

Helping Missionary Kid Repatriation

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Spring 2015

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

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Abstract

The children of expatriates grow up being a part of two or more cultures which allows them to have unique experiences and challenges. Many of these children return to their parents' home country after they finish school and have trouble adjusting to the change. This study interviewed a sample of Missionary Kids about their transition back to the United States as their home country. It looked at how well they have adjusted and what helped and hindered their transition. The subjects were evaluated on how different factors of their overseas experience influenced their repatriation process, current adjustment, and cultural adjustment. As expected, time since returning to the home country, frequency and length of visits to the home country while living overseas, good relationships with other children of expatriates, support from parents whether overseas or nearby, and participation in re-entry programs influenced the adjustment process.

Helping Missionary Kid Repatriation

With an increase in the ability to travel and stay connected through technology, more and more people are leaving their home countries to work and live overseas. This trend presents a cultural transition when people move away from their home country that affects them and any children they have. The move is most likely accompanied by a move back to the home country which also affects the adults who moved as well as their children. Any person who leaves his or her own country to live and work in a different country for an extended period of time will be referred to as an expatriate and the process of returning to one's home country will be referred to as repatriation. The country the expatriates are from will be called the home country and the country or countries they move to will be called the host country or countries. The children of expatriates will be called Third Culture Kids (TCKs).

Cultural Transitions

People who move overseas face continuing adjustment challenges, as shown by a study that evaluated adjustment levels of business people who left their home country to work overseas (McGinely, 2008). The study found that the participants were able to adjust well enough to live and work comfortably in the new country but reported an inability to adjust completely because of cultural differences. The receptiveness of the culture predicted how well the subjects were able to cope with the change, which affected their psychological well-being in making them more satisfied with the change. A study by Adler (1981) reported difficulties in adjusting during the initial transition to the country overseas as well as challenges in adjusting when the participants returned to their home country. The study evaluated adjustment levels at the time of returning to the home

country through self- and peer-evaluations. The results showed that the subjects were not able to reintegrate themselves into their home culture as quickly and easily as they had expected. Reintegration was measured by their effectiveness upon returning to work, their ability to cope with repatriation, and their use of the skills they acquired while overseas. The subjects of this study also reported expecting their children to return to their home country without transition problems, which is the opposite of what happens when children living overseas return to their home country.

Transition Experience for Children

Moving cross-culturally affects emotional security and self-esteem, especially for children who grow up in a country different from their home country (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011). Experiencing more than one cross-cultural move during childhood leads to the instability of cultural identity in TCKs because they experience big life changes (Gilbert, 2008). Children who move to different countries as they grow up experience the different cultures as they are developing their identity. They have the opportunity to assimilate these cultural experiences into their identity but defining oneself while going through such mobility can be difficult. All of the cultural moves are hard for children but returning to the home country has been found to be the hardest move because it causes the individual to experience high levels of stress which can lead to anxiety, depression, and difficulty adjusting to the new culture (Adler, 1981; Davis, et al., 2010; Martin, 1984; Tetzl & Mortenson, 1984).

As children return to their home country, they may do so to visit or to move back permanently. Repatriating at the end of adolescence in order to pursue higher education is an experience that has been the subject of research in order to understand what this

particular transition brings. The end of adolescence is an important part in the TCK's life because it is a time for identity formation (Firmin, Warner, & Lowe, 2006). The process is made even more complex with the addition of a significant transition (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). This transition period is important in a TCK's life and should be given special attention in order to reach an end goal of successful adjustment (Davis, Suarez, Crawford, & Rehfuss, 2013; Tetzl & Mortenson, 1984). The transition itself is accompanied by psychological distress (Davis, et al., 2010). The return to the home country is accompanied by stress because the TCK is faced with a situation outside of his control, and a disruption in the way he experiences the world (Davis, et al., 2010; Rosik & Kilbourne-Young, 1999). These perceptions can also lead to anxiety about the new environment and having to adjust to a change without the presence of immediate family which has been present during other moves. The TCK may also experience depression and emotional instability (Tetzl & Mortenson, 1984). The psychological disturbances during this time have been linked to feelings of grief and loss (Davis, et al., 2013).

