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## Remote Acculturation 101: A Primer on Research, Implications, and Illustrations from Classrooms Around the World

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## Remote Acculturation 101: A Primer on Research, Implications, and Illustrations from Classrooms Around the World

### Abstract

Remote acculturation (RA) is a modern form of acculturation common among youth, which results from contact with a distant culture via the 4 Ts of globalization (trade, technology, tourism, and transnationalism). This article provides an introduction to RA by describing the what, who, how, where, and why of RA, summarizing its implications for youth development and health, and offering additional resources for student/classroom use. Utilizing our perspectives as psychology researchers and secondary school educators spanning 19 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America, we supplement research findings from our lab and others with real-world illustrations from our classrooms around the globe. We conclude that the prominent role of media in RA presents cost-effective opportunities to promote its benefits (e.g., foreign media can sharpen cultural competence) and proactively buffer its risks (e.g., media literacy for inoculation against poor health habits).

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## Authors' Note

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This article is dedicated to Professor Fons van de Vijver (1952-2019), who served as discussant for the first ever remote acculturation symposium at the 2012 biennial meeting of the International Association of Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP) in Stellenbosch, South Africa. A champion and co-author during the development phase of remote acculturation, Fons' indelible fingerprints can be detected in many places within this body of work, and are helping to shape this second phase underway.

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## **Abstract**

Remote acculturation (RA) is a modern form of acculturation common among youth, which results from contact with a distant culture via the 4 Ts of globalization (trade, technology, tourism, and transnationalism). This article provides an introduction to RA by describing the what, who, how, where, and why of RA, summarizing its implications for youth development and health, and offering additional resources for student/classroom use. Utilizing our perspectives as psychology researchers and secondary school educators spanning 19 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America, we supplement research findings from our lab and others with real-world illustrations from our classrooms around the globe. We conclude that the prominent role of media in RA presents cost-effective opportunities to promote its benefits (e.g., foreign media can sharpen cultural competence) and proactively buffer its risks (e.g., media literacy for inoculation against poor health habits).

## What is Remote Acculturation?

Imagine a teenager who moves from Tunisia to France – she might adopt some new behaviors, values, or identities from France, whether many or few, and keep some familiar behaviors, values, or identities from Tunisia, whether many or few. Now imagine her cousin stays in Tunisia yet also adopts some norms and values from France – he keeps in touch with her from afar, watches cable television and streams music from France, and buys food imported from France. Both cousins experience a process of cultural and psychological change called acculturation, but the teen who emigrates has a first-hand immersion into French culture called proximal acculturation, whereas the teen who does not move has a long-distance immersion in French culture called remote acculturation (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012; Ferguson, Iturbide, & Raffaelli, 2019). This article provides an introduction to remote acculturation (RA) by describing the what, who, how, where, and why of RA, summarizing its implications for youth development and health, and offering additional resources for student/classroom use. Utilizing our perspectives as psychology researchers and secondary school educators spanning 19 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America, we supplement research findings from our lab and others with real-world accounts from our classrooms around the globe.

Acculturation is the change that follows when different cultural groups come into contact with each other (Sam & Berry, 2016). Psychologists are most interested in the personal change that occurs for the individual having this inter-cultural experience (Graves, 1967). In the past, acculturation was prompted by migration or international study/work, which brought people from different cultures together. However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the spread of global media through television (TV) and the internet, as well as increasing opportunities for global trade and travel, means that people, especially youth, often have contact with cultures in remote places without ever visiting them (Arnett, 2002; Ferguson, 2013). Therefore, RA was introduced as a new form of acculturation resulting from contact with a culture physically distant from one's own via modern globalization (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012; Ferguson, Bornstein, & Pottinger, 2010). Although very similar to 'globalization-based acculturation', RA involves acculturating to specific remote cultures, such as Japanese culture rather than general 'global' or Western/Eastern culture (Ferguson, Tran, Mendez, & van de Vijver, 2017). For example, a student in Russia might experience globalization-based acculturation by acculturating to the broader Western culture that comprises an amalgamation of many cultural elements from the United States, Europe, and possibly also Australia. On the other hand, this same student would experience RA by acculturating to specific cultural streams such as French or South Korean cultures, or multiple remote cultures, providing that these cultures are perceived by the youth to be meaningfully distinct from each other. RA is also different from remote enculturation, where individuals connect to a heritage culture in which they do not reside using modern globalization mechanisms because RA pertains to learning a non-native culture from afar versus connecting to one's heritage culture (Ferguson, Costigan, Clarke, & Ge, 2016).

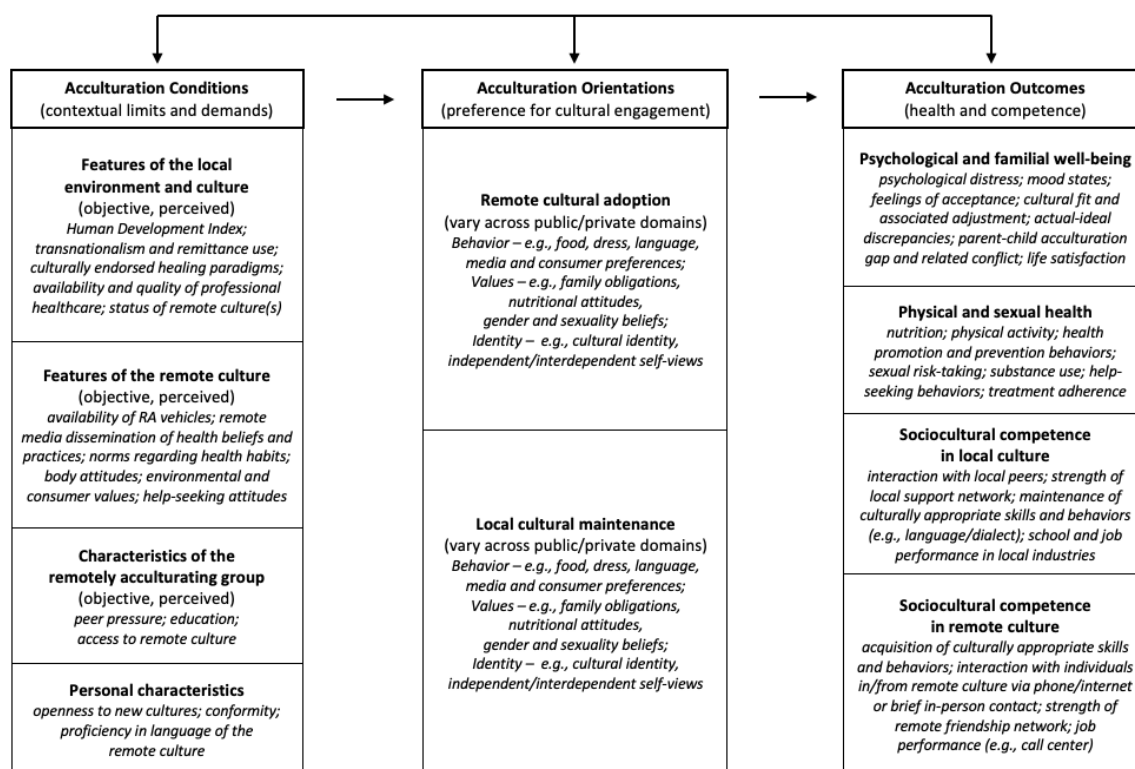
In RA, contact with the remote culture is indirect (not face to face, e.g., contact with foreign media) or intermittent (not constant/continuous, e.g., contact with tourists) or both (Ferguson, 2013). If exposure to a remote culture later becomes direct and continuous, as in the case of a remotely acculturating pre-migrant who later moves to live in that remote culture, then the acculturation transitions from remote to proximal acculturation (Ferguson, Iturbide, et al., 2019). Additionally, remote cultures can be ethnic (e.g., a university student in Zambia who internalizes U.K. culture through media, food, and contact with a friend who moved there) or non-ethnic (e.g., a teenager in Ghana who identifies with U.S. LGBTQ culture through online affinity groups and other media) (see Ferguson et al., 2017). People can also remotely acculturate whether they live in mainly monocultural settings like Jamaica (see Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012) or highly multicultural ones like South Africa (see Ferguson & Adams, 2016), and they can remotely acculturate to several cultures simultaneously (K. T. Ferguson et al., 2017; Y. L. Ferguson et al., 2017).

