A CQR Exploration of Career Development in Repatriated, Missionary Kids

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Method

Introduction

Third Culture Kids (TCK; TCK World, The Official Home of Third Culture Kids, n.d.) are individuals who have spent a significant portion of their developmental years in a culture/country that is different from their parents’. Within this group are children of international missionaries (MKs, missionary kids). Issues related to acculturative stress associated with re-entry into their home country has been researched from a variety of theoretical perspectives and are well-documented (e.g., Andrews, 1995; Huff, 2001; Priest, 2003). For example, Klemens and Bikos (2009), reported that repatriated college-age children of international missionaries (MKs, missionary kids) had lower levels of psychological well-being, and that this was mediated by level of sociocultural adaptation to the U.S. Results from a subsequent qualitative investigation of young adult, repatriated children of international missionaries (Bikos et al., 2009) documented strengths and challenges in the repatriation experiences within three domains of (a) adjusting to the home country, (b) MK identity and personal growth, and (c) support systems.

Because researchers (Bikos et al., 2009; Wrobbel & Plueddemann, 1990) have recommended that future investigators attend to age-related developmental tasks facing repatriating MKs, the purpose of our work was to use qualitative research methods to explore post-secondary educational vocational identity, career self-efficacy, and career decision-making within a sample of college-aged, U.S. repatriated, MKs.

Participants

In a manner consistent with CQR guidelines for sample size (Hill et al., 2005, 2012; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997) we recruited and interviewed 11 participants through advertisements sent to individuals and organizations (e.g., faculty and staff at Christian colleges and universities; the student organization dedicated to supporting MKs, Nu Kappa) known to have contact with potential participants. Inclusion criteria included: 18-25 years of age, citizen of the U.S., currently repatriated to the U.S., and must have spent a minimum of 1 year of high school in an international setting. Our participants ranged in age from 19-23. Their mean age of repatriation to the U.S. was 17.5. Fifty-eight percent of our participants were female and 67% self-reported their race/ethnicity as Caucasian (the remainder self-reported as multi-ethnic/multi-national). On average, our participants spent 12.67 years abroad and attended 2.28 different schools or school types.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the interviews utilizing the Consensual Qualitative Research approach (Hill et al., 2005). While utilizing a start list of questions to begin each interview, we encouraged the participants to shape the course of the conversation, sharing anything they felt was important to share. This allowed us to develop a rich, multi-angled perspective of their experience.

Results

Our resulting CQR frequency table is a 3 X 3 matrix of domains organized by (a) the triadic elements of cognitive-personal variables, contextual barriers and supports, and overt behaviors and (b) the temporal elements of past, present, and future. Within these 8 domains were 40 categories with the frequency descriptors “general,” “typical,” “variant,” and “rare.” Exemplar “typical” themes included “impactful exposure/experience to host culture” (from the environment/past domain), “working towards career goals/drive” (from the overt behaviors/present domain), and “driven to make a difference (helping others)” (from the cognitive-personal/future domain). An unexpected emergent theme was pervasive throughout the entire 3 X 3 matrix (i.e., represented by units of data in all domains) was the presence of “faith.” Consequently, in a secondary analysis of statements that contained reference to elements of faith, spirituality, or religiosity, we identified four categories.

In light of the data, our team proposes a revision of the triadic model of reciprocity specific to this faith-based community to include the presence of faith. Our conceptualization is multidimensional. That is, we suggest that faith intersects the environmental/contextual variables, personal attributes, and overt behaviors in ways that are unexpected and unique.

We believe that information gained from these interviews will assist in designing subsequent quantitative investigations and will provide more information about the career-related needs of repatriating college-aged MKs to the individuals and organizations who prepare them for repatriation (e.g., parents, teachers, international schools) and who receive them once they arrive in the U.S. (e.g., universities and colleges).

Discussion

References