The loss experienced when returning to one's home country at this time manifests itself through different perceived losses (Gilbert, 2008). The loss can be related to relationships that were built while overseas that are now changing because of the increase in distance. TCKs may also mourn the loss of the country itself because it was familiar, comfortable, and may have held particular meaning for them. They could experience a loss of possessions and relationships with pets because they had to leave things behind. They may also experience existential losses such as the loss of knowing where one fits, the loss of security, and the loss of status (Tetzl & Mortenson, 1984). While the home country is where the TCK's family is from, the host country may seem more like home to

them because that is where they grew up (Collier, 2008). This sense of loss, of losing everything they know, can result in feelings of vulnerability (Davis, et al., 2010).

Wrobbel and Plueddemann (1990) have found that these adjustment problems can extend into adulthood if not resolved during repatriation. Especially when compared to peers who have not lived overseas, people who have had cross-cultural childhoods were not able to establish their identity upon returning very well. The researchers suggested that this was a result of suppressing past experiences in order to cope with the changes. Gilbert (2008) found that TCKs may continue to have a sense of uncertainty about safety and trust and Rosik & Kilbourne-Young (1999) found an increased risk for dissociative disorders when they assessed five adult children of foreign missionaries.

Reasons for the Difficulties

As mentioned before, the sense of loss that accompanies repatriation as an adolescent affects the adjustment process (Gilbert, 2008). The loss of the culture of the host country is accompanied by the presentation of cultural differences found in the home country (Bikos, et al., 2009). As the TCK encounters the differences in culture, finding that some things that were acceptable in the host country are not acceptable in the home country can be a source of embarrassment and discomfort (Collier, 2008). As the differences in culture become apparent, the individual realizes that the home country does not feel like home because of their experiences outside of the home country (Bikos, et al., 2009; Hervey, 2009). This is problematic because the home country is at least somewhat familiar because of the language and the individual expects to fit in because they are returning home (Adler, 1981; Martin, 1984). Many return and find that they perceived the culture of the home country incorrectly while they were away (Hervey, 2009). Huff

(2001) found that individuals who identified themselves as being from their host country experienced the transition better than those who identified themselves as being from their home country. The TCK's peers may also have the expectation that the returner should interpret the world in the same way that they do because the returner is technically from the home country. This expectation from the peers can be a cause of stress for the TCK because the expectations will not be met (Hervey, 2009).

The differences in expectations can lead to a difficulty for the TCK in connecting to peers in the home country upon return. This is a result of differences in how relationships are approached in different cultures, which was explored in a study conducted by Bikos, et al. (2009). The TCKs in the study were typically used to moving frequently and developing deep relationships quickly, something that is atypical in the home country. Huff (2001) suggested that the independence gained from learning to live in different cultures may result in an inability to connect well with peers in the home country. The cultural values themselves may also affect the TCK's perception of the home country peers, causing a loss in desire to seek friendships (Bikos, et al., 2009; Huff, 2001).

Difficulties in connecting with home country peers may contribute to feelings of being different, something that the TCK experiences anyways when making this transition (Adler, 1981). Davis, et al. (2013) suggested that growing up experiencing different cultures but not feeling a sense of belonging to one culture prevents TCKs from identifying with their home country peers. Their experiences are unique, setting them apart from those who have not lived overseas. They also experience psychological difficulties that are different from their peers who are only moving away to college, and

different from those who are only moving to a different country. The TCK experiences these transitions at the same time. The grief and loss TCKs feel should be seen as normal for them, while maintaining the realization that it makes them different from their peers. Their cultural experiences make them different too because they return to the home country knowing little about what has happened there while they were gone (Bikos, et al., 2009).

The length of time spent overseas as well as age upon returning have been found to affect the transition. Martin (1984) presented the idea that the more time one has spent in a different culture means more time spent integrating that culture into ways of thinking, acting, and relating to other people. The more that the culture is deeply ingrained into the individual, the harder it is to adjust to a new culture. Huff (2001) also suggested that younger children are able to transition more successfully back into the home culture. In a study on the transitional period, TCKs older than 15 were found to experience more stress and grief which led to having a harder time adjusting to the new culture than children under the age of 15. However, Wrobbel and Plueddemann (1990) found that older TCKs transitioned better and suggested that it was because older children are more developmentally mature and thus can handle the stress that comes with the transition.