Many, if not most, aspects of traditional proximal acculturation theory and methods apply to RA because RA “extend[s] the traditional approaches to enable the study of modern forms of intercultural encounters without having to reinvent the theoretical and methodological wheel” (van de Vijver, 2019, p. 118). Accordingly, RA is built on several key acculturation principles, including the reality of multiple cultural dimensions. This means that remotely acculturating individuals experience two or more cultures and those cultural affiliations do not necessarily compete (Sam & Berry, 2016). Rather, there are various theoretical possibilities for individuals negotiating multiple cultures in RA, three of which have been found in empirical RA research studies. “Remote integration” refers to adopting one or more remote cultures while retaining the local ones(s) (e.g., Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012; Ferguson & Adams, 2016), “remote separation” involves retaining the local culture(s) without adopting the remote one(s) (e.g., Ferguson & Bornstein, 2015; Giray & Ferguson, 2018), “remote assimilation” refers to adopting one or more remote culture(s) without retaining the local ones(s) (e.g., K. T. Ferguson et al., 2017; Galán Jiménez et al., 2019), and “remote marginalization” entails pulling away from local and remote cultures (and has not been found in any RA studies). These and other empirical studies have found remote separation (e.g., Jamaica) and remote integration (e.g., South Africa) to be the most common and remote marginalization to be the least common by virtue of the fact that it has not been observed. These findings regarding the prevalence of integration (e.g., Berry et al., 2016) and the external validity of marginalization (e.g., see Schwartz et al., 2010) are largely consistent with the proximal acculturation research findings, although the particulars of RA study samples (e.g., in-school youth) and sampling methods (e.g., convenience) may have missed youth who feel disconnected from both local and remote cultures examined, and those who orient towards unmeasured remote cultures.

Another key acculturation principle common to both proximal acculturation and RA, includes the presence of multiple life domains: individuals can experience RA-related changes in their behavior, values, identities, or some combination (Schwartz et al., 2010). For example, a teenager in Mozambique remotely acculturating to Brazilian culture may experience changes in behavior (e.g., fashion, accent/slang), and some attitudes (e.g., social inequalities), but may or may not experience changes in a deeper life domain such as

identity (i.e., may or may not feel part-Brazilian). Additionally, RA appreciates that certain acculturation conditions (i.e., makeup of the home culture and remote culture) predispose a person towards having a stronger/weaker preference for their local and remote cultures, which then influences their adjustment and health (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006). See Figure 1 for the framework of acculturation variables adapted to RA, modeled after the Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver's (2006) acculturation framework.

Figure 1.  
Framework of Remote Acculturation Vehicles.



Note. Figure reprinted with permission from Ferguson, Tran, Mendez, & van de Vijver (2017).

The differences in RA theory and measurement relative to proximal acculturation are likely related to the fact that contact with the remote culture is less intense (van de Vijver, 2019) and individuals are likely to be exposed to fewer elements of a remote culture, which allows them to form remote connections to more cultures (e.g., see polycultural psychology: Morris et al., 2015). Additionally, because individuals are not living in the remote culture, some acculturation conditions are much less applicable for RA than for proximal acculturation. For example, discrimination (Celenk & van de Vijver, 2011) and culture shock (Ward et al., 2001) are much less prominent in RA. Empirical research directly comparing remote and proximal acculturation is a fruitful new direction of work just beginning (e.g., Ferguson, Iturbide, et al., 2019).

## **Juxtaposition of formal youth research and informal youth observations.**

In the preceding section, we reviewed key definitional and theoretical aspects of RA. The remainder of this article will address the who, how, where, why of RA, and what we can do about it using empirical research findings from the published RA literature. To supplement these data, we also include illustrative recollections and real-world accounts of secondary school students in our classrooms around the globe. For each educator in our Global Educators Group, we documented on one single occasion their country location, and their perceptions reflecting on the top two remote cultures of relevance to their students, the vehicles of RA for students in their local setting, as well as the assets/advantages and liabilities/disadvantages of RA for their students' well-being. These retrospective accounts were compiled, and in some cases quantified, into tables and figures alongside the empirical research findings as an illustration of what aspects of the research are readily evident to educators serving youth in real-world contexts around the globe, and what aspects of real-world experience either contradict or are absent from empirical research findings. This technique of juxtaposing research with real-world observations gives some insight into the external validity of RA and can serve to direct future RA research.

## **Who experiences Remote Acculturation?**

Anyone exposed to a distant non-native culture can experience RA, as long as their cultural exposure is indirect, intermittent, or both (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012). Therefore, instead of focusing on immigrants, RA extends acculturation to non-migrants, who comprise most of the world. To our knowledge, all published RA research to date has been conducted among non-migrants who still live in their home countries and have never emigrated (Ferguson & Dimitrova, 2019; Ferguson et al., 2017). However, technically, immigrants can also experience RA and may even be predisposed toward it, given that they are more open to experience than are non-migrants (Tabor et al., 2015). For example, consider the proliferation of K-Pop (i.e., Korean pop music) worldwide, where a Jamaican immigrant in the United States could experience RA to Korean cultural elements through immersion in K-Pop (see Ferguson, Boer et al., 2016 for music as a vehicle of RA). Given that rates of international migration and technological connectivity are both expanding exponentially, the timing is perfect to research immigrant RA (Juang & Syed, 2019).

Individuals from groups having no historical, colonial, or other geopolitical connection to the remote culture provide the clearest case of RA such as youth in Germany remotely acculturating to Jamaican culture (Ferguson, Boer, et al., 2016). However, individuals from groups with a distant historical connection to a now remote culture can also be considered to experience RA, albeit a potentially weaker form, given that some features of the remote culture (e.g., language) may already be embedded in the local culture. For example, studies examining RA to both U.K. culture and U.S. culture in Malawi and Zambia – countries that were once under British rule – have found similar levels of cultural orientation to both remote cultures among remotely integrated and remotely separated adolescents (K. T. Ferguson et



al., 2017; Y. L. Ferguson et al., 2017).

