) at the bottom.  
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41 As the concept of vacation gradually integrates into the modern lifestyle of Chinese families, family  
42 vacations have been seen as opportunities to enrich children's learning experiences, promote family unity and  
43 happiness, and get away from the daily hustle and bustle. Therefore, the proportion of family leisure time spent  
44 on family travel activities in Chinese families is showing an increasing trend (Schänzel, 2012). Although Chinese  
45 families are rapidly becoming important consumer units in the tourism industry, there is still a lack of systematic  
46 understanding of family travel phenomena from the perspective of adolescent growth.  
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### 51 ***2.3. The social learning mechanism: influence of family travel on adolescent psychology***

52 The influence of family travel on adolescent psychology is an emerging and underappreciated research topic  
53 (Gao et al., 2020). Family travel studies initially considered children to be a passive component of adults’  
54 vacation experiences rather than independent individuals. Scholars generally took ‘adultist’ and ‘protectionist’  
55 approaches, constructing children as too vulnerable to participate, and asked adults about their influence on  
56 their children rather than directly consulting the children (Canosa et al., 2022). However, sociological scholars  
57 have highlighted that adolescents, as independent subjects, should be considered active participants in family  
58 travel activities and “beings” with their own interests (Zhong et al., 2020).  
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4 Studies have identified education, sports, positive experience, enhancing interpersonal relationships, and  
5 expanding family responsibilities as motivations for family travel (Wu & Wall, 2017). Lee & Lee (2021)  
6 proposed that involvement experiences in family travel strengthen communication and interaction within the  
7 family through interaction, participation, and engagement, increasing the memorability of the trip. They can  
8 significantly enhance family cohesion, which includes emotional bonds, support, help, and care formed among  
9 family members, and can help alleviate adolescent depressive symptoms. Most tourism studies employing an  
10 adolescent perspective have researched adolescent experiences and their subjective feelings toward family travel,  
11 such as subjective well-being and memorable travel experiences. (Kim & Lehto, 2013; Lee & Lee, 2021).  
12 However, the factors that influence adolescent mental health and development are missing (Poria & Timothy,  
13 2014). Mental health emphasizes the positive mental state and the full realization of personal potential (Pan &  
14 Shang, 2023).

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19 Adolescence is a period of distinct psychological development in the course of human life. At this life stage,  
20 children gradually separate themselves from their parents with respect to their emotions, behaviors, and opinions  
21 and begin to form their own perspectives (Liao et al., 2022). That is, adolescents feel a need for independence.  
22 In adolescence, children begin to differ from their parents in their cognition, experiences, expectations, and  
23 personal pursuits, as well as in their perceptions of the value of family travel (Lehto et al., 2012). Therefore,  
24 exploring how family travel affects adolescents' identity development and self-growth inclusive of the  
25 adolescents' perspectives is valuable psychological research.  
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#### 29 **2.4. Self-differentiation**

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31 Self-differentiation refers to the way family patterns affect the trajectory of individual functioning and  
32 development (Bowen, 1978). Self-differentiation is central to personality maturation, mental health, and the  
33 establishment of social relationships and necessary for family members' growth, and the differentiation of the  
34 individual from the family is at its core (Bowen, 1978). In growing up, individuals must confront two competing  
35 forces within themselves, namely individualization and cohesion. Individualization prompts individuals to  
36 psychologically separate themselves from their family, whereas cohesion prompts them to psychologically  
37 maintain intimate connections with their family (Kere, 1981). Self-differentiation is a manifestation of the  
38 balance between individualization and cohesion. Levels of self-differentiation are considerably influenced by an  
39 individual's level of emotional separation from the family they are raised in. Individuals learn to differentiate  
40 between the self and others through their relationships with their parents (Koepke & Denissen, 2012).  
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45 Individualization and independent self-differentiation are integral aspects of adolescent development  
46 (Amani & Shariatipour, 2021). Self-differentiation is closely associated with adolescent mental health, social  
47 relationships, sense of security, attachment, and mental flexibility (Skowron & Elizabeth, 2000). Adolescents  
48 with sufficient self-differentiation can make psychological adjustments and control themselves. They can remain  
49 calm and judicious when faced with stressful circumstances, such as conflict, criticism, and rejection; by doing  
50 so, they experience little stress in their interpersonal relationships. These adolescents are neither excessively  
51 alienated from nor excessively attached to their families, which allows them to develop intimate relationships  
52 with others while maintaining an independent self. Adolescents with unfavorable self-differentiation are  
53 generally more emotional and more likely to exhibit anxiety, fear, withdrawal, defensiveness, and stubbornness  
54 under stress. Furthermore, such adolescents are susceptible to the influences of people around them (Liu, Liu, &  
55 Wang, 2011). Therefore, adolescent self-differentiation should ideally result in a balance and harmony between  
56 internal independence and interpersonal intimacy (An et al., 2018).  
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4 For optimal family functioning on holiday a balanced level of cohesion must be worked out which provides  
5 a sense of both connectedness (we-mode in family time) and separateness (I-mode in own time) in family  
6 relationships (Schänzel & Smith, 2014). Family holiday activities can facilitate adolescent personal growth and  
7 enable children to develop a sense of belonging and identity. They can learn to understand their relationships  
8 with themselves, their families, and their culture in a supportive environment, enhancing their self-differentiation.  
9 Therefore, whether family travel in away-from-home environments can alter family order and adolescents'  
10 interactions is theoretically and practically relevant.  
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13 In conclusion, the existing literature investigating how family travel influences self-differentiation is  
14 fragmented. Therefore, the influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation warrants a research study  
15 based on a social learning theoretical framework.  
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### 18 **3. Methodology**

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20 The influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation is a relatively new and under-explored topic. The  
21 interpretivism paradigm underpins this research because this paradigm focuses on perception and interpretation  
22 and offers a new understanding as a contribution. Since little research has explained the relationship between  
23 influence of family travel and adolescent self-differentiation, this study explores and interprets the mechanism  
24 underlying these two elements taking a child-centered approach. Specially, adolescents have been involved in  
25 this study, child-friendly methodology has been used, and adolescents' voices have been considered.  
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28 Qualitative research methodology fits the interpretivism paradigm well because this methodology can be  
29 applied to phenomena with unknown internal mechanisms (Layder, 1983). Through systematic collection,  
30 analysis, and comparison of data, such topics can be unraveled, and relevant theory can be developed (Layder,  
31 1983). Grounded theory methodology is used to explain the mechanisms and patterns underlying complex  
32 phenomena (Charmaz, 2011) and the interrelationships among constructs (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017). Nvivo 12  
33 is widely considered as the appropriate software to conduct qualitative study (Li et al., 2022). Therefore, this  
34 study used grounded theory methodology and Nvivo12 software to qualitatively analyze interview data. Through  
35 open, axial, and selective coding, general and core categories were extracted, a relationship structure was  
36 developed, and the mechanism underlying adolescent self-differentiation in family travel was identified.  
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#### 40 **3.1. Sampling and data collection**

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42 Despite the core differences between Eastern and Western cultures, separation and connection are necessary for  
43 the healthy psychological development of individuals in all cultures (Chung & Gale, 2009). With the  
44 advancement of globalization, individualism has gradually taken root in China (Cao, 2009). Under the influence  
45 of Confucian collectivism value culture and "home" culture, as adolescents' socialization agents, China's parents  
46 pass on filial social values and collectivism values to them. All these characteristics have affected Chinese family  
47 travel. Therefore, this study tries to explore the influence of family tourism on adolescents' self-differentiation  
48 under the cultural background of China with mixed collectivism and individualism.  
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51 The interviewees were determined by snowball sampling. This study selected a close friend of one author,  
52 and asked him to introduce two of his friends as participants, and these two participants would look for more  
53 people. Twelve families with family travel experience from five major geographical regions of China were finally  
54 selected. In detail, twelve parents (one per family) and their adolescent children were interviewed, for a total of  
55 twenty-four participants (ten mothers, two fathers, six female and six male adolescents). Since this study focused  
56 on the influence of parent-child travel experience on adolescent self-differentiation, the research team focused  
57 on the gender balance of adolescent respondents to reduce the interference of gender differences on the research  
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results. Therefore, six boys and six girls were selected. Regarding parents interviewed, regardless of whether one parent or both parents took the children travelling, mothers tend to play an important role in the planning and execution of family tourism (Wang et al., 2004). Hence, the number of interviewed mothers is higher than the fathers. It was deemed sufficient to interview only one parent if both parents participated in family travel, because parents tend to have similar experiences and thinking about family travel (Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag & Cheah, 2015). Whilst considering the gender of participants, this research selected the family who had a more- than-two-day trip because one day trip influences tourist psychology very less. The basic information on the interviewees is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Basic information of the participants

Family code	Annual family income (S)	Annual travel frequency (times)	Annual travel expense(S)	Sample type	Age interval (years)
A	22,501-45,000	5-7	<750	Mother(A1)	29-39
				Daughter(A2)	11-14
B	0-22,500	2-4	<750	Father(B1)	39-49
				Daughter(B2)	15-18
C	22,501-45,000	5-7	<750	Mother(C1)	29-39
				Son(C2)	11-14
D	22,501-45,000	5-7	750-3,000	Mother(D1)	39-49
				Son(D2)	11-14
E	45,001-675,000	2-4	750-3,000	Mother(E1)	29-39
				Daughter(E2)	11-14
F	22,501-45,000	5-7	750-3,000	Mother(F1)	39-49
				Daughter(F2)	15-18
G	0-22,500	2-4	<5750	Mother(G1)	39-49
				Son(G2)	15-18
H	0-22,500	1-2	750-3,000	Father(H1)	39-49
				Son(H2)	11-14
I	0-22,500	2-4	750-3,000	Mother(I1)	39-49
				Son(I2)	15-18
J	22,501-45,000	1-2	750-3,000	Mother(J1)	39-49
				Son(J2)	11-14
K	22,501-45,000	5-7	750-3,000	Mother(K1)	39-49
				Daughter (K2)	11-14
L	22,501-45,000	1-2	5,000-20,000	Mother(L1)	39-49
				Daughter(L2)	11-14

After the participants were recruited, the research team sent a semi-structured interview outline to the parents of the interviewed families through WeChat, a popular social messaging application in China, to inform them of the topics of the interview in advance. At this time, the parents were able to arrange a time for the interview and were provided with clarification or explanation on the interview topics. This improved the participants' understanding of the questions, which subsequently improved the quality of their answers. Then, we encouraged

the parents to explain the process and main questions of this interview to their children to ensure that the adolescents interviewed could understand and give a response. Consent was sought from the parents and their adolescents, and the adolescents were interviewed separately to avoid the influence of parents' presence on their expression of ideas. Additionally, the interviews were conducted with strict adherence to academic ethics, and no questions were designed to influence the adolescents' physical and mental health, which reduced the influence of the interviews on the adolescents' self-differentiation. These individual interviews ensured the autonomy and privacy of the adolescents. The family home was chosen by all the respondents as the interview location because they were the most comfortable to participant (LaRossa & Bennett, 2018). All the discussions are regarding their last holidays since they can recall the details of the travel. Follow-up supplementary interviews were conducted by telephone Tencent Conference. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and we interviewed each respondent once or twice. The interview records were transcribed, and we achieved theoretical saturation through a circular coding process (Charmaz, 2006).

