ANYWHERE AND EVERYWHERE: Third Cultured Kids and Their ‘Stabilizing Factors’

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ANYWHERE AND EVERYWHERE:

Third Cultured Kids and Their ‘Stabilizing Factors’

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PIM 74

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Intercultural Service, Leadership, and Management at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, VT, USA.

December 16, 2016

Advisor: Dr. Karen Blanchard
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Student Name: Aman Singh

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore the significance of the Third Culture Kid (TCK) and the impact their ‘stabilizing factors’ or ‘constants’ have on their occupation outcome. Third Culture Kid is a term used for people who have travelled and lived in many different countries during their development years. Within that definition there are other subgroups such as: Bi/multi-cultural and/or bi/multi-racial families, immigrants, international adoptees, refugees and Domestic TCKs or CCKs. Ever since the term was first coined by Ruth Hill Useem, a sociologist, in the early 50s, there have been more and more families having the TCK experience due to the world becoming more globalized. Stabilizing factors or constants is a state of mind where one feels connected and is a part of something bigger than he or she is. This is important to study because TCKs do not have a city, town, people whom have been there whilst they were growing up (apart from the parents) during their lifetime. The constants they form within their lifetime (friends, teachers, hobbies, different cultures) become that city, town or people that they did not have before. These constants eventually help pave way for their career choices. For this study there was inputs from seven TCKs, two non-TCKs, one CCK, three international educators, three governmental officials, and one former refugee. In a constantly changing environment TCKs need something to ground themselves. From the interviews and questionnaires conducted themes of TCKs, international education, friends, cultural assimilation/adjustment, ‘Constants’, and the job opportunities for TCKs came up. All the TCKs’ ‘stabilizing factors’ have some say on their job outcome, directly or indirectly. The most common ‘stabilizing factors’ which were found were the parents of TCKs.
Key words

Stabilizing Factors or Constants: Is a state of mind where one feels connected and is a part of something bigger he or she is. Makes the person feel complete.

Limbo state: Is where the person is in transition from culture A to culture B but cannot fully integrate in culture B because he or she has strong ties with culture A.

Phenomenological research: Study that attempts to understand people’s perspectives and understandings of a particular situation.

Third Cultured Kid: “TCK is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her development years outside the parents’ culture.” (Pollock and Van Reken 2001)

Cross-cultural Kid: “is a person who has lived in—or meaningfully interacted with—two or more cultural environments for a significant period of time during developmental years.” (Reken and Bethel 2005)

Culture Shock: “Emotional reactions to the disorientation that occurs when one is immersed in an unfamiliar culture and is deprived of familiar cues” (Paige 1993)

Reverse Culture Shock: “As you've settled into your foreign location, you've spent less time in your home culture. Upon return, not only is home different from what you are now used to, but it may be different from what it was when you left, and different from what you expect it to be like. This causes anxiety and stress among many people.” (US State Department)
Introduction

First-class travel, private chauffeurs, five-star cuisine—all these things might seem superfluous. This is merely an outer shell that people see when I describe to them that I am a diplomat’s son. This is due to the fact that my father works as a diplomat for the Indian embassy. I have been traveling around the world ever since I can even remember. I always had a hard time identifying with a region because I did not spend enough time in any one place. For example, I have spent only two years living in India even though I am Indian, and I am 24 years old. Each time I go back I find it extremely hard to relate to the people there because I do not really know the culture well enough to understand and enjoy it. On the other hand, the countries I have been to: Spain, Bulgaria, Mexico, Myanmar, Denmark, the U.S., and now Mauritius, have all been part of my identity, and I feel comfortable with them.

I consider myself as a third cultured kid (TCKs). Third cultured kids are people who grow up in different countries during their development years (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). For example, I was only 8 months old when my family moved from India to Spain. One of the earliest memories that I can remember from that time is when I came home to my mother from play school and told her the word for cow is “vaca” in Spanish. Later on down the line I started to speak Spanish as a native person. She even told me that my father and she had to communicate in Spanish to me, just so that I would be able to understand them better. After four years in Spain, my father got posted to Bulgaria. I was so young and in my own world that I did not even realize that Spain and Bulgaria were different countries. It was not until I left Bulgaria for India that I realized that I was an Indian citizen. Ever since I had the realization that I was an Indian citizen, I started questioning my Indian heritage—am I Indian because of my skin color, the native language that my parents speak, or the rituals we have as a family? But deep down, I
always felt that I was a Spaniard, a Bulgarian, a Mexican, a Burmese, an American, a Danish, and now a Mauritian more than an Indian. But in a TCK context everything is not so clear, and I have come to the conclusion that I am a bit of everything. What does this mean? Is it a gift or a curse?

In the 21st century it almost like a dream life hopping from one place to another. Taking all the different and diverse learnings along the way and especially if one is enrolled in an international school. It all seems good on paper but as a TCK, I can say that the world around me, at times did not make much sense. It was as if I was in a limbo state where I did not fully adjust to the near environment, more importantly I did not understand why I was there and what my purpose there was. Almost every time I moved to a new country I would get this sense of wonder and curiosity whilst also having nostalgia about the country I had just left. I knew I would be a limbo state; Where I would not know what to do or how to act a certain way.

Looking back at my experiences I noticed I that I had a ‘constant’ to help me figure things out. These constants came in the form of friends, family members and my distinct passions. To this day these ‘constants’ are hugely important to my life and they have been to me what a home or a city might be to a non-TCK person; there is a grounding and foundation value to it. My biggest constants throughout my life have been my parents, my father and mother. It makes sense to have them as my constants because they have always been there from country to country. Apart from them I have made several other ‘constants’ in my life. These include friends, life-long passions, and different TV shows from across the globe. These all contribute in shaping my identity as a TCK.

Currently I am a student at the SIT Graduate Institute working towards the completion of my Master’s degree in the Intercultural Service, Leadership and Management program. I am at a
point in my life where I need to know what direction my life will take in the future. As I am pondering over my future it dawned upon me to look back at my life and draw inspiration and insight. The best identity that describes me is being a Third Culture Kid. Surprisingly it is the one identity that I am least aware of, since I have not really given it much thought up until this point in my life. Amidst all the chaos, there have been few instances in my life where things made sense and I call them as ‘constants’. I believe somehow these constants have a connection in relation to my future occupation. Hence, to understand this connection I am doing research on the relation of TCK’s constants and their future outcomes. I aim to understand the influence that a constant or a ‘stabilizing factor’ has on an occupation outcome for a TCK in a globalized world. I will use the lens of the ecological model for human development to the better understand TCK culture.

**Research Question**

1. What influence do the ‘stabilizing factors’ or ‘constants’ have on the occupation outcome for the TCKs?
   a. What is the importance of TCKs in a globalized world?
   b. How is cultural identity important in the TCK context?

**Literature Review**

Globalization is a concept that has been around since the beginning of human civilization (Steger 2003). It is quite difficult to pinpoint when and how the origin of the word came to be. ‘We are being propelled into a global order that no one fully understands, but which is making its effects felt upon all of us’ (Giddens 2003). Globalization consists of technology and the English language which in turn transforms the world into an ‘interconnected global village’ (Tsui and Tollefson 2007). According to the author Kumaravadivelu (2008) globalization brings cultures and languages together therefore globalization is for English as Second Language countries
where technology and English medium languages are not on par with the rest of the world. Due to international travel and living, author Kumaravadivelu has synthesized the meaning of globalization in four words, ‘Globalization = Westernization = Americanization = McDonaldization’. The western countries with English as their dominant language spread their influence across the globe and this is known as ‘Westernization’. Among the most influential western countries is the USA, hence the term ‘Americanization’ does mirror strong effects of the American pop culture onto other countries. “The term ‘McDonaldization refers to efficiency, calculability, predictability and control’ which produce standardization and homogenized goods and services” (Ritzer 1996). Having a standard product across varied countries is a key of McDonaldization.

With the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, closed economies were getting liberated into open free markets (Mittelman 2000). Many families now worked in foreign lands as a result of globalization. Mittelman describes globalization as “the process of reducing barriers between countries and encouraging closer economic, political, and social interaction.” (2000) Globalization has resulted in families having to leave their country to relocate for the purpose of managing global economic markets (Useem & Downie 1976).

It is necessary to note that the research about TCKs is relatively new, social scientist David C. Pollock explains, “It is important to say that since we are dealing with people, we are writing about process and progress, not a fixed entity”. The term ‘third culture kid’ (TCK) was coined by American sociologist, Ruth H. Useem, while living in India with her husband and children in the in the 1960s. “The meaning behind this term refers to the first culture as the parents’ country of birth, the second culture being the host-culture in which the family lives and
the *third culture* as the in-between state of both or all cultures.” (Wisrecraver 2014) TCKs spend their formative years outside their parents’ home country, as ‘visitors’ in one or more host countries to develop a “third culture” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; Useem & Downie, 1976). TCK spend large parts of their childhood in countries other than their own (Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2003).

