

**ADULT TCKS : LIFE CHOICES, COMMITMENT  
AND PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS**

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Third Culture Kids (TCKs) are a growing population, one which is increasingly relevant in the contemporary interconnected world. Yet, relatively little is known of this population and even less about the lives they live as adults and the kinds of people they are. Before reporting on findings from this study of American Adult TCKs (ATCKs), it is important to provide some background, about the term TCK and about this study.

**BACKGROUND**

**TCKs and third culture**

TCKs, one kind of cross-cultural Kid (CCK),<sup>1</sup> are individuals who spent a number of child/teen years outside their passport country because of a parent's employment in "a representational role. This last point is what distinguishes TCKs from other expatriate kids whose lives are otherwise virtually the same. TCKs' parents are sponsored; they do not work for host country organizations or for themselves.<sup>2</sup> The impact of sponsor on a third culture family's experience overseas is well described by Lois Bushong in her 2005 FIGT conference presentation.<sup>3</sup> Her discussion of the impact of a mission sponsor applies to many other sponsors as well.

Why are TCKs called "third culture" kids? It is because they are raised in third cultures, cultures which are created and shared by individuals in the process of relating different societies. Third cultures draw on, and reflect, the cultures of people involved but are not blended cultures. Rather they are mediating or bridging cultures. Thus TCKs are so called because they are socialized, for at least part of their formative years, by parents who work in third culture positions.

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<sup>1</sup> Van Reken and Bethel (2006).

<sup>2</sup> For a more complete discussion of TCKs and CCKs and explanation of third cultures see Cottrell (2007).

<sup>3</sup> Bushong (2005).

## Research Background

This study of American ATCKs was begun by the author with Ruth Hill Useem and John Useem who coined the term third culture. Ruth Useem was the first to focus attention on children who were taken around the world by parents as they were “doing the work of the world,” and to give them a name, “third culture kid.”

The research was designed to compliment and expand on existing TCK literature in three ways: add to TCK research with a large study, move beyond the problem focus and add sponsor as an important independent variable.

First, in the mid to late 20c. writing on and by TCKs was largely anecdotal or conceptual. There was little hard research on TCKs. The present study is a rare example of a large sample study. While there is more research now, it is still hard to locate. Most of the research is done for theses and dissertations which are generally not loaned by university libraries. Many of these are written by TCKs who move on after completing the degree, and do not publish the research.

Second, a disproportionate amount of writing on TCKs has focused on difficulties associated with this role -- re-entry and identity issues in particular. This makes sense because people tend to think about and want to talk about their challenges and difficulties. And this kind of analysis is critically important in order to increase awareness that there is a largely unrecognized category of people, TCKs, and to raise awareness of challenges faced by such individuals. It is important not only to raise general awareness of TCKs, but also to make sponsor organizations aware that TCKs have needs which haven't been acknowledged.<sup>4</sup>

A third way research was and continues to be limited is the lack of attention paid to sponsor as a variable. Most research and writing does not identify sponsor. Other research is sponsor specific, most often done by the mission community.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Examples of influential early writing include Echerd and Arathoon (1989 a, b), Van Reken (1988), Wertsch (1991).

<sup>5</sup> A noteworthy example of a large research project that is sponsor specific is the MK CART/CORE project, for example, Andrews (1995), Andrews & Taylor (2004).

## **Description of present study**

The present study was designed to extend the understanding of the TCK experience by doing an exploratory study of TCKs' adult life course. The focus is on how and where ATCKs make their adult lives and how they see themselves and the world, rather than dwelling on difficulties. Respondents were recruited to assure representation from various sponsor categories. The study looks at the broader patterns rather than individual stories and internal states, though both were reported in open ended sections of the surveys. Because nothing like this had been done before, the study is exploratory and descriptive rather than hypothesis testing.

Data are from 604 respondents who completed a 24 page survey including many open ended questions. Participants were:

- American ATCKs
- Living in the U.S. at the time of the study
- At least 25 years old (to avoid initial reentry shock dominating responses)
- Abroad as dependents of diplomats, missionaries, military, businesspersons and others such as faculty on sabbatical, international school teachers, UN or International NGO employees
- Abroad from one to 19 years. (individuals who were abroad for a relatively short period of time and can be said to have had a TCK experience were included as well as those abroad for a longer time who are TCKs. This acknowledges the fact that increasingly families are abroad for short term assignments and thus reflects the whole range of TCK experiences.)

