

GLOBAL NOMAD MARRIAGE PATTERNS
Ann Bakier Cottrell

Outline of presentation to Global Nomads International Conference,
Virginia Beach, VA 2000

Background

Comes out of interest in globalization

Useems specifically interested in

people working and studying in other countries and return home

How cultures are carried back and forth,,,

They focused on roles played interaction, shared understandings... culture
and then on kids....

TCK research--past

1) Focus has been and continues to be primarily on TCK children and on reentry

Ruth Hill Useem & I decided to explore kinds of life decisions adult TCKs make

Explore how think about world and their place in it

The lasting effects of being TCK

2) fair amount research has been on specific sub species of TCKs especially mission.

We wanted capture broad TCK experience

To cover lot of territory and

look for patterns and differences related to different TCK experiences

Our Study sample

TCK Definition: anyone who has lived for at least 1 school year outside passport country
because of parents employment in a representational role

25 and older... to get beyond college experience for most

living in US (for ease of access)

Sought good distribution of 5 sponsor groups...

mission government military business other

Sought mix of those who are

--TCKS long term abroad

--and those who had a TCK experience for a short time 1-2 years

because third cultures are changing, increasingly short term

Data collection

Planned as in depth interviews with no > 50

Got calls, from people wanting to be in the study

Initial brief data sheet grew to. Include more meaningful data

Ended 24 pages, lots of open ended questions, took about 3 hours to do

Broadly exploratory, covering a lot of topics

but lacking depth in any single topic

Collected 700 surveys and quit, though I continue collect illustrative data & interviews currently analyzing 604 post war ATCKs

I've been asked speak on TCK marriages today

Talk is based on data we have have
Exploratory, not testing hypotheses.,

Here are questions we are often asked or have heard

1. Do we ever marry?

- subtexts a) it's hard find a soul mate who shares international worldview, interests
b) TCKs have difficulty of making commitment, especially long term
- used to short term relations don't know how to develop long
 - used to solving problems by getting out and start anew
 - fear of losing someone again

Answer:

definitely marry and most stay married to same spouse
3/4 (77%) were married or had been married at time of study
plus 7% had partner = 84%
keep in mind. 1/3 of never married 25-29
41% were 26 or older @ 1st marriage
marry a bit late, at least for their time...
1st marriage age 15 to 44 average. Age of first marriage. 25

2. But do we stay married?

Answer: yes 79% of ever married only once (19% twice, 2% more than twice)

3. Ruth Useem has observed TCKs are out of synch with America peers comfortable w. adults is this reflected in a large age gap between marriage partners? NO

40% same age 0-1 yr diff 3/4 (73%) 0-3 yrs age diff

We then wondered how TCK experience might affect who they marry in terms of cultural background, International experience.

We expected fairly high level of mixed marriage of one kind or another

1. Religion.... Depends on how define interfaith marriages

92% same religion broadly defined
(Prot-prot, Cath-Cath, Jew-Jew, None-none)

percent of in-group marriage smaller if redefine in-group when define according to mainstream and fundamentalists
marriage between Mainstream protestants and & between Fundamentalists

Then 53% same relig heritage. (including Jew-Jew, none-none)

2. Ethnicity...77 % said partner was same ethnicity

11 % said different ethnic groups

but groups would generally not be considered different
e.g. English and German Americans

88% thus married someone who was effectively same ethnicity....

Don't know how compare w. population at that time

3. Citizenship 91% of partners were US born or naturalized as a child (

5% born abroad, naturalized late teen or early adult before marriage

2 born abroad not nat.

rest were naturalized but don't know age, both US first (.4)

4. International

This is topic of much discussion centering more on life style, world view,
Most were vocal about seeking others with an international orientation

Before follow up on that concern want to point out

A certain # said they wanted to and did marry someone rooted

Or at least very middle/typical American

Want quick cure for rootlessness or if roots elsewhere, lack of roots in US

Can use Spouse's home town when need quick answer to where from

Spouse family provide "home" & relatives when own family still abroad

Want a quick passport to "normal American life"

Call it "roots in law" fictive roots roots by association

Passport to normality

Examples of those who "married for roots" all three long term TCKs

(male, govt) I missed the home life on weekends. I saw classmates always going home for the weekend with their parents. My happiest year after coming to the States was the first year when I found a girl friend who I married. I enjoyed becoming part of her family, enjoyed trips to her home, enjoyed the family oriented structure"

he often referred to a benefit of marriage and kids as "it gives you a home"

(note -one of a couple raised by a single parent, in this case a father) from age 5

(male other UNICEF)" I wanted to put all that international stuff behind me. I married a very American girl, got an American job and live in a very American suburb. Sometimes we get married for just one reason."

(F, Mis) "Marrying Joe was a kind of calculated marriage. I didn't marry for love either (she had just described a school reunion discussion of marriage in which love was never mentioned) I wanted to be married and have kids. Also I was very idealistic and I was just getting into the civil rights movement. I wanted to be

involved but I was only just getting to understand the American system and American politics, and here was this guy who was involved and knew it all because he came from this very politically active family; his father was a Communist. That was daring because I grew up with communists as the enemy. Also he was a Jew and I am an MK”

more common was the desire find someone sharing international
they find Americans lacking

“I’ve never dated Americans, they just can’t understand my international side”

“Now I know why my 1st marriage failed & know more about the kind of man I can relate to he must share my background or be older (female)”

“It is too hard without the same terminology. I dated a guy and he couldn’t figure me out” (f, mission)

This is clearly important to a large number of ATCKs and most do find a partner with at least some international experience before their marriage

