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From Third Culture Kids (TCK) To Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCK): What Has Caused These Global Phenomena and What Are Their Effects?

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Global Phenomena and What Are Their Effects?

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Abstract

This paper explores the phenomena of **Third Culture Kids** (TCKs) and **Adult Third Culture Kids** (ATCKs). **TCKs** and **ATCKs** are individuals who grew up outside their parents' and their own country of origin. A TCK is not simply a person who had to move to a different country but also often refers to those individuals who have spent the first eighteen years of their lives (**developmental years**) in more than one country. The primary aim of this paper is to look at what features and experiences are shared amongst TCKs and how they differentiate from individuals who did not grow up in a **globally mobile lifestyle**. This paper explores **personal accounts** in the form of **narrative analysis** of both TCKs and ATCKs. These testimonies are built into a **case study** that indicate four distinct experiences tied to growing up as a **global nomad**. The four categories are: **parents and family**, **international school experience**, **staying in touch**, and **college experience**. The final focus of the paper looks at the **effects** that this phenomenon has in the era of **globalization**.

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<u>Introduction</u>

Mapping It Out

The terms Third Culture Kid (TCK) or Adult Third Culture Kid (ATCK) are not ones we come across much, but they are starting to become more common in the era of globalization. A Third Culture Kid is a person who has lived most of his or her childhood moving from country to country and is often referred to as a global nomad (Pollock and Van Reken, 1999). This often happens based on TCK's parents' jobs such as expatriate, missionary, military, diplomat… Due to the highly globally mobile lifestyle of a TCK, there are experiences unique to them that shape their outlook on the world. These have different effects on many aspects of a TCK's childhood that are carried into a TCK's adult life. This thesis will thoroughly explain the various aspects concerning the life of global nomads. While keeping in mind that this is an international phenomenon, the approach is rather interdisciplinary and borrows from various fields of study.

First, I will look at my own personal experience of being a TCK and the methodology that will be used in the argument of my paper. I will explain the structure of the case study and how it will be influenced by my personal experience. I will then use some important academic contributions in order to further illustrate the phenomenon of TCKs and ATCKs. This will be in the form of a literary analysis that will guide in the understanding of the multi-dimensional aspect and complexity of the phenomenon itself. I will then dive into my four-part case study that will be analyzed through personal accounts of TCKs and ATCKs.

Thoroughly explaining the different experiences that make up the phenomenon of TCKs will aid in the understanding of its complexity. As the world evolves, it is imperative that we

keep up with new phenomena, one of which is that of Third Culture Kids. Understanding TCKs can help us better deal with TCKs, guide TCKs to deal with themselves, and build awareness towards this modern phenomenon.

Mini Autobiography

I grew up as a TCK and am now an ATCK. I am originally from Brazil and so are my extended family and nuclear family. One month after my birth, my parents started my life as a TCK. My parents were living in Italy while my father was working as an expatriate through his job. My mother insisted that all her children, including me, be born in Brazil due to my parents' strong connection to our home culture. She flew back to Brazil for a couple of months in order to give birth to me. They then returned to Italy with their first addition to the family, me.

After spending one year in Italy, which I do not remember since I was a couple of months old, we moved back to Brazil. We stayed in Brazil for one year and then moved again when I was three years old. This time we moved to the U.S. where my mother was pregnant with my sister and lived there for one year. As she was getting closer to giving birth to my sister, she insisted once again that we move back to Brazil.

This time around we lived in Brazil for about two years, until my father was expatriated to France due to his job. We lived in France for six years. It was a long stretch of time compared to the other countries we had lived in and has been, to this day, the country I lived the longest in. I was pretty settled in France and accustomed to the French way of life but one day, at the age of twelve, my parents brought news home that we would move again. This time we were moving to Switzerland.

Up until then, my parents always chose to put my siblings and me in local schools of whichever country we were living in. However, when we moved to Switzerland, they chose to enroll us in an international school. My parents started realizing that we needed a common curriculum and language if we were going to live a life of global nomads. By then, I already had full command of the Portuguese and French languages but had to start learning English, the academic language in most if not all international schools.

We lived in Switzerland for four years and then had a radical move to Singapore. Before moving to Singapore, we had only lived in Western countries that had similar cultures as our own since we are from Brazil. By then, we were used to moving and it was already implied that we were to live a globally mobile lifestyle. To our surprise, Singapore was incredibly westernized due to the overwhelming influence of foreigners. Its national language is English, making it easier to adapt to the local culture since we had been learning English in Switzerland.

I graduated high school in Singapore and had to make an incredibly difficult decision about where I would go to university. Since I was in an international school with the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum, my choices were endless. I could pretty much choose any country in the world that had universities that accepted students coming from an IB background. I was nineteen years old and had already gone through various moves and lived in six countries, so another move did not bother me much. I chose to go to university in the U.S. whereas most of my friends ended up in England, Scotland, and Australia.

While living in the U.S. I moved to Bolivia for a few months in order to do an internship. These last two moves were done without my family, which was a new experience for me as an ATCK since I was always a TCK as long as I was moving around the globe with my parents and siblings. My transition from being a TCK to an ATCK was natural and went unnoticed. The only

thing that stood out to me was that I was now living the life of a global nomad by myself. However, my parents had prepared me so well to move across the globe and cultures that, to this day, I take those coping tools with me wherever I go.

Methodology

The main manner in which I will be analyzing the experience of TCKs will be by drawing on personal experiences. These personal experiences will complete a case study within four chosen categories. The four categories are: parents and family, international school experience, staying in touch, and college experience. Each personal account will be taken into consideration when building the case study as to analyze the shared experiences that exist among TCKs. Within each category there will be supporting arguments from the academic field including those mentioned in the literature analysis.

The personal experiences derive from a pool of Fordham University students in the International Studies major. This is a primary source taken from an assignment given by Professor Christopher Toulouse in the *Introduction to International Studies* class. A course that all International Studies majors at Fordham University have to complete. Here we need to consider two variables, the fact that the accounts come from Fordham University students and that these students are International Studies majors.