In the book written in 2009 by Ruth Van Reken and David C. Pollock entitled, *Third Culture kids: Living Among Worlds*, the definition of TCKs is as follows:

Third Culture kids (TCKs) – Children who spend a significant period of their developmental years in a culture outside their parents’ passport culture(s) – are not new, and they are not few. They have been a part of the earth’s populations from the earliest migrations. They are normal people with usual struggles and pleasures of life. But because they have grown up with different experiences from those who have lived primarily in one culture, TCKs are sometimes seen as slightly strange by the people around them (Pollock & Van R, 2009)

Author Wiscraver explains that children move from one country to another at a very young age leaving the children lacking an understanding for their *home culture*. According to the “Global Expatriates: Size, Segmentation and Forecast for the Worldwide Market” report there are approximately 50.5 million expats worldwide, and it is expected to increase to 56.8 million by 2017 (Paragon, 2014). Author Pollock further explains that TCKs build relationships to all of the cultures being presented to them while not having any full ownership. “Most TCKs go through more grief experiences by the time they are 20 than monocultural individuals do in a lifetime.” (p. 87). TCKs lead highly mobile lives during their formative years and this has a great impact on their sense of identity (Hayden & Thompson, 1995; McLachlan, 2007; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001).
The article *Third Culture Kids: Prototypes for Understanding Other Cross-Cultural Kids*, authors Reken and Bethel (2005) explore who can fully fit to be described as a Third culture kid? Should the term include a child who accompanies parents into another culture because of immigration or as refugees? What about those families who migrate within the national borders, should they be also called TCK? To broaden the topic of TCK in which it encompasses a broader view of intercultural living, the authors purpose a new term—Cross-Cultural kid (CCK). ‘A Cross-Cultural (CCK) is a person who has lived in—or meaningful interacted with—two or more cultural environments for a significant period of time during developmental years.’ Some of the terms that CCK includes are:

- *Traditional TCKs*—Children who move into another culture with parents due to a parent’s career choice
- *Bi/multi-cultural/ and/or bi/multi-racial children*—Children born to parents from at least two cultures or races.
- *Children of immigrants*—Children whose parents are living outside their original country or place not by personal choice but due to circumstance such as war, violence, famine, other natural disasters.
- *Children of minorities*—Children whose parents are from a racial or ethnic group which is not part of the majority race or ethnicity of the country in which they live.
- *International adoptees*—Children adopted by parents from another country other than the one of the child’s birth.
- *“Domestic” TCKs*—Children whose parents have moved in or among various subcultures within that child’s home country.
The terms mentioned above help explain the complexity that cross-cultural families and in particularly children face while traveling (immigrants, adoptees, military families, multiracial) from one place to another. Each definition has a common denominator in the sense that, the families and especially the children have experienced at least two different cultures within their lifetime, while having been intercultural in different ways. Authors further explain the CCK hidden experience as “[appearing] to be the same externally as the majority of their fellow citizens, but internally they have as different a world view and life experiences as any true immigrant would have.” (Reken & Bethel, 2005, p.8)

To put things into context, Reken and Bethel of the article uses the Pollock/Van Reken Cultural Identity Box: TCKs/CCKs in Relationship to Surrounding Dominant Culture (see below) –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreigner</th>
<th>Hidden Immigrant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look Different</td>
<td>Look Alike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel Different</td>
<td>Think Different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopted</td>
<td>Mirror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look Different</td>
<td>Look Alike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Alike</td>
<td>Think Alike</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this chart one can see being a foreigner, one feels and looks different. An example of this would be a Japanese person who has come to the US for Christmas holidays, might be surprised to find out that it is usually a family holiday whereas Christmas in Japan is more of a couple’s holiday. Thus putting the Japanese person at unease. Moreover, the Japanese people would naturally stand out in the US because of their Asian physical features.
Being adopted from one culture to another has the opposite effect of being a foreigner. Using the same example, if a Japanese child was adopted by American parents and had spent all of his life within the states, he would eventually formulate deep American social roots. But he would still stand out since he would be having Asian physical features. Nevertheless, he would be more comfortable living in the US rather than living in Japan.

Hidden immigrants are basically tourists who blend in with the locals, tricking them into thinking that they are one of them. An Indian person who goes to study abroad in Nepal might not get the same attention as French person study abroad in Nepal. The French person would stand out because of his physical features and the Indian person would blend in for his similar physical features of the Nepalese people. But just like the French culture, the Indian culture is also different of the Nepalese culture and thus the Indian person would have the same struggles as the French, assimilating to the Nepalese culture.

The people that pertain to the ‘mirror’ category are natives of a country. They have spent all their lives living and working in a given country. Thus, they look and think just like the majority of the people from a given country.

TCKs fall into three different types of categories: Foreigner, Hidden immigrant or adopted. Some might adopt a culture while not blending in with the local people, others might blend in but might think differently from the majority and others might not even look or think the same way in a given culture. This chart illustrates the different dynamics that TCKs/CCKs go through whilst adjust to a new culture. As Reken and Bethel put it, “Who [TCKs/CCKs] are inside is who others expect them to be when looking from outside” (p.9)
Authors Peterson and Plamondon (2009) argue that TCKs are different from immigrants in that TCKs rarely try to become citizens of the third culture. From their article entitled, *Third culture kids and the consequences of international sojourns on authoritarianism, acculturative balance, and positive affect*, the authors expounds on the fact that TCKs resonate and will relate better with people who travel and live in foreign countries like them, rather than people of their own passport country. A British person who has predominately been living in East Asia and Central Africa is more likely to relate to a person from Indonesia who has lived majority of his life in South America and Eastern Europe, rather than a person who has lived all his life in England. This is because a major part of the British person’s and the Indonesian person’s lives consists of travelling and living abroad. The British person alongside of the Indonesian person have never lived in England or in Indonesia respectively. They have not formed the cultural roots to their passport countries. Thus they will relate more amongst themselves than to a native British person or an Indonesian person. In a sense they need to start from square one as tourists or as outsiders if they are to assimilate to their respective ‘home’ cultures.

In a constantly changing environment TCKs need something to ground themselves. This is important because they do not have a city, town, people whom have been their whilst they were growing up (apart from the parents) during their lifetime. The constants they form within their lifetime (friends, teachers, hobbies) become that city, town or people that they did not have before. Wisecraver, a TCK, interviewed her parents, who had a 30-year career working for the Foreign Affairs Agency, on the concept of ‘home’ her mother responded that home is something that has an emotional attachment. She recounts how she has fond memories of her home in Weston where she had her childhood and now she does not consider it ‘home’ at all. For her it is a state of mind to call a place home. For that to happen she needs the emotional attachment of
friends and family in the same vicinity. Whereas the father said that whenever somebody asks where he is from he responds by saying that “We live in Vienna, VA now but I’m originally from Oregon.” He goes onto say that he has ancestral roots attached to Oregon and makes him feel a part of something. But he stresses that he cannot just live in Oregon or Vienna, he needs to live in each location to feel at ‘home’ (Wisecraver 2014).

In Pascoe’s study, *The Impact of Globalization on Internationally Mobile Families: A Grounded Theory Analysis*, some of the TCK interviewees have stated that “the family is the stabilizing factor and must be strengthened when living a mobile lifestyle.” The interviewee in the study, further adds that Families need to be the ‘roots’ for their children in their ‘rootless’ lives (McLachlan 2007). ‘It has been suggested that global nomads have “roots” which are more relational and less geographic in nature’ (p. 17). Buying or having a house in the home country while living abroad serves as a “stabilizing factor of a permanent home” for the TCKs (Pascoe 1994).

There seems to be a negative side effect to travelling and living in different countries. Being rootless and feeling at home everywhere and nowhere is a common sense of being amongst TCKs (McLachlan). Yet, Pollock and Van Reken suggest that TCKs can feel home anywhere and they move regularly and make successful adjustments. The home symbolizes in having something permanent that the TCKs can anchor themselves into. Walker states that a home may help a young person to form his own identity (1998). Another way a TCK family can adjust and ground themselves into new environments and new cultures is when the parents send their children to international schools for their education. As Akram in McLachlan’s article, “for these families, the international school, over time and place, represents the only stable
environment for the children, the international school and its microcosm, the classroom, is their ‘community’ (p. 19).

