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Cultural Transitions During Childhood and Adjustment to College

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Abstract

As cross-cultural and developmental psychology intersect to create a relatively new field of interest, research has been done on children raised in a multi-cultural setting. Third Culture Kids (TCKs) are those who grow up outside of their parent's culture and build relationships with the multiple cultures that influence their developmental years (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). Their backgrounds are full of transitions and common concerns in the issues of belonging and identity (Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004, p.319). Steps have been taken to address the needs in preparing TCKs for college (Wyse, 1998) in practical, emotional, and social spectrums. While some TCKs successfully adjust to a new environment having gained experience in being adaptable, others face difficulties in developing relationships and questions concerning their identity (Cockburn, 2002). This study was designed to look for correlations between the pattern of transitions during childhood and the success in adjustment into college. Participants were TCKs currently in college whose parents worked overseas with non-profit organizations. I hypothesized that TCKs who had more negative or traumatic experiences in their transitions during development years would find it more difficult to adjust into college. Further, I suggested that those who have had less interaction with American or Canadian peers while growing up and less support when returning to the North America would have greater trouble in the process of transition. In addition, I expected those later in the education process will feel more adjusted than those having recently returned to the US or Canada. While my results supported the first hypothesis, the second two were only partially confirmed. The implications of these and additional unpredicted findings, including the effects of sex and number of times moved, were discussed.

Cultural Transitions During Childhood and Adjustment to College

Over the past fifty years, the advent of improved transportation, increased means of international communication, and advanced technology has sparked a multiplication of global interaction (Hill, 2006). Along with such globalization, the number of expatriates raising their children overseas has grown dramatically (Cockburn, 2002). International schools began to emerge in the 1950s, now estimated to be between 1000 and 2000 in number (Heyward, 2002). With such changes in society emerged a new population of those young people raised in a multi-cultural setting. They are referred to at times as “global nomads” (McCaig, 1992), but more commonly as Third Culture Kids (TCKs), a term coined by John & Ruth Hill Useem (1976). Pollock & Van Reken (2001, p.19) provide the commonly accepted definition:

“A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside of 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.”

Being raised in multiple cultures brings both benefits and challenges. TCKs are influenced by various cultures, both on a superficial level of language and traditions, and a deeper level of values and assumptions (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). Pollock & Van Reken present four possible relationships someone has to a surrounding culture. The “foreigners” look and think differently from those around them, such as adults moving to a new culture. The “adopted” look different but think alike, including children growing up in and feeling ownership of a certain culture, even while having a different nationality. The “mirrors” look alike and think alike, such the average individual who grows up in the parent’s culture. Finally, the “hidden immigrants” look like those around them and think differently, such as TCKs returning to their parents’ culture, where they may feel foreign (p.53-54). TCKs hold distinct relationships with

multiple cultures, at times being more connected to the host culture than to the parents' culture. In some contexts what others expect of the TCKs' experience matches reality, such as having a dissimilar perspective in a newly foreign land. But they may feel frustrated and misunderstood when expected to be different because of a foreign appearance, despite having completely adapted to a culture; they may also face inaccurate assumptions that they are the same as their parents' culture based on similar appearance (Pollock & Van Reken). Such conflict and mixed influences of cultures can bring questions and challenges in the development of identity and a sense of belonging (Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001).

In addition to the cross-cultural elements of their upbringing, TCKs share a mobile lifestyle, finding change to be an ironic constant, whether their own family is moving or other expatriates around them do so (Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999). Such a lifestyle can have a number of effects. Pollock & Van Reken (2001) describe "rootlessness" and "restlessness" (p.121) to be common among adult TCKs. TCKs find it difficult to answer questions such as "Where are you from?" with multiple variables including their parents' origin, where they were born, the places they have lived, where relatives live, their parents' current location, and possibly additional factors playing a role in where they feel at home. Many TCKs have trouble developing intimate relationships, instead maintaining an emotional distance from others to lessen pain that may come with future separation (Carlson, 1997). Even though some adult TCKs face rootlessness, alienation, and unresolved grief, they also develop skills for handling changes in locations, cultures, and relationships (Barringer, 2000). Most find belonging in relationships rather than a geographical location, and relate best to others like themselves (Fail, 1996).

After growing up through patterns of transition, TCKs may also develop a "migratory instinct," expecting to eventually settle down, but feeling restless and frequently moving once

again (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). A previous study showed that 45% of TCKs attended three or more colleges and some migrated to as many as nine colleges or universities (Useem & Cottrell, 1994). Schaetti & Ramsey (1999) suggest that many TCKs live in “liminality,” the intersection of cultural experiences and identities, which can include ambiguity and uncertainty, but also offers a wider perspective. In one study, none of the 150 college-age TCKs said they would prefer a career exclusively in the US, 25% named a different country where they would appreciate working, and only 7% felt at home in the US, while 74% felt most comfortable with people who are “internationally oriented” (Useem & Downie, 1976). This reflects their global frame of mind, and Useem & Downie observe that they become both “a part of” and “apart from” their current situation (p. 105). A study comparing expatriate British adolescents to their peers at home showed a higher level of international awareness, international mobility, flexibility, and respect for others (Lam & Selmer, 2004).

