THEMATIC ARTICLES: CONSTRUCTING AND PRESERVING IDENTITY

"I am not weird, I am Third Culture Kids": Identifying Enabling Modalities for Place Identity Construction among High Mobility Populations
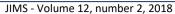
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Abstract. The paper aims to identify the enabling modalities embedded in adult Third Culture Kids (TCKs) –individuals who experienced numerous life disruptions as they move between countries during their developmental years as a result of their parents' employment– in constructing their place identity. An asynchronous Facebook online focus group was used to reach out to the adult TCKs from three different cohorts (young adult, adult and middle adulthood, N=33 persons), who lived scattered around the world. The findings concur with literature that TCKs find themselves to continuously questioning their sense of belonging; battling with validating their upbringing. The middle adult TCK (aged >40 years and above) are only aware of their TCK-ness in their adult life and reporting the scuffle in community involvement. The adult TCK (aged 30-40 years) face a dilemma of contentment and wanderlust. While the young adult TCK (aged 19 -20 years) are more aware and exposed to the term TCK, they are actively involved in introducing their presence –being a TCK- to the society. In making sense of their high mobility experiences, the adult TCKs yield the need for stability, belonging, direction, connectedness, and sense of community throughout their developmental stages of life. Implication of the findings and advice are offered for stakeholders involved in TCK's upbringing, especially family and future expatriates family in ensuring the well-being of TCK in their adult life.

Keywords: *asynchronized focus group, Facebook, high mobility lifestyles, identity construction, Third Culture Kids*

Introduction

"There is no place without self and no self without place" (Casey 2001). Identity manifests itself on many levels (i.e., genetic, social, and cultural, etc.), one

of which is place –the built environment as affirmation of the notion "Where are you coming from?" For people that grow up in one place, their identity related to a sense of belonging and emotional attachment to a place, where memories, familiarity, attitudes, values, and preferences occur within that place (Easthope 2009; Proshansky and Fabian 1987; Manzo and Devine-Wright 2013). In the same time, the place in which they live provides means and modalities through the social interaction between individuals who live in the place for constructing their identity (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell 1996; Wester-Herber 2004).

This study focuses on Third Culture Kids (TCKs) –individuals who experience a high mobility lifestyle and a cross-cultural upbringing in their developmental years (Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock 2017). As a result of numerous relocation and living in several places, the TCKs have difficulties and often felt frustrated to answer to the question "where are you from". The definition of place identity (Proshansky and Fabian 1987; Twigger-Ross and Uzzell 1996) make sense only for those who have lived in the same country during their developmental years, and unsuitable to be applied to the TCK.

In this study, I aim to identify what means the TCKs have gained or needed to gain from their upbringing to have a coherent sense of identity throughout their life span. I implemented the place identity construction theory by (Lijadi and Van Schalkwyk 2017) proposed three enabling modalities in developing a coherent sense of self: (i) sense of stability for young child; (ii) sense of belonging for middle childhood; and (3) sense of direction for adolescent TCK. The purpose of this study is to extend the theory of place identity construction for adult TCKs (aged 19 years and above), using a unique focus group discussion -an online asynchronized Facebook focus group to reach this hidden population who lived scattered around the world. The central question in this study was: How do TCKs make sense of the world amidst their high mobility lifestyle, and what modalities do they gain or need to gain to construct their place identity?

Erikson 1994 stipulated that individuals' sense of identity is not merely the sum of individuals' early identifications, rather, it is a coherent and meaningful identity constructed throughout the life span. Erikson stressed that individuals may revisit unsuccessfully resolved crises later in life and resolve them successfully (Sneed, Whitbourne and Culang 2006). The life cycle approach is also being adopted by environmental psychologists in explaining the place identity construction among youth (Proshansky and Fabian 1987; Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff 1983), that

depending on the psychosocial stages of development, individuals may have endless variety of cognitions and engagement with the place they lived environment on both conscious and unconscious level. For the TCK, they have additional life transition; which are relocating to another country, repatriation, and re-adjustment to their current country of domicile. I adopted the epigenetic principle in constructing the place identity of TCK, stipulating additional enabling modalities to maintain identity at each development stage begin at birth and continue throughout the TCK life.

Literature Review

As social, political and economic changes happen globally, the number of families worldwide moving cross-border is rising; more people than ever are living abroad. In 2017, the United Nations reported that the number of international migrants worldwide reached 258 million, up from 220 million in 2010 and 173 million in 2000. Nearly two thirds of the international migrants reside in Asia (80 million) or Europe (78 million). The world is facing the international immigrant phenomenon of finding home and adjusting to the new country. Among those international migrants are the expatriate families with Third Culture Kids in the making.

