CAMD Scholar Project

Third Culture Kids
Global Nomads in Search of a Home

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Self Introduction, Motivations for Pursuing this Project, and Project Introduction

During the past 17 years of my life, I have lived in distinct cultures around the world. Born in Seoul, Korea, I was on a plane to Nashville, Tennessee by the age of four, just when I started to learn to read. Living in Tennessee for three years while my father attended Law School at Vanderbilt University, I picked up a slight Southern accent as well as a love for country music. However, by the time I finished the first grade, I was off again, following my family to Bethesda, Maryland, for my dad’s new job. In Maryland, I lost all traces of my former accent and developed a new liking for the state’s signature dish: the blue crab. Becoming a part of my elementary school’s newspaper club, basketball team, television show, and drama team, I, along with my parents, established strong ties to our community. Attending birthday parties, block parties, and potlucks every other week, I was absolutely shocked during the summer of my fifth grade when my parents informed me that we were moving yet again: this time across the world.

Just when I was starting to feel comfortable, my parents shook up my world, telling me that we were going to move to Hong Kong, a place that I could not even locate on the map. Yet again, we took all of our belongings and trotted across the globe. The strange street aromas soon became familiar, and Hong Kong became my new home, with its tall skyscrapers, bright lights, and delectable dim sum. Attending an international school for my entire middle school career, I decided to apply to boarding school for high school. Before I knew it, at the beginning of my ninth grade year, I was lugging my suitcases again, but this time, to Andover, Massachusetts to attend Phillips Academy.
Moving every three to four years, my life has been anything but settled. I did not notice it when I was younger, but by the time I was in the second grade, I realized that I did not truly belong to one specific place: I knew I was not fully a part of Korea, Tennessee, or Maryland. By the time I moved to Hong Kong, I felt truly disconnected from any one identity. When anyone asked me the simple question, “where are you from?” or, “where is your home?” I always ended up feeling confused, conflicted, and unsure of myself. These feelings of rootlessness prompted me to further explore multiculturalism. Through discussions with my advisors in my high school’s Community and Multicultural Development Office during my sophomore year, I became aware of a phenomenon called “Third Culture Kids” (TCKs) or “global nomads.”

Through research, I learned that there was a whole community of people like me all around the world, living cross cultural lives with high mobility. I went through a process of self-discovery, and once I knew that I was a TCK, I felt more empowered as an individual, for I felt connected to a community of thousands just like me.¹ I could identify with the numerous qualities of TCKs and developed a deeper understanding of why I am the way I am. For the first time, I learned that it was normal to experience the feelings I was having: a whole community of TCKs always felt a little different from those around them.² After I learned about this new culture that I could identify with, my uprooted sense of myself became more grounded in a global identity. Through the CAMD Scholar Project, I aim to further explore my own cross cultural identity while raising awareness about the “Third Culture Kid” phenomenon to help both global nomads and monocultural people first understand, and second, support Third Culture Kids.

¹ Tina L. Quick, The Global Nomad’s Guide To University Transition (London: Summertime, 2010), 9
TCK Introduction

As globalization is occurring at an ever-accelerating rate, affecting virtually all aspects of modern life, the topic of “Third Culture Kids” inevitably arises.³ So, what exactly is a “Third Culture Kid?” As was defined by David Pollock, a prominent American sociologist, author, and leader in this field, Third Culture Kids (TCKs) are “[children who spend] a significant period of their developmental years outside their parents’ passport culture.”⁴ Although TCKs have been around since the earliest human migrations, it has only been a few decades since language and a name has been given to this experience.⁵

History of the TCK Definition

In the 1950s, two social scientists, Ruth Hill Useem and John Useem, coined the term “third culture” after making their second yearlong trip in 1958 to India to study the American expatriate community of missionaries, foreign-service officers, educators, and businesspeople.⁶ There, the sociologists discovered that although each specific expatriate community had their own distinctive characteristics, all of the groups were ultimately closely interlocked in the way that they preferred to spend time with other expatriates, regardless of dissimilar cultures or nationalities.⁷ This realization allowed the Useems to see that the expatriates in India formed a new international lifestyle, creating a culture different from that of either their home or host

³ Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco and Desirée Qin-Hilliard, Globalization: Culture and Education in the New Millennium (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 3
⁷ Shah, Club Expat, 5
culture. Specific to the particular setting, the expatriates created an “interstitial culture,” or a “culture between cultures.”

Therefore, after intensive research and analysis, the social scientists defined the three separate cultures that expatriates were exposed to: the first culture (home or passport culture), the second culture (host culture), and the third culture (the interstitial culture and lifestyle shared by the community of expatriates) [Refer to Figure 1]. The children who accompanied their parents into this “interstitial culture,” integrating aspects of their passport culture, new host culture, as well as the unique “third culture,” became known as “Third Culture Kids” (TCKs). The Useems ultimately related that these TCK’s “sense of belonging” was found, not in their home or host culture, but “with others who share the experience of living outside their passport culture.”

As studies continued about this phenomenon, authors David Pollack and Ruth Van Reken, a TCK herself, created an expanded definition of the TCK for the modern day, as:

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8 Pollock and Van Reken, Third Culture Kids, Revised edition, 14
10 Pollock and Van Reken, Third Culture Kids, Revised edition, 16
A person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture. The TCK builds relationships to all cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background.\(^{11}\)

Through this definition, the authors aimed to establish the two significant realities that are ever present in a TCK’s life. First, the TCKs are raised “in a genuinely cross-cultural world.” By actually living in diverse cultural settings instead of analyzing or watching from afar, TCKs “move back and forth between their passport and host cultures.” Second, the TCKs are raised in “a highly mobile world.” Unlike immigrants, TCKs have the unique experience of constantly packing up and leaving, changing their lives and their backdrops every few years. Furthermore, the two authors saw numerous unique commonalities in the third culture community, such as “expected repatriation,” “distinct differences” in both physical appearances or thoughts from those around them, “system identity,” and, often, depending on the circumstances, a “privileged lifestyle.”\(^{12}\)

**TCK Visibility and Awareness**

One may ask: If TCKs have been around since the beginning of human history, why have they been so under the radar? It has only been recently that this phenomenon has become largely visible, and sociologists state three main reasons for this.

First, it has only been in the past few decades that the number of TCKs has significantly increased. As transportation and communication have vastly improved all over the world in the latter half of the 20\(^{th}\) century, more people have taken interest in international careers. As a result,

\(^{11}\) Sand-Hart, *Home Keeps Moving*, 21
\(^{12}\) Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids, Revised edition*, 18
more children are following their parents to overseas assignments. Unlike the days of the adventurous explorers, the pioneer missionaries, or the colonial governors, where overseas travel was accompanied by great risks of disease, exhaustion, and dangers, now, a trip from one end of the globe to the other takes a mere day, international schools are in almost every corner of the world, and hospitals are always just “an airlift away.” Therefore, parents find very little reason to embark upon their transnational journeys alone, which has dramatically increased TCK numbers to around 200 million worldwide.  

Second, TCK presence has grown stronger. Through the use of many social networking sites, blogs, and web chat rooms, as well as the rising prominence of many global nomads, TCKs’ public voice has grown louder and stronger. Through Facebook groups and blog sites, such as tckid.com or tckworld.com, “TCK” has become a “visible, identifiable group.” Furthermore, world renowned TCK politicians, celebrities, authors, and athletes have become more vocal about their experiences. One especially vital source of TCK awareness has been the election of President Barack Obama, the current President of the United States. Born in Hawaii, raised in Indonesia, and later growing up in Chicago, Obama put a spotlight on multi-cultural lifestyles.

Third, the TCK’s importance has greatly increased. In this globalizing age, many believe that “the TCK experience is a microcosm of what is fast becoming normal throughout the world.” Sociologist Ted Ward claimed in 1984 that “[TCKs were] the prototype citizens of the future.” This future that Ward predicted is quickly approaching, as even now, it is extremely difficult to find a completely homogenous community in the world. Multiculturalism is fast

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becoming the norm rather than the exception, and as evident through the lives of many famous
TCKs such as Barack Obama, the TCK world can provide helpful guides to new patterns of
“global cultural mixing.”