In the midst of international mobility comes what is commonly known as “culture shock,” or the effect of being immersed in a new culture, and the stress of adaptation. This often includes a sense of isolation, a loss of friends and status, fear of rejection, lack of identity or role definition, being out of synchronization with the surrounding environment, and other means of frustration (Hill, 2006; Westwood, Lawrence, & Paul, 1986). This transitory process comes at different degrees of difficulty for each individual, influenced by previous experience, available support, and degree of similarity with the new culture, but is commonly accepted as part of the process of adjustment (Westwood, et al., 1986).

Less frequently expected is what is known as “reverse culture shock” or the re-adjustment to the home culture after living in a foreign environment, which leads to many of the same difficulties faced when entering a foreign culture (Gaw, 2000; Westwood, et al., 1986).

Westwood, et al. state that little has been done to facilitate preparation for reentry, leading to difficulties in social, cultural, political, educational, professional areas. A study on college students who had lived overseas showed that those with high levels of reverse culture shock reported more personal adjustment and shyness problems, yet were less likely to seek support services (Gaw, 2000). It is important for individuals in the midst of the reentry process to find support through the process of transition and be aware that their expectations may not match their experience, bringing a better understanding of reverse culture shock (Gaw, 2000; Westwood, et al., 1986).

Efforts have been made to facilitate smoother transitions for children and teenagers. Chapman (2001) discusses the need for preparation before transitions and reassurance during the process. It is important for the family to maintain continuity and communication, as well as finding closure in the process of adjustment (Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999). Wyse (2001) addresses the mistaken assumptions about returning teenagers expected to feel at home in the US but not holding the same values as their peers, emphasizing the need for support upon reentry. Pollock & Van Reken (2001) highlight the need for healthy closure through reconciliation, affirmation, farewells, and looking forward to the next destination. Transition must in many ways be recognized as a grieving process, often problematic if left unresolved (Wyse, 2000).

As TCKs face mobility and questions of belonging, it is important that they receive needed support during their developmental years, in the process of reentry, and when adjusting to college. Useem & Downie (1976) suggest that teachers in the US should challenge them academically to prepare them for their desired future, and at the same time not let their uniqueness form a barrier. Because of the increased diversity and international knowledge TCKs can bring to campus, Stultz (2003) encourages universities to welcome and support TCKs as they

adapt, adding that there is much more to be learned about them and from them. Fail (1995) states that, “this huge multi-talented group of TCKs and adult TCKs warrants further study in order to help society take advantage of their full potential” (p. 36).

There are a number of traits and experiences TCKs share, such as the global perspective they offer and the various challenges they face. Yet while some TCKs successfully adjust to a new environment, having gained experience in adaptability, others face difficulties in developing relationships and questioning their identity (Cockburn, 2002). In this context, one must consider the various factors in the lives of TCKs that may play a role in leading to a positive or negative transition into college.

TCKs are often divided into four subgroups according to the work in which their parents are engaged: military, diplomacy, business, and missionary or non-profit work (Useem & Cottrell, 1993). There are a number of differences between groups, such as the level of acculturation and the amount of exposure to the Western sociocultural norms while overseas. In order to remove one variable I am limiting this study to one subgroup, the “missionary kids” (MKs), who often have experienced the most integration into a surrounding culture. Within that group, there are variations in education, amount of time spent overseas, number of moves, and many other factors. The main focus of this study is to identify the possible correlations between pattern of transitions during childhood and success in adjustment into college. A similar study on MKs found the age of reentry into the US to affect the interpersonal distance from others, it being greater for those returning after the age of 15 (Huff, 2001). Those growing up with 10 or fewer transitions experienced greater grief upon reentry and lower levels of adjustment to college than those with 11 or more overseas transitions, possibly because they feel more rooted having moved less often. In addition, greater parental attachment was related to higher levels of college

adjustment (Huff). This illustrates how previous experience and relationships affect a TCK's transition into college.

Considering the negative effects of unresolved grief (Wyse, 2000) and the need for continuity and closure in the process of adjustment (Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999), I hypothesize that TCKs who have had more negative or traumatic experiences in their transitions during development years find it more difficult to adjust to college. Further, I suggest that those who have had less interaction with American/Canadian peers while growing up and less support when returning to the US or Canada have greater trouble in the process of transition and adjustment. In addition, because many TCKs have developed skills for handling changes in locations, cultures, and relationships (Barringer, 2000), I expect those further along in the education process to be more adjusted than those having recently returned to North America, having had more time to establish relationships, become accustomed to the surrounding culture, and process issues of identity and isolation.

Method

Participants

Participants were 115 college age students who grew up overseas, having lived in over 50 countries. In this sample, 60% of participants were female, and 40% were male. All years of undergraduate studies were represented, 36.5% were freshmen, 20.9% were sophomores, 19.1% were juniors, and 23.5% were seniors (see Table 1). The population was limited to students whose parents worked for a non-profit organization, usually called "missionary kids" or MKs. Volunteers were recruited through various organizations (e.g. such as Mu Kappa) that maintained relationships with MKs and helped forward the request to fill out the survey. In

in addition links were posted on websites frequently visited by MKs. Confidentiality was maintained through anonymity when filling out the survey.

Materials

This survey began with a screening question to make sure all volunteers were eligible for participation. Students then provided some demographic information (see Appendix A), including age, sex, year in school, parents' work overseas, number of years overseas, and number of times moved (see Table 1).

