

# Journal of Cross-Cultural Family Studies

---

Volume 1 | Issue 1

Article 5

---

September 2017

## Cultural Nuances for Immigrant Adolescents and Adolescents of the Third Culture Experience: A book review of Immigrant Youth in Cultural Transition: Acculturation, Identity, and Adaptation Across National Contexts


Jennifer L. Wilson

*South Texas Veteran's Health Care System, [jennifer.wilson4@va.gov](mailto:jennifer.wilson4@va.gov)*

### Author Credentials

Jennifer L. Wilson, Ph.D.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/jccfs>

 Part of the [Counseling Commons](#), [Counseling Psychology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Developmental Psychology Commons](#), [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), [International and Intercultural Communication Commons](#), [Multicultural Psychology Commons](#), and the [Sociology of Culture Commons](#)

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Cross-Cultural Family Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ ACU.

Cultural Nuances for Immigrant Adolescents and Adolescents of the Third Culture Experience: A  
book review of *Immigrant Youth in Cultural Transition: Acculturation, Identity, and Adaptation  
Across National Contexts*

Jennifer L. Wilson, PhD

Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center

South Texas Veterans Health Care System

Author Note

Please direct correspondence to Jennifer L. Wilson, Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center, South  
Texas Veterans Health Care System, 7400 Merton Minter Boulevard, San Antonio, TX 78229.  
Jennifer.Wilson4@va.gov.

### Abstract

Cross-cultural children include Third Culture Kids (TCKs) and the children and adolescents whose families have immigrated to a new society. The book *Immigrant Youth in Cultural Transition: Acculturation, Identity, and Adaptation Across National Contexts* (Berry et al., 2012), was a multi-national and multicultural study that sought to explain how immigrant youth navigate among cultures, how they manage their multicultural experience as it relates to psychological and sociocultural adjustment, and how demographics, family variables, and cultural variables affect the immigration, acculturation, assimilation, and adaptation process for these adolescents. Many similar processes have been described in the TCK literature for TCK children, adolescents, and adults. The goal of this book review is to introduce the study, to discuss the overlay between the TCK and the immigrant literature, and to discuss how the developing literature on the immigrant community and TCKs could be valuable to each discipline while maintaining the distinctions of each group. Lastly, similarities and differences in acculturation profiles and experiences for TCKs and Immigrant youth were discussed (Berry, 1997, 2001; Pollock & Van Reken, 2003).

*Keywords:* Third-Culture Kids, Third-Culture Families, Third-Culture Children, Global Nomads, Expatriates, Military Families, Cultural Adjustment, Cultural Adaptation, Cross-Cultural, Acculturation, Multi-cultural Psychology

Cultural Nuances for Immigrant Adolescents and Adolescents of the Third Culture Experience: A  
book review of *Immigrant Youth in Cultural Transition: Acculturation, Identity, and Adaptation  
Across National Contexts*

Van Reken and Pollock (2003) defined Cross-Cultural Kids (CCKs) as persons who have “... lived in – or meaningfully interacted with – two or more cultural environments for a significant period of time during developmental years.” CCKs include bi- or multi-racial and/or bi- or multi-cultural children, children of immigrants and refugees, children of racial and ethnic minorities, international adoptees, Third Culture Kids (TCKs), and “Domestic” TCKs. The research study *Immigrant Youth in Cultural Transition: Acculturation, Identity, and Adaptation Across National Contexts* (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2012) described the cross-cultural experience for immigrant adolescents. The research design was developed using Berry’s paradigm of acculturation (1997, 2001) and Ward’s & Kennedy’s (1993, 1996) work on acculturation. It offers a schema and language to discuss the TCK experience as “hidden immigrants” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2003) as well as its contribution to the study of immigrant adolescents.

Immigrant adolescents, as defined in the Berry et al. 2012 study, include “migrants,” children who relocated with their families to a new society and children born to immigrant families. Third Culture research began in 1973 when the Useems studied families employed in an international context (i.e., military, diplomatic agencies, education, agriculture, non-government organizations, international business, and missionaries). They coined the term “Third Culture” to define the interstitial culture, the culture influenced by the organization and

the host and home culture. TCKs are children, whose parents worked internationally, and therefore experienced the Third Culture for at least 6 months in childhood or adolescence. Pollock and Van Reken (2003) epic work on TCKs emphasized how TCKs feel most at home with those of a similar background, but not assimilating entirely in either the home or the host culture. Cottrell (2007) explained how CCKs and TCKs differ in socialization based on international or domestic cross-cultural experiences as well as familial, mobility, and situational factors. The paradigm gives credence to the overlap between the cross-cultural experiences of TCKs and CCKs, including immigrants.