Due to increased international mobility, international schools were setup to accommodate the needs of internationally mobile children (Mathews 1989). There is a common consensus that International schools were first established to cater to the educational needs of the children of the TCK families. These families are generally from a diplomatic background, NGOs, international organizations, companies, and military personnel. Some of the first schools that were established were The International School of Geneva and The Yokohama International School which were inaugurated in 1924. It is quite difficult to pinpoint what makes an international school a school as there are no governing bodies for the schools to be classified as such. Some call themselves International schools for the courses they offer, the general student population, and as a marketing tool. But there are also some institutions that cater to the international students but do not market themselves as such for integrations purposes. These institutions believe that if they label themselves as international schools then only internationally mobile children would enroll in the schools not the local students, thus creating a bubble and not an environment for integration amongst students (Brooks, Fuller, & Waters 2012). Mathews later on describes the benefits of having international schools as, “an influence equivalent to a nation of three to four million where 90% of students go on to higher education” (1989, p. 21). In the book entitled, Changing Spaces of Education: New Perspective on the Nature of Learning, is stated that there were 50 international schools in 1964 (Bereday and Lauwerys 1964), 1,000 by 1989 (Matthews 1989), and recently 5,200 in 2009 (Brummitt 2009).
The numbers can testify that the world since the mid-20th century has more and more families that travel and live in foreign countries. Since the creation of the international schools was catered to the educational needs of children of diplomatic backgrounds, many of the schools were founded by international organizations and governments. For example, the International school of Yangon was founded by Ms. Jevne with the help of the US-ambassador in 1952. There were many American diplomats that were posted to Myanmar at the time, which caused American families to leave their children with Ms. Jevne, she gave private lessons to the children that were to adapt to the American educational system in order to help them when they returned to their homeland (International school of Yangon website accessed on 20th July 2016). This is just one example of how American families accommodate to a new setting. Similarly, there are British expats who choose to go into British international schools so that the children may adjust well when they go back home (Brooks, Fuller, & Waters 2012). Even though there are American, British, French, Japanese, and Indian international schools across the globe they form their own identity. Brooks explains, “While international schools with a specifically national affiliation continue to exist, increasing numbers of such schools have no national affiliation” (p. 25). Even though international schools have a country based curriculum, the school setting itself becomes its own identity with the mixture of local and foreign students. Students in international schools could fall into two main categories—TCK/global nomads or returnees to their home culture (Brooks, 2012). Brooks explains how the international school setting serves as a third space. Meaning it serves as an educational home for the TCK families. Children tend to feel more comfortable since many of the students that go to international schools have similar backgrounds in terms of travelling and living abroad (2012).
According to the article *Belonging, identity and Third Culture Kids*, the author explains that TCK individuals are ideal candidates for globalized business firms because the “self-concept[s] are constantly being challenged every time [a TCK person] moves to a different place and enters a different culture where learned behavior may no longer be appropriate or acceptable” (Fail, 2004, p.323). In essence the child becomes a chameleon-like person adopting and merging into new environments. As expressed by the author in the article, “*Third-culture kids*: Future business expatriates, “The cultural exposure, during their highly impressionable adolescence, may have made them absorb cultural and behavioral norms developing a cultural frame of reference different from, but assembled by the cultures they have been exposed to; establishing a third culture.” (Lam & Selmer, 2004, p. 430-445) Since TCKs have a hard time in determining about their ‘home’ and them being ‘rootless’, Fail explains, “[TCKs have] become future oriented and have plans for an international career and mobile lifestyle. Their identities tend to be founded upon their goals and aspirations rather than upon backgrounds.” (Fail, 2004, p. 323)

Although there seems to be an overarching definition of TCKs which roughly states a person who has grown up during his or her developmental years in various countries or locations; each individual and family is unique. It is also noteworthy that the literature review brings out the idea of factors stabilizing the lives of the TCKs, in some cases this may be international schools, having a home in their countries of origin, and even other TCKs. These factors can provide the anchor that grounds the TCK person in the midst of uncertainty. There has been a lot of documentation on the different stabilizing factors mentioned in the literature review but there is little information about its influence on how TCKs choose their future
occupations. It is important to note that this research paper is intended to add to the existing research.

Research Methodology

Framework

For this research I engaged the participants through the framework of Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) ecological model of human development. This framework looks at three different stages and how individuals (TCKs) interact with them. Stage 1 is looking at the self; how are we all equally unique (sex, age, health etc.)? Stage 2 looks at the immediate environment which the individual is placed in and the impacts of his or her relationship with it; family, school, work, neighborhood etc. The third stage looks at the ‘big picture’ or large systems such as cultural norms and historical influence and its relationship with TCKs. As Bronfenbrenner states:

“The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, by the larder contexts in which the settings are embedded.” (1994, p.21)

It is important to note that the individuals who are viewed through lens of the ecological model of human development are not mere blank slates. Although the environments and the cultural nuances have a great impact on the lives of the individuals they are not solely responsible of making up their identity. There is a relationship or a conversation that goes between the individual and setting that he or she resides in. (Bronfenbrenner 1994) From this relationship comes the building blocks of cultural identity.
Using this framework also allows us to see that everyone under this lens is different even though they might have gone to the same school, church or may even have the same family. This goes hand in hand with the Third Culture Kid experience as no one person has the same experience as another TCK. Moreover, TCKs are constantly moving and living abroad making them interact with diverse environments.

Method

**Participants:** This research included 17 different participants consisting of those who consider themselves as TCKs, government officials, non-TCKs, and international educators: Seven were TCKs, three were international educators, three were government officials, two non-TCKs, one CCK, and who was a refugee. Within the TCK subgroup, the members consisted of different nationalities: Egyptian, Japanese, Belgium, South Korean, and Indian. The reason why I chose these TCK people is because there was a variety of age, and gender. Most of these TCK people were people who I have come in contact in some point in my life. Many of my former colleagues, classmates and teachers were a part of this study. I chose international educators as a subgroup because TCKs spend most of their developmental years in international schools. This group consists of an ex-study abroad director, a Dean of International enrollment of a college, and teacher in an international school. I had tried to be as diverse as I could as the international educators were of different ages, had different life experiences and have different job titles. Since my father works for the Embassy of India in various countries and is the main reason why I am a TCK, I decided to make government officials a subgroup. I could not go in detail of the specific job occupation title as it would reveal the individuals to the general public. This subgroup mainly consisted of Indian government officials. Furthermore, I was fortunate enough to come across a family whose father/husband was a former refugee. In my opinion, his input gave another
dimension to the study (I did realize that it was only one person but it was hard to find a refugee who would be willing to participate). Leaving a country of which he was forced to leave due to war and civil unrest would give another side of TCK culture. The last subgroup that I added were the non-TCKs, in other words people who have never left their country. Within this category I was lucky to have found a Cross-Culture Kid, a person who moves within the country during his or her lifetime. This CCK person is a classmate of mine and I approached him thinking he was a non-TCK but as I was interviewing him I came to understand that he is a CCK. TCKs are still a minority and the inclusion of non-TCKs was to give a more complete picture to the study.

**What:** The interviews were approximately 30 to 60 minutes. These interviews consisted of questions around the identity of a TCK. I interviewed ten people and the rest were given questions to be filled out. Only interviews or questionnaires were possible because distance made it hard for focus groups to emerge.

**When:** The process was conducted during the months of August and September.

**Where:** The interviews were conducted via Skype due to the participants not living in Mauritius. While the remaining participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire via email.

**Why:** I was interested in this topic because I consider myself as a TCK person and only recently have I come to realize my identity. Although there are many studies about the TCK culture since the late 90s very little information about the TCK culture has entered the mainstream media. As I have been traveling and living around the world for all my life and I had no idea that I am a TCK. As the TCKs are a mixture of identities and cultures I believe it is important to study these
groups of people because they have the power to become leaders of a globalized world due their accumulation of diverse experiences.

**How:** This project was safe because it did not cause physical harm to anyone. All participants were above the age of 18 and their personal information was kept anonymous and aliases were assigned to them while writing my capstone. At the beginning of the interviews I explained to the interviewees the purpose of my project and handed them a consent form for them to look over. The interviewees had the option to leave the interview at any time without any consequences.

My interviews were phenomenological in nature; the interviewer was largely following the train of thought of the interviewee. Phenomenological research is a “study that attempts to understand people’s, perspectives and understandings of a particular situation” (Van Manen 1990). In this case the particular situation is the TCK context, in the Interviews I followed the thoughts of the TCKs who were explaining their life experiences, different perspectives and understandings of the TCK lifestyle.

However, I did have some general questions (See appendix B) to guide the interviews. I would like to point out that I did ask the interviewees to identify themselves as an international educator, a TCK, a non-TCK, a refugee or a government official. It is important because depending on their background they were able to provide their own unique perspective to the research. I asked questions related to the struggles and difficult times that the interviewees had to go through such as culture shock, assimilation, and reverse culture shock. The interviewees had the option to skip these kind of questions or withdraw from the interview altogether. At the end
of the interview I gave the interviewees time to clarify or ask questions that they might have with my research or me.