Next participants answered questions from the CernySmith Adjustment Index. This tool is used for screening and enhancing cross-cultural adjustment for international workers. It usually consists of 20 scales, including questions on organizational, cultural, personal, psychological, and relational areas of possible distress. In order to assess the students' current adjustment to college, I used the compilation of the following three scales: the Cross-Cultural Relationships Scale, the Emotional Connections Indicator, and the Supportive Relationships Scale (see Appendix B). I omitted three questions that did not apply to this study. The remaining 27 questions were rated on a Likert scale of one to five, higher numbers indicating higher levels of distress.

Students then answered questions regarding their final transition back to the US (see Appendix C), recording their age, where they came from, and rating the challenge of saying goodbyes, moving, finding new friends, adjusting to a new culture, and starting at a new school (on a Likert scale of one to five). This was followed by three questions on a Likert scale of one to four, assessing support during reentry: 1) the amount of time parents spent back in the US at that time; 2) attendance at a reentry seminar and its helpfulness; and 3) the support found in peers while adjusting.

Table 1

Demographics

Demographic Variable	N	%	Demographic Variable	N	%
Sex			Number of times moved		
Male	46	40	1-10	83	72.2
Female	69	60	11+	27	23.5
Year in College			Years overseas		
Freshman	42	36.5	0-10 years	34	29.6
Sophomore	24	20.9	11+ years	80	69.6
Junior	22	19.1	Upon return, parents:		
Senior	27	23.5	Stayed overseas	16	13.9
Age			Back for less than month	18	15.7
18	27	23.5	Back for several months	41	35.7
19	31	27.0	Moved back	36	31.3
20	22	19.1	Re-entry seminar:		
21	18	15.7	Didn't attend	58	50.4
22	8	7.0	Not helpful	12	10.4
>22	9	7.8	Somewhat helpful	22	19.1
			Very helpful	19	16.5

Table 2

Comparison of Scores for CSAI Factors

Source of Distress	Mean	Std. Deviation	Source of Distress	Mean	Std. Deviation
Missing friends and family	3.21	1.181	Stressful transitions	2.44	1.121
Not feeling understood	3.13	1.239	Social instability	2.41	1.123
Pressure to keep in touch with others	2.98	1.132	Not enough emotional support	2.38	1.232
Making decisions	2.96	1.226	Tensions related to belief systems	2.38	1.225
Loneliness	2.94	1.142	Getting too emotional	2.29	1.212
Not fitting in or feeling uncomfortable	2.88	1.141	Unrealistic fears	2.24	1.152
Fear of failure	2.86	1.235	Being disappointed by friends or family	2.24	1.117
Discouragement about your spiritual life	2.82	1.125	Unfamiliar surroundings and customs	2.21	1.142
Feeling depressed or sad	2.63	1.172	The inability to fulfill your needs	2.18	1.033
The need for a vacation	2.58	1.292	Feeling guilty	2.07	1.041
Relationship problems	2.52	1.170	Being suspicious of others	1.97	1.092
Low energy	2.51	1.202	Difficulty controlling anger	1.64	.900
Male/female role expectations	2.50	1.173	Lacking education or training	1.63	.932
Not honoring commitments	2.45	1.134			

Students then recalled their five (or less) most recent transition, for each one recording age, location of departure and arrival, and the amount of time spent in the new location. They rated the challenges of transitions as seen in the transition to the US, and for each location overseas (see Appendix C), rated on a Likert scale of one (never) to five (daily) the amount of time spent with other expatriate kids, other expatriate adults, national kids/families, and friends from their parent's country (e.g. through e-mail).

Procedure

Participants were contacted by e-mail or via internet web sites, providing a link to an internet-based survey. They were provided with an explanation of the study at the beginning, asked to fill out the survey, and thanked upon completion. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including correlation, comparison of means, and hierarchical regression analysis.

Results

The mean scores for the 27 questions of the CSAI ranged from 1.63 to 3.21 (see Table 2). The top source of distress was "missing friends and family," $M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.181$. After that came "not feeling understood," $M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.239$; "pressure to keep in touch with others," $M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.132$; "making decisions," $M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.226$; and "loneliness," $M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.142$. These scores reflect what areas are most difficult for the population being studied.

To test the effects of previous transitions, the scores for current level of adjustment were compared with the students' overall ranking of challenge for their latest transition before their return by calculating bivariate correlations (see Table 4). This showed a significant positive correlation, $r(105) = .22$, $p < .05$ ($r^2 = .048$), suggesting that the higher the perceived challenge of the previous moves is reflected by higher scores of distress in current adjustment. Of the five individual variables that make up the overall challenge, the strongest correlation was in the

Table 4

Correlations between Transition Challenges and Current Level of Adjustment

Area of Challenge	Current Level of Adjustment
<u>Earlier Transition</u>	
Saying goodbyes	.219*
Moving	.303**
Finding new friends	.042
Adjusting to the new culture	.157
Starting at a new school	.145
Total earlier transition challenge	.220*
<u>Transition Back</u>	
Saying goodbyes	.270**
Moving	.211*
Finding new friends	.122
Adjusting to the new culture	.354**
Starting at a new school	.170
Total final transition challenge	.315**

** p < 0.01

* p < 0.05

Table 5

Comparison of Transitions

Challenge of:	Transition Back	Earlier Transition
Saying goodbyes	3.75	2.90
Moving	2.99	2.57
Finding new friends	3.14	2.59
Adjusting to a new culture	2.82	2.12
Starting at a new school	2.96	2.41
Overall score	15.66	12.59

challenge of moving, $r(105) = .30, p < .01 (r^2 = .09)$. The challenge of saying goodbye also had a significant correlation with the level of adjustment, $r(105) = .22, p < .05 (r^2 = .048)$. However, the latter three variables (the challenges of finding new friends, adjusting to a new culture, and starting at a new school), did not show significant correlations. Fewer participants recorded the challenges of moves prior to the most recent two, and there were no significant correlations to current adjustment. This may suggest that greater length of time after a transition lessens the effects, but the wide variety of ages present and the lack of responses for earlier moves may also have influenced the results.