Fordham University is a private university meaning that most students come from higher income families. This can often mean that these students have had the opportunity to travel outside of their home country, giving them more global experiences. There is a potential for

more TCKs or students who have had experiences with TCKs. Thus, focusing upon Fordham University students gives greater efficiency to the case study of this thesis.

International Studies majors are more likely to be interested in global matters as the major's name gives it away. Naturally, a portion of those students would have some kind of experience with TCKs or be TCKs themselves. The fact that the case study is constructed on a sample that only accounts for International Studies majors needs to be taken into account. It will be more likely and bias to a globally aware mindset and experiences. This doesn't affect the validity of the accounts chosen for the case study as they were chosen following the method below.

The personal accounts chosen for this thesis range from 2011 to 2019 and were selected based on relevancy. The relevancy of the quotes chosen were based on two components. The first being that of whether the account given was based on first-hand experience of being a TCK or an ATCK. The second element when choosing the quotes for the case study was of those individuals who were not TCKs themselves but who had previous personal experiences with TCK individuals. Having both types of accounts is the most effective way of making a case study as to have both insider and outsider perspectives. These two perspectives are imperative in order to show a more complete view of the experiences of TCKs. By showing these experiences in a more well-rounded manner the case study will show the differences in the general TCK experience as compared to that of a non-TCK.

The reason as to why only personal accounts were chosen for this thesis is because of the validity found within firsthand experiences. Scholars have always preferred to look at first-hand experiences, memoirs, testimonials, and things as such in order to create more accurate

arguments. The Sage Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods calls these accounts Narrative Analysis. It states that:

> Narrative analysis is a genre of analytic frames whereby researchers interpret stories that are told within the context of research and/or are shared in everyday life. Scholars who conduct this type of analysis make diverse—yet equally substantial and meaningful— interpretations and conclusions by focusing on different elements. (Allen, 2017)

I personally find that those primary sources are the best way to look at human interactions and experiences because of the sincerity that they evoke. Personal accounts are invaluable primary sources in order to fully understand the personal experiences of TCKs and ATCKs without having to fully rely on the academic world. That is because although the academic world can aid in our understanding of different life phenomena, they can't always directly experience them.

In the same way, although the literature available will greatly guide us through the phenomenon of TCKs and ATCKs, personal experiences will be a more precise tool when analyzing the different academic theories in the field. Personal accounts also give support to the claims from the academic field. They give those claims legitimacy and are therefore the central way in which I choose to look at this particular phenomenon as it is so heavily based on human experience and interaction with the world and themselves.

The four categories of study mentioned previously were chosen based on the main arguments seen across the literature available about TCKs. Those four experiences are shown to be the most important in the life of a TCK as well as what makes the TCK's experiences different from that of non-TCKs. In order to fully understand the phenomenon, it is important to look at each of those categories with first-hand experiences. These supportive accounts help in legitimizing the fact that those experiences are indeed shared among TCKs and exclusive to

them. They will further support the claim from the academic world that those are legitimate

categories in which the common TCK experience derives from.

Personal Relation to the Case Study

Throughout the paper, I will be referring to experiences that TCKs undergo while being a

TCK myself. I have lived through very similar if not identical things other TCKs have pointed

out in the case study I will be analyzing. These experiences are, in my opinion as a TCK,

accurate and truthful for the general experience of global nomads such as myself. The four

categories (Parents and Family, International School Experience, Staying in Touch, and College

Experience) that will be closely looked at in the analysis of the paper have had huge effects on

my personal life as they have in the testimonials that will be discussed in this paper.

When I moved from France to Switzerland and had to change to an international school

system, I truly discovered what it was like to be a TCK. It was personally the first I identified

with the meaning of being a TCK. Entering the international school world showed me that I truly

was and am multicultural and able to adapt to different cultures with extreme ease. Like in the

many cases that will be studied, I had friends from all over the world. Being in an environment

where everyone comes from a different background teaches an individual to become such a

cultural chameleon like many like to call TCKs.

Moving around and not ever staying with anyone for a long period of time can really

destabilize a TCK's relationships. That is why it is important to look closely at the types of

relationships that TCKs have with their parents as well as their families. For me, having a close,

almost friend-like relationship with my parents really helped me cope with all the moves, leaving

friends behind… This second category will also be thoroughly explored within the testimonials as it is imperative to understanding TCKs in the relationship aspect.

Since I was always moving around, as I mentioned in my brief autobiography, it was always difficult for me to stay in touch with the people I met in the previous countries I had lived in. The lack of technology up until I was sixteen years old made it difficult for me to keep up with my friends. The new life I had to focus on building in the new country also made it difficult to find time to stay in touch with those friends I had previously made.

Many TCKs undergo a similar experience of difficulties when trying to stay in touch. Because of that, individuals in the TCK community are understanding amongst each other. However, the non-TCK community might not understand the struggles of having to constantly build a new life. TCKs have a hard time keeping in touch but I have found that every time I meet someone from two moves ago for example, the relationship remains the same. It is almost as though time had never gone by.

Dealing with TCKs can be hard to understand especially when people think we might have lost touch with them. However, exploring these matters is imperative in order to build stronger relationships with TCKs and amongst TCKs ourselves.

On a personal level, the college experience category has had the biggest impact on my adult life as I transition from being a TCK to an ATCK. Most people don't have to choose amongst a multitude of countries they could go to university to. It is indeed very fortunate that TCKs have the privilege to be able to choose what country they attend university; it can be incredibly overwhelming and troubling. International schools, for the most part, follow the International Baccalaureate (IB) program that is recognized by a lot of countries around the world.

When I was in Singapore during eleventh grade, I had to make a list of the universities I would apply to. I made a list that contained about twenty universities in eight to ten different countries. My friends all had a list of different countries and universities. At this point, I realized how difficult it would be to choose a country to focus on but then how to stay in touch with my high school friends.

The college experience itself can also be very anxiety inducing when a TCK is close to graduation and has no idea where to go next. Often times, TCKs that are in college are not in their country of origin or citizenship so there are a lot of Visa related issues. Other times, a TCK has no "real" home to go to after they graduate since their parents might still be expatriated. These examples have huge effects on the life of TCKs and how it shapes their college experience.