### 3.2. Data analysis

Open coding is based on raw textual data; each phrase of the interview data was analyzed, compared, classified, and conceptualized (Layder, 1983). After repeated comparisons and revisions, sixty-one basic concepts and seventeen categories were identified. The differences and connections between the sixty-one concepts extracted in the open coding stage were examined and analyzed. Those closely connected concepts or in similar categories were combined into one category. For example, resolving conflict, making decisions autonomously, internalizing knowledge, and taking conscious action were integrated into an achievement and growth category. Sorting the logical associations among the categories resulted in identification of five main categories: adapting to away-from home environment, internalization-based learning, developing self-efficacy, enhancing self-differentiation, and achievement and growth (Table 2). The five categories extracted and formed through axial coding were analyzed to determine their associations. A core category, enhancing self-differentiation, was identified, and the relationship of the core category with general categories was constructed.

Table 2 Main categories formed through axial coding

Main category	Subcategory	Definition
Adapting to away-from-home environments	Visiting different landscapes , Adapting to living environments, perceiving the atmosphere of interaction	Adolescents' attempting to adapt to all of the environments they perceive during trips, including those affecting the subconscious, that differ from their usual living environments
Internalization-based learning	Initiating awareness, preserving memories, imitating and outputting	Adolescents "observing information and knowledge from changes in the external environment and in the behaviors of their parents and others, which formed memories and understanding that could potentially instigate behavioral changes
Developing self-efficacy	Developing self-awareness. boosting self-motivation, making behavioral choices	Adolescents' developing individual beliefs and subjective judgments regarding their ability to complete an action; their self-efficacy moderated and influenced their



#### 4.1. Adapting to away-from-home environment

Analysis of the key themes revealed that visiting landscapes, adapting to a new living environment, and perceiving an atmosphere of interaction were key components of adapting to away-from-home environments. Away-from-home environments differ from usual work, learning, and living environments; they involve environments that are foreign to the individual (Li & Liang, 2020). Parents frequently reported visiting different types of landscapes, thus broadening the adolescents' perspectives through travel as motivations for travel (e.g., adolescent E2).

*"We mainly travel to see natural or geographic landscapes that we have not seen before. This can enable the children to better understand the world;" [adolescent E2]*

Travel also permits families to escape their regular living environments. For example, the adolescent F2 discussed differences in weather and food, stating *"The weather in Chongqing is humid and the local food is spicy, which is somewhat different from the weather and food back home."* The away-from-home environment also deconstructed regular forms of family interactions, creating a more relaxing atmosphere of interaction, as parent D1 stated.

*"We would talk with our children about things we usually do not talk about at home, things that spontaneously came up in that situation" [parent D1].*

Through family travel, adolescents entered unfamiliar geographic spaces; the environment they visited replaced their usual work and learning environments, representing considerable changes in their perceived external conditions, living environments, and atmospheres of interaction (Wei et al., 2019). Therefore, the unique experiences in unusual circumstances form the underlying basis of family travel's influence on adolescents.

#### 4.2. Internalization-based learning

Adolescent internalization-based learning during family travel has three aspects, namely initiating awareness, preserving memories, and imitating and outputting. Adolescents' internalization-based learning during family travel involved forming memories and understanding through observation of the external environment as well as others' behaviors and outcomes which then further changed their own behaviors. Landscapes, events, and objects that differed from those observed in home-environments initiated adolescents' curiosity, thereby initiating awareness (e.g., *"He is interested in small animals at the zoo and loves to observe them when we visit" [parent C1]*). After observation and formation of understanding, adolescents preserved what they saw and heard as memories (e.g., *"I had an impression of some animals when I traveled, even though I did not know their names" [adolescent G2]*). Adolescents' internalization of these encounters and experiences as memories influenced their responses and behaviors when they later encountered similar scenes or events (e.g., *"After taking him to different places, he would proactively learn from people he found impressive" [parent D1]*).

Family travel can provide individuals with an appropriate learning environment and learning materials. Adolescents can gain immediate experience during family trips by personally engaging in activities, such as handcrafting or agricultural work. However, compared with activity engagement, observing, and then internalizing what they observed is a more common and effective way of learning that links to all aspects of travel (Wu et al., 2021). For example, an adolescent stated, *"Generally, the things I remembered are things I had rarely seen before. They left a deep impression on me" [adolescent D2]*. Internalization-based learning through observation can shorten the learning process, enabling adolescents to quickly understand a large amount of complex behavioral models without potential loss or harm caused by direct attempts, as parent G1 stated.

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4       *“The people who hiked with us had wide-ranging interests, knowledge, and life experiences. Through being*  
5 *in contact with them when camping, he observed those adults’ and his peers’ manners of behaving. I feel that his*  
6 *abilities have improved considerably. When he encounters problems, he is very active and solves them by himself”*  
7 *[parent G1].*

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9       The three aspects of internalization-based learning represented the process of awareness–memorization–  
10 practice through which adolescents internalize demonstrations in the environment or of others’ behaviors during  
11 family travel (Park, Pan, & Ahn, 2020). However, symbolic memories do not always lead to actions, which is  
12 influenced by self-motivation factors (i.e., self-efficacy). For example, a mother reported, *“My son and I used to*  
13 *go mountain climbing. We would make it our goal to climb to the top. Every time, he reached it quickly”* [parent  
14 G1].

### 15 16 17 **4.3. Developing self-efficacy**

18       The factors influencing adolescent self-efficacy during family travel were increases in self-awareness, self-  
19 motivation, and behavioral decision-making. Self-efficacy involves an individual’s judgment and subjective  
20 beliefs regarding their ability to perform a task or respond to an incident (de Sousa, Dias, & Pereira, 2023; Dias  
21 et al., 2022). During trips, adolescents formed understanding through self-efficacy by weighing their abilities  
22 against their goals and beliefs, which influenced their decision-making. *“Although it’s difficult to climb Mount*  
23 *Tai, I wanted to have a try”* [adolescent D2]. For adolescents with high levels of self-efficacy, when they  
24 recognized the disparity between their abilities and the conditions required to achieve their goals, internal drive  
25 motivated them to persist in their attempt. *“I usually check relevant information on the Internet in advance and*  
26 *make detailed itinerary planning before departure”* [adolescent D2]. By comparison, adolescents with lower  
27 levels of self-efficacy generally avoided challenges and relied on others. For example, an adolescent reported,  
28 *“During the trip, I will refer to my parents’ opinions. If they give me some advice, I will follow them.*  
29 *No compulsion, but I can’t stick to my own ideas.”* [adolescent A2].

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31       Self-efficacy development is a long-term process that is the outcome of consistent interaction between an  
32 individual and the external environment. For adolescents in China, a usual living environment from school to  
33 home might provide less space and opportunities to independently assume responsibility. Therefore, adolescents  
34 exposed only to such environments do not fully understand their abilities, and they do not have clearly defined  
35 self-efficacy. However, family travel affords adolescents an opportunity to directly confront away-from-home  
36 environments, providing opportunities for independent action and autonomous decision-making. Successful  
37 direct experiences and vicarious experiences gained through internalization-based learning led to self-evaluation  
38 and adjustment, which influences self-efficacy (Park, Pan, & Ahn, 2020). Conversely, self-efficacy influences  
39 an individual’s judgment of their abilities and external environment and determines whether the individual can  
40 generate motivation for and actualize a behavior. Therefore, Self-efficacy is a key node involved in the  
41 mechanism underlying the influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation.

### 42 43 44 **4.4. Enhancing Self-differentiation**

45       Through coding, four manifestations of adolescent self-differentiation were extracted, namely controlling  
46 emotional reactivity, emotional cutting off from parents, seeking an I position, and fusing with others. Measuring  
47 levels of individual self-differentiation generally involves evaluating the level of psychological change as well  
48 as changes in handling interpersonal relationships. Family travel can encourage adolescent self-exploration and  
49 differentiation (Wu, Kirillova, & Lehto, 2021). Controlling emotional reactivity involves sensitive or unstable  
50 affective responses, which can be caused by environmental stimulation in adolescents (Kelly, 2020). In this study,  
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4 some adolescents had more control over their emotions after a family trip and “*can remain in control of negative*  
5 *emotions and let them go within half an hour*” [adolescent D2].

6 Our in-depth interview found that family tourism promotes the adolescent’s I-position. An adolescent insists  
7 on his trip decision even if his father can’t accompany with him. “*He had read a lot of travel guides about Mount*  
8 *Tai. .... and took care of me during the trip*” [parent G4]. “*I do not crave the approval of everyone. I feel it is*  
9 *same for travel. I do not want to prove myself because I could not climb the top of mountain, so I quit*” [adolescent  
10 G2] This result is consistent with Kelly (1983)'s point of view. Leisure may be a crucial life space for the working  
11 out of identities that are important to the individual (Kelly, 1983).