Urban individuals are more likely to remotely acculturate than rural ones simply because the impact of globalization is greater in cities (see Arnett, 2002). For example, in one study, rural adolescents in Haiti had weak orientation to U.S. cultures overall, but older adolescents and those who had more remote culture exposure (e.g., ate more U.S.-styled foods, more phone calls with people in the United States, more contact with U.S. tourists in Haiti) had stronger orientation towards U.S. cultures (Ferguson et al., 2014). Recent comparative research in Thailand shows that globalization impacts urban and rural youths' identities and relationships differently (McKenzie, 2019). We should, however, note that rural and Indigenous communities are increasingly impacted as contact with the broader society expands through roads and media (Ozer et al., 2017).

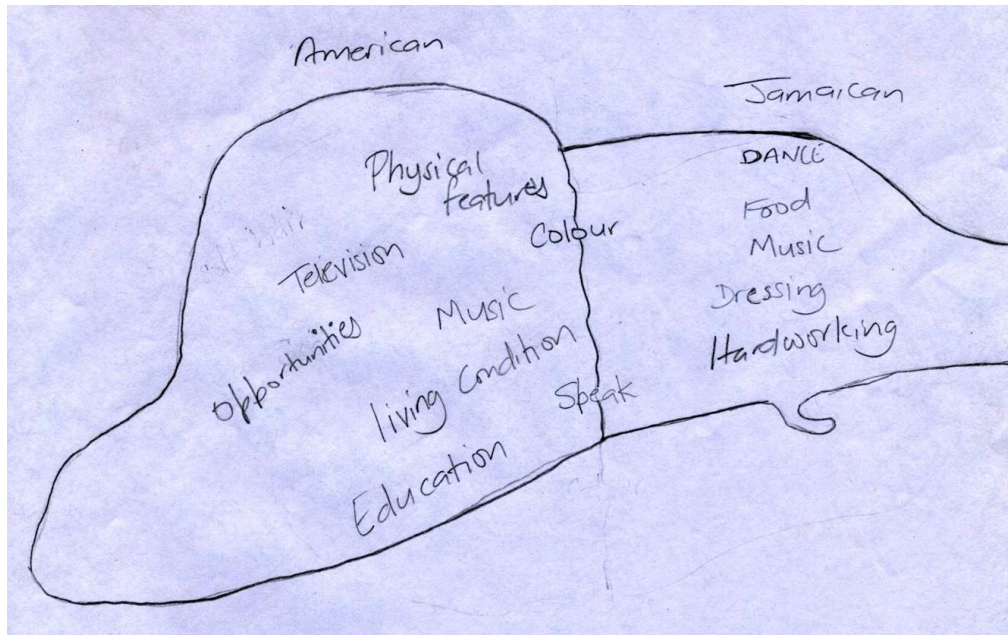
Youth are especially likely to experience RA and to adopt a remote culture alongside their local culture and identity. In the original RA study, Ferguson and Bornstein (2012) found that one in three Jamaican adolescents could be categorized into an "Americanized Jamaican" cluster of youth versus one in ten mothers (while their peers were grouped into "Traditional Jamaican" clusters). Figure 2 shows identity maps drawn by "Americanized Jamaican" and "Traditional Jamaican" adolescents in Jamaica (Ferguson, 2018). Adolescence and emerging adulthood are sensitive periods for RA because of the developmental focus on identity exploration, including cultural identity. Relatedly, market research highlights that the current generation of adolescents and emerging adults – Generation Z – embrace being 'identity shifters' who play with their many identities across place and time (Rubin Postaer & Associates, 2018). The increased autonomy adolescents enjoy also facilitates RA, as well as emerging adults' active consideration of many life possibilities against the backdrop of feeling perpetually 'in-between' (i.e., feeling not quite ready to be an adult but starting to take responsibility for themselves) (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968). Of course, young people's facility with technology allows easier remote culture involvement online, especially through social media where they can form and maintain multiple one-sided parasocial bonds with foreign celebrities and influencers as part of their RA (see Vinney, 2018 for review). Finally, we expect that children may also experience RA, although there are not yet published studies in this age group to our knowledge.

RA studies among youth have used developmentally tailored mixed methods which combine qualitative interviews, identity maps, and open-ended sentence completion with quantitative questionnaires. However, only one small study in Jamaica using a modified case study approach has examined RA over time, and found that students' identification with their Jamaican culture was more stable across two years than their identification with the remote European American culture (Ferguson, 2018). More research is needed to examine RA overtime using a developmental perspective (Titzmann & Lee, 2018; Juang & Syed, 2019).

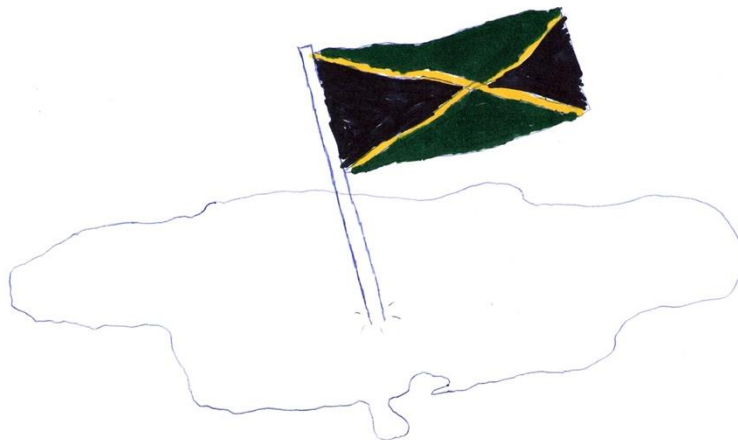
Figure 2.

*Identity Maps of Adolescent Boys in Jamaica*

a)



b)



Notes: Map (a) shows an “Americanized Jamaican” (also called “Jahmerican”) identity; map (b) shows a “Traditional Jamaican” identity. Reprinted with permission from Ferguson (2018).

### How does Remote Acculturation occur?

Remote acculturation is mainly facilitated by “4 Ts,” which act as vehicles transporting remote cultures into local neighborhoods: trade, technology, tourism, and transnationalism

(Ferguson et al., 2017). Think first of *Trade*. With the ability to easily transport goods across the world, people from different cultures have access to a wide variety of products imported from distant countries including cars, toys, and clothing. Being able to purchase and consume products from another culture, especially a high-status culture (e.g., U.K., U.S.) allows youth to vicariously participate in that culture (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2015).

Technology is also a primary vehicle of RA. Television sets are traded worldwide, but perhaps more importantly, they transmit media in the form of television programs and advertising from one country to another (Ferguson et al., 2018). Smartphones, laptops, and other devices enable people in different places to communicate to friends and strangers online through social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (Manago, 2014; Manago et al., 2015). Through these mediums, individuals are able to foster parasocial bonds and identities in a remote culture. Social media platforms also provide a means through which people can learn about new foods and eating patterns from other cultures, treating it as a form of cultural exposure without travel (Choudhary et al., 2019).