Ruth Hill and John Useem coin the term Third Culture Kids in the early 1960s to describe individuals who experience a high mobility lifestyle and a cross-cultural upbringing in their developmental years. Pollock and Van Reken (2017) further refined the definition of TCKs as individuals who find their sense of belonging with others in a similar situation and expect repatriation at some point in their lives. Most TCKs families move to a new location at the discretion of their sponsor organizations, which include Foreign affairs, Military, religious based missionary organization and multinational/business/education organizations.

High mobility upbringing provides the TCKs with benefits and relatively privileged lifestyles during developmental years (i.e., opportunities for expatriation, having first-hand experience of new and different locations, and opportunities to interact with others from many different cultural backgrounds), the TCKs experience a unique way to interact with the places where they have lived (Tarique and Weisbord 2013; Downie et al. 2004). TCKs were reported to have a high level of cross-cultural understanding and adaptability (Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock 2017), multilingualism (Cameron 2006; Dewaele and van Oudenhoven 2009), having a three dimensional of the world (Bonebright 2010; Cockburn 2002), and high

interpersonal sensitivity (Lyttle, Barker, and Cornwell 2011) that are desirable as future workforces in international corporation (Selmer and Lam 2004). In the same time, the TCKs face frequent re-adjustment to new society and new schools (see the work of Lijadi and Van Schalkwyk 2016) and experienced countless losses (both hidden and recognized, such as persons, places, pets and possessions), in particular the loss of personal identity and the loss of home (Gilbert 2008).

Moreover, the TCKs are also challenged adjusting to adult life (Downie et al. 2004). Finding others that understanding their upbringing can be very problematic in adulthood as the number of TCKs is relatively small in any society and often dispersed and unidentifiable amongst the local population in the host country. The TCKs are reported to unable to relate positively with their current residence and to establish committed social relationships with other people (Tarique and Weisbord 2013; Choi, Bernard, and Luke 2013). Gaining a coherent identity is difficult for TCK, when their sense of belonging is constantly being challenged from a very young age (Fail, Thompson, and Walker 2004; Fanøe and Marsico 2018).

Yet, there are very limited number of studies focusing on the impact of a living in many places on the whole developmental trajectories of place identity construction of TCKs. Abe 2018 cross-examined the effect of high mobility upbringing among adult TCKs across the adult life span on the personality traits, dimensions of well-being, and cognitive-affective styles. Working with adult TCKs who used to study in international schools in Japan and had repatriated (N=782, 58% female, aged 18-80+), Abe (2018) claimed that overall the adult TCKs "showed normative changes in personality and well-being in the direction of greater maturity and adjustment during adulthood" (p. 811). However, the study also revealed that the same measures of cultural exposure (such as number of countries the TCKs have lived and years of studying in international school) may result in different acculturation process after repatriation of ATCKs (such as feeling uprooted or marginal). The TCKs may not acquiring positive feelings about any culture due to the hardships of high mobility lifestyle; and the repatriation may cause the TCKs to develop negative feelings about one's home culture.

According to Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff (1983) claimed that a person's actual experience in life is altered by cognitive process of memory (what people remember vs. what is happening now in their life) and interpretation (what people imagine of their life). All these cognitions define the person's place identity (p. 78). The memory of growing up in a certain place gave a physical realities, plus
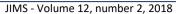
social meanings and beliefs attached to the place by those who live outside as well as its residents. The social meanings are very much depending on the social interaction between individuals and various groups they meet on daily basis –such as racial, ethnic, age, gender, social class, religious groups, etc. Individual may merge all the values, attitudes, and behaviour tendencies from different groups with his or her own.

"When both physical settings and people change, then it is clear that the place identity of the individual is a changing as well" (Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff 1983, p. 159), as of the case of TCKs. In the qualitative work of Lijadi and Van Schalkwyk (2017) with TCK participants from a very young aged of 7 to 18 years on their place identity construction, the authors claimed that the young TCKs were "longing for a safe, secure and, in some cases, an idyllic place where the TCKs can be in a norm-free context, free of the demands of having to adapt and adjust" (p. 7). The authors identified three enabling modalities to ease the construction of place identity of TCKs. The authors advised the parents of young TCK (aged 7-9 years) to create a sense of stability as enabling modalities; for example to maintain and ensure the familiar day-today activities and to bring some keepsake from the previous place they lived to the new place to re-live the childhood memory. The second enabling modalities is the sense of belonging for pre-adolescence TCK (aged 10-12 years); as place for these TCKs are everywhere and anywhere as long as the family is together. The authors claimed that more abstract aspects of the pre-adolescent's cognitive development were emerging with socio-emotional relationships (belongingness) starting to replace the physical space as representation of a place identity. The third enabling modalities is a sense of direction for adolescent TCK (aged 12-17 years), who at this current stage of life, like all children, the TCK face the task of figuring out their basic identity, career choices and future commitments in life and relationships upon which they will build throughout their life.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to extend the theory of place identity construction initiated earlier (Lijadi and Van Schalkwyk 2017) to include the ATCKs (aged 19 years and above). The method to recruit the ATCK participants and to use an online asynchronized focus group discussion are based on discovery oriented decisions as follow. First, the ATCKs are a hidden population and not easily being

