PERSONAL MANIFESTATIONS OF CHILDHOOD BORDER CROSSINGS:

IDENTITY& PERSONALITY TRAITS OF ADULT TCKS

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The theme of this conference is cultural and geographical borders. By implication this is also about border crossers, of which there are many and many different kinds. Increasingly we see imagery of border crossings used in literature on people with complex ethnic histories. Earlier views emphasized assimilation, the elimination of cultural borders by eliminating one of a person's constituent cultures. Recent literature tends to emphasize the reality of borders within the individual's life and identity and suggests the importance of acknowledging the several constituent cultures. Border crossing encompasses a diversity of experiences which are different in their specifics but share many elements of complex identity and world view. One might distinguish people who:

- move from one country to another –immigrants, refugees, cross-nationally married
- ` are sojourners who live for a period in another country -- e.g. for work or study
- . are raised in dissonent or multicultural environment as children -- child migrants (the 1.5 generation), children of migrants, third culture kids, mixed race/ethnic/national children
- are "Borderlanders" -- people who live in border areas

What is a TCK?

In this paper I look at the implications for adult identity and personal characteristics of one kind of childhood border crosser, Third Culture Kids (TCKs). This is a type of border crosser we are all aware of, but most have not conceptualized as a type. In fact many TCKs do not think of themselves as an identifiable socio-cultural "type." TCKs are children who spend all or part of their childhood years outside their country of citizenship because of a parent's employment in a representational role abroad. These are the children of the world's diplomats, international businessmen , missionaries, educators, military, who are doing the work of their country or segments of their country in another part of the world. And they are the children of parents working abroad for international organizations. They grow up in a culture which consciously transcends borders because that is the work of their parents. While TCKs grow up in different occupational third cultures -– e.g., diplomatic, military, missionary, business, education, in different bi-national third cultures -– e.g. American-Brazilian, British-Indian, Japanese-Swiss, and even in different historical third cultures –- e.g. colonial, cold war, their experiences have enough similarity that they can easily understand and relate to each other, as well as to others who experience different kinds of border crossing in their lives. At the very least, all border crossers have experienced some cultural dislocation, have experienced challenges to cultural verities, and

generally have a broader world view and more complex sense of self than those who have remained culturally and geographically centered.

TCKs are from all countries. This paper looks only at American TCKs and it focuses on the meaning of the TCK experience for adult identity and life choices. It is based on study I am doing with John and Ruth Hill Useem who originated the concept of third culture and third culture kid in the 1960s. Most research on TCKs has focused on psychological trauma, reverse culture shock, alienation, rootlessness, homelessness and lack of identity, primarily at the time of (re)entry to the home country and primarily in the teen and early adult years. Adult TCKs are finding their own voice (e.g., Bell-1997, Seaman-1997, Smith -1991, 1996), much as are immigrants, borderlanders (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987) and mixed race individuals (e.g., Root , 1996). Increasingly all are telling their own stories, relating both the pain and the benefit of such complex identities. We have taken the academic route of studying adult TCKs to understand how childhood third culture experiences affect identity, world view and life choices. Over 700 American adult TCKs, then living in the US, filled out our lengthy survey. We are currently analyzing responses from 603 who lived abroad in the post-WWII period. We have purposely included TCKs from different sponsors which we group into five categories -- government, military, missionary, business and other (largely academic).

Before turning to their adult lives, I'd like to provide background by describing third culture kids. First, their overseas experiences vary and these differences can influence (re)entry and adult life choices. Important differences include:

- Age at which they live overseas and return to their passport country. The impact appears to

  increase with age.
- Parents' sponsor –- military dependents' third culture experience is very different from that of missionary kids which in turn is different from diplomatic kids' or those whose parents are with the media, for example.