Although these were my personal experiences on the issues, I will be posing of being a TCK, the case study will give a more holistic account through the various testimonies that will be analyzed. Every TCK is an individual with his or her own life story but there are common TCK experiences that can shape the TCK identity and show the many commonalities.

Academic Contributions

Literature Analysis

Ruth Useem and John Useem were the first to pinpoint the word Third Culture Kid (TCK) in the 1960s (Useem and Schryer,1999). However, it was Pollock and Van Reken who

wrote the first extensive literature on TCKs. Their book titled *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds* gave the first in-depth understanding of what a TCK is and how a TCKs experiences are vastly different from that of people who are not living a mobile life (Pollock and Van Reken, 1999). They defined the term as "a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership of any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background" (Pollock and Van Reken, 1999). In their work, they dive deep into what exactly constitutes a TCK, who can call themselves TCKs as well as many other factors that relate to a TCK's life and further into adult life. They were particularly interested in looking at how TCKs formulate their views about the world. They looked at the upside and downside to a TCK lifestyle and how that might carry onto someone's adult life experiences (Pollock and Van Reken, 1999).

Many people have referred to the work by Pollock and Van Reken as a "bible" for TCKs to understand themselves better. I think this book, although not a bible, is incredibly important in placing the phenomenon of TCKs in conversation with the world. It is a primary source of highly explanatory relationships between such a lifestyle with the bigger picture of things. It gives the TCK and ATCK communities a voice and a meeting place of common understanding. The book is also incredibly important as it introduces the realities global nomads have to face on a daily basis. This could give non-TCKs and non-ATCKs a better understanding of the lives of global nomads as to create better relationships regardless of the differences in lifestyle. The book can also be very helpful to scholars who are trying to conduct further studies in different fields about TCKs.

The best accounts that I have come across concerning the phenomenon of TCKs are those given by ATCKs. Firsthand experiences on this subject matter is key to understanding the individual experience that make up the larger group of TCKs and ATCKs.

Jessica Faleiro, for example, is an ATCK but also a writer. In her non-fiction article *On Being a Third Culture Kid,* she explains how her mobile life as a child has affected her adult life. She gives a personal account of how it has both affected her personal life but also her professional life as a writer. Through the experiences of being a TCK she has formulated a narrative in her adult life that is seen throughout her books and fiction works (Faleiro, 2018). Although her account of being a TCK is pertinent to her own life story, it draws a larger group experience of many TCKs. Every TCK goes through different experiences but those can be grouped together to create the larger experience of the group of TCKs.

In this article she points out that although cultural differences are key to the experience of TCKs, they highly shape the way we view the world. She claims that this experience creates one of living a life free of prejudice since a TCK is faced with so many different cultures throughout his or her life. She calls TCKs "Cultural Chameleons" due to the fact that we are able to fit in and understand a wide range of cultures (Faleiro, 2018).

This outlook on the world can however create a lot of anxiety for TCKs as they might not fully understand their identity, culture or where they come from (Faleiro, 2018). Although being a TCK has benefits that carry on into one's adulthood, Faleiro also points out some drawbacks. She points out that as an ATCK she has trouble staying in one place for long periods of time, trouble staying in touch with people, instability, trauma and perhaps a disconnect from people who have not had the same life experiences as she had (Faleiro, 2018).

In order to define these downsides, Faleiro explains that there is transition fatigue involved in the life of a TCK and an ATCK. Since we are constantly having to move around the world, there comes a point where individuals start losing a sense of identity. This transition fatigue is highly linked to the fact that TCK experiences are unique and very rarely dealt with. They are often ignored since moving around so much does not leave room for much reflecting and self-care which is why it is important to reflect on these life experiences in one's adult life (Faleiro, 2018).

The different patterns Faleiro speaks of are fundamental in understanding the personal experience of a large majority of TCKs. The fact that we are all placed in a mobile lifestyle gives room for conversation and idea exchanges. Her personal experiences, although reserved to her own personal life, speaks about a wider group of people. These experiences should not be thought of as only experiences TCKs go through but rather experiences shared by most TCKs and ATCKs.

Faleiro's article guides us in understanding what parts of these experiences need to be further examined as to make TCKs experiences valuable in their adult lives. Since she is a writer by profession, she can give a more in-depth and understandable account of what exactly it is like to be a TCK and how that has evolved into her adult life as an ATCK. This personal account is also incredibly useful in examining further researches carried out by non-ATCKs in order to either legitimize them or propose another face to the studies of TCKs.

In an evaluative qualitative study, Westropp et al 2016, look at the suitability of ATCKs to work in international settings. Those ATCKs might have been children of expatriate parents and are therefore more likely to understand the workplace under an international setting (Westropp et al, 2016). The study aimed at confirming the fact that ATCKs are invaluable to an

international corporation due to their international experience as children in their developmental years.

Although the study found that it is true that ATCKs are very important to international organizations, new systems of international human resource management need to be put in place in order to be fully functional and helpful to those individuals who are working at the organization as ATCKs (Westropp et al, 2016).

This research was conducted through in-depth interviews with individual ATCKs in order to understand their point of view on how they feel they are personally invaluable to the workplace. Although the research showed that indeed ATCKs are very important for an international setting there are also drawbacks, thus the need for a rearrangement in the human resources department in order to personalize it to these individual experiences.

Some drawbacks mentioned in the study are the fact that ATCKs might be more isolating, rootless, restless, and perhaps more self-centered rather than company focused (Westropp et al, 2016). These drawbacks can however be dealt with if a company rethinks its human resources department as to offer help to ATCKs who might find themselves falling back into these negative traits. A central finding within this research is the common perception that ATCKs have of having no sense of home or where they come from. This can lead to a further separation between new expatriates and ATCKs who have been expatriates their entire lives (Westropp et al, 2016).

This research, although qualitative, gives true insight into the lives of adults who have had a highly mobile life due to their parents' jobs as missionaries, expatriates, military personnel… Looking at the similarities in emotions and feelings of ATCKs can not only guide those who have to deal with ATCKs but also be a way of helping TCKs to better deal with these

emotions once they reach their adult lives. This study can be applied to Jessica Faleiro's experience as an ATCK and her life as a writer, for example, as well as her ability to understand herself. The study carried out by Westropp et al not only guides the understanding of international organizations as well as the wider population of people who have had to come in contact with ATCKs.

