

Cultural Transitions During Childhood and Adjustment to College

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Some research has been done on Third Culture Kids (TCKs), those who grow up outside of their parent's culture and build relationships with the multiple cultures during their developmental years (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). Steps have been taken to address the needs in preparing TCKs for college (Wyse, 1998), but some still face difficulties in adjustment (Cockburn, 2002). This study was designed to look for correlations between the pattern of transitions during childhood and the success in adjustment into college for Missionary Kids (MKs), a subgroup of TCKs. It is hypothesized that MKs who had more negative experiences in earlier transitions would find adjustment to college more difficult, those who have had less interaction with Western peers while growing up and less support when returning to the North America would have greater trouble in the process of transition, and those later in the education process would feel more adjusted than those having recently returned. While the results supported the first hypothesis, the second two were only partially confirmed. The implications of these and additional findings are discussed.

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 and Ruth Hill Usem (1976). Pollock and Van Reken (2001) 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. (p. 19)

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 and Van Reken present four possible relationships someone has to a surrounding culture according to whether they look alike or different from those around them, and whether they think alike or differently from those around them. 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, 2001). 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, 1999b). Such a lifestyle can have a number of effects. Pollock and Van Reken (2001) describe "rootlessness" and "restlessness" (p.121) to be common

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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 and Ramsey (1999b) 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 and 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 stress of adaptation to a new culture, which often includes a sense of isolation, a loss of friends and status, fear of rejection, lack of identity or role definition (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 (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, 1999a). 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 and 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 and 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 (1996)

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 their global perspective 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 this study is limited to one subgroup, the "missionary kids" (MKs), who tend to experience 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 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. 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, 1999a), 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 college age students who grew up overseas, having lived in over 50 countries. After the elimination of incomplete responses there were 109 participants in this sample, 62.4% were female, and 37.6% were male. All years of undergraduate studies were represented, 37.6% were freshmen, 22.0% were sophomores, 18.3% were juniors, and 22.0% were seniors. 75.2% reported moving ten or fewer times, and 24.8% moved eleven or more times. 30.3% lived overseas ten years or less, while 69.7% lived eleven or more years overseas. 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 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, including age, sex, year in school, parents' work overseas, number of years overseas, and number of times moved. Next participants answered questions from the Cerny-Smith 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. The reliability is evident in their Cronbach's alpha of .92, .78, and .85 respectively. 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, 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 (easy) to five (very difficult). 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 (They stayed overseas, less than a month, several months, they moved back); 2) attendance at a reentry seminar and its helpfulness (from "I didn't go to one," to "It was very helpful"); and 3) the support found in peers while adjusting (from "I didn't feel supported at all," to "I found very close friendship").

Students then recalled their five (or less) most recent transitions, for each one recording their age, location of departure and arrival, and the amount of time spent in the new location. They rated the challenges of transitions on the same scale as the transition to the US, and for each location overseas, 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

Data were screened to ensure that the assumptions of linearity and normality were met. Missing data were first eliminated. There were no outliers and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test confirmed normality. However, because this study

relies on convenience sampling, the generalization of findings to the general population of MKs are limited. The study is also unable to infer causation from the correlational statistics.

The mean scores for the 27 questions of the CSAI ranged from 1.62 to 3.24 (see Table 1). The top source of distress was "missing friends and family," $M = 3.24$, $SD = 1.181$. After that came "not feeling understood," $M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.239$; "pressure to keep in touch with others," $M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.147$; "making decisions," $M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.239$; and "loneliness," $M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.130$. These scores reflect what areas are most difficult for the population being studied (see Table 1).