  Sponsor is a major influence on the next two variables.
- Mobility – the overseas experience of this sample ranges from a single overseas residence to 12 residences in six countries, averaging 4 different places of residence outside the US by age 18. Many are additionally mobile in the US, some living in 18 places by high school graduation. This varies by sponsor; military TCKs are highly mobile but may not live overseas for long. Missionary kids (MKs) typically live overseas the longest, but spend most of that time in a single country. Diplomatic dependents spend most of their lives overseas but are highly mobile. Children of college professors, as well as some in each of the other sponsor categories, may leave a permanent US residence for one or two years abroad.

- Length of time overseas -- our sample ranges from one to 18 years abroad. Those abroad for short stays of one or two years are said to have had a third culture experience in contrast to being Third Culture Kids enculturated in a third culture. Most of the following comments regarding identity and home refer to TCKs rather

than those with a third culture experience. World view and adult life choices are not so strongly influenced by length of time abroad.

Second, as a background for understanding the long-term TCK it is important to remember that they have limited, if any, experience of life as a member of a "home" culture. They experience American life overseas, but not in the US. As foreigners in their country of residence, they are brought up in connection with a host culture but are not of that culture; they encounter their host cultures and people as "other." As Americans abroad they are high status and relatively wealthy. In the less developed countries, even the poorest missionaries have servants. And as representatives of their home culture (as they are constantly reminded), a TCK's misbehavior is not merely a personal matter. In some sponsor communities (especially the diplomatic, military, mission) it can jeopardize a father's position, even his career.

> Growing up overseas made me aware early on of how my behavior would seem to others. My parents taught me to think of myself as representative of all Americans, and to behave accordingly.(F, Government, 40)

Consequently TCKs are both self-conscious and cautious in public behavior; they develop repertoires for engaging new and different situations and a sense of themselves as other

Adult TCKs' Identity

Who am I and who are my people?

When living overseas TCKs have no question regarding their identity. They are foreign; everyone agrees on this. Yet, while all recognize that they are not members of the local community, most are comfortable in the company of host nationals. They are attuned to and absorb much of the local cultural and its practices. It is home. Many come to understand, albeit at a child's level, a good deal about that culture. Some, especially in the less developed countries, may spend more time in their early years with a "native" caregiver than their parents. And for some their first language was the caregiver's rather than their parents' English.

There is also complete consensus that they are American. Parents, sponsors and locals tell them so, and it makes sense; after all, they are abroad as Americans because their parents are doing the work of the US or an American organization. What they don't appreciate is that the America they identify with is the America of stories. They are unaware of the extent to which their images have been filtered by parents recalling an earlier time, by sponsors who may idealize, by the media which may sensationalize or popularize or by locals who, depending on time and place, may represent America as the land of golden streets or the evil satan. With only limited personal experience they do not realize until they return how inaccurate their view has been as an Army brat discovered.

> I realized it was not as great as all that. What I had read about and seen wasn't all that much of a reality either I realized. My cousins didn't do it like in the magazines." (F, military, 30)

On (re)entry most long-termers experience an identity crisis. They are surprised to learn that they don't know how to be Americans; they don't fit in. TCKs move from a place where it is agreed they do not belong, but where they feel at home, to a place where others agree they should belong but they don't feel comfortable; and for the first time they are making a move without the structure and support of their sponsor community. They don't know how to act, and they often don't know how to perform basic tasks, like drive, use telephones or washing machines. TCKs find they have virtually no shared cultural experience with their US-based American peers (although this is undoubtedly changing with the increasingly global reach of American popular culture). They have a different world view, different interests, different knowledge. As one said "I have all the answers but no one asks the right questions." Many are out of synch with their peers, behind socially and ahead academically. The military daughter quoted above continued:

> No one in my age group had anything in common with me. I was an outcast. Most of them had never been on a plane, had barely been out of Albany. They didn't know where the places I'd lived were or what languages they spoke.