The overall rank of challenge for their transition back to the US or Canada also showed a positive correlation with the current level of adjustment $r(112) = .315, p < .01 (r^2 = .099)$. The five aspects of the challenge were then tested for significance in correlation (see Table 4). The challenge of adjusting to a new culture showed the highest significance, $r(112) = .354, p < .01$. The challenge of saying goodbye is also significant, $r(112) = .270, p < .01$. Though not as strong as the first two, the challenge of moving also had a significant correlation with the current level of adjustment, $r(112) = .211, p < .05$. In each of these cases, the higher ranking of challenge corresponded with a higher score in current distress of adjustment. The remaining two aspects of transition, finding new friends and a starting at a new school, were not significant. In both the final and the previous transitions, the challenges of saying goodbyes and moving appeared to affect current adjustment, while adjusting back to a Western culture had a more immediate effect than the earlier adjustment to a foreign culture. Saying goodbyes and finding new friends were ranked as most difficult each time. For all of these factors, the transition back was rated more challenging than the earlier transition, the overall means being 15.66 and 12.59 respectively (see Table 5).

Table 6

Correlations between Transition Challenges and Time with Friends from Parents' Country

Transition Back	Time with Friends from Parents' Country
Saying goodbyes	-.032
Moving	-.071
Finding new friends	-.278**
Adjusting to the new culture	-.227*
Starting at a new school	-.129
Total transition challenge	-.204*

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

The results of having support from others upon return were studied using the analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the effects of perception of peer support directly after transition to the US or Canada on current adjustment. Contrary to my expectations, there was no significant difference, $F(3, 107) = 1.696, p > .05$, showing that variance in peer support did not create a significant change in level of adjustment. In addition, the parents' amount of time back in the US or Canada when the student moved back did not show a significant difference on current adjustment, $F(3, 107) = .10, p > .05$. This does not support the hypothesis that less support upon return leads to greater trouble in transition and adjustment. However, a significant negative correlation was evident between the amount of time spent with friends from their parents' country before returning to North America and the challenge of their transition back to the US or Canada, $r(105) = -.204, p < .05$. More specifically, there was a negative correlation between time with friends from their parents' country and the challenge of adjusting to the parents'

culture, $r(105) = -.227$, $p < .05$, as well as the challenge of finding new friends, $r(105) = -.278$, $p < .01$ (see Table 6). While there was no significant effect on the current level of adjustment, the interaction with peers from their parents' culture made transition less challenging. The amounts of time spent with other expatriates or nationals did not show significant effects on the transition or the current level of adjustment.

The current year in college also did not have the expected effect. An ANOVA was used to compare the mean of current adjustment to the students' year in school, and found no significant difference, $F(3, 111) = 1.05$, $p > .05$. However, two individual categories of adjustment did produce a significant difference. ANOVA showed a significant difference in the distress of missing friends and family, $F(3, 111) = 3.39$, $p < .05$ (see Table 7), with Tukey's HSD test showing that seniors had a significantly lower score than freshmen, $p < .05$ (see Table 8), reflecting less distress in that area. There was also a significant difference in the distress of unfamiliar surroundings and customs, $F(3, 108) = 3.30$, $p < .05$, and Tukey's HSD test again confirmed that seniors scored significantly lower than freshmen, $p < .05$, the score gradually decreasing for each year in school (see Table 9). This suggests that while some areas of distress continue throughout college, these factors do improve.

Table 7

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for year in school

Demographic Variable	Overall Adjustment	Missing friends and family	Unfamiliar surroundings and customs
Year in school	$F(3, 111) = 1.05$	$F(3, 111) = 3.39^*$	$F(3, 108) = 3.30^*$

* $p < 0.05$

Table 8

Tukey HSD Post Hoc Analysis for Mean Differences in Distress of Missing Friends and Family

Demographic Variable	<u>M</u>	Freshmen	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Year in school					
Freshmen	3.60	--	.47	.41	.89*
Sophomores	3.13		--	-.06	.42
Juniors	3.18			--	.48
Seniors	2.70				--

* $p < 0.05$

Table 9

Tukey HSD Post Hoc Analysis for Mean Differences in Distress of Unfamiliar Surroundings and Customs

Demographic Variable	<u>M</u>	Freshmen	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Year in school					
Freshmen	2.62	--	.54	.57	.82*
Sophomore	2.08		--	.04	.28
Junior	2.05			--	.25
Senior	1.80				--

* $p < 0.05$

Table 10

t-tests for Number of Times Moved

Demographic Variable	Mean of Current Adjustment	Missing Friends and Family	Social Instability
Number of times moved (11 +, 0- 10)	t (109) = -15.19**	t (109) = -14.74**	t (109) = -9.42**