Interventions

Staying in Touch

Adler's (1981) study on adult transition and return to the home country found that repatriation is not as stressful when the company keeps the individual informed about changes happening in the company while they are gone. This relates to Hervey's (2009)

finding that TCKs who maintain contact with a peer in the home country while they are overseas experience repatriation more positively. The study suggested that staying in touch with home country peers enables TCKs to be aware of current trends in the home country and learn how to build and maintain relationships with people in the home country, even though they are culturally different. This connection also aids in the development of cultural skills, socially and practically, which allows for the individual to be repatriated into the home country with greater ease (Klemens & Bikos, 2009; Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

Relationships with TCKs

Research has also found that forming relationships with other children who grew up outside of their home country has a positive impact on the transition (Collier, 2008; Davis, et al., 2010; Hervey, 2009; Martin, 1984; Tetzl & Mortenson, 1984). Whether the TCKs came from the same host country or a different one does not change the fact that they too are going through the process of learning how to reintegrate themselves into the home country. They all find it difficult because the other culture is an important part of their lives so they understand what other TCKs are going through. These individuals can provide support and understanding for each other that those who have not gone through this experience cannot. Rather than telling their story to someone who does not know what it is like to grow up outside of the home country, TCKs can talk to people who are interested in their stories because they have had similar experiences. They can also find support from older TCKs who repatriated before they did. The older TCKs are able to understand what the more recently repatriated TCK is going through but also provide encouragement in being an example of successful repatriation. The younger TCK can

look to the older ones and know that it is possible for them to adjust to the home country, even if the initial transition is hard. The older TCKs can also give practical guidance concerning how they became accustomed to living in the home country.

Parental Influence

Parents have an important role in the transition experience as well. Greater support from parents can lead to a more positive perception of the transition (Collier, 2008). A strong bond with parents can lead to the development of greater confidence within the TCK and his ability to move back to the home country (Tetzel & Mortenson, 1984). This confidence allows the TCK to seek success in transitioning to the home country despite the difficulties. The spiritual beliefs the parents pass on to their children can give the child greater coping resources, especially if they have made those spiritual beliefs their own (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). Parents also play a role in helping their child make important decisions (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009). These decisions can include where the child should go to college and what social opportunities they should participate in. Another important decision parents make is whether or not they will return to the home country with their child, either permanently or for a short period of time, during repatriation. Returning with the child when they start college has been found to help make the transition period more positive (Tetzel & Mortenson, 1984).

Re-entry Programs

An intervention that has received increasing attention in recent years is the attendance of re-entry programs (Davis, et al., 2010; Davis, et al., 2013). Re-entry programs can be run by missions organizations for the children of their missionaries or by independent organizations for anyone who is interested in the opportunity. Re-entry

programs offer a time between leaving the host country and returning to the home country where the focus is on the TCKs and their specific experiences during repatriation. The programs may include seminars with the intent to help the TCKs learn about cultural differences, their feelings of loss and grief, and ways to integrate their unique experiences into their new life in the home country. Participants may be given the opportunity to talk about their experiences, which Davis, et al. (2013) found to have a positive impact on psychological well-being. The presence of people who have already navigated the transition process and established themselves can be a source of confidence and information for those in the midst of the process. The programs are also a place where the children get to meet, interact with, and form relationships with other children who are experiencing the same things they are. Because most of these re-entry programs are held for the children of foreign missionaries, there is also a religious influence.

Davis, et al. (2010) found that participating in a re-entry program improved levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and psychological well-being when compared to these levels before going through the program. The program also addressed the feelings of grief and loss that the TCKs were experiencing and helped them recognize these feelings as valid. According to Davis, et al., (2013), TCKs who participate in re-entry programs have better coping methods and are more prepared for repatriation. This study also presented narrative therapy as effective in helping the TCKs feel understood. Both of these studies found that the continuing support systems that the organizations provided once the programs were over helped with successful repatriation. Huff (2001) credited learning cultural values, trends and norms as a reason that re-entry programs are helpful for

repatriation because it allows the TCKs to better understand the culture they are entering into and gives them skills for living in the home country.

Time in Home and Host Countries

The effect of the amount of time spent in the home country since repatriation on the transition process has had mixed results. Hervey (2009) found that the evaluations of those who had spent the longest in the home country since repatriation showed better adjustments than those who were closer to the time of repatriation. This could be because time allows for individuals to learn about the culture and find their identity in the new setting. They may also be more developmentally mature and recognize their experience as favorable and useful for growth rather than dwelling on their losses. Brabant, Palmer, & Gramling (1990) suggested that time since returning was not a factor in how well the individual experienced the transition. They presented the idea that transition difficulties impact how well one adjusts and that, if the difficulties are too great, successful adjustment will not be achieved.