As the study proposed, there are upsides and downsides of being an ATCK, just like in any other human phenomenon. However, since a mobile life is radically different from a non-mobile life, it is imperative that the downsides are seen as ways for ATCKs to deal with their childhood trauma of constantly having to move around. As it leaves us with no sense of home and identity. Since these experiences are not traditional, less people are aware of the effects that it has on individuals, which can in turn create a hostile relationship rather than one of understanding towards an ATCK's past experiences.

Another study that was carried out on TCKs was more quantitative, unlike the one mentioned above. Jo Ann A. Abe studies the demographic of TCKs and ATCKs in face of globalization, a phenomenon very pertinent to the 20th and 21st century. Her aim was to look at the psychological effects that being a TCK has on one's adult life (Abe, 2019). She used a multi-culturalism scale based on the participants of the study that is named the *International Experiences Scale* (IES).

In order to measure the participants' personality traits, she used *The Big Five Inventory* (BFI) which includes traits of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience. A scale based on the BFI shows the personality traits pertinent to each individual in the study based on their highly mobile childhood and how they perceive themselves as an adult. The *Psychological Well-Being Scale* (PBW) measures the well-being of participants

based on autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose of life and self-acceptance (Abe, 2019).

Another type of measure called *Need For Closure* (NFC) was used to determine the individuals' desire for life ambiguity. The *Need for Cognition* (NC) assessed how participants feel about engaging in more or less challenging cognitive activities. In order to assess individual optimism and pessimism, the *Life Orientation Test-Revised* (LOT-R) method was used (Abe, 2019).

The final method of study was the *Gratitude Questionnaire* (GQ-6) which measures participants' will to experience gratitude (Abe, 2019). Participants were grouped in four age categories which showed a close correlation on each of the measuring methods mentioned above.

Although all of these measuring methods are key to understanding all aspects of a TCK or an ATCK, the one that caught my attention the most was the IES scale. It is a new scale within the discipline of multicultural studies and captivated one's level of international experience and encounters with other cultures. Naturally, most, if not all, TCKs and ATCKs rank high on the IES scale but the reasons for that are of ultimate interest to me. Under the different criterions for calculating the participants' IES score there was one that included the importance of the International School experience to the individuals. The study proposes that the International School experience was key in understanding how the participants fit within the scale of multi culturalism and how that affects all other parts of the study (Abe, 2019).

I am interested to look at how the International School experience shapes adult life in terms of ATCK's well-being, ability to connect with others, and the different personality traits that are developed from attending International Schools. Since this is one of the only quantitative studies carried out about TCKs, it is still under development but gives good insight at the overall

traits, well-being and outlook on life in general. This source is a great method of evaluating the effects that a mobile life has on one's adult life without being incredibly vague but also not extremely precise as the topic of ATCKs and TCKs is still developing in the academic world of psychology.

Self-help can be an area of studies that could highly benefit the TCK and ATCK community. Sophie Cranston explores how self-help could play a big role in understanding the experiences of TCKs and how the best help can be given and absorbed by this group of people in order to create a better life in their adult lives. She looks at TCKs in order to show how one can balance the grief and insecurities that such a life entails with a space of comfort (Cranston, 2017).

Self-help could play a role for ATCKs to reclaim their autonomy on their emotions as well as their sense of identity. She argues that looking at TCKs could play a huge role in how an ATCK could do better self-improvement in order to reconstruct or reclaim their sense of identity (Cranston, 2017). Through a series of ethnographies, online surveys, TCK events, discussions Cranston was able to come to the conclusion that the label of TCK is itself a self-help mechanism. She claims that by labelling oneself as a TCK or an ATCK one might think that they are better able to deal with their trauma of being so globally mobile. She claims that creating a TCK community is a biopower to understanding oneself and identity (Cranston, 2017).

Cranston's idea that creating a TCK industry itself is a form of self-help to those who have been globally mobile is a new way to look at the TCK experience for me. Creating a label that encompasses a group of people from different backgrounds but similar life experiences can highly benefit the adult experiences of these TCKs. The fact that self-help works in a way where

the individual has to come to terms with themselves in figuring out their identity naturally gives us our autonomy back.

By being able to use self-help as a method of coming to terms with our identity, traumas, lack of sense of home could highly benefit the field of multiculturalism especially when it has to do with the TCK experience. Most people look to others for help in order to reconstruct their well-being, but Cranston proposes a different way of looking at well-being in the scope of self-help for TCKs. This can also be highly beneficial for TCKs who have personality traits of isolation and might not want to speak of their international experience with others. Those individuals can turn to self-help methods rather than speaking to psychologists, for example, who might not understand their experiences and in turn become not very helpful in helping an ATCK deal with the problems that derive from having been TCKs. Creating a community of TCKs that can guide other TCKs through the hardships of having a mobile life could not only create a self-help community but also one that relies on each other's experiences in order to make sense of one's personal and individual experience as well as where they might fit in the world.

Constructing one's identity is very difficult for a TCK or an ATCK due to the fact that we are constantly moving around the world. Patricia A. Duff explores how the field of linguistics could benefit the understanding of one's identity based on transnationalism, mobility and multilingualism (Duff, 2015).

Although she does not focus on TCKs or ATCKs, she gives a good account of different individuals who have had the life experiences that include multiculturalism. She looks at how these experiences have shaped the identities of individuals from all types of background such as those affected by diaspora, people who live in one place but are faced with many cultures as well as globally mobile individuals whether it be for a short-term or long-term period (Duff, 2015).

Her focus in her article *Transnationalism, Multilingualism, and Identity* is to look at how language plays a key role in determining individual identity. She speaks of the different senses people have of belonging to a place based on their globally mobile ways of life. She also claims that it is only natural that people are more and more mobile due to the phenomenon of globalization and how that might shape the field of linguistics in the future (Duff, 2015).

Although her article does not fully address TCKs and ATCKs it is very useful in understanding how globalization has shaped the ways in which people interact in the world. Although we always think that the TCK experience is an individualistic one, there are a lot of crossovers with people who are multicultural or multilingual but not necessarily TCKs. The movement of people across the globe is a huge factor of doubt when it comes to identity.