A primary similarity between immigrant youth and adolescent TCKs' experience is relocation to a new culture is the decision of caretakers (either biological family or others who have assumed familial roles). However, immigrants' and TCKs' experience usually differs in the reasons for the relocation. For immigrants, the relocation gives opportunities to improve their family's financial standing and opportunities for education and employment. For refugee immigrants, it often includes fleeing an oppressive regime, civil war, or persecution. In contrast, for the Third Culture Community, families relocating to a host culture are there to serve the community either in agriculture, education, international business, or diplomacy under the direction of their employer or sending agency (i.e., military, foreign service, non-government organizations, international companies). Further complicating the Third Culture Kid experience, the adolescents may be transitioning between their home and host culture either until the family returns to the home culture, permanently moves to the host culture changing them to an immigrant status, or when the TCK reaches adulthood, as defined by their lifestyle choices

(pursuit of higher education, embarking on a career, and locale of residence) (Pollock & Van Reken, 2003).

The Berry et al. (2012) study defined society of settlement as the community where the immigrant families permanently relocate. Three societies of settlement were delineated: settler societies, former colonial societies, and recent receiving societies. The settlement societies were classified based on the percentage of immigrants as compared to the overall population, amount of cultural diversity prior to the influx of immigrants, and the national diversity policy: openness for immigrant communities in their respective countries. Settler societies, societies developing primarily via a “deliberate process of immigration,” were categorized as Australia, Canada, Israel, New Zealand, and the United States. Former Colonial Societies (France, Germany, Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) now receive moderate levels of immigrants. Recent receiving societies did not actively encourage immigration, but they have started receiving immigrants. These countries were designated as Finland, Norway, Portugal, and Sweden. Many individuals employed in the global economy may not have much influence on where they are sent for employment, therefore, the classification of receiving or host countries is valuable for the cross-cultural community. TCK research has focused primarily on length of time in the host country, number of schools attended, and number of locations of residence (Gaw, 2000; Gerner & Perry, 2000; Melles & Schwartz, 2013; Dixon & Hayden, 2008; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). While the TCK community has conducted research on the importance of re-entry seminars when transitioning home, research is limited on how psychological stressors (Davis, Suarez, Crawford, & Reh fuss, 2013) and family variables influences TCKs when settling in their host country.

Historically the acculturation literature has examined age of relocation, length of residency in country of settlement, language proficiency, acculturation attitudes, as well as national and ethnic identity (Berry, 1997, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Ward, 1996). Other acculturation literature has examined the number of peer contacts in their cultural group and their country of settlement (Ward, 1996). The effects of family values and obligations and cultural and religious visibility for immigrants in the acculturation process were also studied (as described in Ward, 1996). Perceived discrimination (see also Ward, 1996) was examined as a contributing factor to acculturation and adaptation in the country of settlement, as well as psychological (self-esteem and life satisfaction) and sociocultural adjustment (school adjustment and behavior problems) of the immigrant adolescents.

The current study describes the process for immigrant adolescents based on acculturation variables, acculturation attitudes: Integration, Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalization (Berry, 1997, 2001; Ward & Kennedy, 1993; Ward, 1996), and four acculturation profiles: Integration, Ethnic, National, and Diffuse. Variables included were acculturation attitudes, ethnic and national identities, use of ethnic and national language, ethnic and national peer contacts, and family relationships (family obligations and adolescents' rights). Immigrants with the Integration profile occurred most frequently. These adolescents were at ease in their immigrant status as they scored high on integration and lower on separation, assimilation, and marginalization, high on ethnic and national identities as well as national language proficiency; low on ethnic language proficiency, rated themselves high on their ability to maintain peer contacts in their national and ethnic identity group, and scored lower on levels of perceived discrimination than the other profiles. Immigrants whose profiles

were categorized as Ethnic were more oriented towards their country of origin than their society of settlement. Their profiles had high scores on ethnic identity, increased usage of their country of origin's language, and high peer contact with peers from their country of origin. These individuals also endorsed a separation attitude, scored low on assimilation and national identity, reported less involvement in the larger society, were well connected with their own culture, and reported more perceived discrimination than any other group. In contrast, the National profile, a clear example of assimilation, described individuals low on ethnic identity, were rated high on language proficiency, and identified as part of the society of settlement. Their peer group was primarily from the settlement society, and they scored low on family obligations. Immigrants coded as a Diffuse profile reported high proficiency in the ethnic language, but low on ethnic identity. Interestingly, they also reported a low national identity, and they lacked many peer contacts from the national group. Their identification with the acculturation attitudes of assimilation, marginalization, and separation suggest they had difficulty finding a sense of belongingness in their society of settlement (Berry et al., 2012).

Given the challenges inherent to adjusting cross-culturally, one might expect the adolescent immigrant population to report more psychological distress and less sociocultural adaptation. However, the immigrants reported less psychological problems when compared with national youth, and immigrants scored higher on a measure of school adjustment than their national peers. Behavior problems were reported at lower rates than their typical peers (Berry et al., 2012). Research has reported TCKs often report more psychological distress and greater difficulty with sociocultural adjustment than other young adults (Davis et al., 2010; Klemens & Bikos, 2009). The limited research on adult TCKs sociocultural adjustment indicates



they earn bachelor's degrees at four times the rate of their US counterparts. (Cottrell, 2007). When examining cultural variables for TCKs and immigrants, these variables were not found to have an effect on overall adjustment for immigrants (Berry et al., 2012), but TCKs were rated higher than their US peers on openness to cross-cultural experiences (Gerner, Perry, Moselle, & Archbold, 1992). The immigrant and TCK literature could benefit from examining similar outcomes.