## **FINDINGS: ATCK LIFE CHOICES AND PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS**

This paper summarizes the study's findings on adult life choices in the areas of higher education, occupation and marriage followed by respondents' self descriptions.

This presentation of the data begins with quotations from Ruth Hill Useem which are widely cited because they clearly resonate with many TCKs.<sup>6</sup> These give the impression, a commonly expressed belief, that ATCKs are alienated and unsettled, finding commitment difficult.

Some young adult TCKs strike [others] as being self-centered adolescents... not able to make up their minds about what they want to do with their lives, where they want to live, and whether or not they want to "settle down, get married, and have children." They have what some call prolonged adolescence.

Others do what those around them are doing. They marry at the appropriate time, get a "good" job, have ... children, take on a mortgage, and then throw it all over at age forty ... to take a job overseas. Some resign from high-paying positions and return to college to be retrained for a low-paying teaching job. Still others withdraw from all social contact because of extreme depression or because they have come into an inheritance and are quite happy doing nothing but writing French poetry or traveling to all the places they have never been. This is what some have called delayed adolescence.

In each of these four sections data will be presented responding to the suggestion that ATCKs find it difficult to make commitments and settle down and/or are highly alienated. This will be followed, in each section, by a discussion of the extent to which respondents have incorporated an international dimension into their adult lives.

### **Post-secondary education**

Commitment and achievement. Adult life and adult decisions are said to begin at high school graduation. For TCKs the decision to continue with their education is not much of a decision; it appears to be a "no-brainer" because it is what they and their parents expect. All but nine of the 604 respondents had some education after high school. Some started with a trade school or Bible school, but the majority went directly to college or

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<sup>6</sup> Useem and Cottrell (1996).

university. Ninety-four percent entered within a year of high school graduation, the vast majority in the same year.

Clearly they did not wander around before deciding to pursue post-secondary education, and once in college these TCKs were anything but uncommitted and unstable. As Table one shows, they not only started higher education promptly, they continued without interruption. The high percent who completed a Bachelor's level degree was four times the national rate at that time, and half did so within four years at a single institution. Half (49%) continued on to some post baccalaureate education ranging from a few courses taken for interest to credentials and/or higher degrees. Over one-third completed a Master's level degree or higher. The proportion of TCKs in this study having completed advanced degrees is astounding, especially considering that quite a number who were older did their education at a time when advanced degrees were not so common and that others were still pursuing advanced degrees and others who might do so had yet to start.

Table 1: Commitment and stability in higher education

94%	Began post-secondary education within one year of high school graduation (84% in the same year)
81%	Attended no more than two institutions during undergraduate studies (2 <sup>nd</sup> institution might be study abroad or a summer program)
81%	Completed a BA (63% of those within four years, 90% within six years) <sup>7</sup>
39%	Completed at least an MA (11% completed a doctoral degree)

Commitment is one explanation for this high level of success. Another explanation, mentioned by numerous respondents, is that the TCK experience prepared them well for higher education. International schools are excellent, and the experience of living in different cultures was also a good preparation, as a business dependent pointed out:

I was better prepared as a high school student outside the U.S. than many of the freshmen I encountered during my first year...

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<sup>7</sup> According to a 2008 *New York Times* report nearly half of American students who begin a four-year college do not finish within five years and only 54% graduate in even six years.

I was more accepting of others, I had confidence of traveling on my own (great distances), so I felt more sure of myself

Others mentioned the advantage of having lived in or seen places they would study about in college.

The main reason for the TCKs' high level of educational achievement, however, is the high achievement of their parents and others in TCK communities. The great majority of parents had at least a BA and expected their children to achieve at least the same. Furthermore, third culture communities are elite communities. People abroad in representational roles are likely to have at least a college education. Thus nearly all the people TCKs meet in a third culture community who are of their nationality -- their role models -- are well educated. They are not exposed to the wide spectrum of people in their home countries, so don't see others as presenting alternative possibilities.

Adjustment / alienation. Unfortunately these statistics do not tell us anything about TCKs' emotional experiences in college. Sticking to it and succeeding are not the same thing as having a positive experience. Some may have persisted because they couldn't think of anything else to do, or because of parental pressure. Others may have dedicated themselves to studies to avoid facing reentry culture shock or because they didn't know how to fit in socially. These are all explanations commonly given, but we should not overlook the real possibility that the college experience was a positive one for many of these TCKs, and that they enjoyed it while doing well.