Understanding what constitutes one's identity and sense of self is key to understanding the world of a TCK. These kinds of understandings of the world and individuals shape human life and it is therefore imperative to look at other types of globally mobile people in order to fully understand the similarities and differences that arise from TCKs and ATCKs along their life span. Since the world is constantly evolving and becoming more and more globalized, it is key to look at Duff's presentation of multilingualism as a starting tool to understanding the different facets of identity that arise from the phenomenon of globalization.

Case Study

Parents and Family

A TCK moves around the world with no one being constant in their lives but their nuclear family. Usually, a TCK will be a TCK due to their parents' jobs which are jobs that require them to move around a lot. Since that is the case, a TCK has the opportunity to build a special relationship with their parents and siblings. A TCK's nuclear family are the only people who have gone through everything the TCK goes through. They are constantly experiencing new cultures together, adapting to new countries, missing home together… The TCK experience is most shared with the TCK's parents. They build a bond that is unique to their shared experiences together. TCKs are usually incredibly close to their parents as it's the only people who know everything they have gone through. A TCK's parents are the only people who can fully understand the particular struggles that a TCK has encountered since they are the only people who have constantly moved with them. A close relationship between a TCK and his or her parents is vital in order for transitions to happen smoothly and it builds trust upon every other move that happens within the family.

However, a TCK might feel that their relationship with their extended family, who are still in their country of origin, grows weaker. Many factors build into this but the most evident is the fact that the TCK has been away from their extended family for so long that it becomes difficult to build a strong relationship with them. Another factor might be the thought of the extended family members that the TCK does not have roots in their country of origin anymore.

Let us look at some of the testimonies given by TCKs in order to further understand these dimensions of relationships between a TCK and his or her family.

First, I will be looking at the close relationship built between a TCK and his or her parents. Nastassia Porto illustrates her experience as a TCK and why that experience has made her relationship with her parents a stronger one. She says:

I am best friends with my parents because when one moves somewhere and no one speaks their language but their parents, they only have each other; I most definitely have no friends from kindergarten. Because of these things and many more, I am a "third culture kid" and I have never laid blame on my parents for it or been not thankful for what it means. (Nastassia Porto, 2011)

Here we can see within one short testimony, the many factors that make up the relationship between a TCK and their parents.

First, Nastassia points out that since she had to move to countries that she did not speak the languages of, she became closer to her parents. She only had her parents with whom to talk to, since they were the only ones who spoke the same languages as her. It makes sense then, that a TCK will have conversations with their parents that they would not otherwise. They are always together upon every move, so they rely heavily on each other when there is no one else to talk to. Rather than going over to a family friend's or a grandparent's house, the TCK has to rely on his or her parents when trouble comes.

Like Nastassia says, a TCK is usually best friends with their parents. Although they heavily rely on their parents for troubles it is also the case for achievements. A TCK's parents are usually also the only people that a TCK shares everyday achievements with. The fact that so much more is shared between a TCK and his or her parents makes it so that a friendship relationship starts to flourish after a while. The fact that your parents are not just an authority figure but also people you confide in just like you would in a friend, makes it a very dynamic relationship. It is often hard to draw the line between friendship and parenting.

Although it is an odd line to be drawn, it is incredibly important that a TCK's parents understand that due to their experiences as globally mobile individuals, they have no choice but

to build a certain kind of friendship with their child. This relationship becomes vital for TCKs to see the glories of being TCKs rather than blaming their parents for such a lifestyle.

As Nastassia mentioned above, she is thankful that her parents gave her the opportunity of being a TCK and says that she does not blame them for growing up like that. I think that a huge part of this goes back to the friendship built between a TCK and his or her parents. In the case of Nastassia, if her parents had not opened up a kind of friendship with her, she might have grown up to hate such a childhood. A friendship relationship with a TCK's parents aids in the process of transition within a TCK's childhood but also as the TCK transitions into adulthood. Seeing that your parents tried their best to build such relationships with you takes away any anger towards your parents since they were all in it together. This relationship shows support, understanding, and a sense of home wherever your parents are or go.

Although the relationship between a TCK and his or her parents might be very personal, it might not always be the case between a TCK and his or her extended family. A TCK's extended family usually lives in their country of origin, meaning that the TCK might only get to see them once or twice a year. This complicates the relationship with the TCK's country of origin. Their extended families are the ones they are usually closest to when going back home for holidays. However, since the TCK is gone for most of the year, things change and they might not be caught up with the newest pop culture, news media, events…

A lot of the times, this creates a disconnect between a TCK and his or her extended family as they are not seen as 'part' of them anymore but rather a stranger. Cristina Martelo explains this complicated relationship between her and her extended family. She says:

> When asked where I am from I quickly state Colombian because I was born there and it
>
> is where my family is from. However, in the eyes of my Colombian cousins I am

considered a "gringa" (an English-speaking foreigner that is usually American) because I

have lived in the United States the majority of my life. (Cristina Martelo, 2012)

There is a huge complication of identity stemming from the perception of a TCK's extended

family.

A lot of the time, the extended family becomes a symbol of acceptance into a TCK's

country of origin. Depending on how they perceive you, you will build a new conception of

yourself. Cristina explains that when she goes to Colombia she is called an American and vice

versa. This is due to the lack of understanding that people have about TCKs. Cristina might not

fully identify herself as either American or Colombian, but she has built her own identity based

on where she feels her roots most deeply instated. It becomes difficult when a TCK's extended

family treats him or her as a foreigner since TCKs are just trying to make sense of their complex

identities.

This reaction on the part of the extended family is natural but also hindering. It takes a

TCK's trust away from their country of origin as well as their extended family. They might feel

as though, their extended family will constantly alienate them for having grown up in a different

lifestyle. Rather than creating a positive relationship with one's extended family, their perception

of TCKs as merely foreigners can hinder that relationship. TCKs might not want to relate to their

extended families anymore as they are constantly misunderstood and treated differently. This

relationship and the way they perceive a TCK, could further complicate a TCK's sense of self-

identity.

