

Immigrants, Third Culture Kids or International children: Is it about class, race, nationality or something else?

Dr. Mari Korpela

Academy research fellow

Tampere University, Finland

mari.korpela@tuni.fi

Transnationally mobile families

- Increasing numbers of transnationally mobile families
- Blue collar migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, expatriates etc.

- **expatriate:**

a person who lives outside their native country

- colonial history
 - class and race
 - Sarah Kunz (2023)



Expatriate childhood: Children's experiences of temporary migration

(2019-2024, Research Council of Finland)

8-15-year-old expatriate children in Finland

- position in Finland and on the global arena
- belonging
- everyday lives in Finland
- Ethnographic project



A Third Culture Kid

“A person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years [before the age of 18] outside the parents’ culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any” (Pollock & Van Reken 1999, 13).

- diplomats, military personnel, missionaries, managers in international corporations etc.
- Relatively well-off
- Voluntary mobility
- Temporary stays
- **a problematic analytic term but a popular self-identification tool**



TCK characteristics

- open-mindedness, adaptiveness, flexibility, multicultural skills, passion for diversity, ability to see other points of view etc.
- restlessness, rootlessness, loneliness, depression, repeated feelings of grief when leaving etc.

• **Future global elite**



TCK literature topics

- Belonging & identity
- Reverse culture shock
- Shifting identities
- Flexibility
- Friendships
- International schools



TCKs or migrants?

- Immigrants stay, TCKs leave (or not)
- Race: are all TCKs white?
- class
 - The TCK **privilege** seldom discussed
 - **Diversity** among TCK families and among "migrant" families
 - TCK literature prioritises ***location-based identities***
 - Ignores the changing world



Transnationally Mobile Children

- separate literature strengthens the division
 - **Patronising** attitudes towards “unprivileged child migrants”
 - **praising** attitudes towards “Third Culture Kids”
- children leaving their home countries always face challenges of rupture and transition
- Adults’ or children’s views?
- Terms and categories help but also limit our understandings: researchers should **explore beyond restricting terminology**