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13 Strong parental authority and a lack of emotional warmth and support may aggravate the alienation of  
14 children in adolescence (Gao et al., 2020). Family trip activities in such families may reduce adolescents’  
15 perceptions of the quality of the travel experience (Steele & Mckinney, 2019), for example, “*I don’t really want*  
16 *to travel with him in the future*” [adolescent B2]. Fusing with others reflects adolescents’ abilities to balance key  
17 social relationships (Chen, Hyun & Lee, 2022). For example, with respect to the level of compliance with and  
18 respect for their parents’ opinion, some adolescents no longer sought opinions from their parents in handling  
19 interpersonal relationships and formed independent opinions and thoughts (e.g., “*Even if the opinions are not*  
20 *unified, I can find a better solution with my friends, rather than wronged myself during a trip*” [adolescent E2]).  
21 These four aspects were used to garner a comprehensive understanding through precise measurement of  
22 adolescent self-differentiation, which assisted in the identification and evaluation of the mechanism underlying  
23 the influence of family travel.  
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#### 30 31 **4.5. Feeling achievement and growth**

32 According to the thematic model, the achievement and growth category contains four outcomes of family travel,  
33 namely, making autonomous decisions, internalizing knowledge, resolving conflicts and taking conscious action.  
34 Achievement and growth refer to adolescents exhibiting different behavior during family trips from what they  
35 exhibit in typical environments and to the behavioral change adolescents undergo during family travel. After  
36 traveling, the adolescents were more able to think, judge, and decide independently (e.g., “*Seeing that big and*  
37 *prosperous capital, I have determined my ambition for the college entrance examination. I desire to go to Beijing*  
38 *for my college study in future*” [adolescent B2]). Regarding internalizing knowledge obtained during travel, a  
39 parent stated, “*My child saw porters on Mount Tai. He had learned from a textbook that the porters walk in a*  
40 *zigzag and tried it when he climbed uphill*” [parent D1]. Regarding the ability to confront and resolve conflicts  
41 through reasoning, parents reported that their children learned to be considerate and acted accordingly. One  
42 parent stated, “*When we returned from the trip, my child began to proactively help me with housework*” [parent  
43 K1]. The adolescents were affected by what they saw and their personal experiences during the family trips and  
44 started to behave differently after the trips (e.g., “*After the trip, when I don’t know something, I will refer to*  
45 *others’ opinions. But I will judge and decide things I know well, such as swimming*” [adolescent D2]).  
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#### 51 52 **5. Discussion**

53 Family travel situations involve a transmission mechanism comprising adaptation to away-from-home  
54 environments, internalization-based learning, self-efficacy development, self-differentiation, and achievement  
55 and growth. The stimulation caused by away-from home produces a stress response in adolescents (i.e.,  
56 internalization-based learning). As self-efficacy develops, this stress response leads to a change in self-  
57 differentiation levels, which is manifested as behaviors that are different from those in the past. In this  
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4 transmission mechanism, adapting to away-from home is the stimulus, adolescent internalization-based learning  
5 is the trigger, self-differentiation is the core factor, self-efficacy is moderating factor, and achievement and  
6 growth are the results.  
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### 9 *5.1. Influence of adapting to away-from-home environment on adolescent self-differentiation*

10 Away-from-home environments emerged to affect adolescent self-differentiation, adolescent learning, and  
11 individual change. This finding is consistent with research of Qeidari et al. (2021). In family travel, adolescents  
12 can usually focus on leisure, relaxation, and recreation. Thus, they easily transform novel stimuli, such as natural  
13 environments, cultural landscapes, and exotic features, into memories and selectively learn from the language  
14 and behaviors of others and associate positive emotions with such travel experiences. Such positive emotions can  
15 transfer to future learning activities and improve overall emotional stability over the course of adolescent  
16 development (Wang et al., 2022).  
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20 Stimuli in away-from-home environments when traveling can affect adolescents perceived emotional  
21 separation and I-position seeking (I-mode in their own time, see Schänzel, & Smith, 2014). Stimulation from  
22 travel leads to temporary cognitive disorder; when they are away from home, adolescents must quickly adapt to  
23 the environments, adjust their emotions, and handle various problems and challenges that emerge during travel.  
24 As one adolescent mentioned “*I feel I could take good care of myself during my last family trip. For example, I*  
25 *am good at using electronic products, so I could share this skill with my parents during the whole trip*”  
26 *[adolescent G2]*. When adolescents begin to no longer rely on their parents’ protection and assistance during or  
27 after travel, it indicates the formation of independent consciousness, self-awareness, and an ability to  
28 independently make judgments and decisions (Fu et al., 2022). This process of emotional, behavioral, and  
29 perspective separation from their parents is a key step in adolescents’ maturation and a major factor that  
30 influences self-differentiation levels (Wang & Li, 2020). Family travel allows adolescents to encounter adults  
31 and peers with different life experiences. Through behavioral observation, exchange, and interaction, adolescents  
32 become interested in the different states and behavioral patterns exhibited by external groups, particularly those  
33 exhibited by peers (Minnaert et al., 2009). Adolescents either imitate the behaviors or remain distinct; they form  
34 new understandings through comparison and consciously seek an I position.  
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40 Through family travel, adolescents can develop an ability to connect with others. Family travel provides  
41 adolescents with opportunities to discover and observe the external world (Wu et al., 2021). Adolescents with  
42 higher levels of curiosity and a desire for knowledge generally have conflicts with their parents due to differences  
43 in interests and hobbies, or due to their travel behaviors differing from those expected by their parents. Although  
44 the away-from home environments experienced in family travel may augment disagreements and conflicts  
45 between parents and children (Fu et al., 2022), the time constraints of travel require that both parties be aware of  
46 the need to quickly resolve such conflicts. Therefore, in family travel, emotional adjustment, empathy, and mutual  
47 understanding are required of both c adolescents and parents to identify a solution and achieve family harmony  
48 under such circumstances (Jepson, Stadler, & Spencer, 2019)(e.g., “*My child argues with me at home, but he is*  
49 *generally more obedient when we go out and obeys what I say*” *[parent E1]*.).  
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54 In addition, adolescents may become interested in people with cultural backgrounds, lifestyles, and  
55 upbringings vastly different from their own, or they may also be motivated by others’ excitement, enthusiasm,  
56 and active thinking and connect with these individuals. As a father mentioned, “*my child is interested with*  
57 *minority culture when we watched a tourism performance. My son felt the counterpart is hardworking, and he*  
58 *wants to make friends with the counterpart*” *[Parent H1]*.  
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### 5.2. *Internalization-based learning triggers influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation*

In family travel environments, internalization-based learning is a key learning process for adolescents. This study discovered more common and diverse learning activities of adolescents during family travel, including learning of the external natural environment, cultural environment, language environment, and peer behaviors. Adolescent awareness during travel can be triggered spontaneously or with parental guidance. Adolescents transform relevant environments, speech, and behaviors into linguistic and pictorial symbols, which are stored in the brain and internalized as memories. This process directly leads adolescents to imitate others' behaviors, alter their original understanding and reflections, cope with their social relationships, and self-differentiate (Van Merriënboer & Kirschner, 2018).

### 5.3. *Influence of self-efficacy on adolescent self-differentiation*

Self-efficacy moderates the influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation. Self-efficacy does not directly reflect an individual's abilities; rather, it affects the individual's evaluation of their ability and initiation of actions. Family travel elicits adolescents' ability to respond to the challenges and influences of the external environment. Perceiving the capability to perform novel tasks, communicating, and exchanging with others, acting autonomously, and, as a result, enjoying travel experiences can activate adolescents' self-efficacy. As an adolescent reported "*After that trip, I feel I can do everything, so I want to stay away from my parents and have ownspace.*" [adolescent L2]. Thus, they can develop a deeper understanding of their independent consciousness and become more confident (Vespestad et al., 2019;). Adolescents can interact with others independently and connect more with others which can lead to greater self-differentiation under the influence of family travel (Liao et al., 2022).

### 5.4. *Effect of adolescent self-differentiation in away-from-home environment on achievement and growth*

Adolescents can form understandings and a means of learning that are different from the past through travelling in away-from-home environments (Li & Liang, 2020). Through travel, adolescents break the implicit behavioral constraints of their usual living conditions, discover new behavioral states and learning outcomes, and transform behavior-induced direct experiences into memories and deeper understanding. These travel experiences can lead to self-exploration and analysis, and improve adolescent self-differentiation (Qeidari et al., 2021); hence, adolescents can develop a positive outlook and practical abilities for the future. As a parent said, "*my child has changed a lot since last family trip. He can manage the time well and try to figure out the tasks by himself. Maybe it is because he is trained in the family trip, like he needs to make travel schedule and so on*" [Parent G1]. This explains the achievement and growth numerous parents observed of their adolescent children after family trips, including with respect to their maturity, independence, and willingness to assist with housework.