TCK Groups

Although TCKs share commonalities and experiences, they come from a spectrum of
different sponsorship groups. Traditional TCK groups, according to the research of Van Reken,
include “foreign-service kids,” “corporate brats,” “missionary kids,” and “military brats.”
Through Ruth Useem’s research, data shows that before World War II, approximately 66% of
TCKs came from missionary families and around 16% came from business related families
(Refer to Figure 2). However, after the war acted as a catalyst in globalization, the composition
of international families have changed, and now, sociologists estimate the breakdown of TCKs to
be roughly 17 % missionary, 16% business, 23% government, 30% military, and 14% "other”
(See Figure 3). Within these groups, there lie potential differences as well as threads of
similarities.

14 Pollock and Van Reken, Third Culture Kids, Revised edition, 5
As expected, TCKs from different sponsoring organizations are unalike in numerous ways and have sector-specific phenomena. While the children of overseas foreign-service workers may feel obligated to represent their “flag” or country, the children of missionaries often have a “God overlay” in their lives, while the TCKs from military bases overseas may have an instilled “duty and service over desire” attitude. Different variables, such as “length of stay, degree of contact with host nationals, the size of both the sponsoring and expatriate communities, and the willingness of parents to encourage their children to engage the culture and its people” also contend the intensity of the third culture experience.

Foreign Service Kids

Referring to the children of parents who work “full-time with the forces in a posting abroad” in non-military government positions, the “Foreign Service brat” often lives abroad for extended periods of time in the diplomatic corps or near military bases. According to sociologist Dr. Ann Baker Cotrell, more than 44% of these TCKs have lived in more than four different countries, and around 44% have lived abroad for more than ten years. Foreign Service Kids are among the most cross cultural TCK groups.

Missionary Kids

Known as the TCK subset group that spends the most time overseas, with the most contact with the local population as well as the host culture, Dr. Cotrell cites that 72% of “Missionary Kids” live in only one foreign country and more than 85% spend more than

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16 Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids, Revised edition*, 34
19 Cotrell, "Educational and Occupational Choices of American ATCKs," 230
ten years overseas. Although missionary kids were predominantly American citizens, recently, other countries, most specifically South Koreans missionaries, are growing in number.²⁰

**Military Brats**

The children of “active-duty military personnel,” military brats are the most mobile of TCKs. According to Dr. Cotrell, they spend an average of seven years growing up abroad and 59% spend more than 5 years overseas. Due to the unique military culture of self sufficiency that they live in, they have the least interaction with the host culture. Currently, military brats are one of the most studied TCK groups.²¹

**Corporate Brats**

Many times cited as the most privileged of TCKs, “corporate brats” are often from oil families, international businesses, or pharmaceutical companies. Through Dr. Cotrell’s research, she found that around 63% of these children of international businesspeople spent at least ten years in foreign countries.²² Similar to the missionary kids, these TCKs often have continued interaction with the local culture.²³

However, looking beyond these differences and seeing the TCK groups as a whole, researchers have seen significant ties between the distinctive sectors. As defined earlier, the cross cultural, mobile TCKs are extremely similar in the way that they are often very different from their peers in terms of looks and perspectives, live under the general presumption that they will

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²⁰ Cotrell, "Educational and Occupational Choices of American ATCKs," 231
²¹ Cotrell, "Educational and Occupational Choices of American ATCKs," 253
²³ Cotrell, "Educational and Occupational Choices of American ATCKs," 231
return to their “home” culture after an extended period time in their “host” culture, historically have been part of an elitist community with special privileges, and take on “representational roles” for their sponsoring agencies. 24

Whether they are the children of diplomats, missionaries, or military officers, TCKs often experience the perks and entitlements of overseas living, bestowed by their sponsoring organizations: including use of the PX or commissary [retail stores or malls that operate all over the world in US military stations that provide everything from movie theaters, to fast food chains, to brand name stores], chauffeurs, domestic service personnel, or world-wide travel.25 Living all around the world, many TCKs truly live a privileged lifestyle. On the other hand, despite their different environmental settings, each group, historically, has also had to deal with the pressures of their sponsoring organization. Often placed in situations where they were “representing something greater than themselves- be it their government, their company, or God,” TCKs were

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24 Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids, Revised edition*, 18
urged to meet the “various social or behavioral expectations of the organizational system.”

Although not as strict as it was in the past, this “system identity” persists today, and many times, if TCKs’ behavior does not reflect the values of the sponsoring organization, it might put their parents’ job at risk. Furthermore, all groups of TCKs were noted to face similar experiences of reverse culture shock during their repatriation process.

The TCK Experience

Due to the high mobility of TCKs, sociologists generally categorize the TCK experience into five classic transition stages: “involvement, leaving, transition, entering, reinvolvement.”

Involvement Stage

First, TCKs take part in the “involvement stage.” In this period, TCKs do not even realize that this is a “transition” stage. Often times an “intimate part of [the] community,” the TCKs feel safe and settled. They know the cultural codes, feel a responsibility to be involved with different aspects of the society, and know that they belong within the community. On the flip side, others in the community also feel comfortable with the TCKs. As sociologist Van Reken said, “People hear [the TCK’s] name and instantly picture [their] face and form.” The TCK and his or her family have an established reputation, history, and social standing in this period of the cycle. They are mainly focused on the present rather than worrying about the past or future.

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26 Pollock and Van Reken, Third Culture Kids, Revised edition, 16
27 Marion Knell, Burn-Up or Splash Down: Surviving the Culture Shock of Re-Entry (Tyrone, GA: Authentic, 2007), 10
29 Knell, Burn-up or Splash Down, 10
Leaving Stage

Then comes the “leaving stage.” This is when TCKs realize that their life will begin to change. Characterized by detachment and denial, it is during this stage that TCKs start to loosen relational ties and relinquish their responsibilities. Starting anywhere from 6 months to a few weeks before the actual move, this stage often causes the most anger and frustration for both TCKs and those around them.31 Calling friends less frequently or refusing to start new projects, TCKs often partake in numerous “self protective denials” including the denial of “feelings of sadness or grief,” “feelings of rejection,” “unfinished business,” and expectations. 32

Transition Stage

The third stage of the cycle is the “transition stage.” Marked by chaos, this stage begins the moment TCKs leave one place and decide to settle in another. In a completely new setting, with a new schedule and new responsibilities, many TCKs and their families live “temporarily dysfunctional” lives, losing all of their normal support systems and falling into self-centeredness, worrying about their own well being over the welfare of others.33 Often, parents, concerned with the countless issues that follow a transition, overlook the insecurities of their children, forgetting to read, play, or even pick up their kids from school. This is often a tense time, for both TCKs and their parents, for they must relearn the communal codes and behaviors almost from scratch. This period of initial transition can create a “severe loss of self esteem” for TCKs, who frequently believe they “should have known better” in embarrassing situations. 34

32 Pollock and Van Reken, Third Culture Kids, Revised edition, 67
33 Knell, Burn-up or Splash Down, 12
34 Pollock and Van Reken, Third Culture Kids, Revised edition, 69
Entering Stage

The next step is the “entering stage,” or the readjusting stage.\textsuperscript{35} Although still vulnerable and uncertain, TCKs during the entering stage feel more settled and accept their surroundings. They begin to feel like they are “finally getting it.”\textsuperscript{36} However, this is a stage filled with ambivalence, as well, for one day, a TCK may be able to help when someone asks for directions, and feel like they are finally becoming normal again, but fall apart into homesickness the very next day, when they make a cultural mistake, such as being scolded for speaking too loudly or wearing “inappropriate” clothing.\textsuperscript{37} Although emotions fluctuate, this is the stage that hope begins to grow of true belonging in the host community. TCKs start to reach out to friends, mentors, and their new surroundings.\textsuperscript{38}

Reinvolvevement Stage

The last stage in the cycle is the “reinvolvevement stage.” During this stage, the TCK finally feels like they belong in the community. They develop a feeling of intimacy with the new culture and establish their standing in the community. Simultaneously, those around the TCKs see them as a part of their group, knowing the TCK’s reputation, history, and interests. Although the TCK may not feel like they are “native” to the community, they still feel like they belong. As Tina Quick, founder of International Family Transitions, cross-cultural trainer, and international

\textsuperscript{35} Quick, \textit{The Global Nomad’s Guide}, 29
\textsuperscript{36} Shah, \textit{Club Expat}, 25
\textsuperscript{37} Shah, \textit{Club Expat}, 30
\textsuperscript{38} Quick, \textit{The Global Nomad’s Guide}, 29
speaker says, “[TCKs] can now call this new place ‘home.’” This stage, as David Pollock describes, is the “light at the end of the proverbial tunnel.”