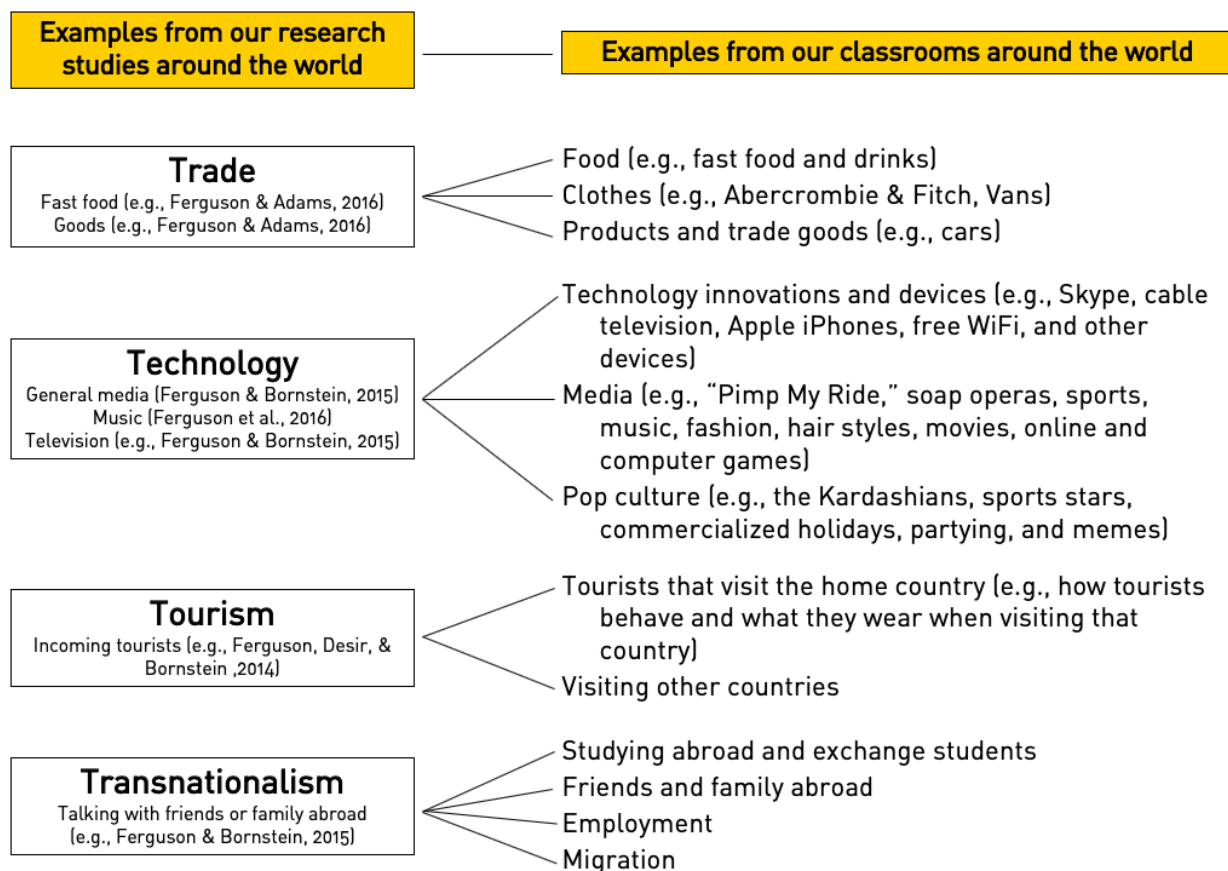
Exposure to tourists from different cultures also facilitates RA. A Haitian adolescent might not ever travel to the United States, but several interactions with American tourists can add up overtime (Ferguson et al., 2014). Through this exposure to tourists, teenagers interact with people who are not necessarily from their own culture – learning about their habits, values, and even fashion choices. The literature is limited on the exact influences of tourism on the acculturation of residents in a local community, but preliminary research indicates it is a vehicle of RA.

Finally, transnationalism facilitates RA. Transnationalism refers to having connections and ways of life that incorporate elements from both a home country and destination country (Glick Schiller et al., 1992). Through transnationalism, individuals can keep connections with friends or relatives who go abroad and therefore gain exposure to that remote culture through their long-distance communications with that person. Today, approximately 272 million people (3.5% of the global population) are living outside of their country of birth and this number is expected to rise, resulting in an increasing number of transnational relationships (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). Furthermore, new information and communication technologies have provided richer opportunities for remote acculturation in these relationships through instantaneous messaging and video conferencing (Baldassar et al., 2016). Individuals can also conduct transnational activities in different domains of life. For example, an individual can engage in economic transnationalism by sending money to a relative in another country, political transnationalism by keeping in touch with the politics of another country, or sociocultural transnationalism by visiting friends and family (for a full review, see van Oudenhoven & Ward, 2013). These 4 Ts are supported both by empirical evidence and by our informal observations in our own classrooms (see Figure 3).

The 4 Ts illustrate how cultural goods and ideas get transported around the world and prompt RA to begin. But how do remote cultures become internalized by individuals? How does Indian culture become internalized by a teenager in the Republic of Congo, for example? First, it is important to remember that some individuals exposed to any remote culture will choose to embrace it whereas others will not, whether it is a free choice or a

forced one due to being marginalized by one's local society. Therefore, remotely acculturating to a distant culture does not mean that this new culture supersedes the local one; rather, individuals can navigate local and remote cultures simultaneously, yet separately (Sam & Berry, 2016). This new remote cultural orientation becomes part of a person's broader identity along with their ethnic/national identity and many other social identities they may have (Knight et al., 2018). Thus, through RA, individuals can have a multicultural identity that extends beyond their local and national communities (Y. L. Ferguson et al., 2017).

Figure 3.  
*The 4 Ts of Remote Acculturation Vehicles.*



### Where can you find Remote Acculturation?

The empirical research literature documents the presence of RA in 16 countries across five continents towards five remote cultures (Jamaica, United States, United Kingdom, South Africa, and India). Our classroom experience supports the research findings of RA in some of these countries and remote cultures. Our classroom experiences also suggest RA occurs

in other countries around the world, including 17 other countries across five continents. European-American and European cultures are among the most common remote cultures seen in our classrooms. See Table 1 for a listing of local and remote cultures, and Figure 4 for world maps depicting remote culture flows based on RA research studies (black dotted arrows) and our classroom experiences (solid arrows). For greater ease in identifying country names, we additionally provide an online resource for locating country names in our maps ([https://www.amcharts.com/visited\\_countries/#BE](https://www.amcharts.com/visited_countries/#BE)). As Figure 4 shows, RA is truly a global phenomenon.

RA is evident in the home, at school, and in society more broadly. Within the home, family-based empirical research in Jamaica and student questionnaires in Malawi show that RA is linked to media preferences, dietary habits, and family relationships (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2015; K. T. Ferguson et al., 2017). At school, focus groups with secondary school students in Jamaica indicate that RA is linked to differences in language/accent used and peer groups (Ferguson & Iturbide, 2013). Remote acculturation also impacts the expectations placed on children in school. Youth in Northern Thailand (McKenzie, 2019), youth in Jamaica, and Latinx youth in the United States (Ferguson, Iturbide, et al., 2019) report experiences of switching between different cultural frames at home, in school, and with their peers. In Northern Thailand, both educators and parents have been found to suppress children's use of local languages, fearing these languages will disrupt children's acquisition of Standard Thai, English, or Mandarin (Howard, 2009; McKenzie, 2019).