## 6. Conclusion

### 6.1. *Theoretical contributions*

First, this research begins to unravel underlying the influence of the microsocial environment of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation. Through taking a grounded theory approach, five core categories of family travel influencing adolescent self-differentiation were identified: adapting to away-from-home environment,

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4 internalization-based learning, developing self-efficacy, enhancing self-differentiation, and feeling achievement  
5 and growth. This study provides a novel theoretical framework for evaluating the effects of family tourism  
6 experiences and products on adolescent growth. The findings provide a theoretical basis for further qualitative  
7 and quantitative studies in the future.  
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9 Second, this study extended the existing social learning theory, which involves a system of environment -  
10 cognition - behavior and developed a new theoretical framework for social learning of environment -  
11 cognition - stress response - behavior. Behaviorist researchers believe that learning does not mean that  
12 individual behavior must change (Bandura, 1977). This new framework highlights that stress responses can  
13 bridge cognition and behavior, and self-differentiation (stress responses) becomes the foundation for behavior.  
14 During family trips, cognition occur in the form of internalization-based learning, stress responses manifesting  
15 as self-differentiation, and behavior optimization through self-achievement and self-growth. This model presents  
16 the mechanisms underlying the influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation and can serve as a  
17 theoretical framework for future research on individual behavior and psychology in family travel.  
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21 Third, the away-from-home tourism environment has a bidirectional element promoting a relationship with  
22 adolescents' self-efficacy. According to cognitive theory, when adolescents are faced with a challenging situation,  
23 self-efficacy is evoked and used as a yardstick for gauging probable success in the situation (Delaney, 2006).  
24 Self-efficacy drives adolescents to make independent decisions in an away-from-home tourism environment by  
25 trying to explore and solve the difficulties they encounter. In this process, the successful experience acquired by  
26 adolescents also reflectively affects self-efficacy and raises the expectation of success, which then affects future  
27 behavior choices. For example, if some adolescents could climb the mountain, instead of cable car, he or she  
28 could enjoy this sense of achievement and is more like to climb next time. The improvement of the self-efficacy  
29 level of adolescents in tourism environments, as consciousness, also continues in their daily life, which is helpful  
30 to improve their independence, enthusiasm, and self-confidence in coping with problems in the usual home  
31 environment. The study found the interaction between away-from-home environments and self-efficacy of  
32 adolescents, which enriches the research on the influence of parent-child travel experience on the psychological  
33 growth of adolescents.  
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## 40 **6.2. Practical implications**

41 This research gives some practical implications for family, tourism practitioners and policy-makers. First, this  
42 research highlights the development of family relationships. From a parent's perspective, understanding the  
43 influence of travel on children's psychology can help them to manage their relationship with children when  
44 traveling, which contributes to the long-term development of family relationships. For a child, when encountering  
45 a challenge during outdoor travel, he/she appreciates their parents for nurturing, therefore, he/she would be  
46 inclined to tackle family conflict and seek a harmonious relationship with his/her parent.  
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49 Second, concerning the operation of family tourism, tourism practitioners should bear in mind the  
50 particularity of family tourism when developing family travel products. For example, family travel practitioners  
51 should focus on improving the landscape environment that balances safety and exploration of activities because  
52 child safety is a primary concern in family travel (Liu et al., 2024). Regarding how to boost tourist experience,  
53 family travel practitioners could arrange appropriate interactive activities to guide adolescents toward personal  
54 growth, empathy, and appreciation of natural beauty; thus developing an understanding of their relationships with  
55 nature, themselves, their parents, and others.  
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59 Third, after recognizing the influence of observational learning on adolescents traveling with their families,  
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4 family tourism practitioners could create innovative tourism products, and enrich the observational learning  
5 elements of trips. Tourism practitioners should do the utmost to offer educational tourist products to children.  
6 Meanwhile, a child-centered and participatory approach means that family tourism practitioners need to take  
7 children into account when they develop products or experiences, because adolescents are the initiators and  
8 important consumers of family travel (Lee et al., 2024).  
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10 Finally, policy makers should introduce policies to support the development of family tourism and enhance  
11 the connection between family tourism, adolescent growth, and education (Kim & Hyun, 2024). Specifically,  
12 tourism policy makers should encourage family tourism and stress the significance of tourism for child  
13 development, while destination organization should ensure a child-friendly tourism environment.  
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### 16 17 **6.3. Limitations and directions for future research**

18 The present grounded theory study has the following limitations: first, the participants comprised of only Chinese  
19 families. Adolescent self-differentiation should be considered in different cultural contexts in the future because  
20 the criteria for a satisfying differentiation may be varied and may depend on a unique set of culturally enforced  
21 norms and values (Chun & MacDermid, 1997). Second, adolescent self-differentiation remains a relatively new  
22 interdisciplinary domain that requires discussion with assistance from different research methods and could be  
23 further investigated from a developmental psychology perspective in the future. Third, this research explored the  
24 influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation taking a child-centered and participatory approach,  
25 however, more interdisciplinary efforts are needed in the future. Fourthly, as Park (2020) highlighted, the impact  
26 of family trips on people's psychology could be longer-lasting, from adulthood to active working stage, even  
27 ultimately to the retirement age lifespan of a person. Therefore, more long-term tracking research is needed in  
28 the future.  
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# Mechanism Underlying the Influence of Family Travel on Adolescent Self-Differentiation: A Social Learning Theory Perspective

## Abstract

Most tourism studies have investigated adolescent experiences and their subjective feelings toward family travel. However, the research regarding how family travel influences adolescent mental development is still fragmented. To fill this research gap, this study used social learning theory and a grounded theory approach to explore the identity development and self-growth of twelve adolescents from families in China with family travel experiences. Taking a child-centered and participatory approach, the adolescents, and their parents (one per family) were interviewed. The data indicated that the away-from-home of family travel could lead adolescents to undergo internalization-based learning as a stress response; such learning could increase adolescents' self-differentiation by improving their self-efficacy and enable behavioral growth and achievement. This study developed a new theory for social learning, that is environment–cognition–stress response–behavior, and the mechanisms underlying the influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation emerged. This study provides theoretical contributions useful in the development of family travel experiences and products.

## Keywords

Self-differentiation, child-centeredness, self-efficacy, family travel, social learning theory, grounded theory

## 1. Introduction

Young parents traveling with children have led to the emergence and expansion of a new tourism market, which is being catalyzed and facing a boom (Wang et al., 2018). For instance, family tourism has accounted for 34% of China's total outbound tourism market (Meadin, 2019). The family tourism market is growing into a major constituent of the global tourism market, which has aroused scholars' attention to family travel (Fu et al., 2022; Miyakawa & Oguchi, 2022). As family structures have shifted toward small and nuclear families, family relationships have transformed. Family awareness, family education, and psychological complexes of children have become increasingly prominent (Wu, Kirillova, & Lehto, 2021). Chinese parents are eager for their children to succeed and are increasingly emphasizing their education and overall well-being. Many Chinese parents have realized the value of family travel and regarded it as an excellent opportunity for children's informal learning (Park, Pan, & Ahn, 2020). Child psychology and pedagogy scholars have become increasingly interested in how tourism shapes the personalities of family tourists, particularly children and adolescents, and catalyzes psychological change (Liao et al., 2022; Pan & Shang, 2023; Xu, Li, Lin, & Feng, 2022).

Adolescence is the period in which an individual's self-differentiation is most prominent (Amani & Shariatipour, 2021). In adolescence (defined as aged ten-nineteen years according to the WHO's definition), adolescents transition from their identity within the family unit to an identity within society. Through self-

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4 differentiation, a person separates themselves psychologically and physically from their family and may achieve  
5 psychological maturity and independence while maintaining the ability to keep in touch with others emotionally  
6 (Finklestein et al., 2020). Family vacation can provide a supportive environment for adolescents to understand  
7 the relationships with themselves, their families and their cultures, facilitating a sense of belonging and identity,  
8 and increasing their level of self-differentiation (Hilbrecht et al., 2008). However, few systematic studies have  
9 investigated the influence of family tourism on adolescent self-differentiation in away- from- home environments  
10 and how family travel encourages adolescent psychological development.

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13 The significant value of this study is to address above-mentioned research gap. Namely, this study applied  
14 social learning theory (SLT) as its foundation to understand the mechanism of family travel on adolescent self-  
15 differentiation because SLT focuses on the role of observational learning and self-regulation in triggering human  
16 behavior. This research aims to achieve the following three objectives: (1) to identify how adapting to away-  
17 from-home environments influences adolescent self-differentiation; (2) to reveal how internalization-based  
18 learning triggers the mechanism of family travel influencing adolescent self-differentiation; (3) to investigate  
19 how self-efficacy affects adolescents' self-differentiation during a family travel. Therefore, this study offers  
20 theoretical insights that can aid in the development of family travel experiences and products.  
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24 This research employed a grounded theory approach by interviewing twenty-four individuals, constituted of  
25 twelve parents and one of their adolescent children. Including the adolescents in the research meant that a child-  
26 centered and participatory approach was used in an area of life where their voices are often neglected (Canosa et  
27 al., 2022). In addition, coding analysis was performed using Nvivo 12 qualitative analysis software, which  
28 afforded exploration mechanism of the influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation. This study  
29 expanded the application of the theory of self-differentiation and improved understandings of the educational  
30 value of family tourism.  
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## 32 **2. Theoretical framework and literature review**

### 33 **2.1. Theoretical framework**

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35 As mentioned before, the interactions of environmental, cognitive, and behavioral factors underly social  
36 learning theory, which emphasizes how environments and society influence and constrain cognition and behavior.  
37 Specifically, human behavior is the result of the combined influences of subjective awareness and external  
38 constraints. However, behavior is independent of and influences environment and cognition itself; behavior,  
39 environment, and cognition are thus interdependent (Bandura, 1977). Family members, especially parents,  
40 considerably influence children's perception of their social surroundings as well as their inner cognition and daily  
41 behavior (Bandura, 1977). A family trip creates a microsocial environment within the already away-from home  
42 aspect associated with travel. On family trips, family members' needs interweave and interact (Kim, Tanford, &  
43 Choi, 2020).  
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### 48 **2.2. Family travel**

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50 Family travel is one of the most important segments in the global tourism market (Lehto et al., 2009) and  
51 can be beneficial to family well-being (Miyakawa & Oguchi, 2022). Vada et al. (2022) found that people who  
52 travel with their spouse or partner, children, and other family members are happier than those who travel alone.  
53 The renewal of relationships with family during travel contributes to an increase in happiness and meaningfulness  
54 of travel. Generally, family-oriented leisure activities are conducive to positive interactions between family  
55 members (Lehto et al., 2009), enhance family cohesion (Lehto et al., 2012), and strengthen psychological  
56 development in adolescents (Orthner & Mancini, 1990). Family travel with adolescents is a subfield of family  
57 tourism research, which continues to grow (Wu et al., 2019). Scholars have analyzed the subjects, forms, and  
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4 requirements of such travel (Liu, Zhao, & Chen, 2016). In family travel, children and their parents are the  
5 traveling subjects. The general aims of such travel are to enhance parent–child relationships, children’s  
6 knowledge and skills, and physical and mental health (Gong, Liu, & Ma, 2020).  
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8 In family travel, the educational value of the activities must be considered without overlooking parents’  
9 tourism needs for entertainment and for improving their communication with children (Park, Pan, & Ahn, 2020;  
10 Zhong, Huang, Peng, Xu, & Yan 2020; Zhong, Xu, Yan, Huang & Peng ,2020). From a parent’s perspective,  
11 family travel with adolescents is an effective means of education and of improving the quality and harmony of  
12 family and marital relationships, which is in line with the social constructs of “good children,” “good parents,”  
13 and “good families”(Lyu et al., 2020). However, few scholars have considered the influence and value of family  
14 travel from a child’s perspective (Gao, Havitz, & Potwarka, 2020). Therefore, a child-centered and participatory  
15 approach is needed here.  
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### 20 *2.2.1. Family travel in China*