Demographic Variable	Fear of Failure	Not Feeling Understood	Stressful Transitions
Number of times moved (11 +, 0- 10)	t (109) = -11.92**	t (109) = -13.88**	t (106) = -9.41**

* p < 0.05

** p < 0.01

Table 11

t-test for Sex

Demographic Variable	Mean of Current Adjustment	Challenge of Transition Back
Sex	t (114) = -12.87**	t (111) = -37.01**

* p < 0.05

** p < 0.01

Consistent with the findings of a previous study (Huff, 2001), those who had experienced eleven or more earlier transitions, adjusted significantly better than those with ten or fewer transitions, $t(109) = -15.20, p < .01$. The specific aspects of adjustment where those with more transitions score significantly lower were the distresses found in missing friends and family [$t(109) = -14.74, p < .01$], social instability [$t(109) = -9.02, p < .01$], fear of failure [$t(109) = -11.93, p < .05$], not feeling understood [$t(109) = -13.88, p < .01$], and stressful transitions [$t(106) = -9.42, p < .01$] (see Table 10). These included the two factors of adjustment (missing friends and family, and not feeling understood) that were rated highest in the overall mean, showing experience in adjustment to have an effect on key areas of distress. Not enough participants returned to the US or Canada under the age of 15 to compare the challenge of re-entry and adjustment according to how old a student was when returning to his or her parents' culture, as done in earlier studies.

I found another unexpected difference when doing a comparison according to sex, with males showing better adjustment than females, $t(114) = -12.88, p < .01$. This difference was also reflected in the challenge of the transition back to the US or Canada, $t(106) = -35.27, p < .01$, females again rating the five aspects of the transition process (saying goodbyes, moving, finding new friends, adjusting to a new culture, and starting at a new school) as more challenging than males (see Table 11). This may measure either differences in the actual challenge and level of adjustment, or possibly a difference between sexes in the recognition and perception thereof.

A series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to examine what factors remained most significant when making other variables constant. This included variables that earlier showed some significant effect on the current level of adjustment for students. The first step I used to keep the variables of sex and year in college constant, and in the second step I

added the number of times moved and the number of years overseas. The third step included the challenge of transition back to the US or Canada, including the challenges of moving, saying goodbyes, and adjusting to a new culture in that transition, and in the final step I added the variables of the challenge of the most recent previous transition, and in that the challenges of moving and saying goodbyes (see Table 12).

The first step showed $R^2 = .074$, $p < .05$, sex and year in college accounting for 7.4% of the variability in adjustment levels. The second step, the number of times moved and the number of years spent overseas, added a significant contribution with R^2 change = $.062$, $p < .05$, allowing 13.6% predictability. In the third step, when adding the challenges in the transition back, the change was even more significant, R^2 change = $.126$, $p < .01$, accounting for a total of 26.2% of variance. The final step, when adding variables from the earlier transition, allowed for another significant change in predictability, R^2 change = $.058$, $p < .05$. This combination of factors accounted for 32.0% of the variability of current levels of adjustment in college, with a final $R = .58$, $R^2 = .320$, $p < .05$.

This hierarchical regression also determined which individual factors carried the most weight. Using a new regression analysis, I found that that the variables which ranked the challenge of adjusting to a new culture upon return and the challenge of moving in the earlier transition together accounted for 17.6% of the level of adjustment, over half of all the earlier variables combined. The challenge of adjusting to a new culture upon return produced $R^2 = .108$, $p < .01$, and the results of adding the earlier challenge of moving, R^2 change = $.068$, $p < .01$, yielded $R^2 = .176$, $F(2, 104) = 10.91$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 1 for the relationship between these two variables and current level of adjustment).

Figure 1

Rank of challenges of adjusting to parents' culture and moving in earlier transition compared to current adjustment.