TCKs who are members of American ethnic/race minorities may experience a double identity crisis because, having lived outside the US, they do not understand "their" subculture in the US or the social meaning of that ethnic/race identity. One commented, "I didn't know what it meant to be black until I got here," and a Japanese American TCK explained:

> I was brought up in Japan on a naval base. We lived with Filippinos, blacks, whites, a lot of different races. I never looked at people that way until I got to the US. That's when I realized there was a lot of racial tension. (F, military, 24)

(Re)entry, then, strengthens the TCKs' internalized sense of otherness and their feeling that they have a better grasp of who they are *not* than who they are. "Returning" to the US makes them acutely aware of their complex identities, feeling part of but apart from both childhood environment/s and America. Some are confused and torn, at least initially.

> I may be a citizen of the USA but I'll never be an American at heart. I'll never feel comfortable with normal American lifestyle, goals, assumptions, attitudes, even normal American success. I may never again be a true Nigerian, but my heart is more there than here. We MKs

are truly between two worlds. (F, mission, 50)

> I am like a chameleon…. It is part involuntary, part putting on behavior. I adapt but not quite.... When I hear myself speak, saying things like "y'know" I feel it's not me... it's me being an American. I'm standing back, detached observing. I am Caucasian American, but I identify as Italian…. I identify as Italian, but not as ITALIAN. I'm not Italian, though my dad is an Italian immigrant. When I am given a list of ethnic identities to check I usually put "other." I don't see myself as typical Caucasian American. The closest thing that comes to describing me is that one that is Hispanic, not Mexican or something like that. Because I am really more like a lot of them than just about anything else. I did grow up speaking Spanish. (F, government, 33)

Identity, as Calhoun notes, "turns on the interrelated problems of self recognition and recognition by others." (1994:20) Not surprisingly, one of the greatest difficulties TCKs face, especially at first, is the complete lack of recognition by others of their foreignness and validation of that difference. In contrast to immigrants and foreigners who are given credit for being different and understanding when they fail to comprehend or make mistakes, TCKs look and speak like Americans and are so identified.

> In the US I often feel like I'm living with only a split part of my personality. The other half of me doesn't know where to operate. [In India] I am a partial outsider and they know I live a different life in the US. If I make a mistake they just say that is because I am a crazy American. In the US I don't appear to be different, so if I openly deviate from my friends in my attitudes, opinions, ambitions or even leisure, they don't say that is because I am a crazy TCK who grew up in India. They just say I'm nuts. (F, mission, 33)

> In my circumstance, cross-cultural problems have been accentuated by skin color or some identifying foreign factor which is missing. In Africa I could not fully integrate due to being white. In this country, people see me as white, speaking American with no accent, and there seems to be a "credibility gap" when they find out my background. I have, in earlier years, responded or acted inappropriately to American situations and consequently been viewed as being mentally retarded, stupid or pitiful. I feel if I had a different identifying factor such as skin or accent, my transition would have been easier. But even now, if someone finds out my background, there is still the element of disbelief because I don't fit the picture. (F, mission, 38)

While they object to the lack of support for their inner self, TCKs' behavior perpetuates the situation. Some initially withdraw from much association with Americans, into studies for
example. Most work at acculturating; they draw on childhood repertoires of observing and learning the ropes so that they can fit in, on the surface at least, without making waves. This bland exterior is further encouraged by the indifferent to negative reactions from Americans when they talk of childhood adventures in the African jungle, going home to Paris for Christmas, friends and school in Buenos Aires. Discouraged from revealing their cosmopolitan histories they begin the process of covering this important dimension of their personal identity.

> I tend to separate myself into two halves. One half is the "American" and the other half is the "American Overseas." I rarely bring up the latter unless someone asks. … I think this reaction is fairly common amongst TCKs. One reason is because most people may express polite interest if you talk about your experiences overseas, but cannot easily relate to it. So you get used to "shielding" your background. I think this reaction is also a product of assimilating back into the US culture. Unfortunately it tends to cause you to feel incomplete or lonely sometimes, even if you're happy and well-adjusted. (F, Government, 36)

This internal struggle is symbolized by the struggle with names and labels. Labels which worked abroad as children -- American, or sponsor identities such as MK, Army brat, Sears kid -- are virtually meaningless in the US. In the US there is no generally recognized category or label which describes them, in contrast, for example to immigrants. While most adult TCKs overtly use available labels identifying themselves as Americans or even attaching racial label to themselves in the US, many do so out of convenience rather than conviction. And when they do it is not uncommon to qualify this as a way of saying "not really." For example: "America is my passport country" "I'm whitebread (a self-depricating label) American."