identified for research participants. The ATCKs lived scattered around the world, with different time zone, that unable face-face focus group. Second, the ATCKs are actively trying to connect and share their story in the social media sites (Hannaford 2016), such as Facebook, in addressing their upbringing and their current emotions and life decisions that might not be understood with other sub-populations within the society. Therefore, the online asynchronous focus group via Facebook method was initiated for reaching out and inviting adult TCKs to participate in the study.

Besides reducing costs and time consumption for transcription, using Facebook platform allows the participants to join, to read questions and post answers at their own convenient time. This flexibility permits more time for participants to recall their life experiences, reflect, think, and search for extra information before contributing to the discussion. Furthermore, there is a rapidly growing literature supported the reliability of utilizing Facebook as a novel tool for researchers to observe behaviour in a naturalistic setting, test hypotheses and recruit participants (see review of 412 academic journals studying Facebook phenomenon by Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012). Facebook also allows for the formation of groups as a means for users to interact closely and according to a certain social agenda. Merits to Facebook group formation, I, as the administrator or moderator of the focus group, can create "secret and closed" group, which only invited friends can join and read all the posts. Therefore, I needed to befriend participants in order to invite them to the group. As a "friend", the participants and myself have access to each other the personal page and their posts; thus enhance trustworthiness between 'friends'.

To familiarize myself with the Facebook focus group discussion, I conducted a pilot study with one of the TCK group, by posting one question about what parents of young TCK could do to prepare and anticipate the next move in order to ensure the wellbeing of their children. Within less than a week, I received 50 comments on my post; thus boosting my self-assurance of the potential for fruitful data collection through this approach. Among the commentators on my post were TCK from various age groups, genders, nationalities, professions and all walks of life. I started recruiting my participants from these groups, and continued with snow-ball method by seeking referral to other TCKs.

The focus group questions are posted one at the time one, when moderator (myself) had received and satisfied with the responses from all participants; which are:

1. Memories: What do you remember of your high mobility lifestyle in your childhood; specifically about places you have lived?
2. Repatriation Experiences: How did you experience repatriation to your passport country?
3. Social relationships: How are your social interactions with the communities in the current place that you live?
4. Future: How do you plan on raising your offspring, and will you continue the same lifestyle?
5. A place called home: Where is home?

Each focus group is scheduled for two to maximum three weeks, based on participants' availability. As a moderator, I made a geographical map with time difference of each participant in the focus group, to ensure that I was engaged and given full attention and response in timely manner to each post. From time to time, I sent reminder to participants to response to others' post through the Facebook private message.

Participants

The adult TCK were invited to participate in the study via an online snowball-sampling method by announcement in tckworld.com, tckacademy.com, tck.com, and denizenmag.com, as well as approaching several TCK groups on Facebook. The criteria for participants were framed in terms of English speaking ATCK aged 19 years and above and who have lived in at least three different countries during their first 18 years of life following their parents' careers.

Profile of participants

In total 33 ATCK were recruited via an online snowball-sampling method. The participants were grouped according to their cohort: young adult ($N_{age\ 19-30}$ =13; eight female and five male, M = 23 years); adult ($N_{age\ 31-39}$ = 10; seven female and three male, M = 38.6 years) and middle adulthood ($N_{age\ 40\ and\ above}$ = 10; six females and four male, M = 49.2 years). Participants were the offspring of parents who worked in three different sponsoring organizations ($N_{business}$ = 25, $N_{diplomat}$ = 6, and $N_{missionary}$ = 2) with an average, 4.5 relocations during their developmental years (i.e., before age 18 years). All participants graduated from high school and spoke on average three different languages.

Middle and older adulthood TCK (Aged >40 years)

The middle adulthood ATCK participants were born in the years 1970s and before. In their childhood, overseas telephone calls and travelling by airplane were expensive and rarely used. Personal computers were still quite a novelty, and the Internet had not existed. For parents of this cohort, taking an overseas job in the 1970s was definitely a very big decision and risk to move the whole family to a new place. One participant from missionary family reported that the preparation back then could two take up to four years from the time of getting the sponsors until final approval to conduct their missionary call overseas.

