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## BOOK REVIEW

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Pollock, D. C., & Van Reken, R. E. (1999). *The third culture kid experience: Growing up among worlds*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, Inc. ISBN: 1-877864-72-2, 333 pages.

David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken's long-awaited book remains a seminal text for international expatriate families and those who work with them. It is a significant contribution to what is a narrowly-focussed but increasingly important and well-defined field. The book is significant in that it both recognises and affirms the unique cultural and life experiences of children growing up in internationally mobile families, defined as Third Culture Kids, and offers well-researched advice on how to manage an international expatriate life and its consequences.

Third Culture Kids (TCKs) were first identified and studied in the 1960s by Ruth Useem who focussed on the psychological deficits of children growing up in an international context. This book characterises Third Culture Kids as not wholly deficient, but possessing both positive and negative attributes. In this, Pollock and Van Reken are in agreement with contemporary researchers such as David Willis, Mary Langford, Barbara Schaetti and Michael Gerner.

A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is defined by Pollock and Van Reken (1999) as:

...a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experiences, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background. (p.19)

Third Culture Kids are described as typically highly-skilled both interpersonally and interculturally, flexible, adaptable, empathic and high achievers academically. At the same time they typically suffer from rootlessness, unresolved grief, insecurity and a difficulty in relating to settled individuals and communities in the 'home' culture. Due to high international mobility of many expatriate families, some may spend their entire childhood lives in acculturation or adaptation contexts, learning the cultures of new schools and communities before moving on to the next posting.

Their identity is not primarily with their 'home' culture – since they may have never lived there - nor with the 'host' culture, but rather with a newly evolving 'third culture'; a global transculture – an international diaspora of globally mobile expatriates. They typically enjoy a privileged expatriate lifestyle supported by the sponsoring organisation, expect to be repatriated at some future time, and identify with the 'system' (missionary organisation, military, government, international company). They are often raised in a context where culturally and physically they are distinct from the host nationals.

Unlike short-term sojourners, many are second or even third generation 'international' people, who are likely to spend only brief periods in their passport country, usually for tertiary study before returning 'overseas' to take up 'international' careers. Many families choose to live their lives indefinitely away from their passport homes or countries of origin. Many more are cross-cultural, bilingual and/or bi-national.

The book is written primarily for Third Culture Kids, and for the parents, families, teachers, caregivers, counsellors and managers of cross-cultural organisations who need to understand them. It is written in a conversational style, addressed directly to the reader, and

richly illustrated with anecdotes drawn from the authors' professional work and from the lived experience of TCKs.

The authors are both practitioners who have been at the forefront of work to support Third Culture Kids through workshops in international schools, communities, missionary, military and business organisations, and through publications, email networks and research. Since 1986 Dr. Pollock has been on the faculty of Houghton College in New York as the Director of Intercultural Programs (1986-1992) and adjunct sociology instructor in Intercultural Studies (1986-present). He is best known, however, for his workshops in international schools and communities throughout the world. Ruth Van Reken, herself a TCK, has been writing and speaking on the personal, spiritual and religious dimensions of TCKs for twenty years.

The book is divided into two sections: (1) The Third Culture Kid Experience and (2) Maximising the Benefits. It includes an appendix detailing the results of a survey of TCK mobility conducted by the authors. Comparing the differences in separation patterns between older and younger adult-TCKs, they conclude that it is the cycles of separation and loss that affect TCKs not merely the longevity or amount of mobility. The book also concludes with a useful Bibliography and Resources section.

Two realities are described as shaping the Third Culture Kid's life: being raised in a genuinely cross-cultural world, and being raised in a highly mobile world. Having defined the third culture experience in the first sub-section, the authors devote a chapter to each of these two realities. In the following sub-section, each of the key identified TCK traits is addressed in an empowering and helpful way through discussion of relevant challenges and benefits for each. These traits, identified through the extensive work conducted with TCKs by the authors and illustrated in the words of TCKs themselves, include: an expanded worldview combined with

confused loyalties, adaptability, decisiveness, rootlessness, restlessness, difficulty with commitment in personal relationships, uneven maturity and unresolved grief. TCKs are typically highly skilled cross-culturally, socially, and linguistically.

The book relies heavily on the use of anecdote to illustrate and inform the analysis. This is both its greatest strength and weakness. It is difficult to find a strong theoretical or empirical basis for many of the assertions and much of the analysis. On the other hand, the liberal use of anecdote and story, which allows for the voices of subjects to speak directly to the reader, provides a basis both for the authors' conclusions and for the reader to build a personal and theoretical picture.

A further weakness, from the perspective of this reviewer, is the USA-bias in the text. Whilst the authors are careful to include a range of perspectives, national and cultural, nonetheless a tacit assumption that the TCK experience is predominately the experience of Americans abroad pervades the text. More significantly, the concept of the Third Culture Kid deserves critical analysis, which is not found in this book. Does the global expatriate community deserve to be termed a culture? Is it a real culture or a thin overlay on deeper traditional cultures? Is the third culture construct as real and meaningful for Europeans and Asians, for example, as for North Americans? The tendency of 'new world' North American theorists to homogenize, to seek a unifying one-world vision, has been contrasted by some with an 'old world' European preference for diversity and divergence. These questions and issues are not seriously addressed in the book.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, this book is an important contribution to a field of growing importance. It is relevant to teachers, students, counselors and managers of international schools and organizations which touch the lives of international expatriate families and is

currently the clearest, most accessible and best organized text available on this topic. It is of special value to Third Culture Kids and their families, affirming their identity as TCKs and providing a conceptual framework to help make sense of that identity, speaking directly to the unique experiences - the challenges and benefits - that characterize their lives.

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