

Third Culture Kids: Transition and Persistence When Repatriating to Attend University

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By

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THIRD CULTURE KIDS: TRANSITION AND PERSISTENCE WHEN REPATRIATING TO  
ATTEND UNIVERSITY

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Third Culture Kids (TCKs), are a large and growing demographic in the global society (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). In the United States, they come from the over four million Americans who were living overseas in 2004, with this number expected to explode in the next decade (Hill, 2006).

TCKs figure prominently in the social and political fabric of the United States, with Barack Obama, the 44<sup>th</sup> President, being one of the most famous examples of a successful TCK. President Obama moved to Indonesia with his mother and step father when he was six years old and lived there until age ten, attending local schools in Jakarta. Speaking of the confusion he felt about who he was, Obama states that during his high school years he experimented with alcohol, marijuana, and even cocaine so that he could “push questions of who I was out of my mind, something that could flatten out the landscape of my heart, blur the edges of my memory” (Associated Press, 2007).

Despite the fact that there are prominent members of society who share a TCK upbringing (U.S. TCKs number in the millions) - and that the TCK phenomenon is not new - they are one of the most under-researched and under-served populations in global society (Fletcher, 2001, Quick, 2010). Even though there has been increased emphasis on retention and persistence to degree completion instigated by Tinto’s landmark study (Mannan 2007), the unique needs of this population continue to be virtually ignored. Very little research is completed on those students repatriating to the United States to attend university (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009).



TCKs come from a variety of backgrounds including the military, global business, diplomatic endeavors, international education, missions, and humanitarian and other nonprofit entities (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). They represent all different facets of society and have a widely varied “global experience.” Some spend only a relatively short time overseas while others spend their entire childhood. The length of time has an impact on acculturation to the host culture (Quick, 2010), but more important in characterizing the TCK experience is the fact that those years are during the time when the individual is forming their identity (Mortimer, 2010).

TCKs spent their developmental years outside of their parents’ passport culture. This can create a situation where identity formation, normally a task of adolescence, occurs later in life – often at the same time the TCK is repatriating to attend university (Mortimer, 2010). This can cause what Erikson terms “role confusion” and affect the TCK’s feelings of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and other factors known to contribute to attrition in college and university settings (Mortimer, 2010). This despite the fact that some TCKs are multi lingual, and accrue benefits of growing up in another culture which can contribute to their being accepting of others, socially adept, self-confident, independent, culturally sensitive, and excellent bridge builders (Useem, Useem, & Donoghue, 1963; Weigel, 2010). The global lifestyle can result in a paradox – an individual who exudes confidence yet does not fully understand who they are (Mortimer, 2010).

Adding to the paradoxical existence of the TCK is the somewhat discombobulated developmental sequence they can experience, which may complicate the transition process to the university setting and create additional challenges to persistence. A majority of TCKs do not persist to graduation, and those who do often end up transferring institutions three to four times during their undergraduate education. Some individuals transfer up to nine times before managing to complete their bachelor’s degree (Quick, 2010). Their previously highly-mobile

lifestyle makes it easier for them to consider simply packing up and leaving a situation that they find difficult or challenging (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

Feelings of surprise at the dissatisfaction they feel upon repatriation and the unexpected “reverse culture shock,” coupled with unresolved loss can create a situation that exacerbates depression or other mental illness that, for some, may be just beneath the surface. It is important to understand the transition experience of the repatriating TCK in order to address their unique needs, help them persist to degree completion, and become fully self-actualized adults who contribute their vast cultural knowledge to global society.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Many Third Culture Kids (TCKs), who are American citizens, repatriate to the United States to attend university. It is expected that, since the TCK is returning “home,” that the adjustment will be smooth, that they will find a solid cultural fit, make friends, assimilate easily into the fabric of the university, and experience satisfaction with their university experience (Quick, 2010).

However, upon returning “home” for university, many TCKs fail to establish a sense of belonging, have difficulty building friendships, feel like misfits, become depressed, and are so dissatisfied with their university experience that they transfer institutions multiple times, or drop out of higher education (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Few university retention programs address the unique needs of the TCK (Quick, 2010).

This apparent contradiction in expectations versus experiences could be explained by the fact that these TCKs do not fully identify as being “American” save in name only, having bonded more with their “host cultures” than the “home culture” of their parents.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this applied research study (Patton, 2002) is to explore how factors may affect Third Culture Kids (TCKs) and how they transition to, feel about, and persist to degree completion at university. Applied research is particularly appropriate in this study because of the focus on exploration of this relatively under-researched phenomenon. Taking into account theory, this phenomenon will be studied empirically. With an emphasis on retention of this population, this study will focus on TCKs with American citizenship who return to U.S.-based colleges or universities with the intent of completing bachelor's degrees.

## **Research Questions**

1. How do Third Culture Kids (TCKs) relate to the concept of culture, and how do they characterize their relationship to any specific culture?
2. In the adjustment to college, what transition experiences do TCKs consider significant?
3. What factors influence the TCK's decision to persist at their university to degree completion?

## **Orienting Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

Just as a skeleton provides form to the body, so an orienting theoretical framework is helpful in providing support for a research concept – a foundation from which to launch exploration and a lens through which to view the study and its results. There are many contributing theories, frameworks, and perspectives that have informed this study – including Kübler-Ross' (1969) ideas on the grieving process, Tinto's (1975) seminal work on retention, Harris' (2005) and Lingenfelter's (1996) perspectives of missions and application to good schools, Useem's (1963) exploration of TCK attachment, and Pollock and Van Reken's (2009)

research on the globally mobile lifestyle. However, the foundational theoretical framework used to examine this study and its results was that of Erik Erikson and his stages of development.

Erikson was born in Germany in 1902, almost fifty years after another famous psychologist, Dr. Sigmund Freud. Both of these theorists postulated that human beings develop in stages and that successful transition through earlier stages is necessary to make progress through later, more complex stages. Erikson proposed eight stages of development including: trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. role confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, and ego integrity vs. despair. Of particular interest in this study are Erikson's stages five and six. Stage five is identity vs. role confusion and represents the developmental task of adolescence - usually taking place between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Stage six, intimacy vs. isolation, usually occurs when the individual is between 18 and 35 years of age – young adulthood.

The fifth stage represents a fundamental shift in “responsibility” for development as it is the first stage where the individual's actions have more to do with appropriate developmental achievement rather than what is done “to” the individual. It is during this stage that the young person discovers who they “are” apart from their families and significant others. The typical adolescent is developing a philosophy of life and begins to look “sideways” – to peers - for influence rather than from parents. Normally occurring in a rather stable social system such as a local community and during the time the adolescent is still safely ensconced within the protective nucleus of the family, this is a time when individuals develop their own set of ideals that will shape their decisions and how they dedicate their energies for the successive stages.

