THIRD CULTURE KIDS:

CHALLENGE TO TRADITIONAL ACCULTURATION PARADIGSS
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<u>Introduction</u>
     Acculturation literature presents an increasingly complex view of a singular experience--

          but fails to address the increasing complexity of experiences of cross-culturally mobile

       Purpose of this presentation to introduce a population which is internationally mobile
          and is faced with issues of adjustment, adaptation, acculturation and identity
          But whose life experiences do not fit assumptions of most current acculturation
          research

     Population will talk about is called Third Culture Kids (TCKs)

<u>Third Cultures and Third Culture Kids</u>

     TCKs are one of many kinds of CCKs (Cross-Cultural Kids)…
          CCKs are socialized as children in complex cultural environments   s
          because of parental decisions
               e.g. Children of immigrants, children of mixed marriages

     TCKs & other expatriates are children who spend significant part of child-teen years outside
     their passport country because of a parent's employment abroad

          Expatriates are different from immigrants because their move is not permanent,
          return to home country is expectation

          TCKs are different from other expatriate kid s
               I argue that although Expatriate kids & TCKs are very similar
               There is an important difference which affects TCKs

               TCKs' parents
                    are abroad <u>in representational roles</u>…
                         they are e.g., Brazilian diplomats, Korean Missionaries, Swiss
                         businesspersons, British military,
                              in an earlier period all the colonial officials

                         Or employees of international organizations,
                         i.e. their parents are <u>not employed by host country institutions</u>.
                         or working independently (as expats may be)

They expect & are expected to retain primary allegiance to passport country and employer

The parent sponsor plays an important role in Third Culture families' lives.

Where does term Third Culture Kid come from?

TCKs are children of parents who work and live in a Third culture,
thus are raised in a third culture

Third Culture, as originally defined by John & Ruth Hill Useem , is
"the behavior patterns created, shared, and learned by men of different societies
who are in the process of relating their societies, or sections thereof, to each
other"   (Useem, Useem & Donoghue 1963)

Thus it is a culture developed by individuals involved cross-culturally and cross-
nationally for purposes of relating segments of society to each other and

mediating between cultures.
These persons generate a composite of values, role related norms, and social
structures which. make them a part of, yet apart from, lst and 2nd cultures which
they span yet from which they. remain distinct (it is <u>not</u> a melded culture)

They and their host culture counterparts adapt to one another but goal is not
to acculturate or assimilate… each maintains own culture with adjustments to
accommodate interaction

Third Culture is generic concept encompassing numerous specific variations

• Historical Third Cultures (TCs)

colonial TCs have different norms expectations from modern TCs
TCs differ according to the nature of relations between countries at a given
time e.g. friendly vs hostile

• Bi-national Third Cultures
British-Indian TC will differ in details from American-Brazilian,

or French-S. African, or Japanese-Mexican bi-national TCs

increasingly there are multinational Third Cultures as in the UN

• Functional Third Cultures
Missionary TCs differ from diplomatic from business etc

Why is this seemingly esoteric population of interest?

Not so esoteric, a large and growing population,
But unrecognized because there is no familiar label to identify them

even to themselves (though this is changing)

If include TCKs and ATCKs of all nationalities must be several million

They forecast much of what life in globalized, post-industrial societies is like

The TCK experience

Commonalities
children of these representatives are socialized not to their "home" cultures/countries
(as the parents see it) nor to the host culture;
they are socialized to life in their home culture which is a third culture.

Although raised in very different specific Third Cultures, there is something in the

TCK experience that provides a basic orientation, & world view….
Participants raised in TCs immediately recognize bond with other TCKs regardless of
how ostensibly different specific experiences were.