The TCK on this cohort entered the world in a time of relative hardship, but thanks economic recovery, they have arisen as a successful and affluent generation, as per the excerpt below.

> "My parents were "Depression Era" children (a whole other category of fascinating childhoods) and were savers from the beginning. It was important to them to establish security and to not spend unwisely. They worked extremely hard to be able to maintain the lifestyle we ended up with, and as kids, we understood that moving around the world was part of their effort to achieve that goal, even was very young kids. We went where the opportunity was. Choice was made by my parents having been given an opportunity to move. It would have been in their best interest to take the offer each time, but it was not required. More of a career advancement thing."

Some of the participants were still living as expatriate and married to a TCK as well; whereas others were settling down in one place.

Adult TCK (aged 30-39 years)

The participants (aged 30-39 years) endured their high mobility lifestyle in the early 1980s. The 1980s were marked by famine in Ethiopia, the discovery of AIDS, the movement against communism worldwide, the Tiananmen Square protest, the Warsaw Pact in Central and Eastern Europe, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. They witnessed great changes in the social, economic and political arenas worldwide due to globalization. It was also the beginning of television viewing in the developing countries of the world.

Among the participants, we identified a self-initiated relocation or *self-*

mobility among their parents, who were proactively seeking for overseas work and conducting most of relocation by themselves (i.e., immigration procedure, work permit, accommodation and living arrangement, education for children, learning the language of the new place, etc.). Self-mobility has increased rapidly with the advancement of transportation and communication.

Young Adult TCK (aged 19-29 years)

The ATCK in cohort aged 19-29 years were young adults who were either university students or just starting their careers. Born in the 1990s, the era of globalization, the young adult enjoyed the rapid development of technology and transportation. The participants witnessed and experienced how the computer and Internet gradually became an essential part of everyone's life and they witnessed the transition from face-to-face social interaction to social media interaction.

More than half of the parents of the participants from cohort aged 19-29 years were TCK themselves, who raised their children using modalities they learned due to their own accumulated high mobility lifestyle experiences. For example, they were very much involved in informing and involving their children on the relocation, provided guidance and attention in adjusting to new places, learning new language, as well as maintaining contact with the relatives and friends in the passport country; as mentioned by participant in the excerpts below.

> "We talked about it a LOT at home. We researched the country and even tried to learn the language. We had moved a lot previously, though in the same country, so we were somewhat accustomed to moving. We also did a two-week exit program at a training center in Colorado that helped prepare us for a cultural switch."

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of all participants. Recruited participants were asked to join the specially created online Facebook focus group in order to participate in the study. All participants were requested to give authorized consent for their

written comments to be used for research purposes in my project. I also asked participants to keep all discussions within the group and not to share these with anyone outside the group. I discouraged the participants from exposing any personal identification such as address, email address or other contact information to other participants during the online focus group discussions.

Trustworthiness and credibility of the research were established by transparency in all stages of the research. The transcripts were read and code separately by my doctoral supervisor, another PhD candidate (who are TCK and raising TCK herself) and myself. We met weekly to discuss on the coding, and to agree on emerging themes, which took in total three months. I am also an expatriate and raising two TCK. Therefore, I constantly reminded myself not to compare the focus group discussion with my own experience.

Results

The focus group discussion with adult TCK on their meaning making of their childhood memories and current live status were dynamic, sentimental and result in rigorous evidence on the impact of high mobility lifestyle to the TCK. The experience moderating the Facebook focus group is humbling yet fulfilling. It was not difficult to achieve data saturation, as in each focus group the TCK reported more or less the same emotional life experiences. The age difference between cohorts of TCK (aged 19-29 years, aged 30-39 years and aged 40 years and above) does not show distinctive difference in their discussion growing up across border. Yet in their current life, the cohort differences are apparent in their social relationships and adaptation to the current country they reside. Three emerging themes were identified from the focus group, which are (1) High Mobility experiences; (2) current social relationships, and (3) future life of TCK. The excerpts from participants were added per se therefore there might be unavoidable grammatical or spelling mistakes.

High Mobility Lifestyle Experiences by TCK
When to move? Where to move?

As a child, the TCKs were not involved on the relocation decisions, even more; their parents were discreet about the move to their closed relatives and peers until very close to the date. For the majority of TCK families, the sponsoring organization dictated the next destination and the length of stay. Parents of TCK

took on overseas assignments as a way towards career advancement and obtaining better remuneration and other benefits, even though the destination might not always have been favourable.

Where to live? The diverse living arrangements made each relocation experience unique yet unpredictable for the TCK; either to live within the premises of the sponsoring organization, living in the staff quarters, or being allowed to find their own accommodation. Some sponsoring organisations provided relocation assistance, and to some extent determined the living arrangement and schooling for the children of their employees. Another option for TCK and their family is to live within the expatriate community – people similar to themselves.