The sixth stage is when young adults have relationships in their focus. Their need to form intimate relationships comes to the fore as they search out strong connections. Failure to

develop these relationships can lead to isolation and loneliness. Individuals who fail to establish loving relationships begin to live in an ever-shrinking world, as their circle of intimacy collapses around them.

Since the dawn of mankind, the human race has been involved in research. Curiosity is natural to people and humans respond to this curiosity by investigating the phenomena that compose their world. Jean Hershey quotes Merriam and Simpson (2000, p. 5) as they define research as “a systematic, purposeful, and disciplined process of discovering reality structured from human experiences. Research is a matter of process as well as outcomes.” Creswell identifies three types of research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Creswell, 2009). This study fits with the qualitative method of inquiry.

Qualitative research involves exploration and understanding. It is the attempt on the part of the researcher, serving as a lens, to examine emerging questions and themes drawn from observations, interviews, document analysis, focus groups, and other means for the purpose of interpretation and meaning making (Creswell, 2009). Inductive in nature, qualitative inquiry is a study of complexity, and the researcher should not be satisfied with superficial analysis (Wolcott, 2009). The researcher should seek complexities and deeper layers, always asking more and more meaningful questions (Dr. Lu Bailey, personal communication, December 16, 2010). Fieldwork is of primary importance in qualitative research and the researcher needs to spend time in the setting and with the participants being studied (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative research typically has a smaller number of participants, resulting in the collection of thick, rich data. The researcher serves as the instrument of the study – so rigor and skill play a role in the credibility of the study (Patton, 2002). Because of the more intimate nature of qualitative research – the study of the meanings that individuals make of their world –

data, descriptions, emerging results, and environment can be very context specific. The richness of the data can provide an opportunity for the reader to determine application to other situations, populations, and contexts.

The guiding epistemology – “how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8) – of this study was constructionism - which disputes that there is objective truth that can be discovered with correct research. This philosophical worldview portends that “truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). Meaning is constructed, not discovered. Creswell refers to the worldview (referred to as paradigms by Lincoln and Guba, 2000) as “a general orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher holds” (2009, p. 6). This orientation of the researcher provides a cohesive fit that contributes to the validity of the study.

Many authors have contributed to the concept of constructionism including Schwandt (2007), Neuman (2000), Berger and Luekmann (1967), and Crotty (1998). Constructionism is built on the concepts of understanding, relationships, interaction, and meaning. The researcher with a constructionist worldview uses broad, open-ended questions to encourage the participant to make meaning of their situation and the world around them. Since each individual is making their own meaning and interpretation of objects, things, and experiences, there are always multiple perspectives and many answers to every emerging question (Creswell, 2009).

The theoretical perspective that determined the methodology of this study (Crotty, 1998) was phenomenology. According to Crotty (p. 12) “Constructionism and phenomenology are so intertwined that one could hardly be phenomenological while espousing either an objectivist or a subjectivist epistemology.” The intentionality of phenomenology “posits an intimate and active relationship between the conscious subject and the object of the subject’s consciousness.

Consciousness is directed towards the object; the object is shaped by consciousness” (Crotty, p. 44). The subject and the object interact. Phenomenological research involves what Moustakas terms an “essence description” (1994). Thick, rich description is the foundation on which qualitative inquiry, and phenomenological research rests (Wolcott, 2009). The researcher invites the reader to “look through” his or her eyes (Wolcott, 2009, p. 27) and through the art of descriptive storytelling attempts to convey the lived experience of the participant.

Phenomenology is a rigorous and scientific approach to qualitative research that attempts to determine meaning from experience and interaction. It involves the “lived experiences” of persons and assumes context is created by the reality of the participant (Patton, 2002). As such, there are as many interpretations, as many meanings, as there are people.

The roots of phenomenology can be traced to Germany and the writings of Edmund Husserl and is the search for *verstehen*, or understanding. Husserl was involved in phenomenological research in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was on his initial philosophy that Heidegger, Moustakas, and others developed modern-day phenomenology (Hershey, 2007).

According to Husserl, there are four philosophical tenets that undergird phenomenology that include: a return to the traditional tasks of philosophy, the pursuit of a philosophy without presuppositions, the intentionality of consciousness, and the refusal of the subject-object dichotomy (Archer, 2010). Phenomenology, by Husserl’s standards is concerned with a meaning that evolves from the relationship between the individual and object and that object and individual are hopelessly intertwined – one does not exist without the other. According to Van Manen (1990), the phenomenologist is more concerned with the meaning made by an individual about an event than the facts surrounding that event – when it occurred or how long it lasted.

Within the large tent of phenomenology, this study relied on “heuristic” research as outlined by Clark Moustakas. In investigating the human experience, Moustakas also focuses on the internal search of the researcher. As the researcher is the lens, is in contact with the participants, and therefore “present” in the process and in the phenomena, he or she cannot emerge unchanged from the experience - untouched by epiphany (Moustakas, 1990). The process of the research itself – the unfolding and the emerging of the discovery creates within the researcher not only new meanings of the phenomena but also a deeper understanding of themselves, their experiences, and their dialogue with the world (Buber, 1965). Heuristic research uses creativity and self-discovery as a way of making meaning of phenomena (Moustakas, 1990).

Phenomenology, and specifically heuristic phenomenology, was appropriate for this study as this research is concerned with the lived experience of the TCK. It was a search for understanding of the transition during repatriation for university and the persistence of the TCK to degree completion. This researcher could not avoid being drawn into the story of these individuals. As she explored the meaning of the phenomenon, while recognizing her own past experiences, she realized that she will be forever changed by the research.

### **Researcher’s Statement**

It wasn’t until beginning this study that I realized that I am married to a TCK – my husband having spent his adolescence in Canada as the son of a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force. He repatriated to the United States to attend university in his parents’ home state of Oklahoma. Having only lived in Oklahoma for a short period of time when in elementary school, he arrived at the University of Oklahoma in the early eighties with a Canadian flag



decorating his dorm room and an accompanying Canadian accent replete with phrases that although common in Ontario, were an oddity in the more agricultural Oklahoma.

I have had some limited opportunity to travel internationally, with trips to Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Canada, Japan, and an entire summer spent in China in 1981 before travel between the U.S. and China became commonplace. I have always been fascinated with other countries and cultures and have had a particular interest in how international experience changes expatriates. Several of my friends have raised their children internationally and are now facing some of the challenges described in this study.