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22 In the context of Chinese culture, the family is not only an environment for nurturing and fostering personal  
23 growth and learning, but also a spiritual and emotional anchor for individuals. Therefore, Chinese society  
24 emphasizes the presence and spiritual value of "family" (Kai & Guo-qun, 2011). Hsu & Huang (2016) proposed  
25 that instrumental values, terminal values, and interpersonal values in traditional Chinese cultural values,  
26 including courtesy, morality, horizon broadening/novelty, knowledge and education, and family  
27 orientation/kinship, can influence the behavior of tourists. Lin et al. (2021) analyzed the impact of social,  
28 economic, and psychological factors on family travel consumption based on Chinese family data, indicating that  
29 family travel decisions are influenced by the overall opinions and attitudes of family members. Wu et al. (2021)  
30 developed a Chinese youth family travel learning outcome scale composed of four dimensions: family awareness,  
31 personal abilities, destination knowledge, and self-reflection, indicating that family awareness is the strongest  
32 predictor of adolescent travel happiness. The core concept of the Chinese-style "family" emphasizes the overall  
33 development of the family, individual respect for the family, with children as the core of the family. Lehto et al.  
34 (2017) revealed the benefits of Chinese family travel in a pyramid structure, with satisfying children's needs  
35 (experiential learning for children) at the top, meeting the needs of the entire family (communication &  
36 togetherness, shared exploration) in the middle, and meeting individual needs (escape & relaxation) at the bottom.  
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43 As the concept of vacation gradually integrates into the modern lifestyle of Chinese families, family  
44 vacations have been seen as opportunities to enrich children's learning experiences, promote family unity and  
45 happiness, and get away from the daily hustle and bustle. Therefore, the proportion of family leisure time spent  
46 on family travel activities in Chinese families is showing an increasing trend (Schänzel, 2012). Although Chinese  
47 families are rapidly becoming important consumer units in the tourism industry, there is still a lack of systematic  
48 understanding of family travel phenomena from the perspective of adolescent growth.  
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### 52 ***2.3. The social learning mechanism: influence of family travel on adolescent psychology***

53 The influence of family travel on adolescent psychology is an emerging and underappreciated research topic  
54 (Gao et al., 2020). Family travel studies initially considered children to be a passive component of adults’  
55 vacation experiences rather than independent individuals. Scholars generally took ‘adultist’ and ‘protectionist’  
56 approaches, constructing children as too vulnerable to participate, and asked adults about their influence on  
57 their children rather than directly consulting the children (Canosa et al., 2022). However, sociological scholars  
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4 have highlighted that adolescents, as independent subjects, should be considered active participants in family  
5 travel activities and “beings” with their own interests (Zhong et al., , 2020).

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7 Studies have identified education, sports, positive experience, enhancing interpersonal relationships, and  
8 expanding family responsibilities as motivations for family travel (Wu & Wall, 2017). Lee & Lee (2021)  
9 proposed that involvement experiences in family travel strengthen communication and interaction within the  
10 family through interaction, participation, and engagement, increasing the memorability of the trip. They can  
11 significantly enhance family cohesion, which includes emotional bonds, support, help, and care formed among  
12 family members, and can help alleviate adolescent depressive symptoms. Most tourism studies employing an  
13 adolescent perspective have researched adolescent experiences and their subjective feelings toward family travel,  
14 such as subjective well-being and memorable travel experiences. (Kim & Lehto, 2013; Lee & Lee, 2021).  
15 However, the factors that influence adolescent mental health and development are missing (Poria & Timothy,  
16 2014). Mental health emphasizes the positive mental state and the full realization of personal potential (Pan &  
17 Shang, 2023). Adolescence is a period of distinct psychological development in the course of human life. At this  
18 life stage, children gradually separate themselves from their parents with respect to their emotions, behaviors,  
19 and opinions and begin to form their own perspectives (Liao et al., 2022). That is, adolescents feel a need for  
20 independence. In adolescence, children begin to differ from their parents in their cognition, experiences,  
21 expectations, and personal pursuits, as well as in their perceptions of the value of family travel (Lehto et al.,  
22 2012). Therefore, exploring how family travel affects adolescents’ identity development and self-growth  
23 inclusive of the adolescents’ perspectives is valuable psychological research.  
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#### 30 31 **2.4. Self-differentiation**

32 Self-differentiation refers to the way family patterns affect the trajectory of individual functioning and  
33 development (Bowen, 1978). Self-differentiation is central to personality maturation, mental health, and the  
34 establishment of social relationships and necessary for family members’ growth, and the differentiation of the  
35 individual from the family is at its core (Bowen, 1978). In growing up, individuals must confront two competing  
36 forces within themselves, namely individualization and cohesion. Individualization prompts individuals to  
37 psychologically separate themselves from their family, whereas cohesion prompts them to psychologically  
38 maintain intimate connections with their family (Kere, 1981). Self-differentiation is a manifestation of the  
39 balance between individualization and cohesion. Levels of self-differentiation are considerably influenced by an  
40 individual’s level of emotional separation from the family they are raised in. Individuals learn to differentiate  
41 between the self and others through their relationships with their parents (Koepeke & Denissen, 2012).  
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45 Individualization and independent self-differentiation are integral aspects of adolescent development  
46 (Amani & Shariatipour, 2021). Self-differentiation is closely associated with adolescent mental health, social  
47 relationships, sense of security, attachment, and mental flexibility (Skowron & Elizabeth, 2000). Adolescents  
48 with sufficient self-differentiation can make psychological adjustments and control themselves. They can remain  
49 calm and judicious when faced with stressful circumstances, such as conflict, criticism, and rejection; by doing  
50 so, they experience little stress in their interpersonal relationships. These adolescents are neither excessively  
51 alienated from nor excessively attached to their families, which allows them to develop intimate relationships  
52 with others while maintaining an independent self. Adolescents with unfavorable self-differentiation are  
53 generally more emotional and more likely to exhibit anxiety, fear, withdrawal, defensiveness, and stubbornness  
54 under stress. Furthermore, such adolescents are susceptible to the influences of people around them (Liu, Liu, &  
55 Wang, 2011). Therefore, adolescent self-differentiation should ideally result in a balance and harmony between  
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4 internal independence and interpersonal intimacy (An, Wu, Wang, & Cao, 2018).

5 For optimal family functioning on holiday a balanced level of cohesion must be worked out which provides  
6 a sense of both connectedness (we-mode in family time) and separateness (I-mode in own time) in family  
7 relationships (Schänzel & Smith, 2014). Family holiday activities can facilitate adolescent personal growth and  
8 enable children to develop a sense of belonging and identity. They can learn to understand their relationships  
9 with themselves, their families, and their culture in a supportive environment, enhancing their self-differentiation.  
10 Therefore, whether family travel in away-from-home environments can alter family order and adolescents'  
11 interactions is theoretically and practically relevant.

12 In conclusion, the existing literature investigating how family travel influences self-differentiation is  
13 fragmented. Therefore, the influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation warrants a research study  
14 based on asocial learning theoretical framework.

### 19 **3. Methodology**

20 The influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation is a relatively new and under-explored topic. The  
21 interpretivism paradigm underpins this research because this paradigm focuses on perception and interpretation  
22 and offers a new understanding as a contribution. Since little research has explained the relationship between  
23 influence of family travel and adolescent self-differentiation, this study explores and interpretes the mechanism  
24 underlying these two elements taking a child-centered approach. Specially, adolescents have been involved in  
25 this study, child-friendly methodology has been used, and adolescent's voices have been considered.

26 Qualitative research methodology fits the interpretivism paradigm well because this methodology can be  
27 applied to phenomena with unknown internal mechanisms (Layder, 1983). Through systematic collection,  
28 analysis, and comparison of data, such topics can be unraveled, and relevant theory can be developed (Layder,  
29 1983). Grounded theory methodology is used to explain the mechanisms and patterns underlying complex  
30 phenomena (Charmaz, 2011) and the interrelationships among constructs (Matteucci & Gnoth, 2017). Nvivo 12  
31 is widely considered as the appropriate software to conduct qualitative study (Li et al., 2022). Therefore, this  
32 study used grounded theory methodology and Nvivo12 software to qualitatively analyze interview data. Through  
33 open, axial, and selective coding, general and core categories were extracted, a relationship structure was  
34 developed, and the mechanism underlying adolescent self-differentiation in family travel was identified.

#### 41 **3.1. Sampling and data collection**

42 Despite the core differences between Eastern and Western cultures, separation and connection are necessary for  
43 the healthy psychological development of individuals in all cultures (Chung & Gale, 2009). With the  
44 advancement of globalization, individualism has gradually taken root in China (Cao, 2009). Under the influence  
45 of Confucian collectivism value culture and "home" culture, as adolescents' socialization agents, China's parents  
46 pass on filial social values and collectivism values to them. All these characteristics have affected Chinese family  
47 travel. Therefore, this study tries to explore the influence of family tourism on adolescents' self-differentiation  
48 under the cultural background of China with mixed collectivism and individualism.