Although this transition model can apply to all children adjusting to college life or employees entering into a new job, the defining distinction with TCKs is the aspect of high mobility which leads to “frequent and repeated cycles” of these transition experiences. This cycle is intensified and some TCKs “soar through” while others “lose their bearings.” Moving overseas, sometimes every one to two years, many TCKs undergo “chronic cycles of mobility,” which inevitably leads to greater and more frequent losses of homes, friends, and responsibilities. Some TCKs do not even have enough time to go through the “entering stage,” let alone finish the “reinvolvement stage” because of their high mobility. Moreover, as these children move to foreign countries, they experience the stress of “culture shock” on top of the stress of any transition experience. Consequently, many TCKs, unlike the average person, often carry with them “unresolved grief” from these intense and frequent transitions, which can lead to debilitating expressions of anger, depression, withdrawal, rebellion, vicarious grief, and delayed grief.

The TCK Identity

As a result of the nature of their cross cultural and mobile lives, TCKs often experience the paradoxical situation of being so “profoundly connected yet simultaneously disconnected to
people and places around the world.”

Therefore, as identity often forms from the influences around us, TCKs have a very different identity development than people who have grown up in one culture.

When asked the question, “Who are you?” many people, even if they have lived in cross cultural settings during adulthood, have a clear answer: I am an American, Korean, German, or South African. There is no hesitation. They have an established “basic value system, sense of identity, and core relationships with family and friends in their home culture”: they know who they are where they are from. However, the case is different for third culture kids.

TCKs are by definition people who live cross culturally “during their developmental years.” Experiencing true multiculturalism during the point in time when a child forms their “sense of identity, relationships with others, and view of the world,” the TCK identity development is complex and different from their monocultural peers. These global nomads’ lives are planted in, rooted to, and watered by the third culture experience.

Traditional Identity Development

While growing up, at some point, everyone faces the need to answer the question Who am I? and Where do I belong? As Pollock and Van Reken point out, most people facing these questions, especially children, find their answers mirrored through their family and community. They can see their own image reflected in this mirrored communal image, which establishes both their sense of personal identity as well as a group identity. This process of finding out and

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44 Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids, Revised edition*, 40
45 Knell, *Burn-up or Splash Down*, 81
46 Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids, Revised edition*, 22
47 Knell, *Burn-up or Splash Down*, 47
adopting an identity and culture has occurred in societies so naturally through the ages, that for
most people, they do not even realize that it is going on. Identity development is an unconscious
process.48

This adoption of culture, however, comes naturally for a reason. Paul Hiebert, a cultural
anthropologist, emphasizes that culture, a system of not only unified standards of external
behavior [how to appropriately dress, speak, and act like those around us] but also a code of
“shared concepts, beliefs, and values,” is ultimately learned- not instinctive. He explains that
culture is “something caught from, as well as taught by, the surrounding environment and passed
from one generation to the next.” Therefore, as Pollock states, from the moment one is born, he
or she is unconsciously learning the culture of his or her community. Spoken to, dressed, and
taught manners in the particular way that is “right” in the society, one continually affirms beliefs
of how “life is approached and lived” from those around them, ultimately internalizing these
practices and principles. After learning and accepting the culture, one develops their own identity
as well as a communal identity, which allows them to confidently grow into adulthood: these
individuals know exactly what is expected of them and have role models in the community of
similar ages that have formed a path that they can follow.49

David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken call this entire process of cultural internalization
“cultural balance”- the achievement of the developmental state which establishes a sense of
belonging and confidence: getting to the point where one has an “almost unconscious knowledge
of how things are and work in a particular community.”50 This subconscious understanding of a

48 Pollock and Van Reken, Third Culture Kids, 43
49 Pollock and Van Reken, Third Culture Kids, Revised edition, 45
50 Pollock and Van Reken, Third Culture Kids, Revised edition, 44
culture, “how things work, how to interact, what is funny and what is appropriate,” is extremely important for individuals because it gives them the freedom from conscious details.\textsuperscript{51} Instead of worrying excessively about what color to wear to any given business event, those in cultural balance who already internalized the customs and underlying assumptions of the community can spend their energies socializing and developing new business strategies during that time. As Pollock states, “Being ‘in the know’ gives us a sense of stability, deep security, and belonging.”\textsuperscript{52}

Therefore for jet set globe trotters, in a world of continuous changes of cultures, cultural balance is difficult to achieve. As one plane ride can completely upturn complete sets of expectations, behaviors, languages, and worldviews, TCKs may feel perpetually “out of sync.” Authors Pollock and Van Reken comment:

While peers in their new (and old) community are internalizing the rules of culture and beginning to move out with budding confidence, TCKs are still trying to figure out what the rules are. They aren’t free to explore their personal gifts and talents because they are still preoccupied with what is or isn’t appropriate behavior.\textsuperscript{53}

Due to the cross cultural and highly mobile realities that underlie their lives, TCKs may not have the chance to comfortably experience traditional developments of identity: many suggest that TCKs have alternative forms of identity development.

\textsuperscript{52} Pollock and Van Reken, \textit{Third Culture Kids, Revised edition}, 44
\textsuperscript{53} Barringer, Carolyn Fox. "Counseling Third Culture Kids." Annual Conference of the American Counseling Association in 2000. ERDS.
TCK Identity Development

Dr. Barbara Schaetti, the Principal Consultant of Transition Dynamics, an “independent consultancy serving the international expatriate and repatriate community,” outlines five stages of TCK identity development. She says that TCKS go through a process of 1) pre-encounter, 2) encounter, 3) exploration, 4) integration, and 5) recycling to answer the question “Who am I?”

Pre-encounter

At this point in the TCKs’ life, they do not fully realize how different they are from their monocultural counterparts. So accustomed to their trans-cultural, itinerant lives, they believe that this “unusual but incredible” lifestyle is relatively normal. They are living life the only way they know how to, without realizing how much it is shaping who they are.

Encounter

Schaetti describes this stage as the “most profound, identity-shaking Encounter stage.” A stage that can be triggered by a number of different experiences, the encounter stage, both sudden and expected, powerfully opens TCKs’ eyes to see that they are really different from their peers. Forcing TCKs to become conscious of their dissimilarity, the encounter stage pushes TCKs into self reflection: the TCK truly contemplates who they are and where they belong.

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Often occurring after repatriation, this stage can be shattering to TCKs. They realize that the place they called home actually feels distant, strange, and foreign. They often say that they do not truly belong anywhere. This profound realization leads to their next stage: exploration.

**Exploration**

Trying to explore and understand why they feel and are so different from their peers, TCKs enter the exploration stage. During this time, the TCK delves into research about his or her identity, scouring the web, purchasing numerous books, and trying to find people like themselves, other global nomads. This stage can be as short as a few weeks to as long as a decade. In today’s technically advanced age, TCKs often join blogs, find support meetings, and discover a community where they feel they belong.57

**Integration**

The integration stage occurs the moment that a TCK comes to terms with his or her uniqueness. Tina Quick says that TCKs achieve “congruence (harmony)” “once [they] understand who they are and how their international life experiences shaped them.”58 Once this insight is realized, Dr Schaetti says TCKs go into the integration stage, a state of comfortableness with being different from their home culture peers. At this point of their identity

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57 Kate A. Walters, “A Story to Tell: The Identity Development of Women Growing Up as Third Culture Kids” (master’s thesis, Trinity Western University, 2006), 29
development, the TCK will choose either to “either embrace his or her life experiences and use them to strengthen his or her success or he or she will discard them as being irrelevant.”

**Recycling**

Schaetti states that TCKs will often have another profound, encounter moment that will, again, lead them to internal reflection. Although not as intense as the initial encounter experience, the TCK will engage again in their identity development stages. They will go through the steps again, from encounter, exploration, to integration.