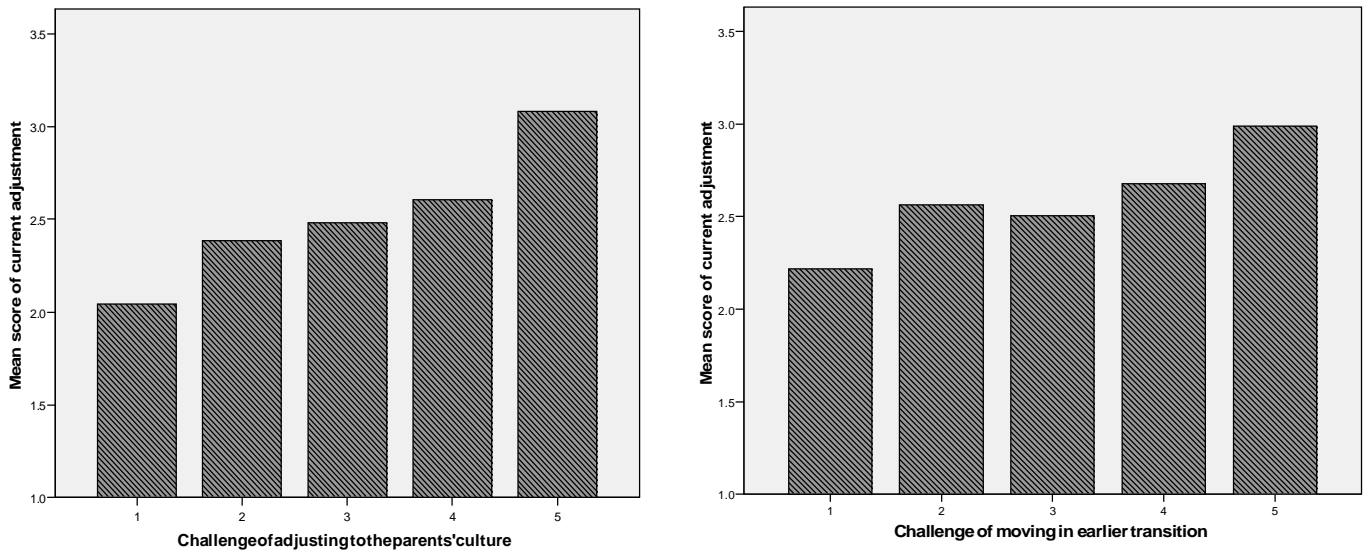


Table 12

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting the Current Level of Adjustment

Variable		B	SE	β
Step				
1	Sex	.267	.131	.200*
	Year in college	-.110	.055	-.198*
2	Sex	.274	.129	.205*
	Year in college	-.120	.055	-.217*
	Number of times moved	-.243	.143	-.164
	Number of years overseas	.260	.136	.188

Table 12 (Continued)

	Variable	B	SE	β
3	Sex	.149	.131	.111
	Year in college	-.114	.053	-.205*
	Number of times moved	-.216	.138	-.146
	Number of years overseas	.198	.130	.143
	Challenge of saying goodbyes	.113	.070	.218
	Challenge of moving	.022	.080	.042
	Challenge of Adjusting to the new culture	.205	.090	.357*
	Transition back	-.024	.038	-.155
4	Sex	.149	.130	.112
	Year in college	-.102	.053	-.184
	Number of times moved	-.199	.135	-.135
	Number of years overseas	.215	.130	.155
	Challenge of saying goodbyes	.084	.074	.162
	Challenge of moving	-.062	.084	-.120
	Challenge of adjusting to the new culture	.167	.090	.290
	Transition back	.001	.038	.004
	Challenge of saying goodbyes	.007	.076	.014
	Challenge of Moving	.161	.075	.317*
	Earlier transition mean	-.011	.022	-.083

Note. $R^2 = .074$ for Step 1; $\Delta R^2 = .062$ for Step 2; $\Delta R^2 = .126$ for Step 3; $\Delta R^2 = .058$ for Step 4.

* $p < 0.05$

Discussion

This study examined the adjustment of college student's into their parents' culture after living overseas, and the various factors that affected that adjustment, including previous transitions, perception of support upon returning to North America, earlier contact with peers, year in school, sex, and number of times moved. The top source of current distress for students is missing friends and family, soon followed by the pressure to keep in touch with others, which may reflect the value of relationships regardless of geographical location (Fail, 1996). This is also evident in the ranking of saying goodbyes and finding new friends as the greatest challenges in both previous and recent transitions. In addition, not feeling understood, loneliness, and not fitting in or feeling uncomfortable were all in the top ten areas of distress, confirming the challenge found in establishing an identity and a sense of belonging (Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004). The challenge of making decisions may reflect the ambiguity and uncertainty that can accompany the life of "liminality" (Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999), or possibly the restlessness suggested by Pollock & Van Reken (2001).

The significant correlation between the challenge of recent transitions and the current levels of adjustment confirms the hypothesis that previous negative transitions may be related to a TCK's ability to adjust well to college. The same effect was evident in the final transition, showing the correlation between the greater challenge found in the transition and a higher level of distress in the current adjustment. The fact that saying goodbyes was a prominent factor in both the final and previous moves may also provide evidence to support the idea that unresolved grief can lead to negative effects (Wyse, 2000). In this case, the more difficult goodbyes were, the more distress was found in current adjustment. The significance of the challenge of moving in both recent and previous transitions could also reflect the need for continuity and closure

(Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999). Once again, the harder TCKs remembered the moving process to be, the less well adjusted they scored. While it is difficult to claim these correlations as direct evidence to these specific statements, the overall pattern seems to support the hypothesis.

Earlier adjustment to a foreign culture did not show a significant effect on current levels of distress, while the challenge of adjusting to the Western culture did, which may be related to effects of reverse culture shock. Although not predicted in any hypotheses, the TCKs ranked the challenge of transition to the US or Canada higher in every area, the overall mean for the earlier transition being 12.59, while the transition back was 15.66 (see Table 2). This could be partially attributed to the latter transition being more recent or more permanent; however I would suggest that false expectations to fit in with their parents' culture may also play a role. This reflects the position of the "hidden immigrant" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001), who looks similar to those of the parents' culture, but after years in another culture has grown to think differently, which may add to a sense of not feeling understood. While family friends and relatives say, "Welcome home," under the assumption that their nationality dictates their familiarity and sense of belonging, TCKs have often just left what was their "home," and upon exposure to this new setting begin realizing that their perspective on their parents' country may not be accurate. While the cultural adjustment is not ranked the most challenging, it shows a noteworthy long-term effect by having the strongest correlation with current levels of adjustment.