49 The interviewees were determined by snowball sampling. This study selected a close friend of one author,  
50 and asked him to introduced two of his friends as participants, and these two participants would look for more  
51 people. Twelve families with family travel experience from five major geographical regions of China were finally  
52 selected. In detail, twelve parents (one per family) and their adolescent children were interviewed, for a total of  
53 twenty-four participants (ten mothers, two fathers, six female and six male adolescents). Since this study focused  
54 on the influence of parent-child travel experience on adolescent self-differentiation, the research team focused  
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on the gender balance of adolescent respondents to reduce the interference of gender differences on the research results. Therefore, six boys and six girls were selected. Regarding parents interviewed, regardless of whether one parent or both parents took the children travelling, mothers tend to play an important role in the planning and execution of family tourism (Wang et al., 2004). Hence, the number of interviewed mothers is higher than the fathers. It was deemed sufficient to interview only one parent if both parents participated in family travel, because parents tend to have similar experiences and thinking about family travel (Khoo-Lattimore, Prayag & Cheah, 2015). Whilst considering the gender of participants, this research selected the family who had a more- than-two-day trip because one day trip influences tourist psychology very less. The basic information on the interviewees is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Table 1 Basic information of the participants**

Family code	Annual family income (S)	Annual travel frequency (times)	Annual travel expense(S)	Sample type	Age interval (years)
A	22,501-45,000	5-7	<750	Mother(A1)	29-39
				Daughter(A2)	11-14
B	0-22,500	2-4	<750	Father(B1)	39-49
				Daughter(B2)	15-18
C	22,501-45,000	5-7	<750	Mother(C1)	29-39
				Son(C2)	11-14
D	22,501-45,000	5-7	750-3000	Mother(D1)	39-49
				Son(D2)	11-14
E	45,001-675,000	2-4	750-3000	Mother(E1)	29-39
				Daughter(E2)	11-14
F	22,501-45,000	5-7	750-3000	Mother(F1)	39-49
				Daughter(F2)	15-18
G	0-22,500	2-4	<5750	Mother(G1)	39-49
				Son(G2)	15-18
H	0-22,500	1-2	750-3000	Father(H1)	39-49
				Son(H2)	11-14
I	0-22,500	2-4	750-3000	Mother(I1)	39-49
				Son(I2)	15-18
J	22,501-45,000	1-2	750-3000	Mother(J1)	39-49
				Son(J2)	11-14
K	22,501-45,000	5-7	750-3000	Mother(K1)	39-49
				Daughter (K2)	11-14
L	22,501-45,000	1-2	5000-20000	Mother(L1)	39-49
				Daughter(L2)	11-14

After the participants were recruited, the research team sent a semi-structured interview outline to the parents of the interviewed families through WeChat, a popular social messaging application in China, to inform them of the topics of the interview in advance. At this time, the parents were able to arrange a time for the interview and were provided with clarification or explanation on the interview topics. This improved the participants'

understanding of the questions, which subsequently improved the quality of their answers. Then, we encouraged the parents to explain the process and main questions of this interview to their children to ensure that the adolescents interviewed could understand and give a response. Consent was sought from the parents and their adolescents, and the adolescents were interviewed separately to avoid the influence of parents' presence on their expression of ideas. Additionally, the interviews were conducted with strict adherence to academic ethics, and no questions were designed to influence the adolescents' physical and mental health, which reduced the influence of the interviews on the adolescents' self-differentiation. These individual interviews ensured the autonomy and privacy of the adolescents. The family home was chosen by all the respondents as the interview location because they were the most comfortable to participant (LaRossa & Bennett, 2018). All the discussions are regarding their last holidays since they can recall the details of the travel. Follow-up supplementary interviews were conducted by telephone Tencent Conference. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes, and we interviewed each respondent once or twice. The interview records were transcribed, and we achieved theoretical saturation through a circular coding process (Charmaz, 2006).

### 3.2. Data analysis

Open coding is based on raw textual data; each phrase of the interview data was analyzed, compared, classified, and conceptualized (Layder, 1983). After repeated comparisons and revisions, sixty-one basic concepts and seventeen categories were identified. The differences and connections between the sixty-one concepts extracted in the open coding stage were examined and analyzed. Those closely connected concepts or in similar categories were combined into one category. For example, resolving conflict, making decisions autonomously, internalizing knowledge, and taking conscious action were integrated into an achievement and growth category. Sorting the logical associations among the categories resulted in identification of five main categories: adapting to away-from home environment, internalization-based learning, developing self-efficacy, enhancing self-differentiation, and achievement and growth (Table 2). The five categories extracted and formed through axial coding were analyzed to determine their associations. A core category, enhancing self-differentiation, was identified, and the relationship of the core category with general categories was constructed.

Table 2 Main categories formed through axial coding

Main category	Subcategory	Definition
Adapting to away-from-home environments	Visiting different landscapes , Adapting to living environments, perceiving the atmosphere of interaction	Adolescents' attempting to adapt to all of the environments they perceive during trips, including those affecting the subconscious, that differ from their usual living environments
Internalization-based learning	Initiating awareness, preserving memories, imitating and outputting	Adolescents "observing information and knowledge from changes in the external environment and in the behaviors of their parents and others, which formed memories and understanding that could potentially instigate behavioral changes
Developing self-efficacy	Developing self-awareness. boosting self-motivation, making behavioral	Adolescents' developing individual beliefs and subjective judgments regarding their

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	choices	ability to complete an action; their self-efficacy moderated and influenced their process of learning about objects and environments, developing behavioral motivations. and taking action on family trips
Enhancing self-differentiation	Emotional responding, creating emotional isolation, locating I-position seeking, fusing with others	A result of adolescents reevaluating their independence from and dependence on their families through psychological cognition after family trips and a key psychological process that constitutes adolescent growth
Feeling achievement and growth	Dealing with conflict, making autonomous decisions, internalizing knowledge, taking conscious actions	Abnormal behavior and changes in behavior during and after family trips

**4. Findings and analysis**

Based on the data analysis, a thematic model for the mechanism underlying the influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation was developed (Figure 1) which informed the structure of the findings. Travel activities led to unique experiences for the adolescents, which induced internalization learning, a stress response to stimulation of being away-from home. This led to formation of pleasant, multisensory, and exploratory memories of the travel experience through sensory observations and interactions with others. Such memories and understanding were enhanced through self-efficacy and manifested in responding emotionally, developing interpersonal relationships, reflecting on the meaning of family, and seeking an I position. That is, the internalization-based learning process of attention–memory–imitation promoted adolescent self-differentiation and influenced their future achievement and growth, with self-efficacy playing a moderating role. Additionally, the travel-initiated difference in self-efficacy promoted selective learning and internalization, which led to different self-differentiation outcomes.

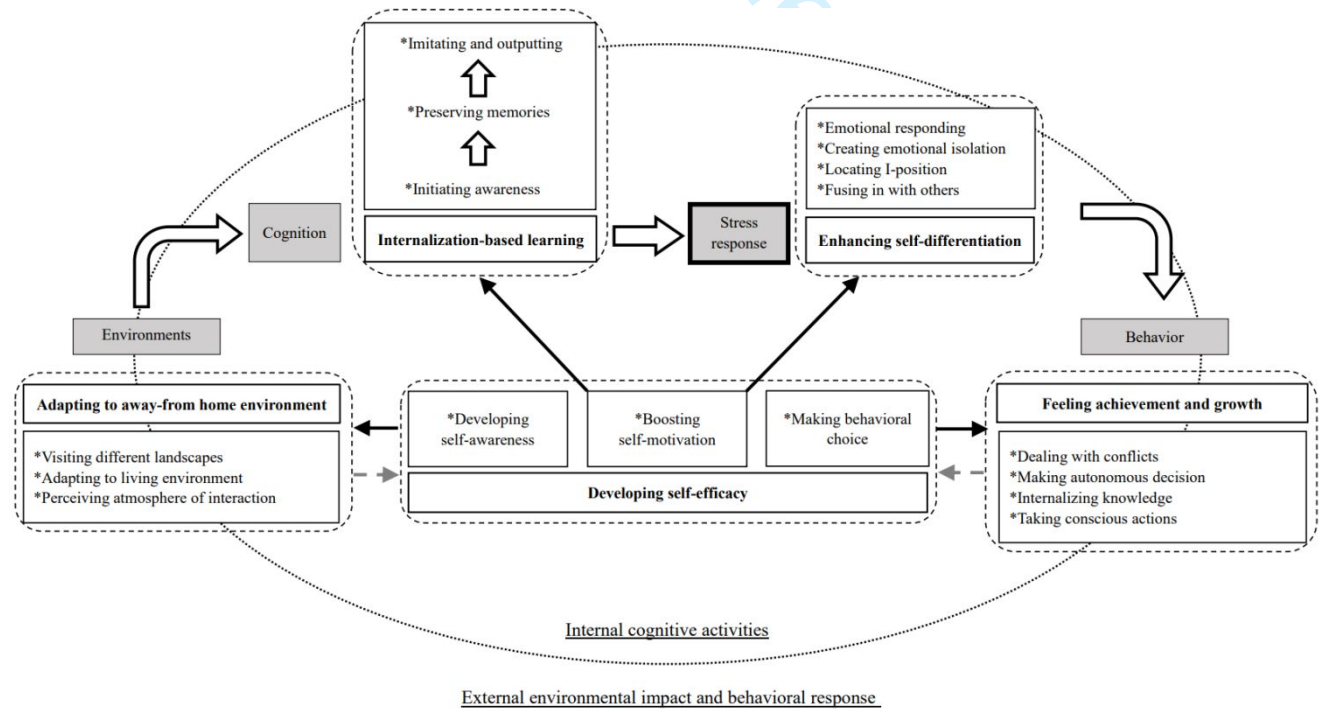


Figure 1 Mechanism underlying the influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation

#### 4.1. Adapting to away-from-home environment

Analysis of the key themes revealed that visiting landscapes, adapting to a new living environment, and perceiving an atmosphere of interaction were key components of adapting to away-from-home environments. Away-from-home environments differ from usual work, learning, and living environments; they involve environments that are foreign to the individual (Li & Liang, 2020). Parents frequently reported visiting different types of landscapes, thus broadening the adolescents' perspectives through travel as motivations for travel (e.g., adolescent E2).

*"We mainly travel to see natural or geographic landscapes that we have not seen before. This can enable the children to better understand the world;" [adolescent E2]*

Travel also permits families to escape their regular living environments. For example, the adolescent F2 discussed differences in weather and food, stating *"The weather in Chongqing is humid and the local food is spicy, which is somewhat different from the weather and food back home."* The away-from-home environment also deconstructed regular forms of family interactions, creating a more relaxing atmosphere of interaction, as parent D1 stated.