Current Study

While Third Culture Kids are people who identify with the culture of the country their parents are from as well as the country they grow up in, this study will look specifically at these types of children whose parents worked overseas as Christian missionaries and will be called Missionary Kids (MKs). Many MKs do not consider the country their parents are from to be their home country because they spent most of their lives overseas and may identify their host country as their home. However, the study will refer to the country the MK's family was originally from as the home country because of its use in the existing literature. The study only looked at MKs who were originally from

the United States. MKs who come to the United States for college but who are originally from a different culture may identify more as an international student than as a returning TCK because they are moving to a different country rather than returning to their home country.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand repatriation difficulties when MKs return to their home country in order to go to college. It will seek to assess how time spent since repatriation, time spent overseas, frequency of visits to the home country, length of visits to the home country, contact with peers in the home country, friendships with other MKs, re-entry programs, family support, and parents' location during repatriation influence the perception of the repatriation process, current adjustment, and cultural adjustment.

Hypotheses

This study expected to find that perception of repatriation, current adjustment, and cultural adjustment for MKs are influenced by:

1. time since repatriation,
2. time spent overseas,
3. frequency of visits to the home country,
4. length of visits to the home country,
5. contact with peers in the home country,
6. friendships with other MKs,
7. re-entry programs,
8. family support, and

9. parents' location during repatriation.

It was hypothesized that time spent since repatriation, frequency of visits to the home country, length of visits to the home country, contact with peers in the home country, friendships with other MKs, re-entry programs, family support, and parents' location during repatriation positively affect repatriation. It was also expected that length of time spent overseas negatively affects repatriation.

Method

Subjects

The subjects for this study are Liberty University students who have lived overseas while their parents worked as foreign missionaries. There were 12 subjects with seven females and five males. The mean age of the sample was 20.75, ranging from 18 years old to 23 years old. The subjects were from different host countries and had moved overseas at different ages. Of the 12 participants, three (25%) had lived in South America, three (25%) in Europe, three (25%) in Africa, and two (16.7%) in Asia. While 11 of the subjects had lived in only one country while overseas or more than one country within the same continent, one subject had lived in several continents. This subject had lived in Central America, South America, Europe, and Asia. The mean age of when the subjects had moved overseas was 4.79, with the youngest being born overseas and the oldest being 12 years old. Subjects had spent differing amounts of time overseas but no less than three years. The mean number of years spent overseas was 12.38 years with the shortest amount of time being 5 years and the longest amount of time being 18 years. The subjects differed in how often they visited their home country, either once a year, every two years, every four years, once, or inconsistently. The subjects differed in the amount

of time they spent in their home country when they visited while still living overseas. Some visited for a couple weeks, some visited for one month, some visited for two months, some visited for six months, some visited for one year, and some visited for different amounts of time during each visit. The home country of all of the subjects is the United States of America.

This study used convenience sampling by getting in touch with Liberty University's Center for Global Engagement department to contact known MKs at Liberty. The department was not able to provide a list of MK students because of confidentiality, but the researcher was able to contact subjects by giving the department an e-mail to send out containing the necessary information and method of contacting the researcher. The students who responded and agreed to participate in the study signed a consent form and were the subjects. MKs that the primary researcher knew personally were also contacted and invited to participate in the study. Two subjects were recruited through the e-mail sent out by the Center for Global Engagement and the other ten subjects were MKs that the primary researcher knew personally and asked to participate in the study.

Measure

This study used a questionnaire for basic demographic information and personal interviews to collect data. The questionnaire, reproduced in Appendix A, was used to collect information from the subjects about their age, host country, time spent in their host country, and time spent in their home country. The information from the questionnaire was also used to eliminate students who did not meet the criteria for being subjects. Subjects were asked their age, gender, year in school, the number of years they

lived overseas, their parents' country of origin, the country or countries they lived in overseas, their parents' current location, and the number of years since they returned to their home country.