I used a voice recorder, pen, and a note pad for the interviews. If the participant refused to be interviewed in front of a voice recorder, the interview was then conducted without one. All individual personal information was kept confidential with aliases given but their general background was kept open (It will not be identifiable by the public at large). For the questionnaire the participants could have skipped any questions or chose not to participate the survey at all if they wished. The questions were asked again based on their identity as a TCK, international educators, governmental officials, non-TCKs or a refugee. All the information has been kept in one single computer.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this research. One of the biggest limitations to this study was the small pool of participants. Unfortunately, it was very difficult to contact or get a hold of Third Culture Kids as they are constantly moving around. When I did manage to send out an email requesting for their input and participation several people ignored the email. I assumed they would not like to participate in the study. I wanted to include as many TCKs as possible because after all they are the focus of this study and each TCK has his or her own unique experiences.

I was only able to get seven TCKs to give their input to this study. Fortunately, I requested participation from other facets of this study such as international educators, government officials, non-TCKs, and a former refugee. I did this to give a better understanding of the TCK experience from different aspects. Again, requesting participation from government
officials and international educators was an uphill struggle. They were either too busy or had said that they would not want to participate in the study.

Another big limitation to this study was the fact that I am living in Mauritius and all of my participants were from around the world. The interviews that I had with them were through the help of Skype. If the participants were not able to skype me then I would email a questionnaire. It was impossible to organize a focus group even through Skype it would have been tough. If I was to organize a conference call on Skype involving 3 to 4 TCKs, international educators and governmental officials, the time difference would have come in the way alongside the availability of the participants. Thus, I was only able to involve two ways for the participants to contribute to the study—Skype and filling out a questionnaire.

The last limitation that comes to mind was the time constraints. I dedicated four months to this research. In retrospect, more time may have allowed me to find more TCKs, international educators, and diplomats to add to my pool of participants. Finding individuals willing to participate was the most difficult aspect of my research process.

Findings

Several questions stood out while gathering the following data (See appendix B). One of the most important question was the first one, as it states, “Can you talk about your life journey up to this point? Feel free to add as much detail as you want.” Off the bat I gave the power over to the interviewee to decide what direction does the interview go and it also helped to see what was important to the person and what sensitive topics. This did not have the same effect on the questionnaire but nevertheless was still very much important. Questions about cultural
assimilation were more personal and therefore gave depth to the study. Each personal narrative was different for every TCK person in this research. These questions mentioned above, I believe helped my research immensely.

**Third Culture Kids**

Raelyn, an international educator, who has and is living her life as a TCK; describes being a TCK as having a ‘wow’ element to her life. She says that she clearly remembers the time when she realized that she is a TCK. “From that realization comes the appreciation of all cultures and values. From this comes the confidence to meet diverse people and cultures”, she adds. As far as TCK culture goes Raelyn’s has a diverse family background. Her father is an American and her mother is a Korean; on top of that she has lived in five different nations throughout her childhood. She considers herself to be neither a Korean nor an American TCK. She considers herself to be ‘Korean-American-Third-Culture-Kid.’

For TCK people they are often perceived of not having a set culture and therefore are misunderstood. For Yak TCKs, “are greatly misunderstood by the fact that they really don’t have a culture of their own, it is more bits and pieces of culture where they have experienced along the way.” As a fellow TCK, I can agree with this statement to be true, I have adopted several small cultural norms from here and there. The biggest example I can think of are the languages that I have picked up over the years, which include: Spanish, English and Hindi. This has enabled me to look at a certain issue with multiple perspectives. As Nab expresses, “It also has given me a sense of what people of other nationalities feel, and allowed me to be more understanding of certain issues or practices that are considered topics in their own culture.” TCKs eventually
become great observers and learners of different cultures and ideas. This enables the TCK population to become more empathetic and caring towards the people around them.

Obliviously there may be some exceptions to this theory. As Ko entails,

“There used to be a Japanese girl of who I went to high school with. She lived in the US for quite a while but she despised the culture as it was. She would constantly complain and miss her Japanese culture. As she made no effort of integrating with the American culture and the people from there. After I left the US, I went to Myanmar and then to the UK for my undergraduate degree. When I went back to visit Japan, I happen to meet the Japanese girl again. It was as if she had never been to another country. To me it seemed a waste that she had even travelled outside of the country.”

To Ko it is the utmost importance that international travelers and Third Culture Kids try to integrate as much as possible within the country of their stay. “It’s not necessarily the time spent in the countries but I feel like how you spend it. The more you try to integrate yourself within the local culture, the more you appreciate it.” It really comes down towards the individual TCK person, as every situation and experience of a TCK is different. Caty describes having the TCK experience can “expand the mind and people can be more accepting of the difference. But some can take the experience in the wrong way and be scarred for life.”

I was also fortunate to interview Charles who is traditionally a non-TCK by the fact that he has not travelled outside of the country all is life. But he has travelled within the United States of America throughout his developmental years. He has lived in several different states such as Maryland, New Mexico, South Carolina, California, Pennsylvania, Colorado and he is currently living in Oregon. According to Reken and Bethel, Charles is a “Domestic” TCK or a CCK (Cross-Cultural Kid). ‘Domestic’ TCKs are children who parents have moved in or among various subcultures within that child’s home country. But unlike the TCKs Charles has an identity as an American even though he has lived in various states.
The majority of the participants who took part in this research agree that being part of the TCK means to have been born into a family who moves around a lot from one place to another due to the parent’s job occupation. But not all families move to another country by occupation. There are some TCK families that had to move out of their country in search of refuge and safety. As Mohammed recounts, that he was working in a newspaper factory in Iran after the Shah had left from Iran. “There was joy on the streets, there was a genuine sense of freedom in the air. Everybody was happy,” He adds.

But this sense of safety and security quickly faded as Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini came to power in 1979. Mohammed adds, “it was difficult for me to continue selling newspapers and I had to sometimes go on the streets at night to sell them.” The dynamic of the country shifted again as it went to war against Iraq in 1980. Mohammed joined the Army that same year and he was on the frontline for a while before he became paranoid about his past. As he recounts, ‘I was very afraid if they found out about my activity before joining the army, if they would find out I would be in a big trouble.’ So he devised a plan to leave the country in fear for his life. He recounts “I made my way somehow to Austria and tried to get an asylum but it was denied. If I had to apply again I would have to stay in the country another five years. The organization that was helping me got me to Germany and then later to Sweden.”

In Sweden is where he found some safe haven. But he decided to move on to the US due to racism and differences within the community. That is where he is currently living. As he puts it, “Here in USA, I have much more friends here, it is more open to different cultures, and they respect you for who you are.”
Travelling the world moving from one place to another seems like a glamorous lifestyle. And I must admit that it definitely has its perks. But for the people who have travelling from country to country in search of refuge and security, I would imagine that they would just want a place to call home. Putting the lens of a TCK on the refugee context really gives a new perspective on the refugee background. It is understandable if a person takes up a job that requires him and his family to move around places, by being a refugee, he or she has no choice. Leaving the country just for fear of not being killed, is the only remaining choice they have left.

International education

According to several of my TCK interviewees international schools are places where, “open-minded, progressive and independent” thinking is promoted and cherished. As Raelyn says, “international schools made me appreciate different cultures more. It is the best place to open up one’s mind of all intellect.” Nab further added, “Growing up with people from different countries has also prepared me to be more accepting of cultural differences and to be more open-minded and tolerant.” For Simon international schools have, “elevated [his] perception of the world…developing a desire to learn many languages.” Caty explains, that TCKs live in a country for a couple of years and then move on. “The teachers in those schools are trained to be able to deal with those kind of students. International schools are ready to support those kinds of kids, kids that are always travelling around.”

For some the international school experience was not too endearing. As evident by their lifestyle, TCKs might go to international schools but the experiences from such settings varies from person to person. Yak explains that in order to have a good education it is important to integrate oneself in the host culture and get the street education of the host country. For Yak
international education and schools is like living in a bubble, it all sounds wonderful in theory but it lacks a practical component. As he puts it, “International or not, you can go down to get educated somewhere but not actually learn about that place and actually dive-in-depth. Actually experiencing first-hand what it’s like to come from that country, to struggle with that people, work with people.”

Ko had the most polarizing opinion regarding international school education. Having been to several international school during his childhood years he has noticed that the schools tend to be really political in nature because of the high-class clientele they attract. Since the schools are targeting a specific set of people who can afford the fees, many of the students have a sense of entitlement. Ko explains, “We international school kids, have this attitude that ‘oh we are better than local school students or even better than some people who are working the schools.’”, he goes on to say, “In a really bad way of saying it, [International schools are] a form of neo-colonialism.” In other words, western countries build international schools in developing countries to influence the children that a certain set of ideas are better than others. For Ko a person doesn’t even need to go to an international school to be a TCK as it becomes a barrier to the assimilation of the local culture. For Ko, the Benefits of having International education system is that fact that there is a “continued consistent education through the international schools globally.”