## **Why does Remote Acculturation matter?**

The literature so far has demonstrated that RA is associated with both assets and liabilities for physical health, mental health, and subjective well-being; family dynamics; and academic and social aspects of youth adjustment. In this section we will focus on the assets and liabilities of adopting a remote culture, unless otherwise noted. An important note to keep in mind is that most of the remote cultures currently studied are European American or Western, with few exceptions.

### **Physical health**

Physical health is a focal point for RA researchers, and research conducted with teenagers in Jamaica exposed to U.S. culture is a prime example. The U.S. culture is pervasive in Jamaica, and western junk food is increasingly popular. For example, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Burger King are two popular U.S. exports that have made their way to Jamaica. While all Jamaicans are exposed to U.S. culture in some form, those who internalize U.S. culture tend to watch more U.S. cable TV every day. For example, quantitative research shows that "Americanized Jamaican" adolescents watch more U.S. television than culturally traditional Jamaican teenagers (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2015). These Americanized Jamaican teenagers are also at higher risk of unhealthy eating due to their identification with U.S. culture and daily U.S. cable TV viewing (Ferguson et al., 2018).

Table 1.

*Local and Remote Cultures Represented in Research Studies and in our Classrooms*

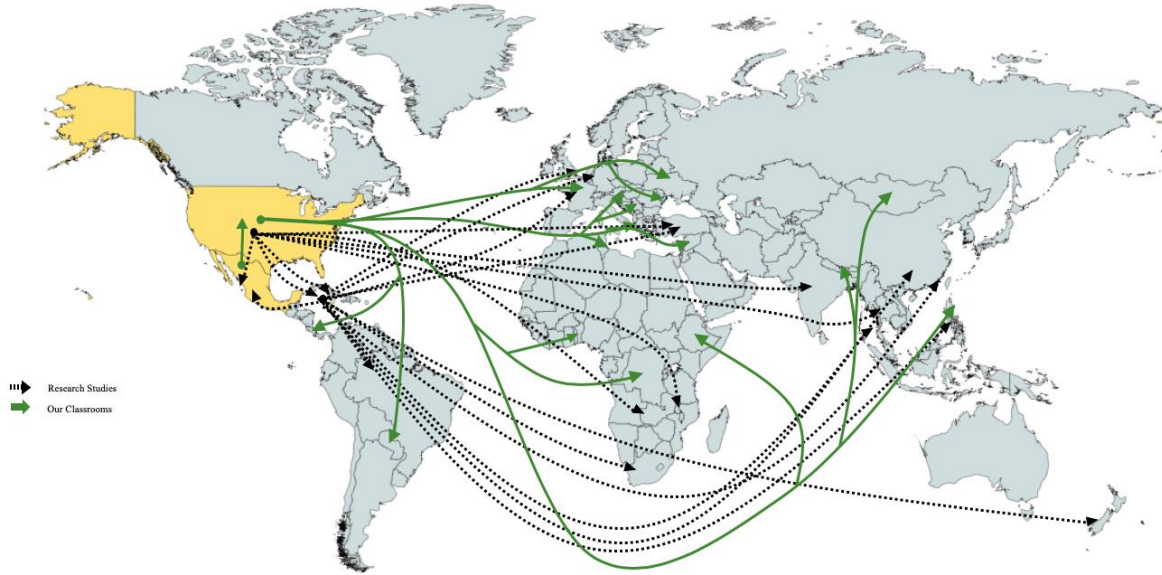
<b>Local Culture in Research Studies</b>	<b>Remote Cultures in Research Studies</b>
Jamaica	United States (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012)
Haiti	United States (Ferguson et al., 2014)
Belgium, Brazil, Mexico, France, Germany, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Philippines, South Africa, Taiwan, & Turkey	Jamaica (Ferguson et al., 2016)
Zambia	United States, United Kingdom, South Africa (Y. L. Ferguson et al., 2017)
Malawi	United States, United Kingdom, South Africa (K. T. Ferguson et al., 2017)
India – Ladakh Indigenous Culture	Western cultures, India (Ozer et al., 2017)
Turkey	United States (Giray & Ferguson, 2018)
Thailand	United States, China (McKenzie, 2019)
Mexico	United States (Galán Jiménez et al., 2019; Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2019)
South Africa	United States (both European American and African American cultures; Ferguson & Adams, 2016)
<b>Local Culture of our Classrooms</b>	<b>Remote Cultures of our Classrooms</b>
Costa Rica	United States
Ethiopia	United States, Middle East
France	United States, United Kingdom, Northern Africa
Greece	United States, Europe
Lebanon	United States, France
Mongolia	United States
Mozambique	Brazil
Nepal	United States, India
Nicaragua	Venezuela
Paraguay	United States, Brazil
Philippines	United States
Republic of Congo	United States, France, India
Romania	United States
Slovenia	United States, United Kingdom, Germany
Tajikistan	Russia
Togo	Togo South, United States, Europe
Tunisia	United States, France
Ukraine	United States, Russia
United States	Mexico, Asia (Philippines & Japan), Spain



Figure 4  
*Remote Culture Flows*

a)

North American and Caribbean Remote Culture Flows

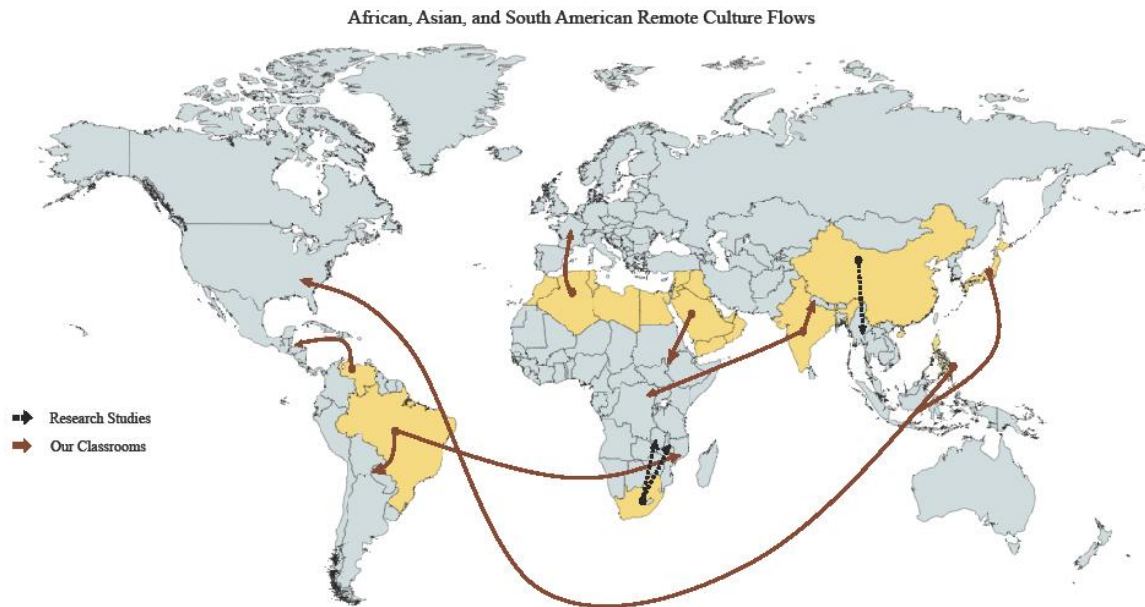


b)