The personal interview, reproduced in Appendix B, was used to assess each subject's adjustment levels. The subjects were asked to rate their transition experience on a scale of 1-5. If their rating was negative, they were asked what made it negative. If their rating was positive, they were asked what made it positive. This was used to determine what the prevalent transition difficulties were and what caused them. The subjects were asked to rate their levels of current adjustment to being in the United States from 1-5. If rated negatively, they were asked what made it negative. If rated positively, they were asked what made it positive. The subjects were then asked to rate how accustomed they currently felt to the American culture on a scale from 1-3. They were asked how often they returned to the United States to visit while they lived overseas and how long the visits lasted. They were then asked how much contact they had with peers in the United States while they lived overseas. The interview also assessed the quality of family support, re-entry programs, and friendships with other MKs. The subjects were asked if their relationship with their parents negatively or positively influenced their transition back to the United States and why. They were asked if they attended a re-entry program during their repatriation experience and if it was helpful to their transition. If it was helpful, they were asked to explain how. The subjects were also asked if their initial friendships upon returning were predominantly with other Missionary Kids, with non-Missionary Kids, or a mix of the two. They were asked if they felt closer to their friends who were Missionary Kids or to their friends who were non-Missionary Kids. They were

asked if having Missionary Kid friends was helpful to their transition experience and, if so, how it was helpful. The subjects were asked if their parents returned to their home country, either permanently or temporarily, when the subject returned. The interview ended by asking what the subjects wish would have happened differently during their transition that would have helped make it a more positive experience.

Procedure

Once the students were contacted about being a part of the study, they had the option to fill out the questionnaire and agree to be a part of the study. The primary researcher then contacted them through e-mail and set up a time to conduct the interview. At the time of the interview, the primary researcher and the subject met at the Starbucks in the Jerry Falwell Library, the Tilley Student Center at Liberty University, or a room in the Center for Global Engagement office. If the subject was one of the subjects contacted personally by the primary researcher, the subject filled out the questionnaire at the time of the interview and then proceeded with the interview. The interviews were recorded using an audio recording application on the primary researcher's mobile phone and were then transcribed into Microsoft Word. Brackets were used to clarify information or to generalize information that could be used to identify specific subjects.

Results

The study assessed the data collected through the questionnaires and personal interviews to identify trends and differences.

Time since Repatriation

The subjects who had spent more time in their home country since repatriation perceived their current adjustment, and their cultural adjustment more positively than did

the subjects who had spent less time living in their home country since repatriation. However, they viewed their initial transition more negatively than those who had spent less time living in their home country since repatriation. Subjects viewed their time since repatriation as influential in helping them learn the culture of their home country and become comfortable living there again. They reported that time was an important factor in helping them adjust to living in their home country again. One subject reported experiencing repatriation as positive because she had time to “put down roots” Another said that “Well, it’s been nine years so now I’m like- now I’m okay.”

Time Spent Overseas

The subjects who spent more time living overseas as MKs perceived the repatriation experience, their current adjustment, and their cultural adjustment more negatively than did the subjects who had spent less time living overseas as MKs. Those subjects who spend more time overseas identified that their ability to transition was made difficult by their lack of contact with their home country. The subjects who had spent less time overseas viewed their transition and levels of adjustment positively for one of two reasons. They had either lived overseas while they were young but then moved back when they were still young and were more flexible in adjusting back to being in their home country. One subject said “The good thing was that I was young enough and still, like, malleable emotionally that I could adapt to the culture.” Another reason is they did not move overseas until they were older, thus enabling them to maintain knowledge of the home culture. Two subjects identified being older when they moved as helpful in allowing them to adjust to being back in their home country. One said, “I was in America

until I was 12 so I was pretty American to begin with.” The other said, “I was 12 before I moved overseas so I had that kind of a base.”

Frequency of Visits

The subjects who visited their home country more frequently perceived the repatriation experience, their current adjustment, and their cultural adjustment more positively than the subjects who visited less frequently. Those who visited the home country often reported being able to keep up with cultural trends and norms and a better ability to maintain contact with peers in the home country. Time spent in the home country while still living overseas was beneficial for helping subjects have an awareness of the changes taking place in their home country. One subject identifies “repeatedly kind of being able to immerse in this culture even if it’s short periods of time,” as being helpful in helping him adjust to being back in his home country.