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. This showed a significant positive correlation, $r(104) = .22$, $p < .05$ ($r^2 = .050$), 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 challenge of moving, $r(104) = .30$, $p < .01$ ($r^2 = .103$). The challenge of saying goodbye also had a significant correlation with the level of adjustment, $r(104) = .22$, $p < .05$ ($r^2 = .048$). 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 $r(109) = .301$, $p < .01$ ($r^2 = .091$). The five aspects of the challenge were then tested for significance in correlation. The challenge of adjusting to a new culture showed the highest significance, $r(109) = .347$, $p < .01$ ($r^2 = .120$). The challenge of saying goodbye is also significant, $r(109) = .264$, $p < .01$ ($r^2 = .070$). Though not as strong as the first two, the challenge of moving also had a significant correlation with the current level of adjustment, $r(109) = .196$, p

Table 1
Comparison of Scores for CSAI Factors

Source of Distress	Mean	Std. Deviation
Missing friends and family	3.24	1.178
Not feeling understood	3.17	1.239
Pressure to keep in touch with others	3.02	1.147
Making decisions	2.96	1.239
Loneliness	2.96	1.130
Not fitting in or feeling uncomfortable	2.93	1.120
Fear of failure	2.87	1.255
Feeling depressed or sad	2.85	1.121
Discouragement about your spiritual life	2.82	1.125
The need for a vacation	2.64	1.183
Low energy	2.55	1.213
Relationship problems	2.53	1.159
Male/female role expectations	2.49	1.168
Source of Distress	Mean	Std. Deviation
Not honoring commitments	2.48	1.143
Stressful transitions	2.45	1.143
Not enough emotional support	2.43	1.235
Social instability	2.42	1.133
Tensions related to belief systems	2.40	1.235
Getting too emotional	2.31	1.215
Unrealistic fears	2.26	1.174
Being disappointed by friends or family	2.26	1.117
Unfamiliar surroundings and customs	2.22	1.133
The inability to fulfill your needs	2.20	1.034
Feeling guilty	2.06	0.998
Being suspicious of others	1.96	1.071

$<.05$ ($r^2 = .038$). 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 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 15.72 and 12.55 respectively (see Table 2).

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, $F(3, 105) = 1.6235$ $p > .05$, 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, $F(3, 107) = .146$, $p > .05$. 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

Table 2
Comparison of Transitions

Challenge of:	Means of Rating Transition Back	Means of Rating Earlier Transition
Saying goodbyes	3.75	2.90
Moving	3.00	2.57
Finding new friends	3.17	2.58
Adjusting to a new culture	2.83	2.11
Starting at a new school	2.97	2.39
Overall score	15.72	12.55

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, $r(104) = -.203, p < .05$. More specifically, there was a negative correlation between time with friends from their parents' country and the challenge of adjusting to the parents' culture, $r(104) = -.225, p < .05$, as well as the challenge of finding new friends, $r(104) = -.282, p < .01$. 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, $F(3, 105) = 1.46, p > .05$. However, two individual categories of adjustment did produce a significant difference. ANOVA showed a significant difference in the distress of missing friends and family, $F(3, 105) = 3.01, p < .05$, with Tukey's HSD test showing that seniors had a significantly lower score than freshmen, $p < .05$, reflecting less distress in that area. This suggests that while some areas of distress continue throughout college, these factors do improve.

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, $t(105) = -14.96, p < .01$. The specific aspects of adjustment where those with more transitions score significantly lower were the distresses found in missing friends and family [$t(104) = -14.53, p < .01$], social instability [$t(104) = -9.22, p < .01$], fear of failure [$t(104) = -11.56, p < .01$], not feeling

understood [$t(104) = -13.79, p < .01$], and stressful transitions [$t(104) = -9.44, p < .01$]. 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.

Another unexpected difference was found with males showing better adjustment than females, $t(108) = -12.65, p < .01$. This difference was also reflected in the challenge of the transition back to the US or Canada, $t(108) = -36.64, p < .01$, 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. 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.

After testing for assumptions of multicollinearity and normality, 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 was used to keep the variables of sex and year in college constant, and in the second step the number of times moved and the number of years overseas were added. The third step included the challenges of moving, saying goodbyes, and adjusting to a new culture when transitioning back to the US or Canada. In the final step the variables of the challenges of moving

and saying goodbyes in the most recent previous transition were added.