**TCK Characteristics**

From their unique highly mobile experience and their distinctive identity development, TCKs develop numerous characteristics. Dr. Sheila J. Ramsey, a consultant to global nomads, notes four common themes in TCKs. In addition, Pollock and Van Reken reveal the common ways TCKs react to their experience. Furthermore, along their global journeys, TCKs pick up various practical skills.

**Common Themes**

First, Ramsey says “change” is a significant theme in the TCK life. Because of their mobility, they have to learn to be adaptable and flexible to constant changes of “location, friends, schools, and cultural experiences.” TCKs ultimately learn to “rely on change” and develop unique skills to adjust to their varying situations. The second theme she investigated was “relationships.” A common characteristic, according to Dr. Ramsey, is their ability to both make

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60 Barringer, "Counseling Third Culture Kids," 7
friends quickly while also adjusting to losing them just as quickly. This, she links, is a direct result of their transient lifestyle. Third, she relates that all TCKs seem to be similar in their expanded world view. While immersed overseas, TCKs come to learn about the “common fundamental humanness” that all people share, regardless of race, ethnicities, or cultures. Through their multicultural experiences, TCKs realize that it is possible to “maintain their own personal truth” while acknowledging that truths exist in different contexts, unconsciously becoming more understanding of other peoples’ beliefs. Therefore, a commonality between TCKs seems to be their strong sense of understanding, empathy, sympathy, and concern with others.61 Lastly, Ramsey states that a common TCK theme is their cultural marginality.62 Especially noted during their similar experiences of reverse culture shock during their repatriation process, TCKs feel as if they do not belong to one specific culture, which can make the TCK “feel at home nowhere.”63 This vulnerability is most prevalent through the encounter stage in Schaetti’s TCK identity development model. However, this cultural marginality can also allow TCKs to balance and internalize multiple cultures, giving them the powerful ability to grasp cultural understandings and insights imperceptible to monocultural people.64

As investigated by psychologists, these themes can have both positive and negative consequences for TCKs. Carolyn Fox Barringer, psychologist and counselor for TCKs, states

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61 Barringer, "Counseling Third Culture Kids," 8
63 Smith, Strangers at Home, 178
that only TCKs themselves can control the consequences of their multiculturalism by making use of their unique skills during adulthood.65

**Reactions to the TCK Experience**

David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken summarize three of the most common, characteristic reactions TCKs display as they experience their cross cultural lives. First, the authors group a quality of “chameleons- those who try to find a ‘same as’ identity.”66 These TCKs blend into their surroundings, hiding their differences. Conforming externally through the way they speak, dress, and behave, these TCKs are many times mistaken as native members of the specific community they are in. They camouflage all traces of their time lived in other places. These TCKs are often noted as having the fullest immersion into host cultures, participating fully in school and community events. However, some note that they live a double life, with a fear of being “found out.”

The second reaction group is on the other end of the spectrum: the “screamers- those who try to find a ‘different from’ identity.” These TCKs, often from the moment they meet someone, will project an “I am different from you and do not want to be you” attitude. They are often perceived as arrogant to those around them, and either cut themselves or are cut out of relationships with people from their host and home culture. Many “screamers” are noted to withdraw from their community, which often leads to “deep loneliness.” Intense evaluations of these TCKs reveal that their behavior is a coping mechanism to “keep true to themselves.” However, in their mission to proclaim their “true identity,” Pollock and Reken reveal that they

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65 Barringer, "Counseling Third Culture Kids," 9
66 Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids, Revised edition*, 57
just adopt an “anti-identity” and destroy numerous opportunities of the advantages and benefits of living a trans-cultural life, like friendships and cultural exchange.\textsuperscript{67}

Lastly, the TCK specialists name a group they call the “wallflowers- those who try to find a ‘non-identity.’” These TCKs do not like being the center of attention. They retreat to the sidelines rather than risk embarrassment or shame of not knowing the local cultural standards. Watching from afar, they do not engage actively in their community. Those with this characteristic reaction are most prone to fall into depression.\textsuperscript{68}

**Practical Skills**

TCKs are also known for their characteristic cross-cultural, social, and linguistic skills that result from their international lifestyle.

**Cross-cultural skills**

One of the greatest advantages of their distinct lifestyles, TCKs develop sensitivity to the deepest layers of cultures. They manifest true understanding of cultures outwardly, through their ability to switch between greeting bows, handshakes, to customary pecks on the check, as well as inwardly, through their ability to successively observe and connect with different groups of people. Their experience growing up among different races, types, and cultured people truly makes them appreciate diversity and trains them to become natural mediator- bridges between different cultures.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{67} Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids, Revised edition*, 104
\textsuperscript{68} Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids, Revised edition*, 57

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Recently, TCKs have been greatly noted by international businesses as models of prime employees. Their history of global awareness and adaptability to change is a great asset in this multicultural world. Their skills have led some of the leading firms in the world to specifically scout them. When Tachi Yamada, M.D., president of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation’s Global Health Program was asked how he hired people in a New York Times interview, he said:

You have to have people in an organization who are willing to truly embrace change… I’ve made an observation about people. There are people who have moved. Take somebody who’s a child of an Army officer — they will have moved 10 times in their lives. And then there are people who’ve been born and raised and educated and employed in one town their whole lives. Who do you think is willing to change? I think, in this modern world, you really have to be sure that your work force has the experience of being elsewhere. That experience then has the ability to ensure that you will be comfortable with change.

A TCK himself, Yamada praises the global nomad’s willingness to embrace change and enthusiasm to try new things out. In this way, the TCK’s cross cultural abilities are a true benefit in the work field.

**Social Skills**

Because they so often glide from one community to another, TCKs are, almost by habit, well adapted to making friends. With feelings of inner confidence as well self reliance, their life of repetitive change often trains them to approach new people more easily than those who grow up in one place. Furthermore, their transient lifestyle bestows them with numerous experiences

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70 Hon Lam and Jane Selmer, "Are former “third-culture kids” the ideal business expatriates?” *Career Development International* 9, no. 2 (2004): 114, Proquest Historical.

71 Smith, Strangers at Home, 30


74 Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids, Revised edition*, 116
that not even many adults can have. Because of these many experiences, TCKs can seem older than their age, or more mature. They can hold their ground in intellectual conversations, keep eye contact with adults, and display etiquette more adeptly than their monocultural friends. These social skills, like their cross cultural skills, are advantages in the TCK’s future career.

**Linguistic Skills**

Linguistic skills are one of the most noticeable and, in fact, useful talents of TCKs. Because TCKs move when they are “kids,” they have the opportunity to learn and use second languages with ease. Almost impossible to teens or adults who learn a new language, TCKs have daily access to members of host cultures who can help them develop fluency and facility with the language and can even learn to speak the language like a native. Moreover, studies show that study of the grammar in one language greatly aides grammatical understanding in the next, which explains the multilingual abilities of many TCKs.

**TCK Issues**

“When a tree is transplanted too often, its roots can never grow deep. So it is with these young people.”

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76 Quick, *The Global Nomad's Guide*, 16

77 Storti, *The Art of Crossing Cultures*, 97


Along with the numerous talents they pick up along their journey, TCKs can also harbor many problems, as well. Issues that range from rootlessness and restlessness, alienation, protective behaviors, to unresolved grief (briefly discussed during the “TCK Experience” section) can be detrimental to the growth of TCKs into adulthood.

