CULTURAL LONGING & LOSS

An Arts-Based Inquiry of the Experience of Cultural Identity for Female Adult Transracial Adoptees (ATRAs) and Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs)

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Introduction to Our Project

Auto-ethnography
A research approach that uses personal ("auto") experience to create a representation ("graphy") of cultural ("ethno") experiences, social expectations, and shared beliefs, values, and practices" (Adams & Holman Jones, 2018).

Arts-Based Research
A "species of qualitative research" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 11), that utilises the creative and artistic process to systematically identify and examine the nuances of human behaviour and experience and give them form

Adult Transracial Adoptee
A person of one ethnic or racial group who, as a child, was legally placed with adoptive parents, caregivers or guardians of another ethnic or racial group (Baden et al, 2012).

Adult Third Culture Kid
An adult who spent at least one year of their childhood living in a country that was different to their parents' country of origin (Pollock et al., 2017).
Additional Definitions

**Cultural Identity**
An individual’s embodiment of beliefs, language, “traditional knowledge, and practices of their heritage country or society” (Hodgins et al., 2016, p.346).

**Longing**
Longing is akin to Bowlby’s “yearning/searching” stage of grief; that is, “anger is seen as an intelligible constituent of the urgent though fruitless effort of a bereaved person is making to restore the bond that has been severed. So long as anger continues, it seems, loss is not being accepted as permanent and hope is still lingering on” (Bowlby, 1998, p.91).

**Loss**
Loss in this project is understood through the lens of grief: “The term generally applied to the internal emotional or affective reaction to loss, most typically of a loved one through death, but it could be from other tangible, symbolic or psychosocial losses, or even threats of losses” (Everly & Lating, 2019, p. 523).
Justification

Capture Lived Experience

Help Services

Lack of Research
Adoptees are **over-represented** in therapy.

Most adoptees seek help for **intimacy issues instead** of identity issues or their adoption.

A lack of training makes some therapists miss or discount the impact of adoption in the ATRA’s life.

ATCKs might struggle with **underlying and unidentified** cultural imbalances.

TCKs often **present during transition** (a move, starting university).

A lack of awareness of the impact and patterns in the TCK experience prevent some therapists from providing adequate support.

References: Bushong, 2013; Charman, 2020; Elovainio et al., 2012; Fall et al., 2012; Pearson et al., 2007; Pollock et al., 2017; Reyka, 2019; Zamostny et al., 2003
Sasson and Barghout arts-based explorations into the themes of cultural identity and belonging.
Methodology

◦ **Frameworks**
  ◦ Autoethnography
  ◦ Arts-Based Research

◦ **What did we do?**
  ◦ Replicated the study with other female ATRA and ATCK participants
  ◦ Collected 2 data sets
    ◦ Recorded Interviews
      ◦ In-person and online
    ◦ Collage Making
      ◦ Used Knill’s Aesthetic Analysis Process to capture the participant’s interpretation

Data Collection & Analysis

- **Data Collection**
  - Audio / Transcript
    - Otter
  - Video
    - Microsoft Teams (online)
    - Video camera in person
  - Collages along with participant’s descriptions

- **Data Analysis (ongoing)**
  - Using NVivo
    - Transcripts
    - Collages
  - Coding
  - Emergent Themes

ATRA Participant Collages
ATCK Participant Collages
ATRA’s Cultural Identity Experience
Sub-Themes of the Overlapping Experiences Among ATRAs and ATCKs
Codes, Themes & Subthemes

**ATRAs**
- Lack of support post-adoption
- Erasing the past
- Feeling “colonised”
- Anger towards adoption
- Ongoing journey of self-understanding
- Expected to be happy

**ATCKs**
- Constantly moving
- Impact of COVID
- Seeing patterns in family
- Patterns in younger TCKs
- Living internationally
- Grateful for experience

**Identity**
- Not Fitting In

**Belonging & Connection**
- Language

**Grief & Loss**
- Ongoing journey of self-understanding
- Erasing the past
- Feeling “colonised”
Theme 1: Identity

“Yea, when you’re a young person, and you’re trying to establish identity and pathway... to then have to find your roots... On top, is not your responsibility...you get that in a biological family, you actually get that from your families. So be a family... Go give them that history without making them go and do it for themselves...”
- ATRA Participant

“I felt like ... my identity is honestly ... to me it's like a whole thing ... it's very interconnected. Like, I, I don't see it as being separated.” - ATCK Participant
Theme 2: Not Fitting In

“I always, this sounds very silly but every time I look in the mirror... It’s like a percentage of me that’s surprised that I’m Asian... I expect to see a, white person even though I know I’m not white.” - ATRA Participant

“I don’t feel like I really fit in anywhere like that I think has probably been a theme in my life, for a very long time.” - ATCK Participant
Theme 3: Belonging & Connection

“I think for me ... a big part of it was going back to Vietnam, absorbing myself in the actual country and culture, and ... opening myself up to how the Vietnamese culture ... how the people are, how they do things how they see things ... there's just so much to culture that we don't really know how to unpack it well and there's certainly nothing as a resource that I'm aware of in Australia.” - ATRA Participant

“...there's just some level of understanding, and almost like immediate acceptance that being a TCK brings kind of an acknowledgment of this isn't an easy thing to be” - ATCK Participant
Theme 4: Language

“I feel really sad that it’s something I’ve lost, I can’t speak it, I’m just guessing that it’s Hindi…but I’ve had people listen to the tape, who knows Hindi and Urdu, lots of different kinds of dialects, but no one can recognize what it is. So I’m wondering if it’s like one of these smaller sites, presuming India has so many different dialects, so I’m thinking maybe could be like a smaller dialect.”

- ATRA Participant

“Music, food, and just like people, those are all things that I’ve always maintained. Like speaking Spanish, wanting to be in community with Spanish speakers. … [When] we came back to the US and I was like in elementary school and I was like, Why does no one else speak Spanish? Or like any other languages?”

- ATCK Participant
Theme 5: Grief & Loss

“but living without your culture is really, it feels like you’ve lost something. If you have this constant feeling of loss and longing for something but you don't know what you're longing for. And I don't really have any Indian people in my life that I can really ask these things.” - ATRA Participant

“It is not the way how I will connect to [a holiday in Thailand], but I am fully aware that this is the way that I will have to relate to the people around me when they're talking about Thailand. So, if I want to connect with them, this is the kind of image that I have to present.”

- ATCK Participant
Outcomes

- Current findings indicate a potential shared journey of cultural identification which all ATRAs and ATCKs oscillate between Recognition, Rejection, Embracing, and Integration of identity.

_Barghout and Sasson, 2021_
What does it all mean?

- **Participants’ Lived Experiences**
  - Understand what they go through
  - Identify overlaps

- **Who is this study useful for?**
  - People working cross-culturally
  - Other TRAs and TCKs
  - People who care for TRAs and TCKs

- **Potential Directions for Future Research**
  - Link with existing theories and practices (McDonald, 2010; Sue & Sue, 2008)
  - Diverse population subsets (Gambhir & Rhein, 2021; Pollock et al., 2017; Tanu, 2016; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009)
  - Minority Stress Model (Shipherd et al., 2019)

Barghout, 2020
References


References, cont’d.


References, cont’d.


Reyka, J. (2019). Treatment Considerations For Adoption-related Complex Trauma (Publication No. 337) [Doctoral dissertation, National Louis University] Digital Commons@NLU