The data do not hold up the hypothesis that less support upon return to the US or Canada leads to greater trouble in the process of adjustment. It may seem surprising that perception of support from peers does not have a significant effect on current adjustment. One possible explanation is the limited time frame in the measures of the first three months, a period which could vary greatly for each individual in amount of mobility and interactions with others. While

one student might go immediately into college upon return, surrounded by other new freshmen also in adjustment, another might be interacting with family acquaintances in a parent's home town. The amount of time parents are back in their home country, with some staying overseas and some permanently moving back, also does not significantly affect adjustment. However, this question does not necessarily reflect the amount of support a returning TCK feels from his or her family. This study does not assess the nature of relationships within the family, an important factor that could play a larger role than the geographical distance between TCKs and their parents. Another study suggests that factors of living overseas such as location and number of different schools attended can influence the level of parental attachment (Huff, 2001), but more research is needed to assess the role of family relationships both overseas and during transitions.

The hypothesis that less interaction with American/Canadian peers while growing up would lead to greater trouble in the process of transition and adjustment was partially confirmed. While no correlation was evident between time spent with peers while growing up and current level of adjustment, the actual process of transition was affected. Those who had more interaction with peers from their parents' culture, such as through e-mail, recorded a lower score on the challenge of their final transition. More specifically, greater amounts of interaction led to lower ratings on the challenges of finding new friends and adjusting to a new culture. This suggests that maintaining long-distance relationships with the parents' culture allows TCKs to stay more connected with current trends and individual relationships. With the current systems of technology and communication, such interaction is much more accessible, and it may be beneficial for parents to support such contacts, decreasing isolation and perhaps allowing an increased ownership of the parents' culture.

The final hypothesis that predicted those further along in the education process to be more adjusted than those having recently returned was not supported with the data. The students' year in college had no significant effect on current level of adjustment. This shows evidence that the majority of stressors continue throughout college, making it important for the TCKs to continue receiving understanding and support, rather than friends and family assuming that after the first year they should be completely adjusted. However, when relating year in college to specific questions, it became evident that there are two areas where seniors find significantly less distress than freshmen. These are the distresses that come from missing friends and family and dealing with unfamiliar surroundings and customs. Such factors fall in line with the idea that many TCKs have developed skills for handling changes in locations, cultures, and relationships (Barringer, 2000). At the same time, sources of distress such as not feeling understood and pressure to keep in touch with others remain substantial throughout college.

The improvement of skills for handling change is also reflected by the comparison of those who had experienced ten or fewer transitions and those who had been through eleven or more. The group with more transitions had better scores on adjustment than those with fewer transitions, similar to Huff's (2001) findings. The significant difference in the factors of social instability, stressful transitions, and fear of failure may indicate an increased sense of security in the midst of change after having had more experience. The lower scores on not feeling understood and missing friends and family could be related to a greater ability to quickly establish new relationships after having done so many times. However, it could also reflect a learned attempt to maintain an emotional distance from others, in order to lessen pain that may come with future separation (Carlson, 1997). The pattern of "rootlessness" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001) could be evident as they seem accustomed to new place, but lack strong ties.

In this study women ranked their transition back to the US or Canada as more challenging than men. They also scored higher on the current level of distress in adjustment compared to men. This dissimilarity was not predicted, but may provide further insight in the difference between males and females. This may be related to the tendency for females to seek social support as a coping mechanism, making the stress of transition more difficult when that very support is to some degree lost. On the other hand, males' tendency toward avoidance coping could fit more easily into the process (Eschenbeck, Kohlmann, & Lohaus, 2007). Further research would be necessary to draw conclusions, and similar themes such as personality, birth order, size of family, and nature of family relationships should be taken into account. Such variables may also account in part for the correlations between the challenges of transitions and the current levels of distress.

The final hierarchical regression analysis allowed additional examination into which factors carried the most weight in predicting a current student's level of adjusting to college. The effect of how difficult it was for students to adapt to their parents' culture surpassed the challenges of saying goodbyes, finding new friends, or entering a new school, an outcome not earlier predicted. However, those other factors may fit the expectations of the transition process, while cultural adaptation could be less predicted, illustrating reverse culture shock, with the unexpected social and cultural difficulties. In other words, students transitioning back to their parents' culture might be more prepared to deal with goodbyes and find support in the process of establishing new relationships, while those around them could assume that cultural differences are not an issue. Their nationality disguises the "hidden immigrant" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001), which could add to feelings of isolation and missing a former environment they knew as home.

The second strong factor for forecasting students' adjustment in college seems to directly confirm the hypothesis that TCKs who have had more negative or traumatic experiences in their transitions during development years find it more difficult to adjust to college. The memory used to rank the earlier challenge of moving had a greater impact than the more recent challenge of moving back to the US or Canada. This study does not include any aspects of what made the process of moving a challenge, therefore making it difficult to draw conclusions about why the earlier move was more significant. In addition, the later move was ranked as more challenging, but less consistent with the current level of adjustment. This may suggest that earlier patterns may have long-reaching effects, even though more recent transitions are more difficult. Further research is needed to confirm these possibilities and to provide a more complete picture of what could cause this relationship.

This study supplements earlier work on the challenges for TCKs in their parents' country for college (Fail, et al., 2004; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001), identifying what they rank to be the highest sources of distress. It also confirms the negative effects of reverse culture shock (Gaw, 2000; Westwood, et al., 1986) that often fail to be recognized. This is closely related to the need for support in the transition process (Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999), it being especially challenging for those who have had fewer transitions already (Huff, 2001).