They are uncomfortable with the mainstream labels and categories into which Americans insist on placing them because these labels are inconsistent with their self definition. Some feel any label is too restrictive for complex individuals, such as themselves, and they resist being encapsulated or
labeled at all.

> No matter how much I flit at the edge of subcultures, I never feel wholly one with them. I deny labels, and avoid them when I can. Even my name is a label I feel detracts from my being. When people ask "who are you?" "what are you?" I answer "me" when I can get away with it. I belong nowhere; nothing belongs to me. I'll no longer allow others to tell me what I am. (M, military, 20)

> People say define yourself, I can't define myself as one thing because I'm not. One word does not describe me ... I don't know if others can define themselves in one word. If they do I think it is kinda sad. (F, military, 20)

Although they may not be able to change the American habit of imposing labels on them, they develop individual ways of handling their unique cultural and social identities. Trying to avoid labels, illustrated above, is one. Another is creating an idiosyncratic label, such as "Canamerinese," coined by a TCK who lived in Canada, America and Japan. This may not help in relating to others but can provide a source of inner satisfaction. Another carries a reminder of her internal status with her:

> It would be helpful to have a group to validate yourself. I don't mind being unique but I don't want to be a freak. A couple of years ago I cut out of the paper a picture of a green card. I wrote resident alien on it, had it laminated and carried it in my wallet -- my own joke with myself. That says it. I don't belong here. (F, mission, 52)

Others who feel they belong everywhere and nowhere, develop a strategy of constantly changing labels and identity to fit new situations, or emphasizing aspects of themselves which transcend cultures such as music or a language.

> My heart feels mostly South American, my intellect European, my drive from the US and my calm is Asian. In fact it is my love and fascination with other cultures that has fueled my interest in sociology. I am a musician by trade; I love music most because it can cross cultural boundaries with ease and it breathes within me..This aspect of self identity has allowed me to be a chameleon of sorts. With Filipinos I am Filipino. I even try to speak what little Tagalog I know. With Latinos I am Venezuelan, with Blacks I am non-white. With Asians I am Asian, with whites I am mostly white. When in Europe I am North American and with travelers I too am a traveler. Whenever I have to fill out those little ethnicity boxes I am always at a loss. Sometimes depending on my mood, I put Asian, Filipino, white -- after all I'm half and half. But mostly I check other. I try with all my heart not to fit into these boxes. Sometimes being a cultural floater brings great freedom, resources and depth to my life. Other times I feel like my ethnic foundation is so weak that the next breeze will surely blow me down. (M, military, 22)

With time they adapt and cope. The majority settle down and come to feel comfortable in the US, although they continue to find Americans narrow, parochial, ethnocentric. As one said:

> I think most of us return to the US in much the same way as we would any other foreign country -- we go through culture shock and then we

adapt, but we're never truly natives. (F, business, 35)

In fact, three-quarters of adult TCKs in this study, including those who have been in the US 40+ years and report that they are well settled, say that they feel different from Americans who have never been out of the country. As one said "I don't just feel different, I AM different." And nearly half (48%) in this study agree with the statement: "I don't feel central to any group" Another 11 percent both agree and disagree with this statement.

This discussion appears to describe a classic case of marginality. TCKs' marginality, however, differs from that of most other marginalized peoples who are stigmatized and have no choice about their status because another group excludes them, typically relegating them to a subordinate position. TCKs, in contrast, are not collectively stigmatized and, as a group, occupy high status positions. Their marginality, then, is internal and self imposed. Many resist commitment to the American culture and identity because of their own discomfort at feeling misunderstood, and feeling they have to suppress an important part of themselves in interaction with Americans .