As we can see, the relationship between a TCK and his or her family is very dynamic. It

is a relationship that is very different between the TCK and his or her parents as compared to the

TCK with his or her extended family. A TCK's relationship with his or her parents is unlike any

other. It molds itself into a friendship sometimes and is one that is most relied upon in the life of

a globally mobile individuals. However, it is often the case, as mentioned above, that the

relationship with a TCK's extended family might be hindered. This is due to the fact that the

TCK did not grow up in his or her country of origin and might therefore be alienated from where

they thought home was.

International School Experience

Due to the globally mobile lifestyle of a TCK, they usually attend international schools.

These schools are very similar to each other all around the world. It doesn't matter what country

or continent that the international school finds itself in, it will be incredibly similar to other

international schools. These schools are built with similar curricula but also have a population of

kids that are inherent to them. The faculty and staff themselves might be former TCKs and now

ATCKs or have children of their own who are TCKs.

An international school is built around the experience of TCKs as to make their transition

easier from country to country and from international school to international school. The body of

students within an international school is incredibly diverse in terms of culture, countries of

origin, and the extent to which each child is a TCK. These variations make international schools

highly diverse while keeping a common identity of being TCKs regardless of one's background.

International school kids all around the world will have similar experiences when attending

different international schools while still having to find their own individual identity.

Culture does not become homogenized in an international school but rather, kids search

for a commonality amongst each other which is that of being a TCK. Although the other children

might not be of the same country of origin as oneself, relating to the experiences of other TCKs helps TCKs further develop friendships and relationships within an international school. The common background of being a TCK brings about a common sense of identity for kids that attend international schools. This relation that is built on the grounds of being a TCK is incredibly important so that TCKs can move around the globe and still feel a sense of community, even if that community is thousands of miles away from their country of origin.

However, since the community built within an international school is inherently mobile, the community itself is always shifting and remodeling itself. Although that community will eventually be found elsewhere in the world, wherever the TCK goes, it is never identical and always changing. Thus, the international school experience is necessary in order for a TCK to build friendships and relationships with others as well as finding a common sense of identity that will be useful when moving to other international schools.

In order to understand the international school experience better, let us look at some of the testimonials given by TCKs within our case study. These will help us see how the individualized experiences of TCKs at international schools create a common ground of experience that build the international school environment. In turn, we will see how that environment caters itself to the TCK community as an individual and as a whole.

Although international schools are a place where various cultures meet, there is a sense that they are built around the Occidental culture. Kristina Yang speaks of her own experience as a Chinese citizen attending international school in China. She says:

> The transition from Chinese school to International School was a confusing time for me since language was not the only barrier I had to overcome. Although I was born in America, I had forgotten all about western culture by the time I was 12. Through time, I

realized that International school is a place where local customs are intertwined with international (western) education system. A place where the school can present two different cultures at once to their students. (Kristina Yang, 2012)

Kristina here speaks of various elements that make up an international school.

First, she refers to the language difference found within international schools. International schools are for the most part monolingual in the methods of teaching and academics. Although students come from all over the world and are multilingual, the language in which things are taught in is English. Since all the classes are conducted in English and it is, for the most part, the only language in common amongst kids from different parts of the world, it is vital that TCKs learn English. In fact, when attending an international school for the first time one might not already speak English, so it is the first meeting point of similarities amongst the student body. Some TCKs only speak English because of the fact that they attended international schools and not because they lived in an English-speaking country.

Since English is a second or third language for most TCKs in international schools, there is a common sense of understanding that all students have the command of the language at different levels. This monolingual structure gives TCKs a common language to build relationships with each other and forms the common identity of a TCK regardless of his or her culture of origin and linguistic background.

Second, Kristina presents the international school experience she specifically had in China but that can be extended to international schools in different countries. She illustrates the fact that international schools are western at their core but that the host country's culture is intertwined with it. Since the central language is English, it is common to think of international schools as western schools in the east.

However, as noted by Kristina, it is only when we look closely at each international school that we notice how the local culture has its influence amongst TCKs in different international schools. Since TCKs move around a lot, it is important to keep the core curriculum the same or similar enough for the transition from school to school to be easiest. However, since the host country of each international school has its own culture, these international schools are shaped by both the local cultures as well as the broader TCK culture that is often referred to as western because of the importance of English in international schools. These are the two cultures that Kristina refers to in the quote above.

It is important to note though, that international schools are not just double layered with culture. Although it seems that the cultures found in international schools are only those of the host country and a broader western culture, there are many layers of various cultures to be found in the student body of international schools. Even though at the surface they might seem to be mono or dual cultural, the reality is much more complex than this as TCKs come from all parts of the world with lots of different backgrounds. In isolation, each international school presents itself with the local culture in mind while recognizing the diversity in culture that is built by students who come from all walks of life.

As mentioned by Kristina, there is a lot of cultural shifts happening within the international school environment. When attending international schools, TCKs have to recurrently get accustomed to new cultures. The number of cultures found within an international school is endless so a TCK has no choice but to learn about new cultures and people every time they move or every time a new student joins the school. These constant learnings and understandings of new cultures build relationships and friendships that would otherwise be

impossible. Anastasia Puglisi reflects on her experience of having to learn about her international school's host culture as well as the underlying cultures of her peers. She says:

> My father works internationally selling medical equipment, and at a young age, I moved to Switzerland when his branch of the company was transferred there. I was immersed into a completely different culture, and for years spent vacations traveling the world with my parents and coming back to the States as often as we could. I attended an International school with kids from literally every corner of the world. Not only was I trying to understand the Swiss culture, but also the cultures of my friends who had come from all different places. A huge chunk of my childhood/adolescence was spent living in Switzerland and it made me even more of a TCK then just my Greek heritage did. (Anastasia Puglisi, 2011)

Although Anastasia attended international school in Switzerland, she had to learn about cultures way beyond the Swiss one. As she mentioned above, the thing about international schools is that students come from all over the world. As a consequence, it is only natural that multiple cultures are produced and exhibited. Juggling these many cultural backgrounds at once is incredibly difficult but inherently important to the individual identity of a TCK.