Some TCK families choose to leave their children in their home countries in a boarding school in order for their children to get a consistent education. As Raelyn explained, “I know many families would not bring their children to visit or live with them to different countries. For them it was more important they have a consistent education with well-established social circles. Not everybody can handle the TCK lifestyle.”
As it is important to have a consistent education, the international school setting itself becomes a home in its own right. Raelyn further explains, “at times I would not feel connected to the world during my summer or winter holidays but as soon as schools were open, I sprung back to life. It was like I was part of something.”

According to several of the international educators, Education is a tool to connect different nations. As the education shapes the lives of the children of a given country and others (if enrolled in an international school), more children end up influencing the lives of others around them in a meaningful way. As Smith puts it, “it is important to learn and appreciate other cultures but then it is also equally important to apply those learnings to your own culture. Only then will you have a true impact.” Luke echoed, “it is important to apply global solutions to local problems.”

Luke also explains that many international schools are having a limited number of students from the host country into the schools. The reason behind this is to create a culture where it is diverse and where it forces students to go out of their comfort zone. Being in a diverse city will have more open-minded local students than in an international school in a rural community.

Roger is a TCK who is also an international educator. When he first went to the United States of America, he would get people asking him if they have running water in India. Or if they have electricity in India. This to him shows that there is a lack of education in the curriculum.

Some of the ways that international students can immerse themselves in the local cultures are by living with host families. Roger, as a former study abroad coordinator, explains, “What local families can do for the international school students cannot be compared to any classroom
teaching. Learning the local nuances, learning through direct exposure, and making lasting memories, will go long way in the development of the student’s learning.” Another way cultural immersion happens is through field trips that students take learning about the history and culture of the country.

Another example Roger gives that shows immersion is when he would invite international business students to meet and greet with some of the important CEOs of Indian companies. “We arrange for corporate dinner, where we invite around 12 to 25 CEOs to come and interact with the students over dinner.” Explains Roger. These interactions with CEOs lasts about four hours and in the grand scheme of things those students might not remember the specific details of the meeting but would have an idea of how business works in India. “When the topic of India comes up, the students will be able to engage with it.” Recounts Roger.

Roger further sheds light on the internationals by saying people of the same nationalities tend to stick together. “Indians among Indians, Americans among Americans, Chinese among Chinese, there is a different comfort level among themselves.” To break out of that mold the international school setting provides the perfect setting for students to explore different cultures. “It comes naturally for you to leave your comfort zone because everyone is different than you.”

Friends

For TCKs there is a mix bag of everyone in their friend circle; local people, other international students and other TCKs. For Ko and Yak, whom made a consist effort to intermingle with the locals, have many local friends from various countries. For Ko, he did not appreciate making friends in international schools because to him the people who went there seemed to be very arrogant and had a sense of entitlement. He explains that he would go to
colleague’s house for a school project, “he would start throwing his shirt, socks and his school bag everywhere on the floor. [Ko] would say to him, ‘what are you doing dude?’ He would respond by saying ‘Oh the maid will clean it up’ that made [Ko] feel that they very different from each other.” Ko further explains, “I feel more at ease with the local population as they are humbler in nature.”

Yak describes having made a friend with Raul who comes from a very poor and dangerous neighborhood. “Raul, a brother to me, was from one of the most dangerous and poor neighborhoods. But I had my fondest memories there.” Having made a friend with a lower socio economic status just goes to show that being a TCK, although having good financial resources does not mean that they will only be friends of the higher socio economic socialites; being a TCK is constantly finding your niche wherever it may be.

Vidya says that there were two set of friends she had at international schools whilst growing up. Group 1 was making friends with other TCK people and international students from around the world. These friendships would often “spill into out of school interactions”; such as hanging out after school in somebody’s house or going to get some coffee. To this day Vidya is in touch with these friends. The Second set of friends were the kids of other members of Indian officials posted abroad. These interactions would happen when families would get together for social dinners. Vidya further adds, “These friendships were important but were not so long lasting as the first set of friends since they were borne more out of the circumstance rather than any conscious reaching out.”

Caty explains that there are different stages of going through before one can find themselves well settled in with a group of friends. The first stage is when you as a TCK look for other TCK people to be able to relate. “I would try to get to know other Third Culture Kids or
international students as they would be more willing to help me out or show me around.” Caty adds. Once you have a ‘feel’ for the place, then you will be able to know which nationals are trustworthy and friendly, as she adds, “Just depends on the personality and how open they are. In terms of how open they are, it is governed by their culture.” Overall people from the local countries going to international schools are better able to understand the situation of TCKs but, “Only other TCKs who travel can know how you feel.” Concludes Caty.

Nab, Ko, Raelyn and Simon had similar thoughts on friendships whilst being TCKs, stating that it was easier to make international friends rather than local friends because of the cultural differences. Going to an international school has given them a plethora of international people and TCKs to relate and become friends with.

As for Charles, a CCK person, it was also taxing to make friends whilst changing places during his developmental years. The technology was not so extensive back then and therefore it was harder to keep in touch with his friends. But now with the technology it has really helped Charles keeping in touch with his friends. When he moved to Boulder, Colorado it helped him settle a lot. Charles explains, “When you move to a new place, it is hard making new friends is really awesome when you [already] have friends. Sometimes it is like I might as well text or Skype my old friends rather than be worried about what to say and not to say in front of new friends.”

For Yannick and Narvesh, who are non-TCKs and have lived all their live in one country, they do not think much of friendships. For Narvesh friendships are very short-lived as “people get married, have kids and move away.” But for him true friendships are those people who remain with you through thick and thin of life’s events. For Yannick, he wishes not to get too
close to people (it seemed to me like a sensitive topic and so I did not press on it.). But he confirms “The friends that I still have been friends for more than five years.”

Cultural Assimilation/Adjustment

“I don’t think I fit in with the Korean society or the American society,” explains Raelyn. She says that she never fit in with the Korean population because she was not fluent in Korean and did not understand some of the cultural nuances. “At school, Korean kids would not accept me as one of their own because of my heritage as a TCK and I would not feel comfortable hanging out with the Americans as they did not look like me.” Echoed Raelyn. She remembers that the most difficult time that she had assimilating to a new culture was when she moved to Germany in her senior year of high school it was very uncomfortable. “I really did not have any friends that year of high school as I was coming from another school and also it was first time in a IB school.” Further adds Raelyn. She later on says that she dived into her books and just concentrated on graduating that year. “I didn’t go out, did not socialize or even try to make new friends; I just wanted to graduate.”

It was not until Raelyn went to college and lived in an international dorm, that she began to embrace her identity as a bicultural TCK. “Living in the international dorm in my freshman year of college gave me the confidence for embracing my identity and heritage as a bicultural TCK. From this confidence I can go to anywhere.” She now says that she would feel comfortable in going anywhere around the world because she has now this belief and confidence in herself. “I know who I am and that gives me confidence to go out anywhere in the world and be successful.” Echoed Raelyn.
For Caty she had a hard time coping with reverse culture shock, but she says that she never had a culture to begin with. “I never really had a culture because I was travelling around all these countries. All I do is pick all the nice stuff and things I liked and made my own kind of ‘international’ culture.” Explained Caty. Her coping mechanism was at first denial and shutting the new information out, as she did not agree with. For her, it was like if she accepts the culture as it was, then she would be part of it. But she could not accept the culture because parts of it she could not understand why would people do things in a certain way. When Caty went to Egypt for the first time she thought to herself, “why are [Egyptians] so conservative, why are they not accepting, why are they not ‘simple’.” She adds that she went to Egypt for the first time when she was coming to terms what are different countries like and “how different Egypt is in comparison to the rest of the world.” But once used to the culture and the country Caty, really liked the “homey feeling, how tight families were, and that everyone cared about everyone.”

When she moved to Myanmar she had a huge culture shock and got bullied the entire first year she was at the international school. But then for the second year she made a conscious decision of “being super nice to everybody for the next three years.” Caty further adds, “I became really attached [to people] and this meant a lot for me because it was a sign of stability that I did not really have.” Now having done her undergrad and gotten herself a job in a UN office in Vietnam, for Caty assimilating has been somewhat smoother both to her parent’s home culture and to any country abroad.

As she now realizes that it is not worth putting a fight, as she explains, “yeah sure I will eat this way, yeah I will dress this way. As long as it is not sacrificing my identity and beliefs. I am ok assimilating to any culture.” By doing so, she also has gained a lot of respect for different countries that she has been too. What Caty has learned from travelling around the world is that
one has to be willing to change and accept some of the local cultural nuances. “There is no such thing as this is the only way, the world is full of so many ways you have to accept them all.” Concludes Caty.