Given the great amount of writing on TCKs' difficulties in college years it is reasonable to assume that difficulties, especially not fitting in, would be the dominant answer in response to an open ended question on how their TCK background affected their college experience. Adjustment difficulty was not, however, the most commonly cited way a TCK background affected higher education. Only a little over one-quarter (27%) of those who said their TCK experience had an influence on higher education mentioned various kinds of adjustment difficulties (19% of all respondents). The response pattern is identical for those who might be expected to have the most culture shock on entering college, those who were still living overseas at age 17 or older.

International dimension. The most common response to the question of how the TCK experience affected higher education was in choice of major, (mentioned by 63% of those who acknowledged an influence, 45% of all). Most commonly respondents said this was a decision to study something international such as international relations, anthropology, area studies or a foreign language. Nearly one-third (29%) of those with a BA had an international major or minor at the undergraduate or graduate level or both. (Internationally focused studies were more common at the graduate than undergraduate level.) This figure would be extraordinarily high today, let alone in the '50s, '60s or '70s before the current emphasis on globalization.

Numerous reasons were given for choosing an internationally focused major. These included:

\* *Love of foreign cultures, especially one of the "home" cultures.* For some this was a genuine interest and desire to understand it more fully, often to share it as a teacher. For others it was a chance to remain in their comfort zone and finally, some chose to study a TCK homeland, especially language, because it would be easy.

\* *International perspective, international work.* Most who chose majors such as international relations, politics or economics did so in order to pursue international careers as diplomats or in multinational organizations. Others gave somewhat more idealistic, less career oriented, reasons for choosing such an international major. For example, an MK said:

[I studied] political science, foreign policy, international affairs, also communication...I wanted to gain tools so I could preach to others my TCK perspective

The son of international school teachers was especially idealistic, saying:

[I majored in] archaeology and Arabic hoping to return to the Middle East...I feel I owe it to myself and the world to go back and better the communication between the Middle East and the Western World.

Others explained that majors which aren't obviously international or cross cultural were still related to their international upbringing. They wanted to:

- *Help others abroad.* This was especially relevant to those who had grown up in less developed countries. It was a common reason cited for studying medicine, but a biologist explained that he chose this major so he could return to Africa as a wildlife biologist.

- *Gain perspective on own life, help others with similar experiences.* Psychology and counseling were frequently mentioned in this category as exemplified by an Army Brat. and an MK:

I became interested in counseling due to experiences abroad and having to adapt to different cultures. I've desired to help others adjust in whatever circumstances they have.

[I studied] anthropology to come to some understanding of my transnational experience

- \* *Get abroad.* Finally, some chose majors not so much for content as for the thought that they would lead to employment abroad. Teaching and nursing are examples of such majors.

One other way a TCK background undoubtedly influenced post secondary education is the high number who studied abroad. Nearly one-third studied abroad at some time during their undergraduate years which is extraordinarily high. Any study outside the U.S. was included in study abroad, though one wonders whether going to a school where your parents are living outside the U.S. is really study abroad.

## **Occupational choices and roles <sup>8</sup>**

Stability and commitment. Reflecting their high educational level and continued commitment, ATCKs are occupationally elite. Seven of ten were executives administrators, professionals or semi-professionals in their current or most recent job (if retired or in school). They were disproportionately employed in service sectors (place of work, not kind of work). Over one-third were working in educational, medical, social service or religious settings. Although there is no directly comparable data at the

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<sup>8</sup> Virtually all had some paid employment; two refused to answer questions about employment history. Five had been exclusively homemakers when not in a higher education program or school but most of them had worked while in school. Jobs held while in college were not included in analysis of career history.



national level, this is undoubtedly high. This choice is not surprising given that most of these ATCKs' parents were in service to country, church and/or host country nationals. Quite a number said they were in service occupations because of needs they saw overseas as children.

As with higher education, these ATCKs' career histories reveal more consistency and commitment than anticipated, given Useem's widely quoted observations. Respondents' lists of all jobs held since high school were analyzed according to the pattern over time. This resulted in 19 patterns which have been condensed into six for presentation.<sup>9</sup>

- *All or primarily student/homemaker* (11%) Seventy-five percent or more of these respondents' time since high school was as a student or homemaker. (Less than one percent had never worked, other than college jobs.) This undoubtedly underestimates the number for whom homemaker was the dominant career because if someone worked part time, even for very few hours, while primarily a homemaker they were coded for that occupation.