Cultural adaptation and assimilation in the immigrant literature often describes a group process; in contrast, TCK literature often refers to one's idiosyncratic experience. Therefore, asking TCKs to rate their identification with the interstitial culture, the culture created between the dominant and non-dominant culture, as well as their level of identification with their home and host cultures may assist with classifying TCKs within the acculturation schemas (Berry, 1997, 2001). However, the current TCK research suggests their experience might be more similar to the diffuse profile.

In conclusion, as the Third Culture Experience is similar to the immigrant experience, research in these realms could serve to give clinicians and researchers a comprehensive knowledge base, a language to describe the process of acculturation and adaptation, and a schema to describe the challenges of clinical work with these populations. Organizations serving the TCK community (corporations, re-entry programs, non-government organizations, organizations serving military families, and universities) and the immigrant community could also benefit from cross-pollination in research. The TCK community would benefit from empirical support for the theory driven construct of the "interstitial culture" as well as

empirical support describing the process of re-acculturation for TCKs. Furthermore, a comparison study between children raised in immigrant communities and children of expatriate families might also serve to assist in conceptualizing the similarities and differences in the immigrant and TCK experience. Re-entry programs could then not only emphasize tangible steps for TCKs re-entering their home culture, but it would also give the individuals serving the TCK community guidance in emphasizing what resilient factors ease transition for TCKs , thereby giving the TCK community a language to process and describe re-acclimating to their home culture as well as the benefits and consequences of their international experiences. For the immigrant community, it might also give them an opportunity to discuss their individual experiences. Facilitating the dialogue these groups would allow TCKs to find a home in the global community, a broader language to describe their experience, and perhaps ease their transition back into their home culture.

### References

- Berry, J.W. (1997). Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46, 5-68. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/026999497378467>
- Berry, J.W. (2001). A Psychology of Immigration. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57, 615-231. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00231>
- Berry, J.W., Phinney, J.S., Sam, D.L., & Vedder, P. (Eds.) (2012). *Immigrant Youth in Cultural Transition: Acculturation, Identity, and Adaptation Across National Contexts*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cottrell, A.B. (2007). *Adult TCKs: Life Choices and Personal Characteristics*. Families in Global Transition, Houston, TX.
- Cottrell, A.B. (2007). *TCKs and other Cross-Cultural Kids*. *Japanese Journal of Family Sociology*, 18, 54-65.
- Davis, P., Headley, K., Bazemore, T., Cervo, J., Sickinger, P., Windham, M., & Rehfuss, M. (2010). Evaluating Impact of Transition Seminars on Missionary Kids' Depression, Anxiety, Stress, and Well-Being. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 38, 186-194. Retrieved from <http://journals.biola.edu/jpt>
- Davis, P.S., Suarez, E.C., Crawford, N.A., & Rehfuss, M.C. (2013). Reentry Program Impact on Missionary Kid Depression, Anxiety, and Stress: A Three-Year Study. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 41, 128-140. Retrieved from <http://journals.biola.edu/jpt>
- Dixon, P. & Hayden, M. (2008). "On the Move": Primary Age Children in Transition. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 38, 483-496. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057640802489418>

Gaw, K. F. (2000). Reverse culture shock in students returning from overseas. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 24, 83-104. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767\(99\)00024-3](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767(99)00024-3)

Gerner, M.E. & Perry, F. (2000). Gender Differences in Cultural Acceptance and Career Orientation Among Internationally Mobile and Non-Internationally Mobile Adolescents. *School Psychology Review*, 29, 267-283. Retrieved from [naspjournals.org](http://naspjournals.org)

Gerner, M., Perry, F., Moselle, M.A., & Archbold, M. (1992). Characteristics of Internationally Mobile Adolescents. *Journal of School Psychology*, 30, 197-214. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0022-4405\(92\)90031-Y](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0022-4405(92)90031-Y)

Klemens, M.J. & Bikos, L.H. (2009). Psychological Well-Being and Sociocultural Adaptation in College-Aged, Repatriated, Missionary Kids. *Mental Health, Religion, & Culture*, 12, 721-733. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13674670903032629>

Melles, E.A. & Schwartz, J. (2013). Does the Third Culture Kid Experience predict level of prejudice? *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 37, 260-267. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2012.08.001>

Pollock, D. C. & Van Reken, R.E. (2003). *Third Culture Kids*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, Inc.

Walters, K.A. & Auton-Cuff, F.P. (2009). A story to tell: The Identity Development of Women Growing Up as Third Culture Kids. *Mental Health, Religion, & Culture*, 7, 755-772. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13674670903029153>

Ward, C. & Kennedy, A. (1993). Psychological and Socio-cultural Adjustment during Cross-cultural Transitions: A Comparison of Secondary Students Overseas and at Home.

*International Journal of Psychology, 28*, 129-147.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00207599308247181>

Ward, C. (1996). Acculturation. In D. Landis & R. Bhagat (Eds.), *Handbook of Intercultural Training*, (2<sup>ND</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.