TCKs learn to learn about new cultures from a very young age since they are constantly meeting kids from different cultural backgrounds from their own. When moving to a new country a TCK has to get used to the culture of the country that is hosting them as a form of respect but also in order to have an easy transition to that country outside of the international school setting. At the same time that TCKs are getting acquainted to the new host culture, they also have to keep in mind that the TCKs in the new country might also have cultural differences from those in their previous international school.

Anastasia's account portrays the complexity of being faced with multiple cultures at once. She alludes to the multiple cultures that a TCK has to get used to all at once and how important this learning experience is for a TCK to have the easiest transition possible when moving from one country to the next. Although the cultures might differ when moving to another country, the tools built to deal with these shifts in culture from a young age, guide TCKs through their experiences of a globally mobile lifestyle.

A third and final account of the international school experience presented by Melanie Marland shows the complexity in identity found in TCKs. She presents her observations of TCKs from her own TCK point of view. She says:

> When we moved from Paris to Geneva I was put in the International School of Geneva for elementary school, and I had a hard time making real friends: most of the other students were foreign diplomats' kids, and retrospectively, I don't think any of them felt like they had roots, which made them too aggressive for the sensitive girl I was then….TCK are, for the majority, educated in international schools since these are easy to transfer in and out of when their parents' posts are changed. (Melanie Marland, 2012)

Her experience of being a TCK and part of the international school community stems from a young age.

As she mentions above, she started attending international schools since elementary school so we can infer that she was between six and eleven or twelve years old (depending on the schooling system or other personal/exterior factors). As a result, she has come in touch with many TCKs. She says that TCKs move around a lot and as a result she observed that they seem to have no roots or self-identities. This is evident for the lifestyle of a globally mobile person. Since they are constantly moving around the globe through different cultures, as Kristina and

Anastasia also pointed out, it is incredibly difficult for a TCK to create a unique and personal identity that remains constant. Each move to a different country will change and reshape a TCKs identity.

Melanie also points out that this makes it difficult for TCKs to find their roots or know where their home really is. Since they are constantly moving around, a TCK has a difficult time figuring out their place of origin. In the international school setting, people usually say that home is where their parents are, or they will say where they just moved from. There is a common understanding that home could be anywhere. Not having roots does not necessarily mean that one has no home, but it does make it more difficult for a TCK to shape his or her personal identity.

The three experiences analyzed above make the parts of a common experience found when TCKs attend international schools. All three accounts show the multicultural complexities of attending an international school and being a TCK while showing that this can be viewed in a positive light. The international school setting creates a safe space for TCKs to share their personal culture as well as create a new communal culture. No matter which country a TCK moves to, an international school will provide for the multicultural needs of a TCK while giving the space to exhibit one's personal identity and previous life experiences. These complexities and, sometimes, clashes of cultures give space for a community of TCKs to build themselves a common culture while guiding each other through the troubled sense of identity of being a TCK. International schools are therefore key to understanding the personalities and experiences that shape the TCK as a result of moving through countries, continents, and cultures.

Staying in Touch

With the constant moving around, it becomes very difficult for a TCK to stay in touch with friends and family. The difficulty arises with being able to keep up with friends made in previous countries that a TCK has lived in. It is also difficult for a TCK to keep in touch with their family members. They might have family members in their country of origin or scattered around the world or both. There is quite an overwhelming amount of people that TCKs have to keep up with especially since they are always meeting new people.

Those relationships have become more and more dependent and eased through the advancement in technology. TCKs can now video chat their friends for example, which was not around twenty years ago. The constant readjustment can however make it difficult for TCKs to find time to keep up with everyone they have gotten to know through their travels. New friends are constantly being made and a TCK has to focus on building a new life wherever they move to. So, even with the advancement of technology staying in touch is a challenge with many hurdles that is experienced by many TCKs.

The most negative challenge of staying in touch as a TCK is the fact that they are constantly moving around. Some might stay at an international school for five years and some as little as one or two years. Anne Blum explains her experience of having TCK friends. She says:

> My father didn't want me to not lose French, my native tongue, so he enrolled me at the French American school. A vast majority of the students there were TCKs. Their parents worked at embassy, the UN, the Red Cross and ect. They would stay for a year or two then leave as quickly as they came. Due to being surrounded by TCKs my whole life I have come to appreciate and admire how they adapt to new countries, lifestyles, and cultures so quickly. (Anne Blum, 2011)

Her friends' parents had jobs of all types that required them to move around the world a lot. Anne was able to see her friends come and go as she remained in the international school placed her in. Although Anne might not be a TCK, her close relationships with TCKs is worth exploring.

Having friendships for such a short period of time as the ones pointed out by Anne, can be very difficult while growing up. The relationships that TCKs build are easily broken due to the fact that they never stay anywhere long enough to build stronger ones. Anne was surrounded by TCKs but not only TCKs so she might have built a closer group of friends that stayed for a longer period of time. Although that is the case, the TCK friendships that she built could never be strong as the ones that built over a long period of time. Staying in touch is incredibly difficult under these circumstances since a TCK never knows when his or her parents are going to surprise them with the next move.

Although staying in touch with everyone is difficult, TCKs are usually up to date with a few friends that they managed to create long-lasting relationships with. TCKs might not see their friends all the time or even be able to do so due to the constant distance. However, the few relationships that do stick, are usually incredibly important to a TCK. It might be the case that the TCK sees their best friend once a year and might not constantly talk to them. Technology has made it easier to stay in touch with friends. Claire Skodnek talks about her experience of staying in touch as a TCK in a rather positive light. She says:

> As a child, it was normal. This was all I knew and I didn't care about any of it. When I
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> was in the U.S. I was an my daddy's American girl and when I was in France I was a
>
> mother's French girl. Leaning two languages simultaneously from birth even allowed me
>
> to master piano and a third language with facility. My constant voyages allowed me to

gain the social skills needed in life, making it easy for me to make new friends and keep

contact with people, aiding my networking skills. It also made me into a kind of social

chameleon, making fitting into any kind of social situation second nature to me. (Claire

Skodnek, 2011)

Constantly being on the move, taught Claire coping mechanisms of staying in touch with

people and many other aspects of her life. As she mentions in her testimony, the skills she built

from being a TCK are incredibility important to the different challenges TCKs have to face. She

built mechanisms that taught her how to stay in touch with people. She shows how moving

around can be difficult but positively proposes ways in which she learned to deal with these

difficulties. Although there are many hurdles to staying in touch with people, Claire shows

herself as an example of a TCK that built on her experiences to overcome these challenges.