The first step showed $R^2 = .086$, $p < .05$, sex and year in college accounting for 8.6% 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 = $.068$, $p < .05$, allowing 15.4% predictability. In the third step, when adding the challenges in the transition back, the change was even more significant, R^2 change = $.106$, $p < .01$, accounting for a total of 25.9% of variance. The final step, when adding variables from the earlier transition, allowed for another significant change in predictability, R^2 change = $.059$, $p < .05$. This combination of factors accounted for 31.8% of the variability of current levels of adjustment in college, with a final $R = .56$, $R^2 = .318$, $p < .05$.

This hierarchical regression also determined which individual factors carried the most weight. A new regression analysis showed 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 18.0% of the level of adjustment, over half of all the earlier variables combined. The challenge of adjusting to a new culture upon return produced $R^2 = .111$, $p < .01$, and the results of adding the earlier challenge of moving, R^2 change = $.069$, $p < .01$, yielded $R^2 = .180$, $F(2, 101) = 11.08$, $p < .01$. This suggests that the earlier moving experience and the adjustment to the Western culture had a significant influence on current levels of adjustment.

Discussion

This study examined the adjustment of college students into their parents' culture after living overseas. It was hypothesized that MKs who had more negative experiences in earlier transitions would find adjustment to college more difficult and those who have had less interaction with Western peers while growing up and less support when returning to the North America would have greater trouble in the transition process. Finally, it was predicted that those later in the education process would feel more adjusted than those having recently returned.

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 an

MK's ability to adjust well to college. The same effect was evident in the final transition, showing the correlation between the greater challenges found in the transition and higher levels 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, 1999a), as the harder MKs 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.

Although not predicted in any hypotheses, the MKs 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, as well as displaying the effects of reverse culture shock. 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 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 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 the challenge of cultural adaptation may be less expected, illustrating reverse culture shock. The second strong factor for forecasting students' adjustment in college seems to

directly support the hypothesis that MKs 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, possibly suggesting 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.

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 MKs to stay more connected with current trends and individual relationships.

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. 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 MK feels from his or her family.

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 MKs 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 MKs 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 transition 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.

This study supplements earlier work on the challenges for MKs 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, 1999a), it being especially challenging for those who have had fewer transitions already (Huff, 2001).

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 et al., 2004). The challenge of making decisions may reflect the ambiguity and uncertainty that can accompany the life of "liminality" (Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999b), or possibly the restlessness suggested by Pollock and Van Reken (2001).

The findings in this research may be in some ways applicable for parents, friends, communities, and MKs 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 MKs 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, decreasing isolation and perhaps allowing an increased ownership of the parents' culture. 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 MKs to what they do not consider "home," may be more supportive if they are previously briefed and given a better view into the MK's perspective. MKs themselves could benefit from understanding the normalcy of feeling for-

eign 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 MKs and their transitions, including identifying more specific factors in what makes earlier moves difficult and testing effective means of improving them. In this study women ranked their transition back to the US or Canada as more challenging than men and also scored higher on the current level of distress in adjustment compared to men, a factor that could warrant future study. This study does not assess the nature of relationships within the family, an important dynamic that could play a larger role than the geographical distance between MKs and their parents and more research is needed to assess the role of family relationships both overseas and during transitions. Differences in personality, the type of schools attended during childhood, and other variables also warrant further exploration, as well as in effective means of counteracting the negative factors discovered. Such variables may account in part for the correlations between the challenges of transitions and the current levels of distress. More comparisons between the different groups of MKs, and between MKs and other students, would also expand our understanding of the benefits and challenges of their mobile lifestyle. Additional studies of adult MKs later on in life would also reveal more information on the long-term outcomes of such a lifestyle. The growing population of MKs 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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