- *Single career* (37%). These individuals' entire work history was in one kind of work, though they may have done that work in a number of different positions and places. Most in this category were in the professions – medicine, law, scientists, professors, engineers, teachers and nurses, for example. Individuals who consistently worked as in retail sales, military, as secretaries or cooks are examples of others who were included in this category. Some were included who on first glance appeared not to fit because of the number of jobs and/or geographical mobility in their work histories. One individual stopped listing her jobs when she reached 20 saying, “you get the picture.” Looking at all these jobs, however, it was apparent that her career was contract project manager, even though most of her jobs were only a year or two. Another example is an individual who was a river raft guide and resort maintenance person in the summer and ski guide/instructor and resort maintenance worker in the winter. While he moved from resort to resort, he, too, stayed within a single occupation.

- *Morphing career* (17%). These individuals pursued a single line of work - - sort of. They were promoted in their work so that at the end they were doing something different from what they did in the beginning, but they had

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<sup>9</sup> Variation within these six categories is largely to distinguish between those who had established a pattern – ten years or more—and those who appeared to fit that pattern but had a shorter work history.

not made a decision to change their line of work. The two most typical examples of this pattern are secretaries who ended up in low level management and computer programmers who advanced to system analysts and sometimes into management. Another variation on this theme is individuals who did the same work but in quite different settings, such that it was a different kind of work. This includes an economics professor who worked briefly in government, an Arabic speaker who worked in a number of different kinds of situation but always because of his linguistic skills, and others whose jobs led to opening a business or becoming a writer or teacher as a continuation of the earlier occupation.

- *Slow start / interrupted career* (16%). These respondents' work history was dominated by a single kind of work, but they may have had a number of different kinds of short jobs before settling on that career. Law school or graduate school often marked the transition from a number of different jobs to the career. Others, mainly wives, had a dominant occupational role, e.g., teacher, nurse or secretary, but engaged in a different field of work for a brief time, usually while rearing children.
- *Major career change/s* (6%). Ruth Hill Useem's quote at the beginning of this discussion of ATCKs' adult life patterns, suggests a fairly high percent of respondents would fit this category – working in one field, then “throwing it all over” and picking up an entirely new line of work. The most typical example of this category is the person who retires from a military career and picks up a different line of work as a civilian. A few other retirees did likewise (not exactly “throwing it all over” for a new line of work). But others changed careers before retiring, for example: a fashion model became a business vice president, a financial planner took up furniture making and a government budget analyst left that to go into business as president of a juice distribution company. A few individuals had three distinctly different careers of approximately equal length.
- *Unsettled* (13%). The second pattern expected to be more prominent is the person who just hasn't settle on any one line of work. Generally, but not always, the varied jobs in this pattern were short – one to three years—although a few individuals included a number of five or six year jobs in quite different fields.

The above shows a high degree of stability and commitment in career history. Over half (54%) remained in one line of work—a single career or

one that “morphed” but did not involve a distinctive break in occupation. Less than one in five fit patterns suggested by the Useem quotation—major career change or unsettled career history. It might be argued that if someone with a single career changes jobs frequently it represents a fundamentally unsettled pattern. Here too, this sample presents an overall pattern of stability. Over half of the sample, including half those 40 and older, had no more than four different jobs including a move to a new employer in the same occupation.

International dimension. A second way to look at the career history of these ATCKs is the degree to which they incorporated an international element. Respondents were asked to list all their jobs and locations and to indicate if they were international in any way. Identifying the international dimension of jobs revealed a great deal of variation in how they defined international. One who worked in a mail room from which packages were shipped abroad indicated that this job was international. Several who taught foreign languages or area studies, on the other hand, indicated that their work was not international. (Those jobs were included among the international). Once again, a larger number of detailed patterns were collapsed into broad categories for presentation, in this case four.

- *No international work (27%).*
- *Minimal international involvement in work roles (42%).* This, the most common category, includes individuals who may have had one relatively short but highly international job. More typically respondents’ work had international moments, but otherwise was not international, for example having a few international clients, traveling abroad for an international conference, occasional translation, or being asked to host foreign visitors.
- *Intermediate international involvement (20%).* Many respondents in this category had a job or jobs with substantial international dimension but which cannot be called internationally focused. Others had some internationally focused job but their other jobs had little or no international dimension.
- *Internationally focused career (11%)* For these individuals the entire career was internationally focused. This includes those whose work was largely or primarily overseas, for example, a diplomat, AID employee, a

missionary. It also includes those living in the U.S. whose career was internationally focused such as international student adviser, language teacher, work in an international division of a multinational corporation, owner of an import-export business, international transitions coach.