After college graduation and a career in public education in Texas, I moved and became the Director of the BRIDGE program at a small private university in the Midwest. The BRIDGE program is designed to provide support to students from underprepared backgrounds. My university is fortunate to have a large number of TCKs in their student population, and offers scholarships to the children of missionaries currently serving in foreign countries. This missionary population coupled with a number of children of families involved in international business and the military provide a significant portion of the entire university student body.

Other contacts that I have had with TCKs include the summer of 2010 when I had the opportunity to cook for a workshop provided by members of the university community for repatriating TCKs. It was during this experience that I heard several comments from the TCKs stating their frustration that no one understood what they were going through and how this impacted their university experience. They were anxious to be asked about their transition and were upset that no research addressed their unique needs and concerns.

This lack of information on the TCK experience became more evident to me as I started inquiring of my colleagues about their impressions of TCKs and their satisfaction at college.

Most were unaware that we had a significant TCK population on campus and thought I was referring to international students. My dissertation committee expressed interest in my topic when I visited with them, encouraging me to pursue my interest based on their extensive experience in higher and common education, missions, international experience, and human development. Each of them possesses a vast knowledge base that significantly contributed to this study.

Recognizing and naming my assumptions was particularly important with regards to the shared faith tradition that I had with some of the participants. Becoming aware of shared language in that tradition was crucial to paring away personal beliefs and pre-conceived notions of the impact of a faith-based perspective on the phenomenon. This enabled me to analyze the responses of the participants while recognizing the impact of my own personal lens.

Just as the data was constantly emerging, the introspective process of epoché was necessarily continual. It was also helpful to formally examine my personal lens at least four distinct times during the study. The first of these formal times was prior to and shortly after beginning the study. A second formal introspection was conducted after reviewing the literature. Mid-way through the interviews, a third process of epoché helped to deal with bias that crept into the process. Finally, I reflexively re-examined the experience after that data was collected and during the writing of the analysis.

By becoming increasingly more aware of my own pre-conceived notions I was able to more effectively transcend my biases and embrace the meaning participants made of their own experiences. This research experience and the relationships that have developed over the course of the study have changed me. I am now aware of the challenges faced by TCKs and am more sensitive in my own dealings and interactions with them.

## **Procedures and Methods**

This study consisted of a series of focus groups, formal and informal observations, one-on-one interviews, and an examination of documents and artifacts (including photos, websites, blogs, yearbooks and other materials) produced by groups associated with TCKs and the universities that they attend. Originally, eighteen participants were planned for interviews but, because of the response to the study, the participant pool was increased to twenty and eventually closed despite additional requests to participate. The study population was drawn from three universities. The first university included in the study was a small, private, religiously affiliated college in the Midwest; the second was a private university in the Northeastern United States; and the third was a large, public land-grant university in the middle part of the country. Originally, another small university located in the Midwest was also included in the study, but, because of the large number of individuals who wanted to participate, it was removed as a site. All interviews and focus groups were drawn from the three identified student populations, and all artifacts and documents originated from these institutions.

Interviews included open-ended questions, prompts initiated by the researcher, and participant-produced drawings and interpretation by the participant. Focus group participants answered open-ended questions, participated in group discussion, produced drawings, and shared their interpretations of their drawings.

Phenomenological research guided the selection of the methods listed above including open-ended interviews, observations, and document analysis. Lincoln and Guba's (2000) evaluative criteria for naturalistic inquiry was used to establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Efforts toward trustworthiness are presented in a trustworthiness table in chapter three.

Emerging data was analyzed by methods including “Pursuing Members’ Meanings” – examining interview data through the lens of Emerson’s categories (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Transcription analysis used the Gee format with Mishler’s co-construction (Dr. Lu Bailey, personal communication, December, 2010). This method organized the data into manageable constructs and provided a “map” for analysis. The “map” was helpful in discovering thematic elements within the data that might otherwise have remained hidden. Analytic statement and integrative memos (Emerson, et al.) divided the data into “chunks” and established threads. Statements from the data was organized onto note cards and divided up into thematic elements to identify similarities and trends.

Interviews, observations, and focus groups were completed by May, 2011. Data analysis of interviews, focus groups, observations, documents and artifacts occurred throughout and following the data collection process.

### **Significance of the Study**

From the study of the experiences of TCKs, both prior to their repatriation and during their time at university, it is hoped that others can benefit from the results of this study. TCKs could benefit by perhaps being better prepared for the emotional and physical stresses they will experience at repatriation, realize they are not alone, and develop the skills, self-understanding, and courage necessary to persist. Parents of TCKs could benefit by becoming more aware of what their child will encounter, helping to prepare them, and better knowing how they can help their children successfully transition. University personnel – professors, staff, and administration - could become better informed about the TCK experience and develop services and support to enable their persistence to degree completion.

## **Summary**

TCKs are a significant and growing population (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Despite a childhood rich in international cultural experience and self-confidence developed from their globally mobile lifestyles, TCKs experience significant challenge and dissatisfaction when repatriating to their passport country for university; this results in serious retention and persistence issues. Erikson's psychosocial theories on development provide an important framework for examination of this phenomenon. Constructionism is the guiding epistemology and phenomenology drives the choice of methods and methodology. Interviews, focus groups, document analysis and observations helped explore the transition experience of the TCK and their persistence to degree completion at their university of choice. It is hoped that professionals, parents, university personnel and TCKs can benefit from the results of this study to better prepare TCKs for the challenges they will experience upon repatriation for university.

In chapter two, literature pertaining to development, grief, retention, persistence, and the TCK phenomenon will be reviewed. Chapter three will delve into methodology, followed by chapter four which will be the presentation of data. Chapter five will explore the results of the study, discussing results and conclusions, and includes opportunities for further research in this important and expanding area.

## **Chapter Two**

### **A Review of the Literature**

Several U.S. Presidents (including the current sitting President), presidential candidates, the U.S. Treasury Secretary, top advisors, corporate CEOs, military leadership and enlisted personnel, and several million other individuals share a common characteristic – they are Third Culture Kids (TCKs). According to Dave Pollock, “A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ passport culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). With improved transportation, the explosive expansion of technology and the internet, and the growing acceptance of the globalization of society, the number of expatriates raising their children overseas has grown dramatically (Cockburn, 2002; Hill, 2006; Storti, 2007). As a result of this shift in society, their children are more multicultural in their outlooks, having roots in no particular culture, but being veritable “citizen[s] of the world” (McCaig, 1992).