**Rootlessness and Restlessness**

Feelings of rootlessness and restlessness affect almost every TCK, but the degree to which it affects global nomads depends on “how many times their family moved and whether or not their kept a home base.”79 Very often, for very mobile TCKs, their sense of home and belonging begin to shift from geographical bearings to relationships with other people, whether it be friends, family members, or community mentors. With every trip, TCKs seem to harness a “migratory instinct”: Pollock says that chronic rootlessness leads to and is combined with restlessness.80

As maintained by counselor Carolyn Barringer, the consequence when “associations with home have little to do with a place” is that “TCKs may feel no roots to one place as an adult.”81 According to the research conducted by Dr. Ruth Hill Useem and Dr. Ann Baker Cottrell in 1993, two significant figures in the TCK field, this rootlessness and restlessness can have grave effects on TCKs. Their findings revealed that although the likelihood of TCKs attending university was almost four times higher than the chance of domestic U.S. children, only one half of the global nomads went on to graduate and of those who did graduate, more than half were noted of transferring schools multiple times during their undergraduate schooling. Rootless and restless,

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79 Barringer, "Counseling Third Culture Kids," 11  
80 Pollock and Van Reken, Third Culture Kids,129  
81 Barringer, "Counseling Third Culture Kids," 12
TCKs state their numerous reasons of leaving or transferring schools: some “never [felt] welcome” to the colleges they attended, others wished to travel and see more of the world, and a select few stated that they just could not connect to the “institutional culture” of the schools.\textsuperscript{82} Beyond college, studies by Cotrell note that TCKs in their mid to late twenties have a difficult time focusing their life aims, figuring out where they want to live, and ultimately deciding if they want to settle down in the long run and start a family. However, when they finally get employed and commit to a specific career choice, TCKs are noted to move every three to five years, continuing their cross cultural lifestyles.\textsuperscript{83}

\textbf{Alienation}

In a survey of 700 TCKs ranging from twenty five to eighty years of age, 90\% reported feeling “out of sync” with their peers.\textsuperscript{84} Pollock describes that when TCKs repatriate, they often feel like “hidden immigrants”- though they look akin to neighboring community members and are in a sense, accepted by them, their thoughts are often vastly different. Due to their lack of language skills or telltale accents, deviations from the standard behaviors of that particular society, and often starkly differing values or worldviews, TCKs may feel internally alien and foreign although externally, they fit right in with the community.\textsuperscript{85} These feelings of difference often alienate TCKs from the community: approximately 40\% of TCKs have difficulties creating close friendships or intimacy.\textsuperscript{86} TCK author Linda Bell quotes, “sometime- for the first time-

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[85] Smith, Strangers at Home, 210
\item[86] Knell, Burn-up or Splash Down, 22
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[TCKs] meet peers who haven’t moved, haven’t had to make new friends, haven’t learned how to adapt…[W]hen internationally mobile children come against this situation, they tend to withdraw, retreat, marginalize.”

“Unresolved Grief

“For most TCKs the collection of significant losses and separations before the end of adolescence is often more than most people experience in a lifetime.”

David Pollock made this stunning quotation in his first book about TCKs. Due to the very richness of their lives, TCKs often face immense pains every time they leave a familiar community. Therefore, as they carry on into their incredible multicultural lives, they always carry around with them the burden of unresolved grief.

As a result of their nomadic lifestyle, TCKs have countless losses- both tangible and intangible- that build up this unresolved grief. With one plane ride, a TCK’s world is flipped around, and they must, as demonstrated through the TCK Transition Experience, learn to readjust during the transition and entering stages. Starting from possessions, to pets, to schools, to friends, and even family members, tangible losses are, though devastating, more easily recognized and

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acknowledged than the intangible, abstract costs of the TCKs experience. More significant to the amassment of unresolved grief are the hidden loses of TCKs. Ranging from the loss of their entire former world, lifestyle, status, relationships, role models, system identity, history, to their future in their former society, the “past that wasn’t,” their grief is multiple, simultaneous, intense, unresolved, and lonely. These invisible losses greatly affect TCKs because there is no official rite of passage to recognize their presence and peoples’ acknowledgement of the said losses: there is no funeral. TCKs often live their entire lives hauling unresolved grief from one culture to the next.

Nevertheless, even when losses are recognized, other factors can block TCK from healthy resolutions to grief. Unresolved grief may also stem from lack of permission to grieve, lack of time to process, and lack of comfort during the moves in a TCK’s life. First, TCKs may not be allowed to grieve for a number of different reasons. Through their many moves, TCKs are often expected to be “brave soldiers” especially in the missionary and military subgroup- they get a direct message that tells them that it is not okay to be scared or sad. Moreover, for many TCKs with internationally influential parents serving noble causes [saving the country from war, representing the government on delicate negotiations, and preaching salvation to a lost world] and sacrificing so much, they cannot admit their grief because, in their mindset, to do so would be shameful. Instead, these TCKs train to create facades of smiles to disguise the negativity they are feeling and conform to the behavior of their current community.

Second, unresolved grief can also be a consequence of the TCK’s insufficient time to acknowledge, process, and accept loss- before they can get over specific grief, they are on a

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89 Knell, *Burn-up or Splash Down*,102
90 Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids, Revised edition*, 81
plane to the next country. With today’s airplanes, TCKs receive only a few hours to truly name, deal with, and come to a closure with their enormous losses.91 The moment they land, they must again rapidly adapt and conform to a new set of societal codes and TCKs have no time to grieve.

Lastly, lack of comfort is a significant contributing factor to unresolved grief. In a well-intentioned gesture, parents often encourage their children not to grieve or negate the mixed emotions that their children are experiencing instead of comforting and acknowledging the fears and sadness. Common themes of encouragement-not comfort- result when parents tell their kids “Don’t worry. You’ll make friends in no time,” insinuating that their children should not be sad, or “Dad’s new job is going to help scores of poor people,” explaining why the TCK should not complain about a few hardships when there is a greater good to worry about. These actions can leave children with the ideas of burying their pains and wearing a mask.92

Ultimately, grief is a natural process and a productive way to deal with fears and sadness. However, when one accumulates this grief with no resolution, and these overwhelming feelings are stored in the deepest parts of one’s identity, unresolved grief turns destructive and can manifest into denial, anger, bargaining, depression, withdrawal, rebellion, vicarious grief, to delayed grief.93 Healthy ways to reconcile unresolved grief are explained later in the “Supporting TCKs” section.

91 Smith, Strangers at Home, 117
92 Pollock and Van Reken, Third Culture Kids, 83
93 Pollock and Van Reken, Third Culture Kids, Revised edition, 161
**TCK Research**

**Dr. Useem and Cotrell**

To this date, noted TCK sociologists Dr. Useem and Dr. Cotrell have conducted the most extensive research in the TCK field. Through a series of five report articles that included a twenty four page survey, in 1993-1994, the two anthropologists examined the data that they collected from seven hundred American TCKs, aged twenty five to eighty years old.94 Asking about the TCKs’ international childhoods as well as their subsequent growth into adulthood, Useem and Cotrell were able paint a portrait of TCKs.95 They defined the adult TCKs with four distinctive characteristics: 1) TCKs continue their internationally mobile lifestyles or cross cultural involvement into adulthood, 2) adult TCKs note feeling more flexible and relatable than monocultural peers, 3) adult TCKs take on roles of mediators and problem solvers, and 4) grown TCKs feel different but not isolated.96 They received overwhelmingly positive reflections of the TCK experience, but realized there were strong undertones of issues, as well.

**Phillips Academy**

Aiming to conduct research myself, I narrowed my focus specifically to TCKs attending Phillips Academy, a prestigious independent boarding school in Andover, Massachusetts whose motto is to educate qualified “youth from every corner.”97 Selecting twenty students, aged fourteen to nineteen, who were noted to have lived abroad by the school’s records, I conducted a

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95 Smith, Strangers at Home, 25
96 Ann Baker Cotrell and Ruth Hill Useem, “Adult Third Culture Kids,” 33
Smith, Strangers at Home, 31
series of casual, video recorded interviews that lasted anywhere between five minutes to two hours, depending on the interviewees willingness to share their information (refer to the Appendix to see the questions that became the backbone of my interviews). Tracking to see the level of TCK awareness on the campus as well as potential ways to support these global nomads, I carefully analyzed my data to see if it was consistent with that of Dr. Useem and Dr. Cotrell, or if there were new trends and patterns in this significantly more globalized world. Furthermore, one of my top priorities was to see how the boarding school experience specifically affected globally inclined students.