Which school is available? The school and education system vary in different countries in terms of the academic calendar, curriculum, languages on offer, requirements to learn the local language, and the observation of local cultures of the country. Most TCK went to international schools as these schools catered to the needs of expatriate families in terms of language (most international schools offer English as first or second language) and ensuring international accreditation. The cohort aged 19-29 years claimed that nowadays, the international schools are inundated with local children; who had formed a clique and spoke local language instead of integrating with the TCK; thus the social interaction within the school was very different compared to the participants aged ≥40 years (Lijadi and Van Schalkwyk 2016).

Monoculture/Multicultural family. Internationally, identification systems recognize the passport country as the national identity of a person, thereby providing legitimacy to travel between countries. TCK are identified with their passport country as their so-called national identity. Monoculture parents indirectly introduce the culture from the passport country at home. Having multicultural parents and being a second generation TCK added to the complexity of their place identity construction. TCK who have multicultural parents might have two passport countries if allowed, or they might have to choose one of the two countries when they turned 18 years old.

What is home? Some TCK reported a strong attachment to one or more places where they have lived; some reported to loathe certain places, when they experienced bullying or other difficulties in adjustment. Home for the TCK includes all the places where they had lived and established some kind of physical and social-emotional link, such as place of birth, passport country or the country of their

grandparents. TCK built attachment to many places, which emotional of the attachment (positive or negative) is depending on the outcome of the social relationships with others throughout their developmental years (i.e., the birth of siblings, marriage of relatives, acquisition and losses of friends or pets, experience in club or organizations that TCK joined, etc.)

Current Social Relationships

Validating TCK-ness

Participants from cohort aged 19-29 years are familiar with the term TCK; however participants from cohort aged 40 years and above and cohort aged 30-39 years declared that they only learned about the term third culture in their adult years, and that this has inspired them to look for articles and research related to the phenomenon.

"I am not weird, I am Third Culture Kids. Thank you Ruth (Van Reken) for your book."

The realization that there was a phenomenon such as third culture kids gave them validation for their experiences and existence as perpetual expats.

Rekindle Friendships

The development of digital technology allows the participants to rekindle their friendships using social network sites. During the focus group discussion, some participants were very excited as their paths were crossed in different places and time. By reconnecting with former peers from their childhood, the TCK came to realize that there was great comfort and trust with their former friends, usually other TCK, as they were fully understood and could also empathize with what the other person was going through.

The participants aged 19-29 years reported that their parents help them to maintain connection with their peers. They allowed their TCK children to spend as much time as possible with their close friends during transition to the new location. One participant in the cohort aged ≥ 40 years, who become a parent of TCK himself, stated that:

> "Although I did have more transition issues to deal with when I was older, changing countries and changing cultures was already a way of life for our family and just a part of what we expected in life. Most problems I experienced when I went

[repatriated] to college in the US. Growing out of that, I made sure to help our kids when moving back to the US."

Commitment Uncertainty

Commitment uncertainty often leads to being unable to commit to a relationship, career or place. The participants claimed that even as adult, they were still indecisive and ambivalent about where they wanted to go or be 5 years or 10 years later. The commitment uncertainty was particularly evident in the college life experiences of TCK in the cohort of 19-29 years of age. More than half of the participants in this cohort reported that they have changed their major programme at least twice as they could not decide what to study. Yet they were reluctant to accept that their indecisiveness was due to their high mobility lifestyle and upbringing.

Establishing long-term friendships or even romantic relationships was difficult for TCK. Several participants asserted that they feared developing trust in friendships and would rather avoid allowing others to get too close to them—they did not want to risk being hurt.

> "I think the average friendship for a TCK is somewhat shallow (and that is preferable because there is less emotional loss when you leave) but that there are a few those will transcend the walls we put up. I recognize that I can be fearful in those. I am fearful that my trust will be wasted (because of risk of moving as a child). It also takes a very patient person to wait for me to allow intimacy (of friendship) in the relationship. I will push people away at times to avoid developing the friendships."

Future and Possibility to continue High Mobility Lifestyle

Fitting in

Most of participants reported that in their current life they felt not to belong and outcast. Some participant pointed out that settling in a place that was multicultural would be ideal for them, compared to settling in a small town without the necessary infrastructure and with monoculture people who did not understand their history of a high mobility lifestyle.

> "I don't belong anywhere. I recently chose a citizenship - though I didn't do it to belong or feel at home, I wondered if it would change my perception of home. This is the place I have lived the longest and it is nice to be known but the concept of

home is less achievable than the concept of love. I sometimes wonder if non-TCK's have any different knowledge about home or if we just think they do."