The findings in this research may be in some ways applicable for parents, friends, communities, and TCKs themselves. It would be beneficial for parents to make an effort during earlier moves to help their children experience a smoother transition, whether that be through establishing consistency in traditions and family dynamics or simply being sure they have freedom to express their feelings and questions. Because increased contact between TCKs and peers from their parents' country leads to the final transition back being less challenging, it could

also be important for parents to support and facilitate the maintenance of friendships. This could be done through e-mail, letters, packages, chat rooms, phone calls, and a variety of other possibilities, and may play a role in easing the challenge of adapting and finding new friends upon re-entry.

I would also suggest that steps should be taken to increase awareness and lessen false expectations about the re-entry process. Well-meaning family, friends, and community welcoming TCKs to what they do not consider “home,” may be more supportive if they are previously briefed and given a better view into the TCK’s perspective. TCKs themselves could benefit from understanding the normalcy of feeling foreign in their parents’ culture, while at the same time being offered tools to process the change and take steps to build relationships despite their differences. In addition, it is important for family and other sources of support to offer continuing understanding and acceptance throughout the college years, as it is more evident that many sources of distress remain present.

Further research is needed on the subject of TCKs and their transitions, including identifying more specific factors in what makes earlier moves difficult and testing effective means of improving them. Differences in personality, the role of relationships within the family, the type of schools attended during childhood, and other variables also bear further exploration, as well as in effective means of counteracting the negative factors discovered. More comparisons between the different groups of TCKs, and between TCKs and other students, would also expand our understanding of the benefits and challenges of their mobile lifestyle. Additional studies of adult TCKs later in on in life would also reveal more information on the long-term outcomes of such a lifestyle. Generational differences may be evident according to changes such as the increases in resource for global communication and travel. The growing population of TCKs has

a unique set of resources to offer society. Such research could be the foundation for taking steps to maximizing the potential of individuals who hold a global perspective that can bridge gaps on a multinational level.

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Appendix A

Demographics

Age: _____

Sex: Male

Female

Year in College: First year

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

Mother's culture or country: _____ Father's culture or country: _____

Parent's work overseas:

Military

Diplomat

Business

Missions or Non-profit organization

Number of times moved: _____

Number of years overseas: _____

Appendix B

CSAI Questions

Thinking about where you are now in college, please choose one answer for each of the following questions:

During the past month including today:	Not at all	A little bit	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
How much have you been distressed by social instability?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by missing friends and family?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by not honoring commitments?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by being disappointed by friends or family?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by pressure to keep in touch with others?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by low energy?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by male/female role expectations?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by fear of failure?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by not fitting in or feeling uncomfortable?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by unrealistic fears?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by being suspicious of others?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by tensions related to belief systems?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by loneliness?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by getting too emotional?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Not at all	A little bit	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
How much have you been distressed by feeling guilty?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by difficulty controlling anger?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by feeling depressed or sad?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by not enough emotional support?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by lacking education or training?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by not feeling understood?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by unfamiliar surroundings and customs?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by stressful transitions?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by the inability to fulfill your needs?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by relationship problems?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by the need for a vacation?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by discouragement about your spiritual life?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How much have you been distressed by making decisions?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix C

Other Questions

How old were you when you moved back to the US/Canada? _____

You went from (country) _____ to _____ USA/Canada _____

Rate the challenge of:	easy	somewhat easy	moderate	difficult	very difficult
Saying goodbyes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Moving	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Finding new friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adjusting to the new culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Starting at a new school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For your final transition to the US or Canada:

How long were your parents back in the US or Canada?

- They stayed overseas
- They came back for less than a month
- They stayed for several months
- They moved back

If you attended a re-entry seminar how helpful was it?

- I didn't go to one
- I didn't find it helpful
- It was somewhat helpful
- It was very helpful

During the first three months how much support did you find in your peers while adjusting?

- I didn't feel supported at all
- I found some support
- I felt accepted by some
- I found a very close friendship

Thinking backward, how old were you the last time you moved before coming to the US/Canada? _____

For Overseas Locations

If overseas rate how much time you spent with:

	never	occasionally	sometimes	frequently	daily
Other expatriate kids	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other expatriate adults	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
National kids/families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friends from parent's country (e.g. through e-mail)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

About the study: Growing up in other cultures has its benefits and challenges. One key part of this lifestyle is the transitions made. Some changes are more difficult than others, but all bring new experiences into your life. This study looks into what makes transitions go smoothly, and what makes adjustment more difficult. Your participation by filling out this survey can help us better understand the process of transition when coming back the US and going into college.

Confidentiality: Results from the surveys filled out for each participant will be used as part of general data for statistical analysis, not on an individual basis. No references to specific participants will be used in presentation without consent.

Risk: There are no foreseeable physical risks.

You are of course free to stop your participation at any point in the survey I am doing. If you have any further questions you can e-mail Emily Hervey at: herveyeg@whitman.edu. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, you may contact Rich Jacks at the psychology department of Whitman College, Walla Walla, WA 99362, (509) 527-5195.

I voluntarily will participate in the study outlined above. I have read all of the above, and understand that I can stop the survey at any time without penalty if I should have any reservations once started.

Yes

No