Surprisingly, despite the technological breakthroughs, leaps in transportation, and virtually instant communication of today, the TCKs I interviewed revealed strikingly similar views as the characteristics from the TCKs studied more than a decade before. Furthermore, the interviewees, although boarding school students, expressed similar characteristics as those TCKs who attended international or local schools. Similar to the results of the adult TCK survey by Useem and Cotrell, all but one of my interviewees planned to continue their international lifestyles. Many displayed the characteristic restlessness quality in TCKs, saying, “I cannot imagine settling down.” Furthermore, when asked if they would raise their own kids as TCKs, all but two students replied that they thought international exposure was a top priority. Also similar to the results of the two anthropologists’ studies was the TCKs positive outlook to their experience. The interviewees unanimously answered, “Positive,” when asked, “Overall, how would you characterize your TCK experience (largely negative or positive)?”

To further delve into this phenomenon, I organized a “TCK Meeting” with Phillips Academy’s International Club and Asian Society to continue my research (refer to the Appendix
for the Meeting’s Agenda). Through this meeting, open to anyone interested in the topic but specifically aimed towards students with international experiences, I wanted to observe a larger sample size of internationally experienced and globally nomadic students. Through opening with of showing Tina Quick’s “Les Passages” [a documentary about TCKs], conducting a quick introduction of the TCK definitions, and facilitating a group discussion, I was able to solidly conclude that “TCK” was not a commonly known term, even for some TCKs who have lived in over ten different countries. Though students had an idea of the general term, no one could provide a specific, accurate definition. Once discussed, three students talked to me after the meeting reporting common feelings of belonging after knowing that there was a term to describe their experience. Furthermore, through the meeting, my results from the twenty interviews proved solid, as the approximately forty meeting attendees disagreed with the negative aspects portrayed in Tina Quick’s “Les Passages,” and instead argued that the TCK experience was almost wholly positive.98

However, also similar to the results of the extensive survey, from the interviews and meeting that I conducted, I could sense an undercurrent of common TCK issues. One student who specifically stood out to me during my interviews displayed the TCK attribute of restlessness and detachment, indicating a significant amount of repressed unresolved grief. Telling me that he could not imagine staying in one place for more than three years, he planned to leave Phillips Academy after finishing his junior year and attend a school overseas for his senior year. While there were numerous other reasons for the decision, including language emersion and creating a greater network of friends, he ultimately explained, “I get bored living in

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one place for too long.” Furthermore, he stated that attachment is one of his biggest issues. Because of his multiple moves since childhood, he said that he always had to quickly make and lose friends. For this reason, when it comes to relationships, from friends to even family members, he says he cannot fully commit and has no problem “just leaving.” However, when asked about how he would characterize his TCK experience, he said it was overwhelmingly positive and even said that he would definitely raise his own children as TCKs.

Analyzing my data, I contemplated the TCKs’ overpoweringly positive reviews of their transient lifestyles. First, as the students attend Phillips Academy, a highly selective institution, I concluded that my interviewees were generally TCKs who fit into the “chameleon” category, easily blending in, adapting to, and enjoying new situations. I inferred that the TCKs who were accepted into the academy displayed the best of TCK characteristics.

Secondly, I realized that the responses were overwhelmingly positive because those who are, in fact, struggling, would have been hesitant to admit that to a video camera, as well as a whole group of other students in the case of the TCK meeting. Especially for students with issues of unresolved grief, exposing their suppressed fears and sadness can cause releases of great internal pains. Also, as the meeting was open to everyone in the community but focused on a very specific topic, the students who attended were most likely students with positive cross cultural experiences who wanted to learn more about their own experiences. According to research, those with the most problems tend to withdraw from meetings and activities in their community and refuse to delve into their identity for fear of more hurt.
Third, referencing a common manifestation of unresolved grief, I concluded that many Phillips Academy students might experience delayed grief later in their lives. A theme continuously expressed in numerous TCK accounts, such as those in *Home Keeps Moving: A Glimpse into the Extraordinary Life of a Third Culture Kid* by Heidi Sand-Hart, *Unrooted Childhoods Memoirs of Growing Up Global* by Faith Eidse and Nina Sichel, and *Strangers at Home: Essays on the Effects of Living Overseas and Coming "Home" to a Strange Land* by Carolyn Smith, psychologists explain that TCKs “may go through life without showing or consciously feeling any particular sadness and then suddenly find to their great surprise that a seemingly small incident triggers a huge reaction.”99 Triggers such as a child’s first day at school, the end of a long term relationship, or even a movie scene can cause great emotional outpours in TCKs. Although they may feel fine now, I believe TCKs should brace themselves and learn ways to deal with the effects of unresolved and delayed grief.

Lastly, I must put into account the extreme restrictiveness of my sample size. Interviewing only twenty students and conducting a meeting with approximately forty students, I cannot, to any degree, state that my research represents the whole spectrum of the TCK experience. This could be a critical factor to the significantly positive reflections of the TCK experience.

After my research, I deduced that intimate sharing of experiences and awareness of a community of similar people is most beneficial to TCKs. Therefore, at Phillips Academy, I, with the help of Phillip’s Academy’s International Student Coordinator Ms. Susanne Torabi, brought five different TCKs together to create a focus group for TCKs. With the success of this group, I

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99 Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids*, 164
went on to create the “Global Nomad’s Group,” an affinity group that acts as a branch of the school’s International Club, with the support of the group members and my advisor. Information about this can be found in the “Supporting TCKs” section.

Supporting TCKs

Knowing the Language

The first step to supporting TCKs, Dr. Barbara Schaetti reveals, is teaching them the language of their experiences. Through research, Schaetti found that giving a name to the mobile life style, such as “Third Culture Kids” or “global nomad,” greatly aided TCKs in feeling more unified and normal, and gave them a stronger sense of belonging in a community. Those TCKs with the greatest transition experiences were introduced to the language of growing up globally while they were living overseas or shortly after they repatriated.100

Establishing Relationships

It is also important to build a solid foundation for TCKs, a sense of stability, amidst their nomadic lifestyle through establishing good relationships. The closest unit that can provide stability in a TCK’s life is his or her immediate family. It is essential that TCKs have positive relations with their family members in order to have a good transition experience, whether it is parent to parent, parent to TCK, or TCK to sibling. These family members can act as a column, a spiritual core, for TCKs: as David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken related, “In a world where moral values and practices can be radically different from one place to another, this block of maintaining constancy of identifiable core beliefs and values is the key to true stability

throughout life.”101 In this way, although everything from the language to customs, to food, to societal codes can change from each individual place they live, TCKs can always rely on the core of their family. Therefore, in the interviews I conducted of twenty TCKs at Phillips Academy, when I asked TCKs what helped them get through the tough times, the answer unanimously had to do with family members, whether it was parents, brother, or sister.

Another vital aide for TCKs during their cross cultural experiences is to find them a good mentor, someone who can act as a “bridge” between cultures. The amount and time of stress and acclimation can greatly be reduced if there is a “big brother” figure or just a friend in the host culture who can answer TCKs’ question, introduce them to the community, and give them tips on the unspoken rules and standards of the new culture. Even through multiple moves, this mentor or friend figure can act as a figure of stability for TCKs. Furthermore, in today’s technological society, it is easier than ever to keep in touch with friends anywhere on the globe. Through Skype, instant messaging programs, and Facebook, TCKs can keep up with their friends.102

TCKs must also develop connections with the cultures they encounter. Agencies working with TCKs cited the benefits of creating ties with both the host community and the home community. In the host community, many specialists encourage TCK families to adopt “extended family” members in the local community or with other TCKs, substitutes for the TCK’s aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Through creating opportunities through parties, special occasions, or get-togethers, TCKs can foster relationships with this “created” family, ultimately giving them the feeling of “growing up in a close community.” However, more importantly,
TCK guardians must help TCKs keep in touch with these “extended family” members, even when they move to a different country or repatriate.\(^\text{103}\)

Moreover, in terms of physical connections to the cultures they have encountered, psychologists advocate acquiring “sacred objects” that can act as portable representations of the TCK’s history.\(^\text{104}\) Whether it is a souvenir, painting, lamp, or postcard, these objects can help TCKs “connect all the places and experiences of their lives. Furthermore, TCKs should maintain a strong bond with their home or passport culture. While overseas, it may be a good habit for TCKs to return to the same home on their vacations. It is always good to physical sense of a home. Returning to the same neighborhood, to the same house, to the same bed, can relieve some of the stress of TCKs.\(^\text{105}\)

Ultimately, these relationships are extremely beneficial for TCKs in the whole, as they give them a stable core to rely on. Through these bonds with numerous people, places, and cultures, TCKs can develop a relational sense of belonging or normalness.