Staying in touch is always hard in the life of a TCK. As previously mentioned, always

being on the move and the lack of profound relationships can be reasons as to why staying in

touch is difficult. It is however incredibly important for TCKs to find ways to stay in touch with

people they were able to create strong relationships with.

The two cases we looked at, show how staying in touch is indeed a challenge that TCKs

have to face but not one that cannot be overcome. With the advancement of technology, TCKs

are better able to keep the relationships they started with people they care about. We can see that

finding a balance between settling into a new country and keeping contact with previous friends

shows to be beneficial to the well-being of TCKs.

College Experience

Like most teenagers around the world, after a TCK has gone through high school he or she chooses to go to university. The choice a TCK has to make is however very different from most teenagers graduating high school. TCKs usually complete the IB as previously mentioned, which gives them a wide range of countries where they can attend university. TCKs need to, therefore, make a decision on which country they want to go to university while keeping various factors in mind. Some of the factors include the place in which the TCK's parents are living and whether they will be moving somewhere else. The TCK also needs to pay close attention to Visa requirements as well as prepare for life after university since TCKs are for the most part on student visas when they attend university. When choosing where to go to university, a TCK might also keep in mind where their friends are choosing to go. A TCK might also be inclined to stay closer to their country of origin in case their parents move again or move back. These many factors build complications but also open doors to the college experience of a TCK.

Juan March is a TCK that had the opportunity to study in many different countries throughout his life. This privilege gave him the chance to be able to choose where to attend university. He says:

> My parents thought that Ecuador was a good environment to start my education, but they looked beyond this traditional regional vision of kids staying in the country their whole life and tried to expose me into an international education. While being in high school, I did not spend a summer with my family and friends. My parents started to enroll me in different language and science international summers courses abroad in which I learned English, French and Italian while making an important international network of friends, which I consider will be helpful for my future. Studying in Canada, France, Italy and the

United States taught me about different cultures, languages, and religion among other

important factors. (Juan March, 2012)

He focuses on the positive aspect of being able to acquire an international education. From a

young age, he had been studying in various countries and was, therefore, able to acquire a lot of

knowledge from different cultures.

Juan points out that these experiences gave him skills that will be helpful in his future

career. Having an international network can be highly beneficial for TCKs. This network can

guide TCKs through their university years. As Juan pointed out, having connections in multiple

countries can give a TCK more autonomy to continue their globally mobile lifestyle as they

transition into ATCKs.

Going to university and moving away for the first time without your parents is a

difficulty that most TCKs go through. They were used to moving around the world with their

parents but when going away to university, it might mean that your parents are now living on the

other side of the world. Coping with the move to a new country alone is a new experience for a

TCK when he or she graduates high school. Although the TCK built skills to deal with new

cultures, the familial support is no longer directly available. A country's acceptance to foreigners

might make it easier for a TCK to adapt to the country that is hosting their university studies.

A TCK's experience with past cultures might also play into how easy it will be for the

TCK to have a smooth transition into the university experience. In the case of Albin Gashi, for

example, moving to a city that is highly multicultural has made his adaptation to the college

experience easier. He says:

I consider myself a "third culture kid" because emotionally and culturally I am not

attached to any of the above countries. When I am back home I get criticized that I

became an American, when I am in America I get criticized that I am from somewhere

else. However, New York definitely brings back to me the emotion of home. The reason

for that is that in this city almost everybody is from somewhere else. So if it don't make

me feel like home, it definitely makes me feel equal. (Albin Gashi, 2011)

He points out that although New York might not be his home, since he is a TCK who is just

going to school in the U.S., he has been able to easily adapt to it.

Since New York is one of the most multicultural cities I have come across, I think it is

natural for Albin to have been able to easily adapt to a new culture. His parents taught him skills

that were helpful for his personal transition into a new culture. Building on past experiences is

incredibly important for TCKs to be able to have a smooth transition into university.

Going to university adds one more move to a TCK's life. A different kind of moving that

builds off previous challenges but that are then faced with further ones. Juan shows how

beneficial it is to have an international education in order to be able to be culturally aware of new

countries and cultures TCKs come across. Albin shows that although there are difficulties to

moving by oneself, a TCK is able to quickly adapt to a new culture due to the fact that they grew

up living a globally mobile childhood.

Conclusion

Where Do We Go from Here?

Taking a close look at the experiences that make up the upbringing of TCKs is vital in

understanding the phenomenon in the light of our globalized society. The academic contributions

allow us to understand the themes surrounding TCKs and ATCKs from various points of view. We had contributions from various fields of study such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, politics… This highly interdisciplinary in-depth literary analysis was the first step in bringing up the different experiences that arise from this phenomenon.

We were then able to take a closer look at these academic theories by looking at personal accounts and carrying out a narrative analysis on each of these. Doing this allowed me to explore the very core of each experience based on each individual personal account. This analytic work allowed me to then look at the common experiences found within the TCK community. The complete analysis has shown how those experiences affect a TCK's life negatively and positively, how those experiences differentiate from those who do not live a globally mobile lifestyle, and how those experiences are carried into a TCK's adult life.

Since it is such a new and often overlooked phenomenon, the outcomes of the case study mentioned above are imperative to having a well-rounded understanding of TCKs and ATCKs. Having a grasp on these facts can aid in the TCK's understanding of themselves and self-identity. It can also help non-TCKs to understand and have better relationships with TCKs or ATCKs. Raising awareness towards this global phenomenon is very important in order to understand the development of our society as a whole.

Although we might look, speak, and fit in the same as everyone else, we often go unnoticed. TCKs are all around us but we just can't see them. Our differences are not based on our appearances but on the experiences that led us to being part of the TCK community. There is a lot the TCK community can learn from the non-TCK community and vice versa. Working together to build stronger bonds between those two communities is vital for living in a more peaceful globalized world than we live in today.

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