Variations

TCKS have wildly differing life histories –in addition to different specific cultures
To give an idea I draw on survey of 604 Adult American TCKs in the US

Who were abroad under many different sponsors

• Length of time outside US

   1-19 years   45% at least 10 yrs   18% 15 yrs plus   (Pie chart)

 • Number of countries outside US
   60% > 1 country

   31% family homes and/or sent kids to school in 3+ countries (pie chart)
    (as if not already complicated enough, not uncommon for kids school to be in
     different country from family home)

additional cultural complexities

nearly 14% parents mixed nationality, race/ethnic or both   probably higher now

and increasingly families including kids hold multiple passports (often different)
For purposes of argument will talk of long term TCKs
who spent most of child/teen years, including high school, abroad
    Though study includes kids with TCK experience (abroad only 1 or 2 years)

Will use two extreme ideal types as examples of long term TCK experience to

illustrate

• Long-term non-mobile (one country)
        MK (Missionary kid), born and lived in India until went to US for college,

        with. a couple furloughs to US (a "foreign" country)

- Long-term highly mobile
     oil company dependent. abroad 15 years in Venezuela, Cuba, Indonesia,

     Italy, Nigeria, Libya & 5 years in US
     As group diplomat kids have highest international mobility moving on

     on average moved every 2-3 years

As use these examples keep in mind other variations-- two important ones:
     The many short term TCKs (this is increasingly the norm)

     The many TCKs from other countries

Acculturation and the TCK Experiences in a "foreign" country (i.e. not parent passport country)

   Main points of acculturation model

      1) Acculturation results from a permanent move from one nation or culture to another
          Third culture Adults intend to return to home country
          & fully expect their kids to return for higher ed.

      2) Acculturation is process of newcomers adjusting to new culture

         Is this really a new culture for the TCK? Often yes, but often not
            Nearly half sample (47%) abroad by age 3,

            including 29% who were born outside US
                For them the host culture is part of earliest cultural environment
                for some host language is the/a first language learned from local caregiver

      3) Acculturation literature looks at motivations of newcomers w. respect to relations

         with dominant/host society & vice versa
            Expectations of newcomers and hosts congruent in Third cultures

         there is no expectation of fully acculturating

                newcomers are Americans representing country or its institutions

                Serious negative sanctions for "going native"
      Might say this situation is closest to Berry's Separation,
          not quite because both sides in TCs do seek relationships to do their work

   But do they accommodate, adapt, acculturate to some degree? Absolutely

      Degree to which need adopt new culture ways and understand values depends on
         • Family location
               Relatively isolated families, live alone "on economy" need more

               e.g. some missionaries, Fulbright scholar,
               Families in encapsulated compounds, less but not no need to learn new

                ways   e.g. most military, some mission compounds, oil company camps
         • Sponsor… sponsor generally provides orientation and support in adjust

Some families closely bound by sponsor, others more independent
- Schooling… TCKs have more need to acculturate if in host school,
    But most in some kind of TC international school
    And for some school not in same country as parents

    others home schooled

- Attitude as acculturation literature points out, interest in acculturating varies
    Most, TC Parents need & want to adapt to get along & do work
    for TCKs, less of conscious choice, it is part of their culture growing up
        they follow sponsor and school norms

Where do they feel they belong as TCKs outside the US ?

Consider 2 meanings of "belong":   feelings of Home & membership

  1) Where is home? Some confusion

    Country of Third Culture residence?
    Long-term non-mobile TCK,
        that place is home

        Those are familiar smells, sounds, is is place of comfort, roots
    Long term, mobile may feel at home in each place but it is not "home"

        "home' attached to people, especially family, more than place

    Passport country?
        TCKs call it "passport" country everyone else calls it their home country

        This does not feel like home to any long term TCK
            Little experience, no emotional attachment to place
            Little knowledge what know is thru school, media, parents stories
                Often idealized, outdated
            If do visit for summer or furlough it is just another foreign country

  2) To what culture or community do TCKs belong? Where are they a member

    TC country of residence?
        TCKs, long or short term, know they are not members of host community
            Even though may feel completely comfortable, even speak language,

            have good friends and feel entirely comfortable w them

    heritage/"home"/passport nationality ?
        Mobile & non-mobile, no question that I am American
        but it is abstract understanding
        reflecting what told by host nationals, parents, schools

TCK reentry to "home" / "passport" country & culture
    This is not addressed in acculturation literature

    What is experience?