**The Transition “Home”: Leaving Well and Entering Well**

Often the most difficult of all transitions, repatriating requires special attention for global nomads.\(^\text{106}\) Although TCKs distinguish themselves from other immigrant groups by living with the assumption that they will one day return permanently “home,” once the internationally experienced children go through this awaited reentry, they may confront a number of unexpected stresses, including finding out that their home country is not the “dream world” that they had

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\(^\text{103}\) Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids*, 232

\(^\text{104}\) Knell, *Burn-up or Splash Down*, 97

\(^\text{105}\) Pollock and Van Reken, *Third Culture Kids*, 223

\(^\text{106}\) Smith, *Strangers at Home*, 110
believed it to be or reverse culture shock, discovering that they need to go through the same process of culture relearning as they did when they lived abroad.\textsuperscript{107} These following stresses can weigh heavily on TCKs, as they may have a hard time relating to their monocultural peers, realize that this “home” that they envisioned all throughout their life is not as dear to them as they had thought, experience homesickness for their host cultures, and feel ignorant and vulnerable because of their lack of practical life skills and common communal values.\textsuperscript{108} These surprising turn of events can cause TCKs to develop elevated fears, excessive anger, a sense of elitism, and depression in their passport nation.\textsuperscript{109}

Although there is no one specific way to solve all repatriation issues in TCKs, different counselors have multiple varied approaches to helping the global nomads. One of the most complex aspects of this specific move, founder of Global Nomads International Norma McCaig explains, is the conflicting views of parents and children. Although parents are finally returning to their home, their internationally raised children might just be entering their parent’s home. As one TCK parent related, “For my children, home is just another somewhere.”\textsuperscript{110} In many cases, parents may be returning home but their kids may be leaving home. Therefore, to alleviate these clear conflicting perceptions and expectations of home that can cause divisions and conflicts in the transition process, McCaig recommends that those around TCKs first accept that the global nomad’s international childhood has shaped them into belonging to another culture, second are realistic about how and when to expect the TCKs to assimilate to their “home country,” and third,

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Knell} Marion Knell, \textit{Burn-Up or Splash Down: Surviving the Culture Shock of Re-Entry} (Tyrone, GA: Authentic, 2007), 8
\bibitem{Pollock} Pollock and Van Reken, \textit{Third Culture Kids}, 230
\bibitem{Smith} Smith, \textit{Strangers at Home}, 110
\end{thebibliography}
allow the TCKs themselves to be realistic about their adjustment. As the research team comprised of Dr. Useem, Cotrell, and Jordan stated, “The answer to the question of how long it takes [TCKs] to adjust to [their passport country’s lifestyle] is: They never adjust. They adapt, they find niches, they take risks, they fail and pick themselves up again… As one woman put it, I don’t feel different, I AM different.” Those closest to TCKs, especially parents, should help TCKs understand that it is okay not to completely identify with one culture; they should encourage TCKs to see that a cultural identity can be compartmentalized globally or to another country—that it is okay to become a citizen of the world.

To support TCKs during this unstable time, parents, peers, and mentors can use strategies to guide global nomads through these distinct circumstances. First, it is always critical to keep communicating with TCKs. To help alleviate numerous issues, such as anxiety or unresolved grief, those near TCKs should encourage them to express their reactions, feelings, and observations. Second, the process should include collaboration between TCKs and their family members. Often times, TCKs feel powerless in the face of the great decisions of their life. Having no control over their parent’s overseas assignments and in turn, their own lives, many TCKs fall into problems such as depression or eating disorders. To prevent the buildup of feelings of vulnerability in TCKs, parents should, if possible, include their children in the discussion of moves as early as possible so they feel like they have somewhat a grasp on their lives and also can have time to prepare themselves for the move. Third, TCKs should feel closure before they return “home.” Often parents neglect the need for closure in their children’s
life, either because they are unaware or unwilling to face the deep feelings that accompany the procedure. It is vital for families to allow global nomads to grieve, to express their fears and sadness. Some counselors even recommend throwing good-bye parties every time a family leaves a country.

**How Schools Can Help**

Schools, such as boarding schools or universities, can greatly aid their TCK students in a number of relatively easy ways. Currently, schools are accepting more and more TCKs into their campuses but are not addressing the students’ needs, mostly because global nomads do not fit into the prototypical international student model. Often hidden immigrants at these institutions, TCKs may seemingly blend in with the local students or typical international students, but have deeper complexities that can espouse problems with peers and teachers alike: They may not fit in, project arrogance, relate differently, and lack belonging with those around them. Teachers may have a hard time understanding why the supposed American girl is struggling with elementary grammar problems: little does he know, she grew up in Sierra Leone, attending a local school run by missionaries where the standards were very different. Friends might be completely taken aback by the TCK’s complete lack of knowledge of popular culture: “You don’t know who Britney Spears is?” Too often, as explained by restlessness and rootlessness, TCKs change schools three or four times before they graduate if they even graduate at all. Worse, TCKs have an elevated chance of becoming depressed and may even develop suicidal tendencies.  

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Therefore, schools should create support systems to recognize and affirm TCKs. One simple way for schools to immensely aid the global nomads’ effective transition to their institution is to, first, identify incoming TCKs, and second, hold a gathering, meeting, or orientation specifically for TCKs. At this gathering, new global nomads can meet with others who share their experience, introduce themselves to older TCKs who are a few years ahead of them in the school, and learn the language of their experience, which can trigger the “exploration stage” in their identity development. This way, not only will they be meeting new friends that they connect well to, but also begin acquiring mentors and great knowledge about their experiences.115

It is also extremely beneficial to create sustainable, long term support systems, as well. After the initial meeting or orientation for TCKs, many schools recently have created mentoring programs for TCKs as well as permanent TCK groups that meet on a regular basis. Through these ties, global nomads can be eased into their new settings and feel more stable with someone to go to for help. Furthermore, schools can hold informational meetings, workshops, or check ins throughout the year to see how the first year TCKs are transitioning, making sure no is falling through the cracks. TCKs can be made aware of the reentry shocks and stresses, and share their experiences with others. Moreover, through these clubs, advisors and mentors can continually aid the personal growth of TCKs as well as encouraging those who are inclined to withdraw to actively commit to the present.

Lastly, to look after their internationally experienced students, schools should have resources available. Valuable sources include guidance or mental health counselors who

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115 Tina Quick, "Neither Domestic Nor Domestic: How Universities Can Support the Global Nomad" (NASFA Annual Conference 2011 in Vancouver).
understand the issues that confront global nomads, a list of books, website, and other resources about the TCK experience, as well as alternative activities or programs for these overseas students during short school vacations or Parent’s Weekend. Schools help the most when they support TCKs find or build a community and validate this extraordinary experience, not only affirming the experience to the TCKs at their campuses but also spreading the awareness all across the student body.\textsuperscript{116}

\textbf{Phillip’s Academy TCK Support}

Starting from my sophomore year at Phillips Academy when I learned that I was a global nomad, I was so surprised at the affirmation and empowerment I developed from just discovering one term: Third Culture Kid. Therefore, after I explored and research this topic for myself, I discussed ways to support other TCKs at our school with our Community and Multicultural Development Office advisors. After numerous discussions and meetings, especially with our International Student Coordinator and advisor for this research project, Ms. Susanne Torabi, we were able to put together a small focus group of TCKs in the winter of 2010. Looking through a list of multicultural students at our school, I contacted a few who I thought would be interested and more willing to share their experiences in a small group setting. Aiming to create a safe, intimate setting for this small focus group, the group of us and our advisor met over dinner. I wanted to see how this gathering would play out and ask the other TCKs for suggestions to improve this affinity group. After just thirty minutes, many of us who were at first mere acquaintances created strong connections and bonds through our similar stories. Briefly defining

\textsuperscript{116}Tina Quick, "Neither Domestic Nor Domestic: How Universities Can Support the Global Nomad" (NASFA Annual Conference 2011 in Vancouver).
the terms and characteristics about TCKs, I acted as a facilitator and was pleasantly surprised at just how open everyone was about their experiences. Discussing everything from relationships, to re-entry shocks, to how we defined home, we were able to get to know each other at a deeper level. After the meeting ended, many members of the group approached me and told me that “a light bulb went off” for them.