The TCK were often being misunderstood, misjudged. Furthermore, their local peers were not interested in knowing about their upbringing, often being prejudiced due to places the TCK had lived before. The participants also admitted that they faced difficulties opening up to people and that it took time to establish the intimacies that came naturally for those who grew up in the same place throughout their childhood.

> "To be honest I felt more lonely living in a small town in UK than in any city of the world where I couldn't speak the local language. Cities tend to have people from many nations, some TCK and people who have various interests. Small towns tend to be less exposed to foreign cultures, and quite stand-offish with strangers they can't immediately pigeon-hole."

Wanderlust versus Saudade

> "I agree that home is where the heart is. But my heart has been split up into pieces all over the world, where my memories and loved ones are, so home isn't just one place. I feel like a big part of being a TCK is never feeling complete in any one place, because you're always missing someone somewhere else."

> "I don't like being stagnant and like the adventure of going somewhere new. Meet new people, eat different foods, breathe in a different air and feel a new soil under my feet. Home to me is the world."

The excerpts above are the evidence of the on-going struggle for TCK to overcome their wanderlust and nostalgia. The participants from cohort aged 19-29 years claimed that they have not decided what they want to do in the future, but they know for sure, they would like to continue explore the world. Thus they are finding career that allows them international experiences. Some participants in the cohort aged 30-39 years and cohort aged ≥40 years ended up spending their adult life in places where they lived previously in their childhood, as they held fond memories of the life they experienced there. Other participants prefer to stay as foreigner, continue the high mobility lifestyle and never attaching to any one place for too long.

Discussion

High mobility lifestyles upbringing gives the impression that during the ATCK's childhood, they were living in a temporary mode, not knowing how long they will stay; only knowing that they will have to move eventually or to repatriate. Their interactions within a place are limited to the living arrangement with the sponsoring organization. In some place, the TCKs may be exposed to local culture, learning local language; hence, there were TCKs who stayed within their sponsoring organization compound and only interacted with other TCKs. It became habitual for TCKs to leave tasks unfinished or for them to be unexpectedly left by close friends (see also Lijadi and Schalkwyk 2014; Choi, Bernard, and Luke 2013). The unpredictability of their high mobility lifestyle have also lead to some participants expressing commitment uncertainty when, for example, changing university major more than once, changing jobs frequently, all of which confirm similar findings from other studies (see also (Fail, Thompson, and Walker 2004; Lijadi and Van Schalkwyk 2016; Gilbert 2008).

At some point of their life, TCKs may repatriate to their passport country. Depending on age, length of stay outside the passport country and language fluency, the transition to the passport country can be more overwhelming than moving to another country. For many TCKs, relocating to the passport country has the same implication as moving to a new country—they are foreigners in their country of origin. Some TCKs may not even be fluent in the language of the home country, they experienced a lack of belongingness, loneliness and a persistence of transient friendships even during college in the country of origin.

Growing up globetrotting, the TCK needed to develop enabling modalities in order to adapt appropriately within each new context at different stages of life. Every relocation to some extent demanded that the TCK re-visit earlier modalities; for example, it was evident that when the TCK moved to a new place, they needed to (again): establish stability, make new friends, re-examine their academic or career goals, join a new community, etc. The inability to acquire these modalities in place identity construction could cause place identity confusion and difficulties that could affect the ability of TCK to adapt and commit later in life. Concurrent to the previous findings by Lijadi and Van Schalwyk (2017), we identified the same three enabling modalities for TCKs aged below 18 years: sense of stability, sense of belonging and sense of direction. We further added two more modalities for ATCK: sense of

connection and sense of community.

Sense of Stability

> "My furniture tends to be in the same place relative to each other regardless of where I live."

> "There is always a couple of little things I always take with me to the next place, a small silver train, a travelling Buddha a friend gave to me ...Whenever they are put on a windowsill or a mantelpiece. It means I have arrived in my new home"

Above excerpts were the voices of the participants about the importance of stability in their childhood. Providing a sense of stability is crucial so that individual could feel safe and secure to move on with his or her social interaction. In terms of schooling, the TCK appreciated when the relocation was scheduled to the end of school semester, and they could attend school with the same curriculum.

Sense of Belonging

The most unpleasant experience in moving to a new place is to lose the sense of self and to lose touch with the people closest to us (Ralph and Staeheli 2011). The TCKs reported countless farewell and loss as they move to another place. In the new place, the TCKs were prompt of their differences compared with local peers in terms of physical characteristics, language ability and a lack of understanding of the culture of the host country. Winter and Mace (2014) advised that, in order to avoid identity struggle in the future, the TCK needed to secure membership in at least one cultural group. The questions for TCK were with which cultural group did they want to associate and where did they want to establish a secure membership. *Sense of belonging* is the enabling modality for the TCK, particularly those in their pre-adolescent years, as a key aspect in promoting social learning behaviour, necessary to boosting the feeling of being accepted.