1st marriage... > half (55%) some international backgroundl

32% someinternational experience

23% lots of international experience including other TCKs

60% had at least one partner w. some international. (including all marriages)

Many commented on appreciation of fact partner shared international dimension

But others point out just having international experience doesn’t guarantee shared world view

From 2 who married TCKs

“I am now divorced from my 1st husband who was my classmate in an American school abroad. We kind of fell into the marriage. We were good friends at Sasebo; our fathers were friends. When we came back I hated Texas, all there were were Mexicans and cowboys. So I came to San Diego to visit my friend’s family & then I married him. I think we were so sheltered in Japan we came back here and neither of us really explored other people.” (f milit)

“My wife lived in Peru too, but our experiences were too different and we both have so many issues to work out” (male)

And some found a foreign nationals do not necessarily provide an shared international outlook . One discovered that her foreign husband was, after all, monocultural . Another that potential mates were unable to shed elements of their own culture she found unacceptable

“I’ve dated a lot of Arabs who find it interesting that this blonde American speaks fluent Arabic. I can relate to their Arab side and their Westernized side. But I find they can’t let go of all parts of their culture that aren’t so beautiful, like the way they deal with women, so I’ve got out of those relations before it’s too late.”

We anticipated differences in adult patterns based on sponsor, sex, age,
And on overseas experience such as length, # countries, # years, # moves

Sex as would be expected for age 1st marriage—women younger

Also internationally experienced partner

Women (26%) somewhat more likely choose 1st partner with lots international experience than men (18%)

men (50%) somewhat more likely to marry 1st partner with no international experience (women -41%)

Sponsor... to some degree patterns are complicated by the fact mission respondents are older and other sponsored are younger

Other least likely married, (28% never married) (they are youngest group)

Mission most likely to be married at time of study (77% includes widowed)

of all married respondents

mission highest % of those married who married only once (82%)

mission most likely all marriages in same denomination e.g Baptist-Baptist (72%)

Business & other most likely to marry someone foreign born (13%)

no relation of sponsor to partners’ ethnicity or international experienced

look at variables related to overseas experience

marriage patterns are not related to

years abroad , or # of moves

of nations TCK lived in is associated with ethnicity and religious heritage of partner
those who lived in 1 nation most likely same religious heritage....

Why? MKs are most likely to have lived in just one country

62% of 1 nation had partners of same religious heritage

vs, 39% of those who lived in 4-8 different countries

those who lived in 4-8 countries were most likely to have a partner from a different ethnicity 19% v. 9% (1 nation) 5% who lived in 2-3 nations

We asked no specific questions about the marital relationships but comments made in interviews suggest some themes which might be explored in further research.

1. Strongly felt need for partner to understand them and their background.
Almost missionary zeal

“I need to express the Indian side of me. I don’t think anyone realizes how immediate this need is except now my husband because I’ve been *really, really, really* communicating with him about this. He’s a monocultural but learning S. Californian “ (f, mis)

A number mentioned taking spouses to see where had lived as child...
some went reluctantly others with more positive outlook

“My husband loved our Latin American trip partly being there and partly his desire to understand where I came from. It helps him understand me, my stories of growing up aren’t too credible. If he hadn’t gone and seen and met some people there would always be a separation between us” (f, govt)

“After our trip, *finally* she understood me” (m)

Interesting to note strong theme of need for partner to understand TCK, never heard
Anyone say they needed to gain greater understanding of partner,

2. some spoke of partners’ lives in way suggesting they feel some jealousy toward partners lives

Jealous of spouse’s ties with family proximity... especially if own family overseas
Jealous of connections with past... bump into people, reunions

3. another theme reports differences with partner in life style related to own international and more often to own mobility as child

Much discussion of need to travel while also crave stability and roots

Or own need to travel or get abroad while partner not interested or unable

Differences sometimes noted even when do travel

He’s a tourist, I’m a traveler
She’s a visitor I settle in

Compromises were suggested

Travel but not live abroad,
Only live abroad when kids very young
Wife and kids stay home when I travel with Navy

4. highly mobile may find substitutions for moving if they are stable, e.g. rearrange furniture

5 TCKs admit lack of preparation for or knowledge of spousal role

remember third culture/expat lives often

little or no relation w. extended kin

don't see old people in third culture community

most TC families are 2 parent families though this is changing

TC families have servants in many posts...

never question how things get done they do don't need take responsibility

sample comments illustrate these themes

from how to do things

“I Didn’t know how to cook”

“my wife expected me to do repairs around the house, I had no idea “

To different expectations regarding social life

“My husband couldn’t understand why I got out all the silver every time someone came over... Now that I have learned how to do the dishes I know why he questioned “ (f, govt)

Related to lack of role models for familial behavior ,

2 MKs suggested an idealized view of marriage based in part of fact that not with parents day to day as they were in boarding school

Both responded to small crises, burning the toast was an example, as if it meant the end of the marriage

Altho another MK indicated that his wife couldn’t understand why he didn’t take mini crises seriously.... “we don’t get upset over the little things after all we’ve seen and been through” he commented

Comments provide insight into potential stresses in TCK marriage, but give perhaps overly problem oriented view since people more prone to talk about stresses and problems

Useful to look at responses to a global question posed

“as you reflect on your adult years, do you feel your early overseas experiences have been beneficial, detrimental or been irrelevant in relations with your husband/wife

could say mainly beneficial, mainly detrimental, both or irrelevant.

Responses indicate strong endorsement for benefit of background to marriage

Of those ever in marriage type relationship

55% said background mainly beneficial.... Another 15% said both = 70% acknowledge some benefit

vs. 23% acknowledge some detrimental aspects.... Only 8% mainly detrimental

21% of those who ever married say irrelevant (probably short???)