Ko first experienced culture shock when his family moved to Brazil from Japan. For the first couple of weeks that his brother and him had a hard time in the international school at Recife. The students there would call them “shne, shne”. Shne in the Japanese context means “fuck you” and it is rarely used. Along with that the children would throw things at them; apple, bags of chips, bottles of water etc. Ko and his brother would often come home crying and tell their mother that they do not fit in the Brazilian culture. Until their mother suggested that the kids would not necessarily understand the Japanese word ‘shne’ and its context. She later on suggested that if the children are throwing things at them, why don’t they do the same to the children.

So the next time the children threw something at them, Ko threw it right back at them. “They absolutely loved it and during the breaks they started talking to us. Obviously we did not know Portuguese, so it was more of a sign language communication.” Explained Ko. He explains that for the students it was a way to break the ice and see what reactions do the ‘new kids’ give. Ko also explains that ‘shne’ in Portuguese means Chinese and not “fuck you” in Japanese. Ko, says “All you need to do is have a good energy while trying to bond with the local population. The important thing is to make an effort to connect.”

But when Ko and his family moved to Myanmar from the US, he tells that he never really assimilated to the international school culture. “I got there first week of junior year and talked to people and found out how boring and how weird people were.” Ko also explained that there was a bullying culture, if you did not hangout with the ‘right’ people you would be bullied against.
So much was the impact that Ko did not even do the assignments and homework that year. Ko says had it not been for his mother he would have been lost. His mother then introduced him to volunteering and for Ko, volunteering was “to cope with a not-so-fulfilling life. With volunteering I got to leave the rich area of Yangon and experience other parts of the country. This has led me to my passion which is developmental work.”

Ko says that whenever he goes back to Japan, his country of origin, he does not experience reverse culture shock. For him it is more of a place where he is from by birth and that’s it. But in order to assimilate to the Japanese culture, he puts on his ‘Japanese cap’. As he describes it, “I just act more Japanese and do the things more Japanese. I know the culture taboos so I do not touch upon it.” But the native Japanese people figure out that there is something off about him. As Ko’s grandparents even call him and his family ‘foreigners’ with a negative connotation, which in English it roughly translates to being called an ‘alien’. But Ko thinks to himself that deep down the Japanese people who look down upon him are jealous or proud that he and his family get to travel the world.

Ko says that media played a huge part in assimilating to a new country or culture. He says that when he was in the US he would watch “a movie every single day. To the point where [Ko] would remember certain phrases. Just wanted to get the accents correctly.” While living in Geneva he watched a lot the local news so to be able to understand the French and then he would imitate them. And now there is social media. Ko says that social media has made it somewhat easier to assimilate to a country or culture. Like when he was in the US and Facebook was just coming out, Ko remembers when people used to say oh ‘Facebook me’ and that felt as if you were friends with somebody. What Ko has learned up till now in terms of assimilation is that
communication counts a lot. “It is important for you to make [the local population] understand certain things; meet them at halfway.” Concludes Ko.

For Nab, culture shock is something that you get into and it comes with practice; as you might want to distance yourself in the beginning because you are afraid of what you might see. “But as time goes on, you learn to maintain a good relationship despite the difference.” Explains Nab. “One has to keep an open mind or else things might surprise you.”

For reverse culture shock, Nab explains every time she went back home to Egypt, it was important for her to immerse herself in the local culture. “It helped me understand the references that were made when I would be talking to someone from the community (current events, common jokes, famous, common practices, etc.). This made me belong towards the culture.”

For Simon Culture shock came when he moved to the US from Mexico right after completing his junior year of high school. “Everything was shocking; the pledge of allegiance, the ‘talk-back’ to the teacher, the rebellious behavior, and the lack of motivation.” Explains Simon. Simon felt integrated in the American community by surrounding himself with friends who were motivated enough to earn a degree in college. Simon never really had a problem with reverse culture shock because he never really lived in Korea, only just visited for a month or two.

Vidya handled culture and reverse culture shock quite well. According to her, “my parents taught my sister and I to approach cultural differences with a sense of adventure and discovery.” When abroad, Vidya and her sister would pick up the local English accents in schools so that they could just blend in. When they were in an American international school they had picked up American accents and then when they were in New Zealand they picked up
the local Kiwi accents. Vidya explains that learning the local accent was extremely helpful since she was often blend-in with the local culture.

Vidya’s parents never went from one country to another and they always went to India before going to a new country. This in return helped Vidya and her sister stay connected to the Indian cultural nuances. Having said that, Vidya did have a hard time initially dealing with the pollution, non-secure public spaces, overcrowding, and bad weather. The different education system also a burden initially but Vidya’s parents were always there to help her and her sister out in whichever way they could.

For Yak in the beginning going to new places was not that bad, it was amazing. As he says, “I fell in love with the different celebrations around me, different kind of mentalities, I absorbed it. Like a chameleon.” When Yak first went to Bolivia, he was enjoying life and had many new friends. But then a new kid came and started to turn people against him as Yak was the only white person in the room. “[New kid] was able to make everybody see me as the outsider or the outcast.” From then onwards, Yak felt depressed and wanted to take his own life.

Luckily, Yak went to a Buddhist retreat in Bordeaux, France to find some inner peace and solace. When the retreat was over, Yak’s parents advised him to give education another try and made him understand the importance of it. Yak decided that he would go to a boarding school in Canada. “It was more of an out of the firing pan and into the fire kind of deal.” Recalls Yak (there was a lot of bullying and hazing within the school). But since the school was heavily focused on sports, Yak fell in love with rock-climbing and white-water kayaking and that was how he got by during his time in Canada. But he did not stay there long in Canada as he did not want to be associated with bullying. So Yak then decided to go back to Bolivia, because he missed his parents a lot.
But his parents said that if he was going to come back to Bolivia he would need to go back to the school where he was bullied in the first place. But while living in Canada “I learned in Canada very quickly that sometimes to make sure somebody does not insult you again is to stand your ground and actually fight them for it.” Exclaims Yak. So that’s what happened when Yak went back to Bolivia. He got into a lot of fights but at the end Yak was able to gain some respect amongst his peers for standing up for what he believes in. During this time, he also turned to substance abuse, to numb to pain away. But eventually he graduated and went to college in the US.

Reverse culture shock was not much of an issue for Yak as right now he lives and works in Belgium. He says that he needs a family environment wherever he goes and as long as he has that he can manage to assimilate anywhere.

For Mohammed, as a refugee in Sweden, it was initially pleasant as they were placed into a community where everybody was understanding and helped out one another. But then Mohammed was forced to move to a rural part of Sweden and there he found it hard to assimilate to the local culture because the people there had never experienced foreigners of Arabian decent. Hence Mohamed was called ‘blackhead’, to which Mohamed tried to talk to the local Swedish people but because of language barriers it was hard for him to communicate to the locals.

For Mohamed it is was hard to assimilate to the Swedish culture because of culture differences. As Mohamed puts it, “Family is very important, relationships between the members of the family, respect to the elders and religion has a special place in our heart.” But “In Sweden it seemed to me that the families did not have values, there was no family; wives and husbands living together did not necessarily have respect for one another.” Moreover, Mohamed explains that Swedish people would tell him that he would not be able to get a job. Determined to prove
them wrong. Mohamed went to university. After completing a degree in electrical engineering, Mohamed moved to the US for a better lifestyle. “Here in USA, I have much more friends here, it is more open to different cultures.” Adds Mohamed.

For Charles, a CCK who has lived in seven different states within the USA up till now, says, “Living from place to place is definitely a gamble. You might think that you will be able to assimilate yourself anywhere but that is not always the case.” Explains Charles. When Charles moved to Colorado for his master’s program he thought he would fit right in. But the place was so different from him that he expected, that he could never really assimilate to it. “It’s like I had imposter syndrome where I act like everybody else around but deep inside me I was not happy. I could not imagine myself being there for too long.” Echoes Charles. This is one instance where a CCK person has his or her struggles just like a TCK.

Roger, another international educator, explains that integration within the local culture is important for the growth of an individual. Before the student leaves for their study abroad Roger and his study abroad office would give a ‘pre-departure’ orientation and an on-site orientation the moment the student arrives. “Pre-departure orientation is very critical as well as the onsite orientation so that we can prepare them mentally, emotionally, psychologically to what they are going to see, smell, feel, experience once they arrive.” Echoes Roger.