> I felt completely alienated when I came back… at 18, 12 or 13 years ago, and I still feel alienated in the U.S…. *I alienate myself* from others because I feel so different. I am like a square peg in a round hole. (F, Government, 32) (emphasis added)

Some resist becoming too acculturated to the American scene for fear of loosing the edge, the awareness, the connection with other peoples. As a foreign service daughter put it: "As I become more comfortable in the US I fear becoming complacent about the larger problems."

Does this clear sense of difference condemn an adult TCK to an isolated and lonely life? If not, how are these widely reported feelings reconciled with a healthy sense of self. A minority do continue to dwell on their alienation from the larger society throughout their adult years. For the majority, however, this feeling declines with time as they settle in the US and find their niche. The increasing comfort with life in the US is seen in the decreasing number who express a desire to live abroad -– 90 percent of 25-29 year olds and 35 percent of those 55 and older.

For many, the negative feeling associated with marginality is further reduced by reconstructing its meaning. They recognize that while they may be marginal to central, mainstream groups, they can be central to marginal groups. They find their community with others like themselves whose identities and interests transcend cultural boundaries. In fact 60 percent agree, or both agree and disagree, that they are drawn to others who are marginal in some way. These may be intellectuals, artists or others who are non-conforming.

I can't see myself ever not feeling detached... I feel no huge pain....We

> tend to be marginal in some way, in a good way. There is a Spanish word for it that doesn't have the negative connotations there is in the U.S.... just to be on the margins you are there and I am here, that's all. ... My friends are all marginal in some way, artists etc. None of my close friends are dead center. (F, government, 33)

Many report being drawn to international communities and/or foreigners in the US.

> While my initial approach to life in the US was fitting in, learning the lingo, the customs etc. I quickly decided that blending in was not satisfying. Since then, the majority of my friends have not been mainstream North Americans; instead, they are race-ethnic minorities or foreign students. (F, business, 35)

Being from another country is not necessarily sufficient for creating a bond, however; what they seek is others who share a cosmopolitan outlook. One TCK found that her Japanese husband was not a cosmopolitan who shared her world view and interests as anticipated; he was a monocultural person who did not share her outlook any more than a monocultural American would. Another also recognized that just being foreign is insufficient for establishing a bond:

> In college I couldn't relate to the other American undergraduates, so I sought out either foreign students or Americans who had grown up overseas …..the foreign students, especially those that made it all the way to Stanford, *were the kinds of people who you would have known in the American school in Delhi*... I'm not meaning .. to sound judgmental about the typical person in a third world country but there is a lot of difference in experience there. (F, Government, 35) (emphasis added, i.e. foreigners who are connected with third cultures)

A few find their greatest comfort in an international setting abroad; they are most comfortable where they are foreign instead of just feeling foreign. And it doesn't make a great difference where that is.

> When I am in a completely foreign situation I am very gregarious….I think maybe it is that in a foreign situation I don't know the rules so I can't be expected to conform. I have a kind of no holds barred attitude. I guess I'm a little crazy too. (F, military, 43)

> I am a lot more comfortable being foreign, it's more that than the place itself. I am more comfortable being a foreigner than where I am supposed to know and belong. Now I am pretty much at home, but in your own culture you are supposed to feel a part of it, it is expected. I don't. You feel everyone knows something you don't. Overseas everyone knows you are foreign and you can be what you want. I also miss the excitement of being overseas.

The most commonly mentioned resolution to feeling a lack of deep connection with national communities is to find it in connecting with others who have similar histories. They “click;” they recognize a shared identity and an immediate sense of community with others who have a third culture childhood, especially if they have been abroad under the same sponsor. School reunions are meaningful not so much for meeting individual classmates as for the opportunity to reconnect with this community. Similarly, adult TCKs seek and find “tribal” connections in organizations such as Global Nomads (all TCKs), Overseas Brats (military) and Mu Kappa (missionary kids).