Length of Visits

The subjects who spent more time in their home country when they visited perceived the repatriation experience, their current adjustment, and their cultural adjustment more positively than the subjects who spent less time in their home country when they visited. Those whose visits to the home country were long were able to experience a sort of pre-repatriation which prepared them for when they made the move on their own. Those who spent short amounts of time whenever they visited were accustomed to leaving the home country and returning to the host country without having to cope with experiencing feelings of grief and loss. One subject saw the benefit of her year in the home country when she said “I went to a public High School when I came back so I was amongst my peers here in the States. It was a really awkward year but it

really helped me be excited about coming back.” Others also identified spending time in public school while being on long visits as helpful.

Home Country Peers

All of the subjects reported little to no regular communication with peers in the home country. Some identified being too young to keep in contact or even care about doing so as the reason. Others said that they were so focused on living and being in the host country that they did not think much of friends they had made in the home country. Some identified their lack of friends in the home country as the reason for not having contact. Several recognized that the rise in the use of social media while they were in High School allowed them to have more contact with peers in their home country but that, even then, it remained minimal.

Missionary Kid Peers

Subjects who had friendships with MK peers upon returning to their home country perceived the repatriation experience, their current adjustment, and their cultural adjustment as more positive than subjects who did not have friendships with MKs upon returning to their home country. Subjects who had MK friends during repatriation had a source of support and understanding as they learned how to live in their home country again. Some of their peers were going through the same experience which helped them know that they were not alone in how they felt. One subject identified mutual understanding as important by saying “I never had to account for all the places I’d been and the different experiences I had because we just understand that.” The subjects also had MK peers who were older or had been back in the home country for longer. These relationships benefitted them because they had someone who understood what they were

going through but who also had experienced repatriating successfully or unsuccessfully. These older MKs were seen as mentors and examples that the subjects could rely on. One subject recollected that “it was helpful because I could see them being successful, I could see them making steps.”

Participation in a Re-entry Program

Few subjects participated in a re-entry program upon returning to their home country. Two had seminars at their schools in their host country that provided re-entry information. Those that did attend a re-entry program recognized that it was helpful in connecting them with other MKs. One said that it was good to be with those MKs but that “I don’t think it fully prepared me for transitioning,” though she recognized that the transition would have been harder had she not gone. Another subject identified the re-entry program at her school to be more helpful than the one she attended upon returning to her home country because they spent time talking through the different challenges they would face and how to handle them. Those who did not attend a re-entry program were asked if they would have found it beneficial to their transition if they had and most responded that it would have. One subject who said it would not have changed his experience also said “I think there is a case for that, but I don’t think that, across the board, you should have to go to this Missionary Kid program.” Another subject recognized specific topics addressed in his re-entry program as helpful, “the contents that they talked about regarding time, American punctuality, sort of just cultural things that even I hadn’t thought about. One of the biggest things they talked about was relationships and the ways that MKs vary in how quickly we can get deep but not so deep that it’s intimate.”

Relationship with Parents

Subjects reported that their relationship with their parents influenced their transition. Some identified a mainly positive influence, but some identified the relationship as having a negative influence. Subjects who reported having good relationships with their parents benefitted from keeping in touch with their parents and knowing that they could go to them for support if they needed to. In speaking on her relationship with her parents, one subject said “we always talked about how it was better that we were three thousand miles apart and had a good relationship than next door and fighting all the time.” A subject whose relationship with her parents affected her transition negatively said that “I think it was hard because when I came here I, like, wanted to cut them off and I was like ‘It is so hard for me to talk to you because, when I do, I am so homesick.’”

Parents in the Home Country

The subjects whose parents returned to their home country at the same time that the subject did perceived the repatriation experience, their current adjustment, and their cultural adjustment as more positive than the subjects whose parents did not return at the same time as the subject. The presence of parents in the country benefitted the subjects by allowing them to have increased contact and providing support, predominantly emotional, during repatriation. Parents who were back in the home country were a source of support because they were closer to the subjects than if they had stayed in the host country. Parents who were in the home country and within a close distance of the subjects were a support because of their availability if the subjects needed to spend time with them or have a place to go away from college. Those whose parents did not return with them were

asked if their transition would have been different if they had returned. Some said yes and some said no. One subject said, “I think it definitely would have helped but I understand that they couldn’t really leave.” Another subject said, “it would have had a negative effect because I would have felt like they were trying to hold on to me and couldn’t let me go.”