*"We would talk with our children about things we usually do not talk about at home, things that spontaneously came up in that situation" [parent D1].*

Through family travel, adolescents entered unfamiliar geographic spaces; the environment they visited replaced their usual work and learning environments, representing considerable changes in their perceived external conditions, living environments, and atmospheres of interaction (Wei et al., 2019). Therefore, the unique experiences in unusual circumstances form the underlying basis of family travel's influence on adolescents.

#### 4.2. Internalization-based learning

Adolescent internalization-based learning during family travel has three aspects, namely initiating awareness, preserving memories, and imitating and outputting. Adolescents' internalization-based learning during family travel involved forming memories and understanding through observation of the external environment as well as others' behaviors and outcomes which then further changed their own behaviors. Landscapes, events, and objects that differed from those observed in home-environments initiated adolescents' curiosity, thereby initiating awareness (e.g., *"He is interested in small animals at the zoo and loves to observe them when we visit" [parent C1]*). After observation and formation of understanding, adolescents preserved what they saw and heard as memories (e.g., *"I had an impression of some animals when I traveled, even though I did not know their names" [adolescent G2]*). Adolescents' internalization of these encounters and experiences as memories influenced their responses and behaviors when they later encountered similar scenes or events (e.g., *"After taking him to different places, he would proactively learn from people he found impressive" [parent D1]*).

Family travel can provide individuals with an appropriate learning environment and learning materials. Adolescents can gain immediate experience during family trips by personally engaging in activities, such as handcrafting or agricultural work. However, compared with activity engagement, observing, and then internalizing what they observed is a more common and effective way of learning that links to all aspects of travel (Wu et al., 2021). For example, an adolescent stated, *"Generally, the things I remembered are things I had rarely seen before. They left a deep impression on me" [adolescent D2]*. Internalization-based learning through

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4 observation can shorten the learning process, enabling adolescents to quickly understand a large amount of  
5 complex behavioral models without potential loss or harm caused by direct attempts, as parent G1 stated.

6 *“The people who hiked with us had wide-ranging interests, knowledge, and life experiences. Through being*  
7 *in contact with them when camping, he observed those adults’ and his peers’ manners of behaving. I feel that his*  
8 *abilities have improved considerably. When he encounters problems, he is very active and solves them by himself”*  
9 *[parent G1].*

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12 The three aspects of internalization-based learning represented the process of awareness–memorization–  
13 practice through which adolescents internalize demonstrations in the environment or of others’ behaviors during  
14 family travel (Park, Pan, & Ahn, 2020). However, symbolic memories do not always lead to actions, which is  
15 influenced by self-motivation factors (i.e., self-efficacy). For example, a mother reported, *“My son and I used to*  
16 *go mountain climbing. We would make it our goal to climb to the top. Every time, he reached it quickly”* [parent  
17 G1].

### 20 **4.3. Developing self-efficacy**

21 The factors influencing adolescent self-efficacy during family travel were increases in self-awareness, self-  
22 motivation, and behavioral decision-making. Self-efficacy involves an individual’s judgment and subjective  
23 beliefs regarding their ability to perform a task or respond to an incident (de Sousa, Dias, & Pereira, 2023; Dias  
24 et al., 2022). During trips, adolescents formed understanding through self-efficacy by weighing their abilities  
25 against their goals and beliefs, which influenced their decision-making. *“Although it’s difficult to climb Mount*  
26 *Tai, I wanted to have a try”* [adolescent D2]. For adolescents with high levels of self-efficacy, when they  
27 recognized the disparity between their abilities and the conditions required to achieve their goals, internal drive  
28 motivated them to persist in their attempt. *“I usually check relevant information on the Internet in advance and*  
29 *make detailed itinerary planning before departure”* [adolescent D2]. By comparison, adolescents with lower  
30 levels of self-efficacy generally avoided challenges and relied on others. For example, an adolescent reported,  
31 *“During the trip, I will refer to my parents’ opinions. If they give me some advice, I will follow them.*  
32 *No compulsion, but I can’t stick to my own ideas.”* [adolescent A2].

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Self-efficacy development is a long-term process that is the outcome of consistent interaction between an  
individual and the external environment. For adolescents in China, a usual living environment from school to  
home might provide less space and opportunities to independently assume responsibility. Therefore, adolescents  
exposed only to such environments do not fully understand their abilities, and they do not have clearly defined  
self-efficacy. However, family travel affords adolescents an opportunity to directly confront away-from-home  
environments, providing opportunities for independent action and autonomous decision-making. Successful  
direct experiences and vicarious experiences gained through internalization-based learning led to self-evaluation  
and adjustment, which influences self-efficacy (Park, Pan, & Ahn, 2020). Conversely, self-efficacy influences  
an individual’s judgment of their abilities and external environment and determines whether the individual can  
generate motivation for and actualize a behavior. Therefore, Self-efficacy is a key node involved in the  
mechanism underlying the influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation.

### 54 **4.4. Enhancing Self-differentiation**

55 Through coding, four manifestations of adolescent self-differentiation were extracted, namely controlling  
56 emotional reactivity, emotional cutting off from parents, seeking an I position, and fusing with others. Measuring  
57 levels of individual self-differentiation generally involves evaluating the level of psychological change as well  
58 as changes in handling interpersonal relationships. Family travel can encourage adolescent self-exploration and

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4 differentiation (Wu, Kirillova, & Lehto, 2021). Controlling emotional reactivity involves sensitive or unstable  
5 affective responses, which can be caused by environmental stimulation in adolescents (Kelly, 2020). In this study,  
6 some adolescents had more control over their emotions after a family trip and “*can remain in control of negative*  
7 *emotions and let them go within half an hour*” [adolescent D2].

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9 Our in-depth interview found that family tourism promotes the adolescent’s I-position. An adolescent insists  
10 on his trip decision even if his father can't accompany with him. “*He had read a lot of travel guides about Mount*  
11 *Tai. .... and took care of me during the trip*” [parent G4]. “*I do not crave the approval of everyone. I feel it is*  
12 *same for travel. I do not want to prove myself because I could not climb the top of mountain, so I quit*” [adolescent  
13 G2] This result is consistent with Kelly (1983)'s point of view. Leisure may be a crucial life space for the working  
14 out of identities that are important to the individual (Kelly, 1983).

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17 Strong parental authority and a lack of emotional warmth and support may aggravate the alienation of  
18 children in adolescence (Gao et al., 2020). Family trip activities in such families may reduce adolescents’  
19 perceptions of the quality of the travel experience (Steele & Mckinney, 2019), for example, “*I don’t really want*  
20 *to travel with him in the future*” [adolescent B2]. Fusing with others reflects adolescents’ abilities to balance key  
21 social relationships (Chen, Hyun & Lee, 2022). For example, with respect to the level of compliance with and  
22 respect for their parents’ opinion, some adolescents no longer sought opinions from their parents in handling  
23 interpersonal relationships and formed independent opinions and thoughts (e.g., “*Even if the opinions are not*  
24 *unified, I can find a better solution with my friends, rather than wronged myself during a trip*” [adolescent E2]).  
25 These four aspects were used to garner a comprehensive understanding through precise measurement of  
26 adolescent self-differentiation, which assisted in the identification and evaluation of the mechanism underlying  
27 the influence of family travel.  
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#### 33 **4.5. Feeling achievement and growth**

34 According to the thematic model, the achievement and growth category contains four outcomes of family travel,  
35 namely, making autonomous decisions, internalizing knowledge, resolving conflicts and taking conscious action.  
36 Achievement and growth refer to adolescents exhibiting different behavior during family trips from what they  
37 exhibit in typical environments and to the behavioral change adolescents undergo during family travel. After  
38 traveling, the adolescents were more able to think, judge, and decide independently (e.g., “*Seeing that big and*  
39 *prosperous capital, I have determined my ambition for the college entrance examination. I desire to go to Beijing*  
40 *for my college study in future*” [adolescent B2]). Regarding internalizing knowledge obtained during travel, a  
41 parent stated, “*My child saw porters on Mount Tai. He had learned from a textbook that the porters walk in a*  
42 *zigzag and tried it when he climbed uphill*” [parent D1]. Regarding the ability to confront and resolve conflicts  
43 through reasoning, parents reported that their children learned to be considerate and acted accordingly. One  
44 parent stated, “*When we returned from the trip, my child began to proactively help me with housework*” [parent  
45 K1]. The adolescents were affected by what they saw and their personal experiences during the family trips and  
46 started to behave differently after the trips (e.g., “*After the trip, when I don't know something, I will refer to*  
47 *others' opinions. But I will judge and decide things I know well, such as swimming*” [adolescent D2]).  
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### 54 **5. Discussion**

55 Family travel situations involve a transmission mechanism comprising adaptation to away-from-home  
56 environments, internalization-based learning, self-efficacy development, self-differentiation, and achievement  
57 and growth. The stimulation caused by away-from home produces a stress response in adolescents (i.e.,  
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4 internalization-based learning). As self-efficacy develops, this stress response leads to a change in self-  
5 differentiation levels, which is manifested as behaviors that are different from those in the past. In this  
6 transmission mechanism, adapting to away-from home is the stimulus, adolescent internalization-based learning  
7 is the trigger, self-differentiation is the core factor, self-efficacy is moderating factor, and achievement and  
8 growth are the results.  
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### 10 11 *5.1. Influence of adapting to away-from-home environment on adolescent self-differentiation*