Unable to gain sense of belonging may cause continuous struggle to adulthood, and even loathing their upbringing as TCK, as per the excerpt below:

> "I don't remember being "sad" about a move until I was 14. Up until then, it was another adventure. High school started, etc. We actually moved in the middle of my senior year of high school. It was traumatic for me, and I still feel angry about it, 35 years later. As a teenager you just want to belong. Being "new" is not belonging, and I felt awkward, ugly, outcast."

Van Der Zee, Ali, and Haaksma (2007) found that emotional stability, in particular being accepted and belongingness appeared as an independent predictor of adjustment. Across three cohorts, TCK were found to develop a sense of belonging to the sponsoring organisation or the institution or organisation where their parents worked and as a result of attending organized annual staff gatherings and other celebrations. One participant from cohort ≥40 continued following his parents' career path as missionaries because this career gave him a sense of belongingness. Learning local language and language of the passport country was found to ease adaptation for TCK. Other TCK reported that besides school activities, actively engaged in local activities such as sport, music and dance club allowed them to interact with local peers and eased their ways to understand social rules.

Sense of Direction

In order to escape possible dissonances of earlier (childhood) unfinished tasks or unresolved psychosocial crises, the TCK were in constant pursuit of new beginnings and rarely able to finish what they started. Purportedly, the high mobility lifestyle experienced as children left them with an avoidance of seriously engaging in physical or emotional intimacy, and with a notion that one could simply change one's mind and walk away or switch to something else or a new interest. Their commitment uncertainty also seemingly generated negative behaviour that further made commitment to a place, a person or a career difficult.

> "In college I changed my major a few times, from bio science to psychology to communication to journalism then to law. I don't know if these can be attributed to my status as TCK. As for relationships, well, the longest relationship I have had lasted for about 3 months (I am 27 now). Growing up as TCK, studying at an international school, having friends from all over the world, it became a normal ritual to say goodbye to friends who had to leave and go back to their home countries. Having to experience the pain of separation so often at such early stages of life left me unable to understand the concept of commitment. I've become so accustomed to only experiencing temporary bonds that I tend to get freaked out at the prospect of a longer and deeper relationship. At the back of my head, I'll always know that I can end up alone at anytime."

> "I lived in 7 different countries, with curriculums varying from US, to UK to Dutch. Imagine learning math on abacus one place and going to learning French another. Weird…I have always had this weird habit of growing frustrated quickly and wanting

to "walk away" easily. I think it might be attributable to bouncing around so much. Even in my adult life I find myself doing this, and I have to make myself focus in again and follow through things. Its subtle, but I feel it in my mind."

Referring back to place identity theory by Proshansky et al (1983), the important or significant events that occur during adolescence period are most likely to be commemorated in the future and become unforgettable personal memories. These events and memories also give direction to the adolescents for their career choices and future commitments in life and relationships. As per the case from participant in the cohort aged 19-29 years; in most host countries, children can only stay abroad with their parents as foreign citizens under their parents work permit until they are 18 years old, at which time they need to repatriate. The TCK could feel anxious in their preparation for adulthood, because not only they needed to leave their parents, but also because this would be the first time they will have to undergo the rollercoaster of transition cycling on their own.

An enabling modality for place identity construction for the adolescent TCK is therefore a sense of direction for the future, to enable TCK to commit more easily and to utilize the great qualities they possess, such as an international education, multilingualism, intercultural competency, great tolerance to diversity and to think more on global perspective. Parental involvement and support from all stakeholders (i.e., sponsoring organizations, international counsellors) were crucial to direct the TCK in their life transition not only in academic adjustment, but more in the psychological adjustment. The TCK need a direction from their parents and social support on how to make the best of their skills and to avoid wasting their unique talents and capabilities.

Sense of Connectedness

The focus groups revealed that the ATCK still had an on-going battle in finding their belongingness, thus they were reluctant to put much effort in developing social relationships, as per the excerpt below.

> "I sometimes feel guilty for being able to let people go so easily: out of sight out of mind attitude. As if they are objects I leave behind in one place, which get replaced in the next place I arrive at."

The elder cohort participants recalled the hardship of maintaining relationships back in the 1970s due to the high cost of telecommunication.