TCKs are not a new phenomenon. Since the beginning of time, mankind has migrated. Paleo-Indians traveled across Beringia from northern Asia to Alaska, the ancient Mayans deserted Chichen Itza and Tikal, and the Israelites left Egypt en masse, traveled across Sinai and settled across the Jordan River in Canaan. Other people groups were nomadic, moving from place to place in order to survive. Now, families with children move all over the globe for the purposes of the military, business, education, diplomacy, and missions (Hervey, 2009), resulting in the emergence in prominence of the TCK population. This trend will only grow, as the U.S. Census Bureau estimated in 2004 that more than four million Americans were living overseas for

a variety of reasons (Eakin, 1999), and according to Forrester Research, by the year 2015 over three million Americans will move overseas for high-tech and service industry jobs, alone.

Despite the growing numbers of TCKs in the population, this group has been virtually ignored by researchers (Fletcher, 2001; Quick, 2010). For instance, retention, which is one of the most pressing issues facing higher education, has been studied extensively with regard to the general student population, but very little research has been done on one of the most cohesive and fastest growing student populations – those students repatriating to the United States to attend college (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009). It is imperative that higher education address retention of this population, not only for the economic survival of the institution, but also because understanding the TCK experience is essential to understanding much of what happens during the transition to higher education (Quick, 2010).

This review of the literature will address several issues directly related to the transition of the TCK to university. The review is divided into three major topic categories. The first one concerns the TCK – who they are, the various subpopulations, the TCK experience, U.S. Third Culture Kids, and Adult TCKs. The second major category explores the challenges of re-entry including topics concerning identity development, loss, shock, and the transition that TCKs experience. The third category specifically delves into the university experience and associated topics such as choosing a college, settling in, factors affecting retention, and various retention programs. An alternative perspective on the TCK experience is included in the second section of the review, providing a counterpoint to the topic of identity formation in that section. A conclusion will tie together the various threads that compose the tapestry of the TCK phenomenon.

## **Third Culture Kids**

### **Who they are**

Many terms exist to describe this unique sub-group of the world's population. "Global nomads," "missionary kids (MKs – specifically for the children of missionaries)," and "Third Culture Kids (TCKs)," are just a few. TCK is the term of choice for this particular study as it encompasses the essential components of the most descriptive definition of this population and is grounded in developmental theory. The reference to this population as Third Culture Kids does not infer that they are currently children. In fact, there is another entire subpopulation called Adult TCKs (ATCKs). The term TCK refers to the fact that they spent their developmental years of their childhood outside of their passport culture. While they were children – sometime between birth and 18 years of age - they were not raised in what society would consider their "home" culture or country (McCaig, 1992; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010; Useem, Useem, & Donoghue, 1963).

The first researchers to study this group, and the ones that coined the term "TCK," were John and Ruth Hill Useem. Living in India in the 1950's, Ruth Useem, a prominent social scientist, was the first to notice that TCKs share unique characteristics in common with each other that were not shared by their "home country" peers (Useem, Useem, & Donoghue, 1963). She identified these common TCK characteristics as a "third culture," the "first culture" being that of the "home country" of the parents of the TCK, and the "second culture" being the conglomeration of all of the different places that have served as home for the TCK (Useem, et. al). This "third culture" provides natural "glue" that binds TCKs together into a cohesive group – this shared experience of belonging everywhere yet nowhere. This relationship with others



like them provides the sense of belonging that is critical to healthy human development (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002).

TCKs are multi-lingual, open to new ideas, accepting of others, culturally sensitive, socially adept, and excellent bridge builders (Useem, Useem & Donoghue, 1963; Weigel, 2010). This capacity for bridging cultures was recognized by the Nobel committee when they awarded the Peace Prize to President Barack Obama shortly after he took office (Hervey, 2009; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010). Add to these qualities the independence they develop as a result of globally nomadic lifestyle and the TCK is an adaptable, confident, and skilled arbiter of culture (Quick, 2010), able to make friends and adapt quickly in whatever environment they find themselves. They are a different sort of individual as, according to Bellah, “Leaving home in a sense involves a kind of second birth in which we give birth to ourselves” (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1996, p. 65). The TCK is birthed from the global experience and inherits characteristics that allow them to adapt, survive, and thrive as a citizen of the world.

The TCK experience is described as “paradoxical” by Mortimer (2010, p. 3), “their unique characteristics prove to be both benefits and challenges at the same time. TCKs are highly adaptable, yet they lack a true sense of their own identity or culture. They get things done quickly, yet they have great difficulty planning or making decisions. They mature early, but then they often have delayed adolescence.” It is essential to understand the TCK profile because of its importance to understanding so much of what happens during important transitions such as that to higher education (Quick, 2010).

When asked about the TCK experience, TCKs expressed the following major benefits to Quick (2010): learning new languages, meeting new people, learning first-hand how other cultures operate, seeing and experiencing many “exotic” places, having confidence in travel and

starting anew, having friends all over the world, learning to be creative, understanding that there can be more than one way to look at the same thing, being good storytellers, and having cross cultural skills, observational skills, adaptability, and social skills. However, when asked to list the challenges, TCKs produced a similar list including the following: having to say frequent goodbyes, having to find new friends, leaving pets and people behind, having to wear “masks,” being abnormally normal, being culturally imbalanced, being all too familiar with pain, not knowing their own country as well as other places lived, and being critical of many things but especially of home-country peers. This complicated existence gives the TCK a broader view of the world that can lead to a condescending attitude or an “arrogance” that can damage their ability to interact (Quick, 2010). They experience the same fundamental needs as their non-mobile peers, but their life experience is totally different putting a unique perspective on every need.

The TCK phenomenon is not cut and dry and no two experiences are identical. The danger of oversimplification of the TCK experience is ever present. It is imperative to keep in mind that TCKs are individual human beings, and as such, have their own unique lived experience. Even so, the impact of spending their developmental years outside of their parents’ passport culture contributes to a sharing of some common characteristics. The TCK experience is a complex one, offering many shades and depths of meaning to be explored.

TCKs are also known as “hidden immigrants” because even though they look like the dominant culture they think and act differently. It is actually easier to enter a culture as a total foreigner that does not resemble those in the home culture. Because “foreigners” look different, people expect them to act differently and they are allowed more leeway in making cultural errors. On the other hand, when the individual looks as though they belong in the home culture,

they can receive negative responses, including anger or disgust, from people in that culture (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

There are many types of “TCKs” or “global nomads. In the next section a brief description of these sub-populations will be outlined.

### **TCK subpopulations**

People who move outside their home culture are known by a variety of monikers including, Third Culture Kids, Sacredly Mobile Youth, Global Nomads, Sojourners, Internationally Mobile, Expatriates, Missionary Kids, and Overseas Brats. Each one of these names implies a small difference in the sub-population. For example, missionary kids are exactly that – the children of missionaries living overseas. Sacredly mobile youth implies young people whose parents are involved in some spiritual work overseas. Overseas brat is typically a term to refer to the military TCK. Internationally mobile, sojourners, expatriates, and TCKs are general terms that refer to a child of any parent living outside their culture. The term TCK is an umbrella term that encompasses all children of missionaries, diplomats, educators, military, business, media, non-for-profits, or any other overseas occupation.