Discussion

Hypotheses

The findings of this study supported research done by Hervey (2009) and Davis et al. (2010), which found that having friendships with other MKs makes the repatriation process easier. The amount of time spent overseas was indicative of how well the subjects perceived their repatriation experience, their current adjustment, and their cultural adjustment, as found by Martin (1984). Those who spent more time living overseas did not have enough contact with their home country to offset transitional difficulties.

The study found that adjustment to the home country improves over time, in accordance with Hervey (2009) but in disagreement with Brabant, et al. (1990). In contrast, the findings showed that subjects who had been repatriated for less time showed a more positive perception of the initial transition than did those who had been repatriated for more time. This is most likely because those who had spent more time were able to look back and assess how well they transitioned more accurately than those who were closer to or even still in that time of transition. Studies conducted by Davis, et al. (2010) and Davis, et al. (2013) supported the finding that re-entry programs can have a positive influence on repatriation. As proposed by Wrobbel and Plueddemann, (1990) having

positive family relations does positively affect repatriation. Having their parents return with them was beneficial to the subjects' repatriation process (Tetzel & Mortenson, 1984).

Other Findings

The study found trends that were not mentioned in the existing literature. The frequency of visits to the home country while living overseas and the lengths of these visits had a positive effect on the repatriation process, and adjustment to living in the home country again and to its culture. Three of the subjects were unsure about how to answer the question asking for their home country on the questionnaire. These subjects identified the country they were born in overseas as their home country rather than the country their parents were from as their home country. When asked about being friends with Missionary Kids or non-Missionary Kids, subjects recognized the importance of having Missionary Kid friends but also identified the need for friendships with non-Missionary Kids. One subject said, "we connected on different levels and so, it was nice to have both because I was able to connect deeper quicker with my TCK friends but [. . .] I didn't mind the more shallow, not shallow in a negative sense, but just more shallow friendships at first."

Subjects also identified what they wished would have been different that would have made their repatriation process more positive. Having access to an established group of Missionary Kids when arriving at Liberty was identified by one subject who said "something I felt was lacking when I first arrived was something within the university to help me with the transition. I remember just thinking that I pursued it and I tried to find different groups but there just wasn't anything set up." Another subject identified that

“something that gets Missionary Kids together right away,” would have been beneficial for his transition.

During the ninth interview, the subject attributed most of her success in transition, adjustment and cultural adaptation to having an older sister at the same school who had repatriated before the subject had. A question about the impact of older siblings and their return to the home country was added to the remaining interviews and revealed much of the same. Having older siblings who had repatriated before the subject had was beneficial in giving the subject support if the sibling was going to the same school or nearby. The subjects also benefited from having seen their siblings transition either well or get better after transitioning. One subject said “[my sister] was really good for [having] somebody who understands both the community that I came from and my family.”

Limitations

This study was limited because it relied on personal self-report from the subjects. The subjects could have tried to present themselves favorably as they answered the questions. They could have also not remembered experiences accurately or may not have felt comfortable telling the truth. The subjects may have also sought to answer in ways that they thought the researcher expected of them. The fact that the subjects chose to participate in the study was also be a limitation because people who volunteer to participate may be different from people who do not want to participate. The sample size limited the study because the participation of more subjects would have provided more data, allowing for a more complete view of the repatriation experience. Using a personal interview was another limitation because the interview questions had not been tested for validity or reliability.

Future Research

For future research, the use of psychological tests would make the results more valid and reliable. They would also present more accurate assessments of psychological well-being. The study could also be run outside of Liberty University in order to be able to generalize the results to MKs outside of Liberty. It could also look at the difference between MKs who attend a Christian university, MKs who attend a non-Christian university, and MKs who return to their home country and do not go to college. Future research could look at MKs who were returning to their home country for college and MKs who were going to a different country from both their home and host countries for college. It could find a way to assess integration into the host culture before leaving the host country and how that could affect transition. Gender differences would be another way to compare differences in transition experiences. Research could further look into the impact of being the first child to return to the home country for college, of not being the first child to return and not having older siblings nearby, and of not being the first to return and having older siblings at the same school or nearby.

Future research could also make use of a pretest-posttest design in order to compare psychological well-being before and after repatriation. It could include assessments answered by the subjects themselves and by those close to the subject, like parents, teachers, and friends. Future research could also compare older MKs who have graduated, who have gotten married, or who have steady employment to MKs who had been repatriated for less than four years. Martin (1984) also suggested that longitudinal research would portray a more accurate picture of the repatriation process and the difficulties that come along with it.