12 Away-from-home environments emerged to affect adolescent self-differentiation, adolescent learning, and  
13 individual change. This finding is consistent with research of Qeidari et al. (2021). In family travel, adolescents  
14 can usually focus on leisure, relaxation, and recreation. Thus, they easily transform novel stimuli, such as natural  
15 environments, cultural landscapes, and exotic features, into memories and selectively learn from the language  
16 and behaviors of others and associate positive emotions with such travel experiences. Such positive emotions can  
17 transfer to future learning activities and improve overall emotional stability over the course of adolescent  
18 development (Wang et al., 2022).  
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20 Stimuli in away-from home environments when traveling can affect adolescents perceived emotional  
21 separation and I-position seeking (I-mode in their own time, see Schänzel, & Smith, 2014). Stimulation from  
22 travel leads to temporary cognitive disorder; when they are away from home, adolescents must quickly adapt to  
23 the environments, adjust their emotions, and handle various problems and challenges that emerge during travel.  
24 As one adolescent mentioned *"I feel I could take good care of myself during my last family trip. For example, I*  
25 *am good at using electronic products, so I could share this skill with my parents during the whole trip"*  
26 *[adolescent G2]*. When adolescents begin to no longer rely on their parents' protection and assistance during or  
27 after travel, it indicates the formation of independent consciousness, self-awareness, and an ability to  
28 independently make judgments and decisions (Fu et al., 2022). This process of emotional, behavioral, and  
29 perspective separation from their parents is a key step in adolescents' maturation and a major factor that  
30 influences self-differentiation levels (Wang & Li, 2020). Family travel allows adolescents to encounter adults  
31 and peers with different life experiences. Through behavioral observation, exchange, and interaction, adolescents  
32 become interested in the different states and behavioral patterns exhibited by external groups, particularly those  
33 exhibited by peers (Minnaert et al., 2009). Adolescents either imitate the behaviors or remain distinct; they form  
34 new understandings through comparison and consciously seek an I position.  
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36 Through family travel, adolescents can develop an ability to connect with others. Family travel provides  
37 adolescents with opportunities to discover and observe the external world (Wu et al., 2021). Adolescents with  
38 higher levels of curiosity and a desire for knowledge generally have conflicts with their parents due to differences  
39 in interests and hobbies, or due to their travel behaviors differing from those expected by their parents. Although  
40 the away-fromhome environments experienced in family travel may augment disagreements and conflicts  
41 between parents and children (Fu et al., 2022), the time constraints of travel require that both parties be aware of  
42 the need to quickly resolve such conflicts. Therefore, in family travel, emotional adjustment, empathy, and mutual  
43 understanding are required of both c adolescents and parents to identify a solution and achieve family harmony  
44 under such circumstances (Jepson, Stadler, & Spencer, 2019)(e.g., *"My child argues with me at home, but he is*  
45 *generally more obedient when we go out and obeys what I say"* [parent E1]).  
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47 In addition, adolescents may become interested in people with cultural backgrounds, lifestyles, and  
48 upbringings vastly different from their own, or they may also be motivated by others' excitement, enthusiasm,  
49 and active thinking and connect with these individuals. As a father mentioned, *"my child is interested with*  
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4 *minority culture when we watched a tourism performance. My son felt the counterpart is hardworking, and he*  
5 *wants to make friends with the counterpart” [Parent H1].*  
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### 8 *5.2. Internalization-based learning triggers influence of family travel on adolescent self-* 9 *differentiation*

10 In family travel environments, internalization-based learning is a key learning process for adolescents. This study  
11 discovered more common and diverse learning activities of adolescents during family travel, including learning  
12 of the external natural environment, cultural environment, language environment, and peer behaviors. Adolescent  
13 awareness during travel can be triggered spontaneously or with parental guidance. Adolescents transform relevant  
14 environments, speech, and behaviors into linguistic and pictorial symbols, which are stored in the brain and  
15 internalized as memories. This process directly leads adolescents to imitate others’ behaviors, alter their original  
16 understanding and reflections, cope with their social relationships, and self-differentiate (Van Merriënboer &  
17 Kirschner, 2018).  
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### 22 *5.3. Influence of self-efficacy on adolescent self-differentiation*

23 Self-efficacy moderates the influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation. Self-efficacy does not  
24 directly reflect an individual’s abilities; rather, it affects the individual’s evaluation of their ability and initiation  
25 of actions. Family travel elicits adolescents’ ability to respond to the challenges and influences of the external  
26 environment. Perceiving the capability to perform novel tasks, communicating, and exchanging with others,  
27 acting autonomously, and, as a result, enjoying travel experiences can activate adolescents’ self-efficacy. As an  
28 adolescent reported “*After that trip, I feel I can do everything, so I want to stay away from my parents and have*  
29 *ownspace.” [adolescent L2]. Thus, they can develop a deeper understanding of their independent consciousness*  
30 *and become more confident (Vespestad et al., 2019;). Adolescents can interact with others independently and*  
31 *connect more with others which can lead to greater self-differentiation under the influence of family travel (Liao*  
32 *et al., 2022).*  
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### 39 *5.4. Effect of adolescent self-differentiation in away-from- home environment on achievement and* 40 *growth*

41 Adolescents can form understandings and a means of learning that are different from the past through travelling  
42 in away-from-home environments (Li & Liang, 2020). Through travel, adolescents break the implicit behavioral  
43 constraints of their usual living conditions, discover new behavioral states and learning outcomes, and transform  
44 behavior-induced direct experiences into memories and deeper understanding. These travel experiences can lead  
45 to self-exploration and analysis, and improve adolescent self-differentiation (Qeidari et al., 2021); hence,  
46 adolescents can develop a positive outlook and practical abilities for the future. As a parent said, “*my child has*  
47 *changed a lot since last family trip. He can manage the time well and try to figure out the tasks by himself. Maybe*  
48 *it is because he is trained in the family trip, like he needs to make travel schedule and so on” [Parent G1]. This*  
49 *explains the achievement and growth numerous parents observed of their adolescent children after family trips,*  
50 *including with respect to their maturity, independence, and willingness to assist with housework.*  
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## 56 **6. Conclusion**

### 57 **6.1. Theoretical contributions**

58 First, this research begins to unravel underlying the influence of the microsocial environment of family travel on  
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4 adolescent self-differentiation. Through taking a grounded theory approach, five core categories of family travel  
5 influencing adolescent self-differentiation were identified: adapting to away-from home environment,  
6 internalization-based learning, developing self-efficacy, enhancing self-differentiation, and feeling achievement  
7 and growth. This study provides a novel theoretical framework for evaluating the effects of family tourism  
8 experiences and products on adolescent growth. The findings provide a theoretical basis for further qualitative  
9 and quantitative studies in the future.  
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12 Second, this study extended the existing social learning theory, which involves a system of environment -  
13 cognition - behavior and developed a new theoretical framework for social learning of environment -  
14 cognition - stress response - behavior. Behaviorist researchers believe that learning does not mean that  
15 individual behavior must change (Bandura, 1977). This new framework highlights that stress responses can  
16 bridge cognition and behavior, and self-differentiation (stress responses) becomes the foundation for behavior.  
17 During family trips, cognition occur in the form of internalization-based learning, stress responses manifesting  
18 as self-differentiation, and behavior optimization through self-achievement and self-growth. This model presents  
19 the mechanisms underlying the influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation and can serve as a  
20 theoretical framework for future research on individual behavior and psychology in family travel.  
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24 Third, the away-from-home tourism environment has a bidirectional element promoting a relationship with  
25 adolescents' self-efficacy. According to cognitive theory, when adolescents are faced with a challenging situation,  
26 self-efficacy is evoked and used as a yardstick for gauging probable success in the situation (Delaney, 2006).  
27 Self-efficacy drives adolescents to make independent decisions in an away-from-home tourism environment by  
28 trying to explore and solve the difficulties they encounter. In this process, the successful experience acquired by  
29 adolescents also reflectively affects self-efficacy and raises the expectation of success, which then affects future  
30 behavior choices. For example, if some adolescents could climb the mountain, instead of cable car, he or she  
31 could enjoy this sense of achievement and is more like to climb next time. The improvement of the self-efficacy  
32 level of adolescents in tourism environments, as consciousness, also continues in their daily life, which is helpful  
33 to improve their independence, enthusiasm, and self-confidence in coping with problems in the usual home  
34 environment. The study found the interaction between away-from-home environments and self-efficacy of  
35 adolescents, which enriches the research on the influence of parent-child travel experience on the psychological  
36 growth of adolescents.  
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## 43 **6.2. Practical implications**

44 This research gives some practical implications for family, tourism practitioners and policy-makers. First,  
45 this research highlights the development of family relationships. From a parent's perspective, understanding the  
46 influence of travel on children's psychology can help them to manage their relationship with children when  
47 traveling, which contributes to the long-term development of family relationships. For a child, when encountering  
48 a challenge during outdoor travel, he/she appreciates their parents for nurturing, therefore, he/she would be  
49 inclined to tackle family conflict and seek a harmonious relationship with his/her parent.  
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52 Second, concerning the operation of family tourism, tourism practitioners should bear in mind the  
53 particularity of family tourism when developing family travel products. For example, family travel practitioners  
54 should focus on improving the landscape environment that balances safety and exploration of activities because  
55 child safety is a primary concern in family travel (Liu et al., 2024). Regarding how to boost tourist experience,  
56 family travel practitioners could arrange appropriate interactive activities to guide adolescents toward personal  
57 growth, empathy, and appreciation of natural beauty; thus developing an understanding of their relationships with  
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nature, themselves, their parents, and others.

Third, after recognizing the influence of observational learning on adolescents traveling with their families, family tourism practitioners could create innovative tourism products, and enrich the observational learning elements of trips. Tourism practitioners should do the utmost to offer educational tourist products to children. Meanwhile, a child-centered and participatory approach means that family tourism practitioners need to take children into account when they develop products or experiences, because adolescents are the initiators and important consumers of family travel (Lee et al., 2024).

Finally, policy makers should introduce policies to support the development of family tourism and enhance the connection between family tourism, adolescent growth, and education (Kim & Hyun, 2024). Specifically, tourism policy makers should encourage family tourism and stress the significance of tourism for child development, while destination organization should ensure a child-friendly tourism environment.

### **6.3. Limitations and directions for future research**

The present grounded theory study has the following limitations: first, the participants comprised of only Chinese families. Adolescent self-differentiation should be considered in different cultural contexts in the future because the criteria for a satisfying differentiation may be varied and may depend on a unique set of culturally enforced norms and values (Chun & MacDermid, 1997). Second, adolescent self-differentiation remains a relatively new interdisciplinary domain that requires discussion with assistance from different research methods and could be further investigated from a developmental psychology perspective in the future. Third, this research explored the influence of family travel on adolescent self-differentiation taking a child-centered and participatory approach, however, more interdisciplinary efforts are needed in the future. Fourthly, as Park (2020) highlighted, the impact of family trips on people's psychology could be longer-lasting, from adulthood to active working stage, even ultimately to the retirement age lifespan of a person. Therefore, more long-term tracking research is needed in the future.

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