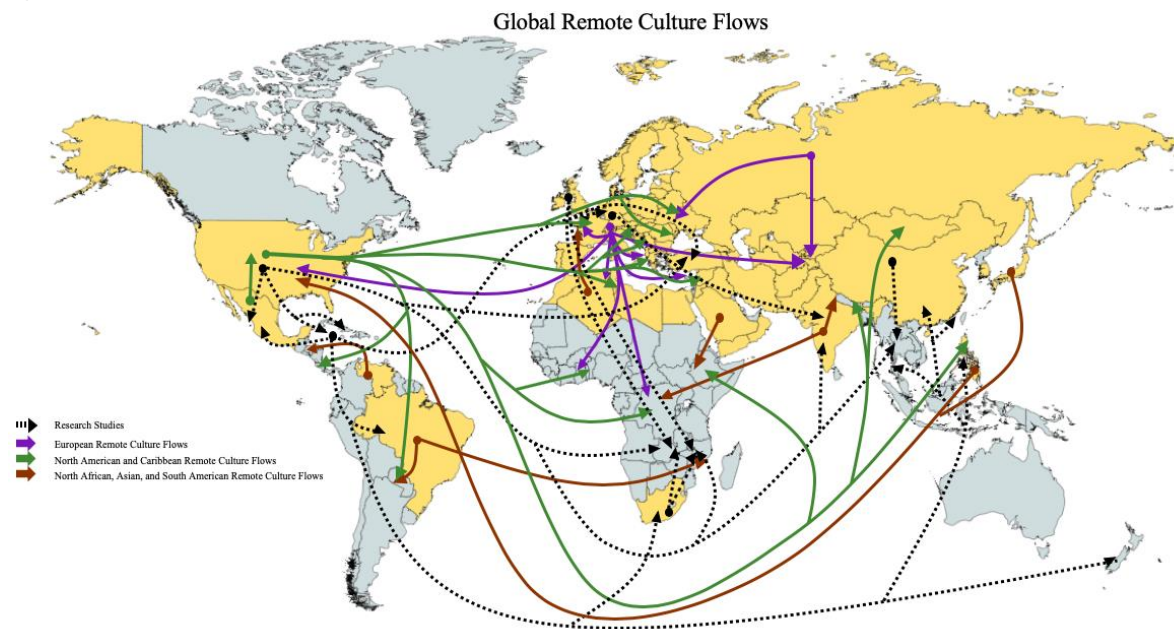
European Remote Culture Flows



c)



d)



Notes: Yellow shaded countries represent the remote culture(s) flowing outward, and arrows indicate the directional flow to local culture(s) (unshaded). Black dashed lines indicate remote culture flows identified in research studies, and the remaining arrows indicate remote culture flows observed informally in our classrooms around the world. Maps a (North American and Caribbean), b (European), and c (African, Asian, and South American) depict the remote cultures by region and map d combines them all for a truly global picture of remote culture flows. Occasionally, cultures in Asia, Europe, and Africa were identified at the regional level versus at the country level. If no specific country was identified, arrows were pinned to the center of the geographic region; otherwise, arrows end in the identified country.



Specifically, Jamaican girls' American identity and behavior was associated with more unhealthy eating habits, as was their mothers' U.S. cable viewing. For boys, this relationship between identity/behavior and unhealthy eating habits was mediated by the number of hours of U.S. TV hours they themselves watched daily (Ferguson et al., 2018). There is likely a circular connection between RA and media use – viewing U.S. media may initiate the RA process for many youths, and then those who become Americanized enjoy U.S. culture more and therefore watch more U.S. media, which furthers their RA to the U.S. culture. The published research on the connections among RA, media use, and nutrition is cross-sectional, and experimental research is needed to untangle these chicken-and-egg linkages.

Remote acculturation is also associated with other risky physical health habits, like cigarette smoking. The quantitative study by Lorenzo-Blanco et al. (2019) in Mexico examined cigarette use susceptibility among adolescents in relation to their Mexican or U.S. cultural orientation. The researchers found that a stronger U.S. cultural orientation was related to more positive smoking-related attitudes (e.g., “I think I would enjoy smoking”), which then was associated with increased smoking susceptibility (e.g., more likely to say they would smoke if their friend gave them a cigarette, etc.). These results highlight the possible risk that remote acculturation to a U.S. culture can bring for adolescents around the world. There is limited work on the physical health of youth that is oriented towards other remote cultures other than the U.S.

### **Mental health and subjective well-being**

Mental health and subjective well-being have also been a central focus in the RA literature. Life satisfaction, one aspect of subjective well-being, has had both positive and negative associations with RA. For example, when examining South African emerging adults and their orientation towards European American, African American, and African culture, “European-Americanized” emerging adults had higher life satisfaction than did “Traditional South Africans”; however, “African-Americanized” South Africans had higher psychological distress than “European-Americanized” peers (Ferguson & Adams, 2016). For Zambian adolescents, those whose orientations to American, British, or South African culture exceeded their Zambian culture orientation also reported slightly lower life satisfaction (Y. T. Ferguson et al., 2017). These results suggest that while there are well-being implications for remote acculturation, these associations are dependent on the *specific* remote culture in question.

### **Family dynamics**

Family dynamics are also associated with RA for adolescents. Malawian adolescents with stronger affinities for U.S. and U.K. cultures reported higher levels of parental autonomy support (i.e., support to make their own choices) than those who identified more with their local Malawian culture (K. T. Ferguson et al., 2017), whereas “Americanized Jamaican” adolescents reported more parent-child conflict than did traditional Jamaican peers (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012 & 2015). A parent’s cultural orientation is also associated with child outcomes. Giray and Ferguson (2018) asked divorced mothers in Turkey to self-report

on their cultural orientation to the U.S. and Turkey. Mothers also reported on their perception of their ex-partner's Turkish or U.S. orientation and about their child's internalizing and externalizing behaviors. The authors found that if a mother reported that she had a high "AmeriTurk" identity (i.e., strong affinity for U.S. culture) and her ex-partner had a strong Turkish identity, the child was likely to have lower social withdrawal and anxiety symptoms. This study illustrates the complex and sometimes unexpected family implications of RA for the well-being of children and youth.