With the success of the focus group and through the collaboration of our members, we decided that the group could be benefited by more members with greater awareness for more TCKs. Therefore, working again with our passionate advisor, I, with our members, created the Global Nomads Group, an affinity group for TCKs to affirm and raise awareness about their experiences (Refer to the Appendix for the Global Nomad Group’s Mission Statement). This club has become a branch of our school’s International Club and already has eighteen members registered. Although we are in our formative stages, I feel like we have taken great strides of improvement. We are the only boarding high school to have taken these measures to helping our global nomads.

Furthermore, as an aspect of my CAMD Scholar Project, I will be conducting a TCK meeting in our students’ International Orientation on September 9, 2011. Through this introductory meeting, I, with three other TCK group leaders, will raise awareness about the TCK phenomenon through videos, skits, and brief lectures, as well as creating opportunities for the incoming global nomads to connect with each other as well as making ourselves available for questions. I plan to, also through this meeting, show the new TCKs the importance of becoming conscious of one’s own identity as well as introducing the new TCK affinity group as an added layer of support for our new students.
Conclusion

Three decades ago, sociologist Dr. Ted Ward predicted that third culture kids were the prototype citizens of the future. However, this future is waiting by our doorstep, as multiculturalism, even confined to one community, is becoming the norm rather than the exception. With the rise of prominent TCKs, most notably U.S. President Barrack Obama, but also founder of Amazon.com Jeff Beznos, and even popular rapper Wiz Khalifa, traditional assumptions of what it means to be part of a culture, or a nationality, or race are continually challenged. These globally raised children have been formed by a number of different cultures, and therefore, do not have one fixed identity. As David Pollock stated, “[TCKs] lead to some awareness that old categories of identity are no longer sufficient for today’s world.”

Therefore, we must embrace these TCKs, as they are becoming a microcosm of what is accelerating in this day and age. Raised with global cultural mixing, TCKs can become an indication of the consequences of globalization: they can display both the numerous advantages as well as the challenges of multiculturalism. We must realize that TCKs may be, as Ruth Van Reken explains, “the first results of a great, but not fully explored, cultural shift of our changing world- the difference between being raised in a monocultural environment or a many layered cultural setting.”

TCKs, by the nature of their life experiences, are trained to become global citizens as well as leaders of this international world. With their expanded world view, acceptance of others’ humanity, as well as their learned abilities to become bridge builders, I feel that it is important to support and nourish this frequently overlooked group. Too often grouped by their nationalities, the amazing hidden diversity and experiences of these students are covered up and brushed aside.
Therefore, parents, mentors, teachers, and schools should support TCKs in their journeys, providing them with the “language and understanding to an experience lived” but largely unnamed. We must help TCKs maximize their incredible experiences and lend a hand to prevent them from falling through the cracks. In the end, homogenous and singular cultures will not be the world of tomorrow. TCKs, trained from childhood, are well equipped and prepared for this tomorrow.

**Remarks on Being a CAMD Scholar**

The CAMD Scholar Project has been a deeply personal journey for me. Through this research project, I was able to dig deep into all different kinds of TCK research, starting from newspapers editorials from the parents of TCKs to the dissertations of the most noted TCK sociologists. Collecting this wealth of information, I was able to reflect on my life journey that spanned five different cultures: Seoul, Nashville, Bethesda, Hong Kong, and Andover. There were points during the process where I felt enlightened and other points where I was afraid to read on, especially during articles of unresolved grief. Reading many of the TCK books available on the market, I felt as if the authors were talking directly to me. I almost felt as if they knew the details to my entire multicultural life. However, truly looking into my own TCK identity and transition experiences, I was able to feel gratitude to those closest to me that always provided support. Through this project, I learned new ways to resolve the burdens of grief that I have been unconsciously carrying throughout my multiple moves, as well as strategies to guide others to do the same.
Furthermore, I am so thankful for the opportunity to conduct research TCK research at Phillips Academy. I realized, through this project, how much diversity is hidden behind apparent facades. I was able to meet a whole community of students who shared my unique experience, and in the process, create an affinity group, as well.

In the end, this project has given me a lot of closure on the uncertainties that have defined my identity. I feel more self aware and have confronted the biggest obstacles of fear and grief in my mobile, cross cultural life. Also through this project, I was able to interview and connect with a truly close but unexpected subject: my dad. A TCK himself, growing up in England, the Netherlands, and Korea, my father, who has always been very reserved about his cross cultural childhood, opened up about his experiences and I was able to realize just how much the TCK experience affects one’s life as well as the life of one’s family. All in all, this CAMD Scholar Project has been a great aid in my realization of my past, present, as well as an indication of my future.

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for their endless energy and kind words. Lastly, I need to thank all of my friends, mentors, and teachers who have truly made me the global nomad I am today.
Appendix

Independent Interviews Taken of
20 TCK Phillips Academy Students

Interview Questions:

1. Can you briefly describe the places you have lived and the subsequent lengths of stay at that location?

2. Do you know what a Third Culture Kid is? If so, can you explain what it is in your own words?

3. How do you answer the question “where are you from?”

4. With which country, home, culture, or nationality do you identify the most? Where do you think you belong?

5. To where and when are you “homesick?”

6. How do you think your cross cultural and/or mobile life have affected you? How did you make new friends? How did you adapt?

7. Overall, how would you characterize you TCK experience (largely negative or positive)? Why? What helped you get through the rough times?

8. When do you feel most vulnerable? Have people ever misunderstood you? When do you feel different? If comfortable answering, please describe a specific incidence.

9. How has Phillips Academy helped or not helped in meeting your needs as a globally nomadic student? Do you feel like you fit in at this school?

10. What does the future hold for you? Where do you see yourself going? Can you ever imagine settling down one day- if so, where would that be? Would you raise your own kids as TCKs? Explain.
International Club/Asian Society Joint Club Meeting:

Third Culture Kids

February 23 at 5:30 pm

Blurb:

Do you have to take a moment before you answer the question “Where are you from?”
Have you ever felt different from those around you?
Do you feel like you do not have what others might call, a home country or a home?

Come join International Club and Asian Society’s joint meeting on Third Culture Kids this Wednesday, February 23 at 5:30 pm in CAMD!

The definition of a Third Culture Kid (TCK) is "someone who, as a child, has spent a significant period of time in one or more culture(s) other than his or her own, thus integrating elements of those cultures and their own birth culture, into a third culture." Come to learn and discuss what it means to be a TCK, or a cross-cultural kid (CCK) in a globalizing world.

International Club Board & Asian Society Board

MEETING AGENDA:

1. **Introduction** by (announce format of the meeting, will mention TCK focus group)
2. **Showing of clip “Les Passages”** (8 min)
3. **Sharing our stories**
4. **Definitions of TCKs/ATCKs versus CCKs**
5. Intro to format of group discussions and “discussion ground rules”
6. **Group discussions**
7. **Closing remarks**
Global Nomads Group Mission Statement

Global Nomads Group is an affinity group for students who identify as a Third Culture Kids (TCKs), "[people] who, as a child, have spent a significant period of time in one or more culture(s) other than his or her own, thus integrating elements of those cultures and their own birth culture, into a third culture." Because of their globetrotting experiences growing up, many TCKs feel both restless and rootless. Global Nomads Group will provide opportunities and support for Third Culture Kids to meet and discuss different aspect of the TCK experience, such as the difficulties of answering the question, “Where are you from?” to the complexities of returning to one’s “home culture.” Through weekly meetings, Global Nomads Group will allow Third Culture Kids to truly explore their identities and affirm their experiences with others who went through the similar situations, identifying the both the benefits and challenges of being a Third Culture Kid. With trips to local conferences and talks by renowned specialists on TCKs, like Ms. Quick, the Global Nomads Group will provide the opportunity to learn more about oneself and in the end of the school year, present to the Andover community about their findings and revelations.
Bibliography