Each sub-population has its own unique characteristics even though they share much in common. For example, expatriates who are involved in business oftentimes have a much different international experience than the children of missionaries. They may have special compounds in which they live, have domestic help at home, attend an international school, and live rather isolated from the host country (Hervey, 2009). Missionary children, on the other hand, may live in a primitive tribal village, go to school with native children, eat native foods, and experience the culture on a more basic level of integration (Quick, 2010). This is not to say

that all members of the same sub-populations have the same experience, rather that, in general, the experiences may be as varied as the individual families living overseas.

Specifically regarding international mobility and attending university, there are three types of experiences according to Quick (2010):

1. Repatriating TCKs – those who live in another country and return “home” in order to attend university. The repatriating TCK may return to their passport country with or without their parents and family.
2. Transitioning TCKs – those who live in another country outside of their “home” and decide to attend university in a different “host” country outside of their “home.” They are considered an “international” or “foreign” student.
3. International or foreign students – those who grow up in their passport country and expatriate to attend a “foreign” university. This transition is more straightforward and clearly delineated and the student is considered “international.”

This study will focus on the repatriating TCK with American citizenship coming to the United States to attend university.

In the next section, the global nomad experience will be explored with special emphasis on the impact of that experience on the outlook of the TCK.

### **The TCK experience**

The TCK Experience is unique but in no means monolithic. Ruth Hill Useem and her husband spent years in India observing and interviewing the expatriate population that lived there during the 1950’s. She discovered that expatriates prefer to spend time with other expatriates even though they may be from different cultures and countries. According to Quick (2010, p. 9) “Expats had formed an interstitial lifestyle that was different from either their home

or host cultures, but it was one that they shared together in that particular setting.” This enhanced comfort level with others of shared experience creates a situation where TCKs quickly reach out to others like them and form strong bonds in a condensed amount of time. TCKs have spent incredibly rich childhoods in a myriad of cultures, learning that there are many beliefs and manners of life that are different from their “home” but that are valid and meaningful, contributing to who they are as a person. However, according to Quick, (2010, p. xxvi) “upon returning to their ‘home’ culture they find themselves misunderstood, weird, strange, standing out as being different, misfits in the very place where they had always imagined they belonged.”

TCKs are influenced by various cultures, according to Hervey (2009, p. 3), “both on a superficial level of language and traditions, and a deeper level of values and assumptions.” They may feel more connected with their “host” culture than the culture of their parents’ home country. This connection may not be shared by the parents, whose cultural identity was formed within the cocoon of the passport culture (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). TCKs may have difficulty identifying and verbalizing where they are from – feeling at once like they belong everywhere and nowhere.

The fact that the TCK assimilates the values and assumptions of the various host cultures can create difficulties in relating to home country peers who they view as shallow, monocultural, and isolated. This attitude is not lost on home country peers who tend to view the TCK as arrogant and over-confident. Even President Obama is not exempt, at times being viewed as exotic and elitist (Quick, 2010; Van Reken, 2008). The global experience of the TCK that binds them together with other more “internationally acquainted” individuals can, in fact, serve to isolate them within the international community, especially if they are reticent to expand their comfort zones.

The TCK experience often involves schooling. Some TCKs attend schools within their local host communities while others attend an international boarding school. These international boarding schools offer the chance for the TCK to bond with other internationals in an academically challenging environment (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Many times these international schools offer an internationally accredited curriculum such as the “International Baccalaureate” program, based in Switzerland. The academic expectations of such a curriculum are advanced and many TCKs experience disappointment with their perception of the level of academic rigor of their university upon repatriation (Quick, 2010).

The global experience of the TCK, the moves inherent in the nomadic lifestyle, and the unresolved grief associated with repeatedly leaving people behind, causes the TCK to have difficulty forming long-lasting and deep attachments to other people (Hervey, 2009; Wyse, 2000). This is despite the fact that they are identified as individuals who are flexible, have a global perspective, and can interact comfortably with individuals who are very different from themselves (Davis, Headley, Bazemore, Cervo, Sickinger, Windham, & Rehfuss, 2010; Gillies, 1998; Pollock, 1998; Van Reken 2008).

This study is specifically concerned with U.S. Third Culture Kids. In the following section, U.S. Third Culture Kids will be discussed with emphasis on their unique characteristics and the challenges they face.

### **U.S. Third Culture Kids**

U.S. TCKs, or U.S. citizens who spend their developmental years in other cultures, are often shocked by the perceived materialism and shallowness of their home-country peers. This is especially true for those TCKs who have grown up in under-developed countries and have lived among the population rather than in a compound or an international facility. Partially

because of the fact that the United States is separated by an ocean from Europe, Africa, and Asia, the American culture is very ethnocentric. The home-country peers of the TCK may have never been exposed to any culture other than their own and may not be as open-minded and culturally accepting as the TCK feels they should be. This creates a situation where the TCK views the home-country peer as sheltered, shallow, ignorant, and close-minded, while the home-country peer views the TCK as arrogant and self-important (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009).

Another unique cultural difference experienced by the U.S. TCK is that home-country peers tend to use facetious humor in interactions – all in an attempt to get to know the newcomer. This may feel offensive to the TCK who may not realize that sarcasm is saying the opposite of what is intended. The TCK may view the dialogue as coarse and insensitive (Quick, 2010). Because there are so many different phenotypes in the United States, the home-country peers will tend to view the TCK as belonging according to how they look. They look for a comfortable label for the newcomer so that they can place them within the existing social order. This creates a problem for the TCK who is more different than they are alike.

The Third Culture Kid phenomenon does not exclusively affect children and adolescents. Many TCK challenges extend into adulthood. In the following section, the unique challenges faced by adult TCKs will be examined.

### **Adult TCKs**

Ruth Useem and Ann Baker-Cottrell of San Diego State University, in a 1998 study, surveyed adult TCKs and discovered that a full three-fourths of ATCKs feel differently than others who had not lived overseas during their developmental years (Quick, 2010). ATCKs may have difficulty establishing themselves and may capriciously discard current relationships for new ones, or switch jobs repeatedly. They feel that the “next” change will be the “one” and then

they will finally “settle down.” According to Mortimer (2010, p. 4) “Consequently, all of these factors that are unique to those who have transitory developmental years can either prove to be a strength or a weakness in the adult years, depending on what kind of help a TCK receives from their family and other professionals.” Many are often angry – feeling isolated as a result of identity issues (Mortimer, 2010).