While a majority of this U.S. based sample of American ATCKs had little or no international dimension in their work history, the fact that nearly one-third had a significant international involvement at some time in their work life undoubtedly puts them well above the U.S. population as a whole in this regard. Impressive as it is, this data under represents the degree of international involvement of American TCKs for two reasons: (1) Obviously the proportion of internationally involved American ATCKS would be higher if the sample included those working outside the U.S. (2) This data is based on a narrow definition of “international,” meaning work with people / institutions / cultures of other countries. Quite a number of respondents, such as teachers in diverse classrooms or social workers in Latino communities, pointed out that their careers were cross-cultural, if not strictly international. It is also important to note that many respondents who had little or no international element in their work lives had that in their volunteer lives. For example some whose work involvement was entirely domestic, got their international “fix” by activities such as hosting foreign students or serving on a sister cities committee.

### **Marital patterns**

Some of the questions most commonly put to the author concern marriage, in particular “do we ever marry?” and “is it possible for us to make a long term commitment to stay married?” The answer to both questions for this sample is a definite Yes.

Stability and commitment. A significant majority (77%) of these ATCKs have been married (an additional seven percent identified a long-term partner). And most (72%) of those who actually married had remained in their first marriage. This certainly indicates a willingness to commit and to stay committed, at a far higher rate than for the U.S. population as a whole. It is likely that the percent married would be higher except that 40% of the never married were still relatively young, between ages 25-29.

International/cross-cultural dimension. The second concern for TCKs is whether they can find someone who shares their cosmopolitan

outlook/international experience. Alternatively, one might ask whether the international background of TCKs “frees” them to marry outside their race/ethnicity, religion or nationality. On first glance it would appear that the answer is no, because the great majority married within each of these categories. However, as table two shows, half married someone who differed from them on at least one of these characteristics. Although it is impossible to identify comparable statistics for the country as a whole, it is likely that the percent who marry someone who differs on one cultural trait is higher than average.

Table 2: Spouse Characteristics (percentage)

Same major religion (Catholic, Protestant, Jew)	92%
Same ethnicity / race	88%
Same nationality (U.S. born or naturalized as a young child)	91%
Differs on at least one of the above	50%
Internationally experienced	60%

TCKs seem more concerned with finding someone to share their international outlook than someone who has the same cultural characteristics. On this they did slightly better; 60% said a spouse was internationally experienced. Many pointed out that they married another TCK. Combining this with the information from above, we find that over three-quarters married someone who was different on some cultural characteristic and/or had international experience.

For some, a marriage to a person of the same race/ethnicity, religion and nationality who has no international experience is a matter of opportunity. There may not have been much diversity in the people they met when at an age to marry. Others may well have married a mainstream American in order to feel more connected to their “home” country. One dependent of an international N.G.O. employee commented

I was miserable when I got to the States. I wanted to fit in, so I put away all that international stuff, married an American girl, got an American job and lived in an American suburb.

Another who married a mainstream American wife commented that, although this was not the reason he married her, he appreciated the fact that her family gave him “roots-in-law.” He often used these roots-in-law when he didn’t want to give the long answer to the dreaded “where are you from?” question.

The author’s earlier three-nation study of cross-national marriages<sup>10</sup> in addition to interviews with ATCKs, suggest that we make too much of demographic characteristics (race, religion, nationality) as representing major cultural orientations. This is not to say they don’t often, if not usually, make a difference, but rather that they cannot be assumed to make a difference. One ATCK was in the process of divorcing her Chinese husband when interviewed. She explained that she thought by marrying someone of a different nationality she would be marrying someone who shared her cosmopolitan outlook. “He’s just a monocultural, a Chinese monocultural, but just monocultural,” she lamented. Two cross-national couples in India objected to my identifying them as culturally mixed couples. One said “we’re not a mixed marriage, we’re Marxist economists” and the other gave a similar answer pointing out that they were homogeneous in terms of the culture most important to them, “we’re South Indian Methodists.”