Pre –Repatriation expectations of TCK and "home" community congruent

tho expect to miss friends expect should fit in, belong & feel at home,

On reentry TCKs experience contradiction of expectation/appearance and reality

TCK appears to belong

Look like other Americans

Adept at "psyching" situation and figuring out how to conform
Good deal of appropriate cultural capital
Language
Basic knowledge of culture
Well educated

Markers of membership, passport, parental history in US
But painfully aware reality is not as expected
Experience reverse culture shock (much discussed in TCK literature)

They do not feel they belong, they feel foreign because

They don't fully understand the "home" country culture
Don't share cultural history with cohort

Cultural knowledge is superficial and often outdated/ idealized

And most don't like the "home" culture they encounter
Find Americans narrow, ethnocentric, uninformed, materialistic etc

i.e. they don't fit TC values
Don't approach US as they do other "foreign cultures"

by try understand and appreciate, accommodate differences
Disconnect between expectations/ appearance of fitting
and psychological feeling of not fit extremely stressful

They are "Hidden Immigrants" who feel foreign

but lack external clues to their difference.
Given no credit for lack of knowledge or different outlook
"[In India]. If I make a mistake they just say that is because I am a crazy American. In the US I don't appear to be different, so if I openly deviate from my friends in my attitudes, opinions, … they don't say that is because I am a crazy TCK who grew up in India. They just say I'm nuts."

Re-entry is stressful for mainstream (i.e. white American) TCKs

much harder for American TCKs of color
Virtually no experience with ethnic cultures in US,
That distinction irrelevant in third culture

But because they appear to fit are pressured to
and for TCKs from other passport countries
Don't get exposure to parental culture in global media

Most International schools are American or British based

Another major source of stress is grieving (a major theme in TCK literature)

For loss of

- culture -- Third Culture & others who understand it

- familiar environment geography etc etc especially if long term

- friends….TC is characterized by high mobility constant change

if they not move friends do -- half way around the world

- Parents and family-- often they remain abroad when TCK returns for college

- Parental understanding if parents also return
  See parents as revert to being American
    Reconnecting with people, places, memories which TCK can't
  Feel loss of sharing they have had with parents

  feel parents don't understand them or what they are going through

- Sponsor – many were in strong sponsor communities…
  sponsor provided, problem solved,
  established clear sponsor based normative system
  familiar community & environment wherever (e.g. military base)

  sponsor identity w. privileges… lost at 18

- Status & associated perks

- Excitement, challenge, being different & special:

Who is the ATCK (adult TCK) and where does s/he belong?

Where is home? This is a major question for long term ATCKs

Answers indicate difficulty of answering this in traditional place terms

everywhere and nowhere

Wherever my family is, though I may not have been there

where I am foreign, don't care where
 or make up somewhere in US to give a short answer to the dreaded

where from question

Who am I?
Not really American

(75% feel different from Americans who have not lived overseas)

Clearly not a member of the country of childhood residence

Most not really bi-cultural
Listening to many describe themselves see identities incorporate a number of different cultures, but belong to none.

I may be a citizen of the US but I'll never be an American at heart. I'll never feel comfortable with normal American lifestyle, goals, assumptions, attitudes… I may never again be a true Nigerian, but my heart is more there than here. We MKs are truly between two worlds

My heart feels mostly South American, my intellect European, my drive is from the US and my calm is Asian. … With Filipinos I am Filipino..With Latinos I am Venezuelan, with Blacks I am non-white. With Asians I am Asian, with whites I am mostly white. When in Europe I am North American

They struggle to find a way to conceptualize who they are.
A diplomatic daughter began to understand what I would argue is their identity

without a recognizable name
I feel we are part of a population but no one recognizes that population. If you asked where I feel I belong I couldn't identify any geographical place. What I identify with is the overseas dependent community

What this reveals is that home / heritage culture is actually the third culture
Their parents worked in TCs, the host population w. whom interacted were in TC

And if international school likely most classmates we re other TCKs

They learned to connect with many cultures without becoming one with any

But few people (TCKs included) conceptualize it this way and insist on using national culture labels for identity and they don't fit

Most in the survey had not heard the term and a common note at the end said
"Thank you for telling me who I am" "Thank you, now I know I'm not crazy"

This is changing
international schools and many sponsor organizations use the term and provide opportunities for TCKs and ATCKs to connect.

And TCKs feel increasingly comfortable in today's globalized, multicultural, post industrial societies

Back to Acculturation Models
Mainstream acculturation theory is not adequately addressing complex cross cultural experiences such as those of TCKs

Authors for whom identity issues are an important focus in acculturation research
Come closer to addressing concerns of TCKs who seek an identity to help them
Make sense of their complex heritage and able to negotiate numerous different cultural environments comfortably without a loss of self