Nowadays, the ATCK found the Internet to be a source of information and very useful for communication purposes. Social media can cut across time and geographical distance, and allow an unlimited flow of information. With the help of digital communication, there are many ways to maintain connectedness. The ATCK also mentioned that re-connecting with old classmates from childhood and college fosters them with reciprocal feelings of being acknowledged and significant.

The need to establish social support in host country is in congruent with the findings from qualitative study with 18 expatriate adolescents on their adjustment in host country (Weeks, Weeks, and Willis-Muller 2009). The study highlighted that each family member of the expatriate need a support network for different reasons; the parents need to develop new social network to overcome loneliness, while the adolescent need "a friendship network to help them fulfil needs in their initial identity formation, and this may be even more important for students who are thrust into a new culture in a new country" (p. 38). Therefore, the enabling modality for place identity construction of the young adult TCK is a *sense of connectedness*, the feeling that they are part of social relationships as well as their making an effort to seek out social relationships. Resolving connectedness can lead to comfortable relationships and a sense of commitment, safety and care within a relationship.

> "It's interesting that as an adult settled in one place, I have had to learn how to choose friends more carefully (before, it didn't really matter, because we would be moving on soon, anyway). And, I have also had to learn how to maintain adult friendships rather than giving up on friendships as soon as there is conflict."

Sense of Community

Once back in the passport country, the participants claimed that their expectations of the passport country were much different from the reality they experienced there in everyday living. The place (country) had changed. Finding others that understanding their upbringing can be very problematic in adulthood as the number of TCKs is relatively small in any society and often dispersed amongst the local population in the host country. The society often tries to fit the TCKs into their own mono-cultural mould. In so doing, they often interpret a single fragment of the TCKs' identity as representative of the whole person while disregarding all other parts of their background and life experiences.

In narrating a coherent life story, the enabling modality for the TCKs in adulthood is having a *sense of community*. *Sense of community* is established when individuals practise and influence the daily customs, values and traditions in concert

with other members of the community, even though they might not know everyone within the community (McMillan and Chavis 1986). From the excerpts below, the TCK participants showed that having a sense of community could provide a meaning of life. The participants encouraged other TCK not only to limit their community involvement within certain place, but also to get involved to the world affairs.

"I've been working with different NGOs and social enterprises working on development and social change in the [Country A] and [Country B]."

"I volunteer with TCKid to work on building a community for TCKs."

The adult TCKs may never develop salient place attachment with the current place they live. However, they believe in being connected and being part of the community in order to have a meaningful life. The adult TCKs look for symbols of continuity with the past and the future or a "familiar place" to confirm their existence. Some adult TCKs shared their experiences by publishing an autobiography along with accumulated narratives from other TCK as a way of influencing the daily customs, values and traditions of their TCKs community (see book review by Lijadi 2012). Parents, educators, expat family counsellors may benefit from Family in Global Transition (www.FIGT.com), a non profit organization initiated by TCK, which focus on the wellbeing of the mobile families.

Conclusion

Less and less individuals live in only one place throughout their lifetime. A high mobility lifestyle affects the negotiation and maintenance of a coherent identity in relation to movement between different parts of the world, as well as movement between multiplicities of cultures within the same place. The present study aimed to describe how the TCK made sense of a high mobility lifestyle and the meanings they attributed to places they have lived. In the process of constructing their place identity, the TCK need to acquire five enabling modalities in finding a coherent sense of self, which are stability, belongingness, direction, connectedness, and community. Age of TCKs during relocation, parents' adjustment, schooling, length of stay and the outcome of previous relocation are all affecting the identity construction of TCKs.

The first three enabling modalities (stability, belongingness and direction) of place identity construction are concurred to the findings by Lijadi and Van Schalkwyk 2017 with TCKs aged 7 to 18 years old. Hence, with each relocation, the TCKs will need to re-acquire and revisit the enabling modalities. In their adult life, the TCKs

need to build sense of connectedness, in order to deal with constant prejudice and misunderstanding from the non-TCK. This enabling modality is developed when the TCKs learn to be sensitive to their surroundings, respect different cultures and accept that they are different compared to non-TCK. Other modalities needed in adulthood stage of TCKs is a sense of community, an ultimate modality that enable the adult TCKs to share their wisdom and insights of their high mobility lifestyles for the future generation.

Limitation of the study

This study has two main limitations. First is the usage of Facebook Focus groups, which limited to TCK that have Internet access, a computer or smart phone, have a Facebook account and respond to the invitations by the group administrator. Second limitation is the small number of participants to represent TCK from different sponsoring organizations, which may refrain from generality of the findings. For future research, there is a need to explore repatriation phenomenon and to develop intervention strategies, particularly for TCK adolescences, as this is the most crucial stage of development for most people, moving from childhood to adulthood.

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