### **Adult TCK Self Portrait**

Respondents were presented series of statements; they were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed or both agreed and disagreed with each..<sup>11</sup> An ATCK self portrait emerges from responses to a which a majority agreed or disagreed, including qualified agreement or disagreement (both). Overall, this self portrait affirms TCK characteristics identified in other writing, e.g. flexible, adaptable, broad minded.<sup>12</sup> Consistent with the sections above, only those elements of the self portrait related to sense of alienation, lack of commitment and those related to international orientation are included here. Given the frequency with which alienation, commitment

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<sup>10</sup> Cottrell: 1990, 1979, 1973.

<sup>11</sup> The “both” option was intentionally included to accommodate the TCK ability to see all sides of an issue. While complicates analysis a number of respondents thanked us for providing this option. The “both” responses can be taken as a qualified agreement or qualified disagreement.

<sup>12</sup> For two of many examples see: Pollock and Van Reken (1999) and Willis, Enloe and Minoura (1994)

difficulty, rootlessness etc are mentioned in the literature, these were anticipated to be prominent themes

Alienation, commitment. The portrait emerging from responses to the statements in the survey does not convey the sense of alienation, from other people or from the country that was anticipated.

These ATCKs reported feeling different but not isolated./alienated. ATCKs never entirely stop being and feeling that they are TCKs. These respondents, some well into retirement, strongly agreed that they feel different from Americans who have not had an overseas experience. Probably because of this about half do not feel central to any group. This does not, however, mean that they are isolates, but rather that they feel comfortable in different groups or situations and do not want to be encapsulated in any single group, consistent with strong agreement that they can relate to virtually anyone regardless of race, ethnic, religious or national difference. Finding it easy to establish relationships, they reject the notion that they are often lonely.

Many spoke of feeling out of place and often uncomfortable in the U.S. on reentry. However, with time nearly all find a niche in American life, settle down and feel at home. Overall these respondents are comfortable with their lives in the U.S. They feel it is the best place for them to be living and believe that having lived abroad they are more appreciative of much in the U.S. than others. While they are comfortable and can feel at home in the U.S., they sense it is not as complete as for most Americans as indicated in their agreement with the oft quoted statement “I feel at home everywhere and nowhere.”

The idea that ATCKs have difficulty with commitment was soundly rejected as respondents *disagreed* that they hesitate to make commitments or that they feel adrift. On the contrary most set long term goals and have plans to achieve them. The commitment and long term planning may involve mobility, however; most admitted that they experience some stress due to conflicting desires for stability and mobility.

International dimension. As indicated in their adult decisions these ATCKs have an interest in maintaining an international dimension to their lives. Not only do most manage to incorporate some international dimension in education work or volunteer activities, their homes reflect their international

interests and they welcome opportunities to meet foreigners. They maintain an interest in visiting places they have lived and make an effort to keep informed about those countries (and others). They are also willing to stand up for foreigners or other countries by speaking up when they disagree with others views about the rest of the world.

## **CONCLUDING COMMENT**

These findings from our study of 604 American ATCKs counter the prevalent view that ATCKs often lead relatively unstable lives, due in part to the need many feel to keep moving and a difficulty committing and/or are unusually alienated. These ATCKs are among the elite in terms of education and occupation. The commitment they show in those areas is also seen in marriage. In all these areas most maintain an international connection. Their self portraits are consistent with the commitment and international interest seen in adult life choices. This in no way denies that many ATCKs have difficult periods in their adult lives, quite possibly related to their TCK childhoods and that some never resolve these issues. These findings put such experiences and feelings into the larger context, looking at adult life choices and personal characteristics more broadly. This more holistic view is reflected in overall assessment of effect of the TCK background on adult lives. Asked whether this background was positive or detrimental to their lives the majority agreed that, overall, such a childhood has been beneficial to their relations with parents, siblings, spouses and children, as well as in social relationships, work and higher education. And three-quarters agreed that overall they are fairly satisfied with the way their life has unfolded.

None would argue, however, nor would the author maintain, that the TCK background is wholly beneficial or wholly detrimental. Comments by three ATCKs -- an MK, a business dependent and a diplomat's kid, indicating the complexity of feelings about the meaning of a TCK childhood provide an appropriate summation.

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. It has complicated my life and enriched it too. All in all I wouldn't trade it for anything.



It is extremely difficult to summarize my experience as a TCK. Being raised abroad was both most wonderful and most terrible thing that ever happened to me. My life is forever enriched and changed and I will never fit fully into American society.

As I reread my responses...I am struck by the negative connotations...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 broad-minded 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.

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This chapter is a consolidation of five articles which appeared in the International Schools Service *Newslinks* which can be found on [www.TCKworld.com](http://www.TCKworld.com).

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