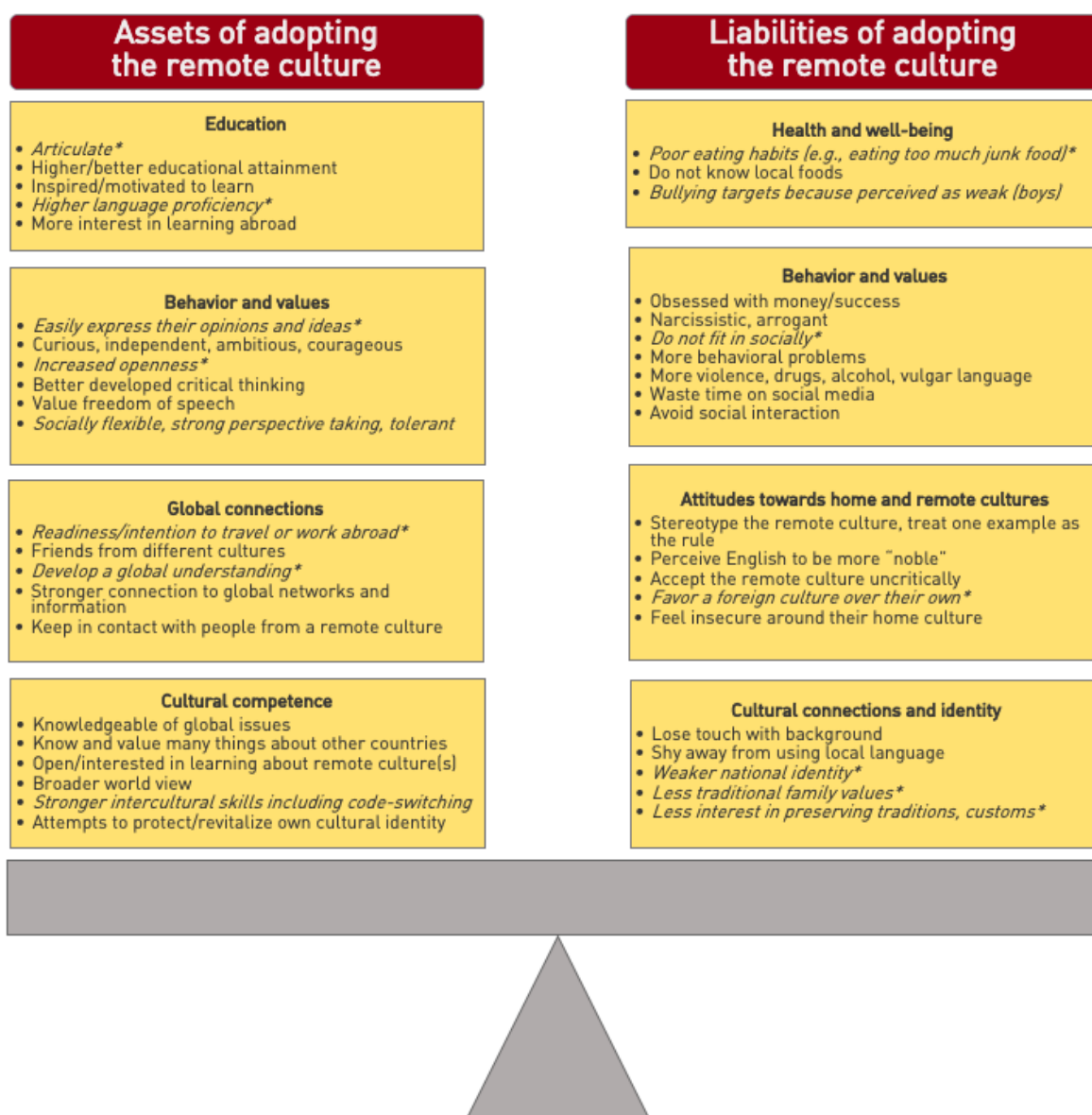
### **Behavioral and academic adjustment**

The association between RA and youth behavioral and academic adjustment is the least explored in the literature to date. Recently Ferguson and Dimitrova (2019) examined behavioral and academic adjustment among adolescents in Jamaica remotely acculturating to European American culture. They found that mothers' higher European American orientation and lower Jamaican orientation was associated with lower academic grades of their teenagers. Additionally, whereas an adolescent's higher Jamaican orientation was associated with better behavior, their European American orientation was not. Taken together, teenagers with better behavior and grades had stronger Jamaican orientation and their mothers had a weaker European American orientation.

However, elements of remote acculturation can also be an asset. Ferguson, Boer, et al. (2016) examined the relation between values in Reggae listeners around the world and values in Reggae listeners in Jamaica. Listening to Reggae was associated with stronger openness to change values in listeners across 11 countries, suggesting this specific element of acculturating to the Jamaican culture from afar is associated with positive values. In addition, qualitative interviews with secondary school students in Jamaica showed that they perceive "Americanized Jamaican" youth, who they called "Jahmericans", to be more interpersonally skilled, socially and culturally flexible, adept at code-switching, better at English language use, and more prepared to travel outside Jamaica (Ferguson, Iturbide, et al., 2019).

Our compiled retrospective accounts of our students in our classrooms illustrate some of these assets and liabilities of RA documented in the research literature just summarized. In our observation, students who adopt a remote culture seem to be more engaged with their education (e.g., more interest to learn abroad, more motivated to learn), to display more positive youth development (i.e., open, curious, independent), to have more global connections (e.g., travels, connections to global networks), and be more culturally competent (e.g., broader world view, better global understanding, stronger intercultural skills). We also noted some disadvantages of RA in our classrooms, some of which overlap with the research findings. In our observation, adopting a remote culture seems to co-occur with worse eating habits (including more fast food consumption), spending excessive amounts of time on social media, weaker national identity, and greater narcissism. Figure 5 depicts these assets and liabilities from research studies and our retrospective classroom accounts.

Figure 5.  
Assets and Liabilities of Remote Acculturation



Notes: Assets and liabilities of remote acculturation from the research literature (italics) and from our retrospective accounts of observations in our classrooms around the world (non-italics). Assets and liabilities seen both in the research literature and in our classrooms are denoted with an asterisk (\*).

## What can we do about Remote Acculturation?

On one hand, RA is a product of globalization, and there is virtually nothing individuals can do to stop or slow globalization. On the other hand, there is something we can do to

maximize the benefits and minimize the risks of RA for global youth. As individuals, it is important to consider the way that global forces impact our own identities, behaviors, and beliefs. By understanding the ways in which RA may shape our lives, we can become intentional and informed consumers of media, goods, and ideas from remote cultures. Similarly, parents, educators, and all those who are responsible for promoting young people's healthy development should be aware of the vehicles through which remote acculturation may be impacting the next generation. For instance, in addition to monitoring the content and values presented in children's TV, movies, and other screen-based media, parents should be aware of the advertisements targeting them in media and the potential impact on their diet (Eales & Ferguson, 2019; Ferguson et al., 2018; Ferguson, Iturbide, et al., 2019).

The complex global health challenges associated with remote acculturation necessitate cooperation among experts across disciplines and the inclusion of key community stakeholders to develop effective interventions (Ferguson, Fiese, et al., 2019; van de Vijver, 2019). Transdisciplinary team science involves this sort of collaboration to develop new methods for addressing real-world problems and, consequently, may be particularly able to tackle the challenges presented by RA (Ferguson, Fiese, et al., 2019). For example, the J(amaican and) U(nited) S(tates) Media? Programme (<https://innovation.umn.edu/culture-and-family-life-lab/projects/jus-media-programme/>) is a food-focused media literacy intervention developed for Americanized Jamaican families by an international team of collaborators with expertise in developmental cross-cultural psychology, advertising, and nutrition, alongside local stakeholders serving youth and families in Jamaica. The mission of the JUS Media? Programme is to promote critical thinking to combat the negative health messages of U.S. food advertisements, a possible mechanism through which remote acculturation influences diet (Ferguson et al., 2018). The prominent role of media in RA presents cost-effective opportunities to promote the benefits (e.g., cultural competence and language skill training) and proactively buffer the risks (e.g., food/substance-focused media literacy training) of RA to ensure the best outcomes for all children and youth in global classrooms and communities.