Once at the site, Roger says that the country resident director would then recommend varies student clubs to the international students or TCKs, in order for them to accommodate and network in the local culture. There would also be field trips organized by the resident director. The purpose of these trips would be to learn more about the history and culture of the country. Roger adds “The key thing for me when we do an immersion program is that to create
environments intentionally and strategically so that the students has the opportunity to immerse themselves within the culture.”

Once back to their respective countries, Roger says, more and more universities are focusing on reverse culture shock orientation. In it, the students are made to understand that the place they had left is not the same. As they have outgrown themselves whilst leaving abroad. Roger says, “Once back the students tend to think that everybody will listen to them. But that is not the case, they might not get the attention that they are looking for. They have to make a new normal for themselves and once they have made it they can carry on with their lives.”

Luke, an international educator, explains that in his university to make the international students integrated in the local student population there are several different events that they hold. One of the events that they do is “inviting guest chefs through [their] dinning and hospitality program of foods from their home country to make an authentic cuisine.” Adds Luke. He further echoes, “We also have a very activity campus ministry that is very active with different faith communities in our city.” Throughout his eight years of experience, he has noticed that TCKs generally bond well with other international students. Lastly, he mentions that TCKs “thrive in assimilating to new environments.”

**Constants**

The TCK lifestyle consists of constant traveling and moving around. As one travels, one meets new friends, learns new values and eventually has to learn to let all that go as he or she will move again. In between the stages of assimilating into the new culture and leaving the old culture behind, TCK people might come into a limbo state where they find themselves confused.
This is when their ‘constants’ come into play. People, things, or ideas that make sense in the world. For Caty, Ko, Yak, and Vidya, family has been their number one constant in their lives.

For Ko, his mother has been the there when he needed support and guidance. “Yeah, I think she has been the supporting [me] just mentally. She is strong, kind and the most important is that she always tries to integrate herself in the local community wherever she is.” Adds Ko. He stresses that for TCKs, parental education is just as important as international education maybe even more. “If you do not try and are just comfortable where you are, you will never fully understand or appreciate the local culture. I think the trying part is where your parents come in.”

For Caty, her constants all along were also her parents along with her two sisters. She explains that she never really talked to her parents directly about her experiences, “but just having them is a very comfortable and constant reminder of where I come from, my culture, my religious beliefs, just certain ways of being. My parents make me feel very grounded.” Explains Caty. She further adds that “A lot of things are changing around me and change is the only constant in life. Also, I feel like my parents give me support and my sisters expect that same support from me as I am the oldest sister.” Caty says that her sisters are going through the similar issues she went through whilst growing up as a TCK. There are some things that the sisters cannot discuss with their parents and Caty is there for guidance. Caty also learns a lot from her sisters about the world through their perspectives.

For Yak, his parents have always been there for him, when things were not going so well. Yaks says that his parents always gave him the freedom to do whatever he liked but when there was a need of a safe haven, the parents were there to provide support. For him, not only his family are his constant but he himself is his own constant. He explains, “Being a TCK teaches you a lot about what it means to have yourself as an ally. At the end of the day, you are the only
person who can truly understand your experience as a TCK because everybody’s TCK experience is completely different.”

For Vidya, family was and has been very important in her life alongside the books she read during school days. She describes being with her family is like coming home to a ‘safe place’, a place where she feels comfortable. Just like Yak, Vidya’s parents also did not pressure her to go down a specific career path. But they had always grounded her but forcing her and her sister speaking in their native tongue—Bengali. Her father worked for the Indian government as a diplomat and has been to several places during his career. Vidya explains that it was important for him and his family to go back to India after every outing, so that Vidya and her sister have a somewhat connection to India.

For Raelyn, her constant and method of integration with in a new culture was through learning the local language of the country. As she now knows, Korean, English, Thai, German, Mandarin and French. Raelyn adds, “Learning a new language was like having a best friend.” Through this passion of learning languages Raelyn is now a certified TESOL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) instructor.

For Nab and Simon, there constants have been with the company of friends. Family are always there but there are somethings that one cannot discuss or share with family members. As Nab puts it, “friends make me part of the environment that I live in; they make me feel as if I am not alone. But due to my constant travelling the distance makes hard to maintain friendships.” For Simon, “friendship is like connecting to someone with the same frequency as yours. The more you travel the more interesting this becomes.
For Mohammed, his constant in the midst of finding a new home culture was the pursuit of freedom and education. As Mohammed states, “I moved to USA, here it was easier to find a job…here if you have experience for some specialty, knowledge of new technologies, and a be hard worker, you can go far. It took me about one year to find a company to hire me for my knowledge.” Mohammed also states, “I have made long lasting friendships and have made the US my home because of freedom of persecution.”

Future

“Being brought up as a TCK, you ideally want to work in an international environment.” Explains Caty when asked where she would like to work in the future. She further goes on explaining that even though a TCK person would settle down in the country of his passport of his birthplace and work in a local company. “He or she will internationalize the workplace by just being there,” explains Caty. The person’s experience and ways of dealing with different people would bring a new dimension to the workplace where he or she is working.

Right now Caty works with a UN agency in Vietnam. Caty says that she always wanted to work for a UN agency but now working in one, she realizes that there is a lot of paperwork to be done. “It is not like you go out and actually help people. But I strive for that and at some point, I would want to be sent out for helping poor people, refugees or something.” Illuminates Caty. In terms of her constant, her parents and her sisters, they did not have any say on Caty’s job outcome. The only connection that Caty sees is, “my parents have chosen a life where I am always travelling and so I have adapted to the international atmosphere. That influenced my decision in choosing to work for an international organization.”
For Ko, TCKs will not play a major role in our society in the coming future, but they will be more of a commonality. Ko also explains that if TCK really want to make a difference in a country then he or she would need to fully integrate themselves in that culture. They would need to integrate themselves to the point they are citizens of that country. For example, if a TCK was born in Mongolia and happened to connect with the culture of South Africa and decides that he wants to settle down. Then he would have to relinquish his TCK heritage to be fully one with the South African culture. “TCK is like having no emotional ties to a country; the more one integrates the more the TCK mentality eludes them.” Explains Ko.

Having said that, Ko believes that TCK people are responsible to make a difference with in a given community. Therefore, Ko’s contribution to help the community is by going into developmental work. This inspiration to go into developmental work is seeded by his constant—his mother. “My mother made me do volunteer work which in turn developed a passion inside of me to do development work. I am still finding what to do in development and that is where I am right now.” Concludes Ko.

Nab would like to improve environmental and climate conditions in her ‘home’ country—Egypt. “This has largely been influenced by the way I’ve seen other countries run, and I am always comparing my home country to the country I live in; it has given me many ideas for improvement.” Explains Nab. Nab says that her constant, her friends, have not really influenced her on becoming an environmentalist.

Raelyn always had a passion for learning a new language, as well as education in general. “I definitely want to go into working as a language educator.” Explains Raelyn. She further adds that she would like to work in an international environment as it makes work “a lot more
interesting.” Raelyn also feels that TCKs have a lot to contribute to any work environment as they have many, “culturally enriching experiences.”

Simon now works for his own fashion business which he started by the help of his parents. “My family had been in the business for a long time in Mexico City. With their support, I am now the owner of a wholesale company for women’s clothing in Los Angeles.” Explains Simon. His inspiration to go into the fashion industry has always been his parents not his friends who Simon named as his constants while growing up. Simon further adds, “For TCKs the sky is the limit, now every job it trying to get that international statues and TCKs are the ideal fit.” Exclaims Simon.

“People who have had an early exposure to living in (and not just visiting) different countries have a broad and progressive world-view that will serve them very well. Becoming more effective and productive ‘world citizens’. Points out Vidya. She explains that TCKs are blessed by having immense empathy and understanding which then can close down the bridges between nations. Working in the Indian Diplomatic service has allowed her to fulfil her dream of “traveling, meeting new people and expressing herself.” Her inspiration came through her parents who were also in the Indian Foreign Service.

After having a turbulent life experiences, “[Yak’s] parents gave me the confidence to apply for this [hotel management position], they are my backbone.” Explains Yak. For Yak, TCKs “understand the world as it is and how it functions.” TCKs, for him, can have a successful career in which ever field they go to.

Roger, international educator, says that TCKs have great potential but they need to know how to use it to their advantage. Roger gives the example of a girl who was from a Korean
decent and who sang very beautifully in English but when it came to speaking her insecurities took over her and would not talk due to the fear of humiliation. Roger says, “The psychological barriers are very subtle but it’s there. You can even see it in body language. I want to be careful, I don’t generalize.” To be successful one has to break out of his or her insecurities. Roger further explains that TCKs are going into business, translation, education, and obviously the Foreign Service of a given nation.