> I feel we are part of a population but no one recognizes that population. If you asked where I feel I belong I couldn't identify any geographical place. What I identify with is the overseas dependent community. The people I've stayed in touch with are not from college or law school, but are foreign service brats. We can acclimate anywhere, we can have a life here, but it is not our whole life. I don't talk about that [third culture] life, I don't try to share it with others. It bores them, or they wonder what's the point. The only people I can share with, are the others who have lived overseas. Even my college friends grew up in Taiwan and Korea. Even though we weren't in the same country we can share because of the similar life style. (F, government, 35)

> I knew that the African culture wasn't my system....I said [at a conference], you don't understand, the missionary life IS our culture. That's who we are and that's why we understand each other even if we're from different countries. And in that instant I knew it was so. I DID have a root system, I DID belong somewhere. I hadn't recognized it before. The long and short of it was I belonged to the missionary sub culture." (F, mission, 46)

These individuals, then, have reconceptualized marginality now seeing it as something that connects rather than separates. They no longer experience Joan Bennett’s encapsulated marginality, as individuals

> …trapped in their marginality …buffeted by conflicting cultural loyalties and unable to construct a unified identity… [who] see themselves as so unique they may be incapable of envisioning a peer group with whom they can relate…this captive state can be called ‘terminal uniqueness;’ for it seems irresolvable…. [They] may report feeling inauthentic all the time as if any engagement in society is simply role playing and there is no way to ever feel ‘at home’ (1993: 113-6)

Rather they grow into what Bennett calls constructive marginals who are conscious of their own
marginality and their own role in creating a cultural identity .

> [this] has been called state of “dynamic in betweeness” [by Yoshikawa, 1988]. The suggestion here is of continual and comfortable movement between cultural identities such that an integrated, multicultural existence is maintained…The constructive marginal feels authentic and recognizes that one is never *not* at home in the world ....That indeed one does have a peer group [with] a group of fellow marginals (1993:118)

Finding a label which fits and reflects this communal and personal identity is perhaps even more exciting, liberating, than finding soul mates, because it is with you regardless of where you are.

> [on first hearing the term TCK] it was like this enormous thing opened up and I could understand again what was going on, ...until then I thought I was just an odd ball…..then I discovered there's how many other odd balls out there? And that there's a term for it and that it is really an OK thing. It gave it so much legitimacy and I really do think of -- well, who am I? and I'm not an American,
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> I'm not an Indian what am I? Well there's this third culture (F, mission,
>
> 33)

Is It Really That Bad?

The TCK literature, as mentioned in the beginning of this paper, focuses disproportionately on issues of marginality, alienation and lack of adjustment, to the point of painting a pathological picture. One might easily decide, based on this, that taking children abroad is far too risky. The discussion above, based mainly on themes found in open-ended questions and interviews, indicates that the existing literature is far from incorrect. While there is no doubt that a great many TCKs experience such confusion, discomfort, and even pain, I argue that the literature, including the above analysis, paints an overly negative, one dimensional, view of the TKCs’ adult experience. There are a number of reasons for this. First, it must be acknowledged that some apparently do not experience a prolonged or difficult adjustment period and report no negative consequences for their adult lives.

> I had to learn some things very quickly (managing money, driving etc) I feel, however that these were relatively minor and my adjustment to “full-fledged” American society was brief and complete. (M, government, 37)

Second, it is possible that our sample over-represents those who are concerned about issues of identity and community because two important means of recruiting research participants were school alumni associations and TCK organizations such as Global Nomads and Overseas Brats. Those who do not experience (or acknowledge) such issues are unlikely to be drawn to these organizations. Third, individuals are more likely to talk about issues which concern them than areas of their lives which are going

smoothly and require no particular thought or effort. Fourth, one-third of our sample is between the ages of 25 and 35 when the process of accommodating, adjusting and defining a place in an American community is still prominent and memories of reentry are particularly fresh.