Future RA researchers can continue to conduct studies that address the current holes in the field. For example, as mentioned earlier, most of the remote cultures in the existing literature are WEIRD cultures (meaning Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Therefore, we mostly know about how adolescents are remotely acculturating to Western cultures, whereas much less is known about how adolescents and individuals around the world might be remotely acculturating to less Western cultures or smaller sub-cultures (however, three studies stand as clear exceptions wherein Jamaica and South Africa were remote cultures studied). It is important to note that the over-representation of WEIRD remote cultures in RA studies is not merely artifactual – because of their greater wealth in many Western societies, Western cultures are much more broadly exported globally through cultural products including media (more on this topic follows below). Additionally, much of the current research is cross-sectional, meaning that we cannot infer causality or direct effects of RA. With this in mind, future researchers could build on the existing literature moving forward by targeting more remote

cultures and designing longitudinal and experimental studies.

## Conclusions

RA is a global phenomenon whereby children and youth (and some adults) internalize a distant culture to which they are exposed via the 4 Ts of globalization (i.e., trade, technology, tourism, and transnationalism). RA is easy to see in classrooms, homes, and societies around the world. This article provided a brief primer on the what, who, how, where, and why of RA, summarized how it makes a difference in the lives of youth today, and suggested areas for future RA research. We combined our perspectives as RA research and secondary school educators in classrooms around the world to demonstrate how our published research knowledge gained in a subset of countries, maps on to real-world observations across many more countries. Overall, our experiences as teachers in local classrooms around the world overwhelmingly reflect the RA research findings. One such similarity, which will come as no surprise to most, is that U.S. remote cultures are predominant, and extend into other cultures far and wide. Our experiences on the ground in classrooms around the world validate the heavy representation of U.S. remote cultures in RA research. This lopsided reality of remote culture flows is largely due to the \$717 billion U.S. media industry (a third of the global industry: Select USA, n.d.) and the fact that media is a primary mechanism of remote acculturation for youth. However, our paper also shows that there are many more remote cultures being experienced by youth globally than have been documented in the research, revealing an exciting avenue for future studies. In this sense, we see that for RA, what matters is not merely the wealth of potential remote cultures, but their cultural influence; sometimes wealth facilitates cultural influence (e.g., U.S. media industry), but not always (e.g., consider the “outsized influence” of Jamaica: Gibson, 2019).

Another point worthy of discussion is that our concerns as high school educators aligned with fears expressed in RA research that adopting a remote culture could mean the abandonment of local culture(s). These concerns have emerged in multiple qualitative studies (Jamaica, Thailand, India) where young people, parents, and other adults report their perspectives on the remote cultural influence in terms of a cultural encroachment of the remote culture and cultural loss for locals. However, these concerns do not align with RA quantitative research, which has found that remote integration (i.e., internalizing and combining local and remote cultures) is much more common than cultural assimilation (i.e., swapping allegiance from the local to the remote culture). Additionally, new qualitative RA research in Jamaica has revealed that remotely integrated youth code-switch between their local and remote cultural identities across contexts. Therefore, it is important to keep this dynamism of RA in mind, and remember that as remotely integrated youth reformulate their cultural selves, new representations of local culture in their transformed identities may be less recognizable at first glance. Qualitative studies should continue to give voice to how local culture is represented in the identity reformulations of remotely integrated youth. And for cases of true remote assimilation, we should remember that young people’s individual remote acculturation status can shift overtime (Ferguson, 2018) and there are numerous

examples of cultural revitalization movements across societies globally (see Berry, 2008).

A final takeaway from both our research and classroom experiences is that youth who adopt remote cultures appear to have strengths pertinent to positive youth development (PYD: Lerner et al., 2005) including stronger competence, confidence, and connection, although they have also had weaker caring or character. Recent research across as many as twenty countries has demonstrated support for the PYD framework among youth globally (Wiium & Dimitrova, 2019) and it may be fruitful to apply it to RA more directly. Also, much RA scholarship has focused on the family context of RA, and it is now time to expand our gaze to the school context, especially in connection to indices of positive youth development.

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## Resources

We have learned a lot about RA in a decade, and there is so much more to learn in the decades ahead! If you are interested in reading more about RA, diving deeper into RA research studies, or sharing a story of RA in your community, we provide some resources and links below:

1. A comprehensive list of articles published by the Culture and Family Life Lab on RA: <https://innovation.umn.edu/culture-and-family-life-lab/publications/remote-acculturation/>
2. An article published by the Culture and Family Life Lab on remote *enculturation*: <https://innovation.umn.edu/culture-and-family-life-lab/publications/remote-enculturation/>
3. A tip sheet for 21<sup>st</sup> century parents and adults on media use recommendations for children and teens titled “What should I know about my child’s media use?”:

[https://innovation.umn.edu/culture-and-family-life-lab/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2019/11/Childrens-Screen-Time-Recommendations\\_CFL-Lab\\_ICD\\_UMN\\_11.9.19\\_FINAL.pdf](https://innovation.umn.edu/culture-and-family-life-lab/wp-content/uploads/sites/51/2019/11/Childrens-Screen-Time-Recommendations_CFL-Lab_ICD_UMN_11.9.19_FINAL.pdf)

4. The JUS Media? Programme: <https://innovation.umn.edu/culture-and-family-life-lab/projects/jus-media-programme/>
5. The Culture and Family Life Lab website with information on other projects: <https://innovation.umn.edu/culture-and-family-life-lab/>
6. To share a story, image, or experience of RA in your community you can use #RemoteAcculturation on social media or email us at [cultureandfamilylife@gmail.com](mailto:cultureandfamilylife@gmail.com)

## Discussion Questions

1. Which cultures have you been exposed to that might influence who you are today – your likes and dislikes, your style, your beliefs, the values you think are important, your friendships, or your hopes for the future? Which of these cultures are proximal (directly around you on a daily basis) and which are remote (distant and/or infrequent contact)?
2. How would you define RA in your own words? Can you give an example? You can also share a story, image, or experience of RA on social media using #RemoteAcculturation.
3. Have you or anyone you know ever experienced RA? For each person you think of who has experienced RA, including yourself, describe:
  - a. the local culture(s) and remote culture(s) involved in their RA
  - b. the vehicles which brought those remote cultures into their local communities
  - c. how much they chose to adopt the remote culture(s) and how much they chose to retain their local culture(s), keeping in mind that a person can be immersed in multiple cultures simultaneously
  - d. the life domains in which they did and did not change due to RA (e.g., did their behaviors, values, or identities change?)
  - e. any assets and liabilities of RA for that person
4. In your country, what elements of RA are more positive and which seem more negative? How can we enhance the positives of RA in our communities and around the world?
5. What is one question you have about RA that has not yet been investigated?
  - a. How might you design a research study, or part of a study, to explore this question: Who would participate in your study and what methods would you use (questionnaires, interviews, drawings, social media, physiological measurements, other creative strategies)?
  - b. What would be your hypothesis, meaning your guess about what you would find?

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