The ATCK experience is not entirely negative. In fact, research has shown that ATCKs are highly educated, linguistically proficient, and tend to have high-level careers. Some modern-day examples include President Barack Obama, Valerie Jarrett, U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, and Senator John S. McCain. Once established, they tend to have a significantly lower divorce rate than the general population, and are active and integral volunteers in their communities and beyond. They can relate to almost anyone, possessing an independent spirit and a cosmopolitan attitude (Mortimer, 2010). However, because of their delayed adolescence they may accomplish these tasks later in life and may attend multiple universities, taking longer to graduate, all of which may be factors in their higher rate of depression and suicide than the general population (Useem, 1971).

This study examines the TCK repatriating to the U.S. to attend university. Challenges of re-entry are a significant part of repatriation and are explored in second major topic category of this review that follows.

### **The Challenges of Re-entry**

Quick (2010) states,

“...among the many transitions and relocations of their lives, the most difficult one for most is when they repatriate long term to the country which their passport declares as home but in which they may not have lived for much or all of their childhood.” (p. xv).



The TCK and their parents expect that they will be returning “home” when, instead they discover that their global lifestyle has shaped them in ways that make it difficult for them to return to the “shape” of their passport country. They think differently, have a different outlook, and relate to others in a manner that is foreign to their home country and can appear strange to their peers who have experienced a more traditional upbringing. It is commonly recognized that the repatriation experience is as difficult as or more so than moving abroad. This is primarily due to the fact that the TCK may not know who they are and how they can fit in anywhere. They feel no sense of belonging – no connection to the culture in which they find themselves (Quick, 2010). They cannot seem to answer even the simple question of where they are from.

The fact that this identity confusion may happen at the very time of repatriation for university complicates an already daunting situation – growing up and taking care of the transition to university. TCKs may have difficulty making friends and building relationships causing them to feel even more isolated. The TCK, according to Quick (2010) experiences “mind unpacking” which, as it continues, causes grief to recycle over and over, revisiting the pain as the TCK is momentarily swept back in time to a place that has become idealized or romanticized. The TCK remembers only the good, coming to believe that what “was” is so much better than what “is.” They felt comfortable in the past and the current discomfort they are feeling seems to grow in their minds.

Multiple moves impact the ability of the TCK to successfully develop their identity. In the next section, identity development of the TCK will be examined with emphasis on the psycho-social theory of development proposed by Erikson.

## **Identity Development**

Identity development is a crucial task of the adolescent according to Erik Erikson, a noted psychologist and developmental theorist (Mortimer, 2010). Without successful completion of this task, the TCK has difficulty transitioning to adulthood. In this section of the literature review there will be a discussion of what constitutes identity, why identity development is crucial, and the importance of the developmental years.

### ***What is identity?***

Identity is how the individual defines him- or herself. It is a complex combination of sense of place, parental influence, and flavoring added by the values and cultural mores of the surrounding culture. In the normal course of human development, identity formation is taken for granted, occurring organically as the child grows up within their home culture under the influence and care of their parents. However, in the case of the globally mobile, everything is in constant flux, creating a situation where the TCK is attempting to establish a static identity in a tempest fueled by the constant comings and goings in the TCK world (Mortimer, 2010).

There are two basic realities that shape the formation of the TCK's identity – they live in a “genuinely” cross-cultural world and they are highly mobile (Quick, 2010). This unique combination of exposure to many different cultures and the fact that they are never in any one place long enough to “own” one culture or another creates a search for identity that can not only be extended over time but also partially confused (Mortimer, 2010). This is different than prior to World War II when most people were born and raised in “stable communities” – ones that seldom changed, people moved infrequently, individuals kept their jobs for twenty years or more, and pastors, teachers, extended family, and community leaders all took part in the lives of the young people of the community. This mono-cultural environment added a sense of security –

of knowing who one was and what was expected. The social values, rules, traditions – the culture – was a comfortable, well-worn fit and created within the individual a sense of belonging (Quick, 2010).

***Why is identity development important?***

Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development and attachment theory outline that adolescence is the time when identity development occurs and that this is crucial to successful transition to adulthood. If the individual fails to develop their personal identity during this stage of development, then he or she experiences what Erikson terms “role confusion.” This can result in difficulty in making “life” decisions such as college major, college choice, career, spiritual direction, and relationships (Mortimer, 2010). Research indicates that TCKs have a more difficult time with the developmental task of identity and therefore take longer to find their “paths” in life (Eakin, 1999). This can lead to a series of “non-completions” and floundering as the TCK attempts to make decisions when they do not know who, with any certainty, they are. Without appropriate identity development, relationships suffer, as it is difficult to build a connection with someone else when you do not know yourself (Carlson, 1997; Hervey, 2009). This search for congruence of self – knowing who one is and having a sense of belonging – is a journey that involves comparison with surrounding “others.” By sorting out who they think they are in relation to others, the individual is establishing the foundation for further development (Quick, 2010).

According to Quick (2010, p. 6) “Global nomads [or TCKs] often know more about other places, peoples, cultures, and languages than they do their own passport countr[ies]. This can lead to cultural imbalance, identity issues, and being misunderstood by home-country peers,

which can then lead to the feeling of not fitting in or not belonging.” Implications for higher education are obvious and will be discussed later in the review.

Identity development is the task of adolescence during the developmental years. The next section includes a closer examination of the importance of the TCK’s developmental years.

### ***The importance of the developmental years***

The definition of a TCK is someone who spends their developmental years outside of their passport culture (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). By the very fact that the term “developmental years” is used as a defining characteristic of this population indicates its importance. The developmental years are a busy time for the child. It is during this time that they decide whether or not they can trust those around them, if they are secure, and who they are. These years provide the foundation for adulthood and if the foundation is strong, then the tasks of adulthood are easy. If the foundation is poorly laid, or is broken or crumbling, it is nearly impossible to successfully transition to adulthood and conquer the accompanying developmental hurdles (Mortimer, 2010). Denial of the need to complete adolescence simply shoves the developmental tasks “under the carpet” only to later re-emerge as depression or an inability to form healthy relationships (Mortimer, 2010).

Adults go through culture shock and may experience a self-reflection that defines their adjustment period as difficult and challenging. The difference between adults and children is that adults have already come to terms with who they are and have established their core values, sense of guiding principles, and cultural identity. This important foundation gives them the security they need to realize how they belong (Quick, 2010). According to Weigel (2010, p. 2) “The cross-cultural experience also affects adults; however, the impact is more profound for

youth between birth and 18 years of age when the child's sense of identity, relationships with other, and view of the world are being formed in the most basic ways.”