The themes of identity and community, or lack thereof, presented above is put in perspective when we look at the responses of these adult American TCKs to a series of forced choice questions. Although these questions provided ample opportunity to express feelings of alienation this is not the overwhelming picture to emerge. For example, most agree that they are more appreciative of much in this country because they have lived abroad (79%) and that the US is best place for them to be living (68%). Only a minority agreed with statements reflecting alienation such as: I often feel lonely (26%), I feel adrift (16%), I feel like a spectator on American life (32%), and these feelings decrease with time in the US.

An even stronger indictment of the unidimensional, negative interpretation of adult TCKs' experience is the respondents' generally positive evaluation of how their third culture background affects their current lives. Asked to reflect on several aspects of their adult lives, the majority considered the impact mainly beneficial to: work (72%), relations with children (71% of parents), higher education (67%), relations with parents (61%), relations with siblings (60% of those with siblings), social relations (60%), relations with spouse (55% of ever married). , Keep in mind that if those who said equally beneficial and detrimental were included the affirmation would be higher. Further discrediting the suggestion that a third culture childhood is primarily detrimental for adults, over three-quarters (77%) concluded that, overall, they are satisfied with the way their life has unfolded.

Responses to these forced choice questions reveal a group of people who have adapted though not completely "adjusted." They are not dead center, in part because they have a broader world view and interests than their non-mobile compatriots. Responses to this survey reveal that adult TCKs are internationally experienced, desire to maintain an international dimension in their lives and do so. They are comfortable with ambiguity. They are adaptable and relate easily to a diversity of people; they are helpers, mediators and problem solvers. While they do feel different from the mainstream, because of their broader involvement they do not feel isolated.

Conclusion

The themes in the problem-centered TCK literature must be seen as part of a broader picture. As is true for identity and sense of home, feelings about the third culture experience and its implication for adult life are complex. As many pointed out, it is not a question of good or bad, but rather a lot of both. Positive and negative feelings often co-exist.

As I reread my responses to these questions I am struck by the negative

> connotations in them. As I reflect on [the] effects of my TCK experiences on my life, I must say the sum total is not at all bad. I wholeheartedly believe that my upbringing overseas has made me a unique, if somewhat off-centered, broadminded person. The most distinct advantage/disadvantage of my transnational experiences is that I disdain anything ordinary! Makes for an interesting lifestyle, though, and keeps me on my toes. (F, government, 32)
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> My childhood in India is the seminal aspect of my life. I have spent enormous amounts of time reflecting on it alone and with others…..We each accommodate the experience in different ways, each combining some functional and some dysfunctional accommodations …..It has complicated my life, and enriched it too. All in all, I wouldn't trade it for anything though. (M, mission, 42)
>
> It is extremely difficult to summarize my experience as a TCK. Being raised abroad was both the most wonderful and the most terrible thing that ever happened to me. My life is forever enriched and changed -- I will also never fit in fully in American society. (F, business, 38)

For most time does heal. With time TCKs become increasingly settled and comfortable in the American environment. As they redefine self identities and join both mainstream and transcending communities, the difficulties of accommodating, fitting in, redefining oneself recede, though they may never disappear.

> Since my overseas experience was over 20 years ago, I can say with certainty that my answers to many of these questions would have been very different the year after I returned, as well as 5, 10, or even 15 years ago. The unfolding of my life has placed my overseas experience in some perspective and it has had different meaning to me over time. (F, other, 42)
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> I feel different from other Americans, but less like the "exotic alien" I once was. I've outgrown wanting to play that role….I used to feel the greatest belonging with my fellow expats – of all types, from any country of origin. Now that's still true but there's room for my synagogue community, my professional colleagues, etc., too. (F, business, 38)

In short, these adult TCKs embody many of the characteristics most suited to life in our increasingly global future. Most would agree with the TCKs who reflected:

> Like most experiences, my nomadic early life had its pluses and minuses, but, on balance, I feel that it really prepared me well for the rapidly changing and shrinking world in which we live. (M, Business, 45)
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> I feel wealthy as a result of my upbringing... I value the survival skills,

entrepreneural skills and the diversity of my background. I feel stronger and superior to most people in terms of depth and breadth and interior wealth. (F, Mission, 42)

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