As an Indian Foreign Service officer, Devi says that “a TCK government official is more likely to be a better communicator and listener… As a result, they would be very effective in putting for our national interest and getting results in a foreign country.” Ian, Another Indian Foreign Service officer adds, “a TCK can assume any role or responsibility in any country – be it in the government or the private sector.” He further added “[TCK] can be successful anywhere but how much home-grown knowledge and insight he or she has is to be seen as he or she has been mostly away from his birth country.”

**Discussions**

It is important to note that the sampling group for this research is not extensive to draw any concrete theories relating to the Third Culture Kid context. Through my research I have learned that each TCK experience is unique in nature. Deriving from that, I was able to find some rough outlines regarding the TCK lifestyle.

Growing up in different cultures and countries during one’s early developmental years is the general definition of being a TCK. But what I found through this research is that TCKs go through culture and reverse culture shock quite often throughout their lives. Being in a culture or reverse culture shock in a country, is like being in a limbo state, where one does not know what
should he or she do. This eventually goes away as one starts to integrate or assimilate to that one culture or country. Interestingly, the more one integrates oneself in a culture or country, the more he or she is becoming part of that community, the more he or she is becoming a bicultural person and less a TCK. In my humble opinion, part of being TCK is being in that state of limbo; not knowing where to belong and what to do with accumulation of diverse information. As Ko puts it, “TCK is like having no emotional ties to a country; the more one integrates the more the TCK mentality eludes them.”

Going through culture or reverse culture shock should not be taken lightly. As one of my interviewees discusses how he went into substance abuse, depression, and almost tried to take his own life. While being in that state it is important to be doing something sort of activity or developing a hobby such as volunteering, playing a sport or joining a student club. As Caty explains after she was bullied her first year in Myanmar, she had made a conscious decision to open up to people and try to get along with them. Doing so Caty was able to make long lasting friendships with her peers. It is important for a TCK person to try and experiment with new ideas and habits.

The families of TCKs can generally choose their lifestyle as such as being international educators, foreign service officers, working in a multinational company etc. But people often tend to forget about those individuals who do not choose to leave their homes but rather are dislocated due to war, civil unrest, or natural disasters. Refugees are not always mentioned in the same breath as TCKs but there are many parallels to their lifestyles. The biggest difference that comes to mind is that TCK families have somewhat of a choice to leaving their passport country but refugees do not have that luxury. There seems to be a positive connotation towards the
lifestyle of TCKs but a negative connotation for refugees, although they share very similar experiences. It would be interesting to have a study to see the parallels of the two.

Refereeing to the research question, what influence do the ‘stabilizing factors’ or ‘constants’ have on the occupation outcome for the TCKs? There does seem to be a connection between the ‘constants’ or ‘stabilizing factors’ and the occupations interests. As some of the interviewees have stated their constant have a direct influence on the occupation. Ko states that it was his mother who was the main reason behind him going into developmental work. For Simon it was his parents who helped him with his fashion career. Yak got the confidence from his parents to apply for the hotel management position. Raelyn became a TESOL instructor by following her passion of learning new languages. The parents of Vidya were Indian diplomats and influenced her to pursue the same career. Caty’s parent’s contribution to her working in UN agency was that they picked a job or lifestyle where it has made Caty comfortable living and working in an international setting. The only exception was Nab’s career choice. She wants to be an environmentalist but the influence she got was through her travelling and noticing how wasteful her home country is in terms of resources. Nab names her friends as her constants throughout her life but they had little to no influence on her being an environmentalist.

The majority of the constants that the TCKs have are their parents and immediate nuclear families. This comes to no surprise as families often travel together and share many of the same memories together. The parents have a huge influence both directly and indirectly on their TCK children.

Institutions, organizations, or people that might benefit from this study are the following: Foreign service agencies or the diplomatic corps., the medical community, teachers and scholars,
study abroad institutions, multinational companies, and border petrol/customs and immigration department of a given country.

Some ideas for further research:

- TCKs and higher international education
- Refugees and Trauma
- TCKs and racism
- TCKs and mental illness
  - Substance abuse
- TCKs and sports and recreational activities
- TCKs and various forms of media
- TCKs and languages
- TCKs and their families
Work Cited


InternationalschoolofYangon.org. Date accessed: 20th July 2016


Appendix A

Informed Consent

You are invited to be a part of a research study to look at the significance of Third Culture Kids (TCKs) in a globalized world. Please take whatever time you need to discuss the study with your family and friends, or anyone else you wish to. This is an invitation and you as the participant have the full authority to decline to be part of this study. In this research study, I am exploring what influence do the ‘stabilizing factors’ have on the occupation outcome for the TCKs?

Should you decide to participate you will be asked to participate in a[n] (Interview/questionnaire) where you will be asked few open-ended questions. The estimated time for the entire interview is around 30-60 minutes.

You can stop participating at any time. You will not be penalized in any way. You may also choose to skip or refuse to answer any question. This study involves the following risks: possible triggering of stressful memories. There may be other possible risks but I am unable to predict.

It is reasonable to expect the following benefit: better understanding of the TCK context. However I cannot guarantee that you will personally benefit from this study. The information that you provide will further assist those who are interested about the topic.

I will take the following steps to keep information about your confidential and to protect it from unauthorized disclosure, tampering, or damage: no names instead aliases will be used. All records from this interview will be kept on a single, password computer. If you would like you may also have a final copy of the capstone when it is finished.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to not participate in this study or withdraw from the study at any time. Deciding not to participate in this study will not result in any consequences. If you have any questions before, during or after the interview/focus group please call Aman Singh at +230 59223185 or email aman.singh@mail.sit.edu and/or contact the SIT Institutional Review Board at irb@sit.edu.

Please type a response after the statement below. A “YES” response indicates that you understand the statement and are at least 18 years of age and you agree to participate. If you respond “NO,” your response to this study will not be used.

I understand the potential risks associated with participation in this study. I also realize that while the researcher will keep responses confidential, e-mail surveys are not secure. Furthermore, I realize that I any omit any question(s), and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty. I am at least 18 years of age or older. (YES/NO)
Appendix B

Questions (TCKs)

1. Can you talk about your life journey up to this point? Feel free to add as much detail as you would like.
2. How do you define TCK?
3. Was your education in an international setting? If so, how has that impacted you as a person?
4. Were you friends with the local people or other TCK colleagues or other internationals?
5. What did you study in College?
6. What or who remained constant in your life?
7. How did you cope with Culture Shock?
8. How did you cope with Reverse Culture shock?
9. How many languages do you know? How does language influence your identity?
10. How did media help you assimilate to a particular culture or country?
11. Do you think being a TCK has influenced your values or interests?
12. What future do you see the TCKs having in a globalized world?
13. What type of work interests you? How do you see your career path progressing?
14. How does your constant influence the decision on your job outcome?

Questions (Non-TCKs)

1. Can you talk about your life journey up to this point? Feel free to add as much detail as you would like.
2. How important has your school setting and education been?
3. How important has the longevity of your friendships been in your life?
4. What or who has remained constant in your life?
5. What did you study in college?
6. What are your views on traveling and living abroad?
7. How would you define globalization?
8. What are some of your views of people who live and travel abroad?
9. What type of work interests you?

Questions (Refugee)

1. Can you talk about your life journey up to this point? Feel free to add as much detail as you would like.
2. What led you to leave your home, friends and family to go to another country?
3. How was the assimilation process once you were in another country?
4. How was the culture shock once you were in a new different country?
5. How was reverse culture shock dealt with when you went back to visit your family and friends in your country of origin?
6. Were you ever a victim of prejudice?
7. Once assimilated how easy or hard was it to get a job?
8. How hard or easy was it to make friends in the new country?
9. Now that you have spent x amount of years in the new country, do you yourself more of a citizen of the country of origin or the country you reside in?
10. How easy or hard was it for you children to assimilate to your country of origin?
11. Who or what has remained constant in your life during your transition from one country to another?

Questions (International educators)
1. Can you talk about your life journey up to this point? Feel free to add as much detail as you would like.
2. What do you think is the role of TCKs in a globalized world?
3. Why is International education important in a globalized world?
4. Do you feel that International schools are a safe cocoon or a bursting bubble for foreign students?
5. How is it decided in your school what should be taught and what should not be taught?
6. Working with a number of diverse students, would you say that they are more open-minded than other local students?
7. What languages are taught in your school?
8. What are some of the cultural immersion programs at your school?
9. In your personal opinion how hard or easy has it been to help TCK students assimilate to a new culture?
10. What are occupation trends do you see TCKs taking?

Questions (Government officials)
1. Can you talk about your life journey up to this point? Feel free to add as much detail as you would like.
2. Define globalization in your own words. Is it good or bad for the world?
3. What do you think is the role of TCKs in a globalized world?
4. What are some of the benefits/disadvantages of having a TCK person as a government official in a foreign country?
5. What future do you see the TCKs having in a globalized world?