TCKs may outwardly appear to be more mature than their peers, but in reality they may actually be somewhat slower in their adolescent development. This can be attributed to the normal process of adolescence where the individual discovers who they are by testing the rules – also known as rebellion. This normal task of adolescence is complicated by the fact that the TCK is absorbing a conglomeration of customs, traditions, rules, and norms from every place they have ever lived. Instead of testing the rules, they are oftentimes still trying to figure them out. So, rather than being able to move to the higher order developmental tasks, they are stuck in developmental limbo, trying to figure out what is culturally appropriate so they know what to rebel against. This can delay rebellion until the time of repatriation – which often coincides with college (Quick, 2010).

One TCK researcher, Dr. Barbara Schaetti, developed an identity model addressing the specific challenges faced by TCKs. Erikson's theory was chosen as the theoretical lens for this study because of its broader, more fundamental base of the theory, and the fact that it has been proven over time; Schaetti's model is shallow in application, however, it is important to be aware of the components of the Schaetti model. The Schaetti model will be explained in the following section

### ***A TCK identity model***

Dr. Barbara Schaetti has developed an identity development specific to TCKs. This model is used by many who work with TCKs including Tina Quick, author of *The Global Nomad's Guide to University Transition*. The model identifies five stages that the TCK traverses while discovering who they are:

1. Pre-encounter – The TCK is living their extraordinary lifestyle believing it to be “normal” and not understanding how it is shaping them in unique and unusual ways. They have not, as of yet, been confronted with the fact that they are “different.”
2. Encounter – The TCK has an “experience” that illuminates that they are different from their peers. They begin to ask fundamental questions about who they are and how they fit in. This can take place a variety of times, but sometimes upon repatriation.
3. Exploration – During this stage, TCKs attempt to figure out why they are different. They may feel inward pain as they experience unresolved grief.
4. Integration – This stage can last months or even years – it involves becoming comfortable with being different and experiencing congruence. This harmony comes from realizing how their international experience has fundamentally shaped who they are. At this stage, TCKs will either embrace their life experiences and use them to facilitate their success or discard them.
5. Recycling – The TCK may experience multiple encounter experiences with each successive one being less intense but causing self-reflection. They will eventually move through exploration and integration again (Quick, 2010).

Not everyone agrees that TCKs face a fundamental challenge with identity development. In the next section, an alternative TCK perspective will be examined – one that focuses on faith and relationship with a higher being as opposed to the societal perspective.

#### ***An Alternative TCK Perspective – Identity and the Sacredly Mobile Youth***

Contrary to the societal perspective, as outlined above regarding TCKs and their struggles with identity development, is a second perspective outlined in research by some in the

religious community. This second perspective is one that focuses on the sense of identity and belonging, exterior to culture, that the traditional societal perspective claims that the TCK struggles with. These researchers, who use a hermeneutical approach in an attempt to revise the entire typology of the TCK, maintain that the TCK (whom they refer to as a “sacredly mobile youth”) derives the essential sense of identity and belonging from their relationship with God (Keuss & Willett, 2009). They refer to the holy displacement of Israel found in Psalm 137 and use the language of the psalmist to examine the sense of place or belonging that they believe the TCK should experience. Even though they acknowledge that the normal markers used in identity formation in the *eretz sham* (the land of “there”) are not available to the TCK, they propose that the TCK understands that deepest meaning is derived from the Sacred. According to Keuss and Willett (2009, p. 9) “In short, the assumption is that identity that is deep and robust is always grounded in theological rather than simply sociological dimensions of personhood.” They go on to explain that the identity of the individual is formed “vocationally” through the work of Christ rather than “culture” as a sociological “location.”

Additionally, the authors claim that the TCK experiences a “depth of being rather than a developmental deficit to be overcome” (Keuss & Willett, 2009, p. 10). The TCK, according to Keuss and Willett (2009), should exhibit a confidence that comes from affiliation with the spiritual as opposed to the confines of culture. The very fact that they belong to no one culture in particular, according to Keuss and Willett, strengthens their identity in the *Imago Dei* (the image of God), as they quote Augustine (p. 10), “*Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi; in interior homine habitat veritas* (Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth).”

This “sacredly mobile” perspective concerning TCKs was not adopted for this study because it is the researcher’s opinion that it deals too specifically with those TCKs who

expatriate for religious reasons alone – the overall TCK population is larger and encompasses those who expatriate for other reasons including: international employment, military service, diplomatic endeavors, and education. Furthermore, this study views the TCK experience more holistically, encompassing all facets of identity development, not just identification with the theological component of personhood. The “sacredly mobile” perspective ignores some of the fundamental emotional struggles experienced by the TCK, choosing instead to blame socio-emotional struggles on a deficiency in the TCK and in their religious faith.

The life of the TCK is filled with constantly leaving. In the following section, “leaving” and its affect on the TCK will be examined.

### **Leaving**

The life of the TCK is filled with transitions. Quick (2010) quotes Nancy Schlossberg, counseling psychologist as saying, “A transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requiring a corresponding change in one’s behaviors and relationships” (p. 1). These transitions can be “keenly anticipated or feared. They can be stepping stones to maturity and new stages of life, or they can be fraught with uncertainty and inconclusiveness and laced with pain” (Quick, 2010, p. 25). Constant comings and goings make the TCK well-acquainted with “leaving.” The TCK just becomes comfortable within a culture, and with people of that culture and they are forced once again to leave. Add to this the fact that they typically make friends with others of like experience so that even if they aren’t the one who is leaving, their friend may very well be.

In order to be able to “enter well” at the next place on the TCKs itinerary, it is important for them to “leave well.” Dave Pollock developed a model for leaving well using the RAFT acronym – Reconciliation, Affirmation, Farewell, and Think Destination:



1. Reconciliation – do not leave a place with loose ends, undone business, or unfinished business as this can lead to relationship problems later in life.
2. Affirmation – affirm people who have been important. Tell them how much they are appreciated.
3. Farewells – many cultures have built-in farewell traditions. Observe these when appropriate or create new ones. It is important to say proper farewells to move forward on the journey.
4. Think Destination – keep focused on purpose and the end. Without forgetting what was before, realize that the end of the journey holds promise and opportunity (Quick, 2010).

By leaving well, the TCK has emotional energy reserves that are available to spend on the transition to the new location, easing the stress of the relocation. It is the fear of leaving, or being left that drains the ability of the TCK to successfully transition. From the book by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross *On Death and Dying*, she quotes a poem by Rabindranath Tagore:

*Let me not pray to be sheltered from  
dangers but to be fearless in facing  
them.*

*Let me not beg for the stilling of  
my pain but for the heart to conquer it.*

*Let me not look for allies in life's  
battlefield but to my own strength.*

*Let me not crave in anxious fear to  
be saved but hope for the patience to  
win my freedom.*

*Grant me that I may not be a  
coward, feeling your mercy in my  
success alone; but let me find the grasp  
of your hand in my failure.*

Only by tying up the loose ends and coming to resolution about leaving can the TCK hope to face the new era after transition with energy and hope.