Conclusion

It is important to recognize that MKs are privileged in their experience with growing up overseas (Sharp, 1985). They may face challenges when returning to their home country, especially when they are on their own because they are leaving their family in order to pursue higher education. In spite of this, they have the unique advantage to have grown up knowing of and participating in more than one culture. As they grow and mature, they will hopefully take the best parts of each culture and integrate them into their own personal identity.

In order to help MKs, and even other TCKs, as they return to their home country, international schools can prepare their students for their return to the home country, something that is not often done (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009). Parents can encourage the formation of relationships with peers in the child's home country while the family is living overseas because the contact between the two helps the child be aware of changing cultural norms in the home country and provides support for when they return. Parents of returning cross-cultural children can also return to the home country as their child is being repatriated to offer support. If they cannot return, they can still be active in helping their children navigate the difficulties of leaving their host country and reintegrating themselves into their home country's culture. Parents can also work to establish good relationships with their kids even before they return to the home country (Tetzel & Mortenson, 1984). Missions organizations can give missionary families the opportunity to return to their home country for frequent visits. Missions organizations can also make use of the existing re-entry programs. More programs can be developed for the purpose of connecting cross-cultural children to others with the same experiences, teaching them

daily living skills, alerting them of differences in cultural norms and providing them with a place and time to share their personal life stories (Davis, et al., 2010). The schools themselves can offer programs or establish organizations with the purpose of connecting students who are TCKs.

TCKs do not need to experience each of these things in order to transition well. Missionaries may not be able to control how often they return to the home country, how long they stay during visits, how long they live overseas for, or whether or not they can return with their child when they repatriate. This does not mean that there is no way the TCK will have a successful repatriation. The family may need to focus on other areas that will help them transition well. This also does not mean that experiencing at least one of these factors will automatically lead to a successful repatriation. Each TCK is different and needs different experiences and sources of support to help them transition well. This is when it is up to the parents and the TCK himself to assess what will help and what will hinder repatriation and be aware of how to promote those helpful experiences and avoid the hindrances.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire:

Please indicate your age

Please indicate your gender

Male

Female

Please indicate your year in school

Freshman/1st year

Sophomore/2nd year

Junior/3rd year

Senior/4th year

Post-graduate

Please indicate how many years you lived overseas

Please indicate which country is your home country

Please indicate which country or countries you lived in overseas

Please indicate your parents' current location

Please indicate how long it has been since you returned to the United States

Please write your e-mail address (by doing so you agree to be contacted for a personal interview)

Appendix B

Interview Questions:

1. How would you rate your transition back to the United States from 1-5? (5 being very positive and 1 being very negative)
 - a. *If rated 1 or 2*
 - i. What made it negative?
 - b. *If rated 4 or 5*
 - i. What made it positive?
 - c. Do you feel a sense of loss?
 - i. *If yes*: loss of what?
2. How would you rate your current level of adjustment to being in the United States from 1-5? (5 being very positive and 1 being very negative)
 - a. *If rated 1 or 2*
 - i. What has made is negative?
 - b. *If rated 4 or 5*
 - i. What has made it positive?
3. How would you rate your level of being accustomed to the culture from 1-3? (3 being “accustomed,” 2 being “still becoming accustomed,” and 1 being “not accustomed at all”)
 - a. How often did you return to the United States when you lived on the mission field?
 - b. How long would you spend in the United States when you came back?

- c. How much contact did you have with peers in the United States while you lived on the mission field?
4. Has your relationship with your parents influenced your transition back to the United States?
 - a. Negatively or positively?
 - b. Why?
5. Did you attend a reentry program upon your return to the United States?
 - a. Was it helpful to your transition experience?
 - b. *If yes:* How?
6. Were your initial friendships upon returning predominantly with other Missionary Kids, with non-Missionary Kids, or a mix?
 - a. Did you feel closer to your friends who were Missionary Kids or to your friends who were non-Missionary Kids?
 - b. Was having Missionary Kid friends helpful to your transition experience?
 - i. *If yes:* How?
 - c. Are your current friendships predominantly with other Missionary Kids, with non-Missionary Kids, or a mix?
7. When you returned to the United States, were you parents still living overseas or did they return to the US as well (permanently or temporarily)?
8. What do you wish would have happened differently that would have helped your transition experience?