With every “leaving” the TCK experiences loss. The losses unique to the TCK experience will be explored in the following section.

### **Experiencing Loss**

The accumulation of significant losses experienced by the TCK is far greater than those of other “non-mobile” human beings (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Routinely they are uprooted and transported to a location totally alien to them, often without their belongings. The losses TCKs experience are both tangible and easy to identify such as loss of their house, pets, possessions, friends, foods, places, languages, and schools, and intangible such as a lifestyle, status, reputation, sights, sounds, smells, events, history, celebrations, and their entire world. The intangible losses, as they are more obscure, can be more difficult to identify and therefore grieve.

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) in her seminal work *On Death and Dying* has identified five stages of grief travelled by most people experiencing loss. These five stages include: Denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. In order to successfully progress to the stage of acceptance, it is important that the other four stages be traversed in some form or order. According to Kübler-Ross, acceptance is not necessarily a “happy” stage, rather it is as if “the pain is gone, the struggle is over (1969, p. 124). Acceptance of the new situation

does not imply rejection of what went before (Kübler-Ross, 1969). Some TCKs fear that when they accept their transition to their “home” that they are turning their back on the culture that helped make them into who they are (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

Quick (2010) elaborates on these five stages by addressing the specific “tasks” associated with loss that the TCK needs to address. She terms these tasks, “grieving well” and states that humans can get “stuck” emotionally until we recognize our losses and grieve for them – thereby validating all the good in life. These tasks include: Recognize and name the loss, mourn the loss, accept the loss, and move forward to the next developmental stage. Grieving well provides the closure necessary to progress developmentally to the next life stage.

However, completion of these tasks may not be as easy as might be thought for the TCK. One of the most critical components of grieving is time, and most TCKs have little of this important resource. Airplane trips make travel from one location to another hours instead of days – reducing the amount of time TCKs have to come to grips with their grief. They arrive in the new location, in the case of repatriation, – “home” by their parents’ definition – and are expected to function with acceptance, even enthusiasm (Quick, 2010).

Additionally, the parents of the TCK may inadvertently add to the inability of the TCK to grieve. They often do not allow themselves to grieve, fearful that they may create anxiety in their child. They tend to focus on the “cognitive” reasons for the move rather than the emotional implications. Programmed by mobile living to take care of business efficiently and effectively, they do not take the personal time to deal with the painful side of the move. Above all, parents do not want their children to be sad and acknowledging that the TCK is grieving would upset the “tough upper lip” script many have come to accept. Parents also may not understand why the

TCK is not excited and happy about returning to the place that the parents consider “home” despite the fact that the host, or second culture feels more like home to the TCK (Quick, 2010).

Unresolved grief can lead to multiple serious issues later on in the TCK’s life. Weigel (2010, p. 4) states, “Losses throughout their lives are common for third-culture students, and many deal with unresolved grief well into adulthood.” This inability to overcome grief can lead to depression, which has recently become more common among all college students (Weigel, 2010). Depression has been described as being “bigger” than grief in that it is “clinical” and may require medication to remediate. Depression makes each day, each moment, seem insurmountable. It is a deep sadness that cannot be escaped and the individual only seems to want to sleep. According to Quick (2010), the American College Health Association’s National College Health Assessment found in a 2005 survey that fourteen percent of over 50,000 students surveyed reported feeling so depressed they had difficulty functioning anywhere from three to eight times during the past year. Depression seems to spike about six to eight weeks after the start of the semester. This correlates closely with homesickness brought on by the stress of mid-terms and the passing of the first school holidays. School holidays present additional challenges to the TCK as they may not be able to visit their families. They have no real “home” to go to as they are no longer members of their host culture and are not established in their home country. The further the TCK goes into the first semester, the shorter the days become adding to depression. Quick goes on to say that since 18-25 years of age is the new “prime time” for mental conditions such as depression to emerge, this can couple with identity issues for the TCK creating more complex psychological issues (2010).

One aspect of loss and grief is homesickness. Even though many college students experience homesickness, the TCK who is homesick faces unique challenges. In the next section homesickness and the associated challenges will be explored.

### **Homesickness**

Homesickness is an expression of grief. Many transitioning college students experience this phenomenon and act it out in frequent phone calls and visits home and focusing on friends, family, and situations that they left behind to attend university. The TCK, despite having experienced many “leavings” in their lifetime, also can be severely impacted by homesickness. They may feel uncomfortable or uneasy, and phoning their family may be a luxury they cannot indulge. Neither can they hop a flight back to familiar places when they feel lonely (Quick, 2010).

While every person who moves to another country experiences culture shock, in the case of the TCK this shock is often unexpected when repatriating. In the next section, implications of unexpected shock will be examined.

### **Unexpected Shock**

Culture shock is difficult and challenging for anyone. However, culture shock can hit like a ton of bricks for the TCK, as it is unexpected because they are moving to what others consider to be their home. The TCK soon discovers, however, that even though they may look like their home-country peers, they are actually quite different (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). TCKs have learned as a result of their numerous relocations that they need to watch and wait in order to fit in and not offend the local culture. However, TCKs are slower to use this skill in their home country as they and those around them expect them to be able to fit in without really trying (Quick, 2010).

This unexpected culture shock may result in what Quick (2010) labels Type I and Type II cultural incidents. Type I cultural incidents occur when the TCK is surprised and reacts to the behavior of the individuals in the home country. Type II incidents are when the TCK commits a cultural “faux pas” causing the locals to react with derision or revulsion. While Type I incidents can make the TCK feel uncomfortable, Type II incidents can be devastating to the self-confidence of the TCK. When the TCK commits enough of these cultural faux pas or the ones that they commit are embarrassing, the TCK may withdraw and become isolated in an attempt to avoid being embarrassed (Quick, 2010; Storti, 2007).

Every change happens in stages and the transition of the TCK is no different. The five stages of transition as envisioned by Dave Pollock will be outlined in the next section.

### **The Five Stages of Transition**

Dave Pollock (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009) outlines five stages of transition that the TCK experiences upon leaving their host country and entering their “home” culture. These stages are not linear as the TCK may go forward and backward and may skip or remain in a particular stage for a longer period of time. These five stages are:

1. Involvement stage – things are normal. The TCK has a sense of belonging and participation. They feel like they are at “home.” They enjoy a reputation and status within their social community. They feel affirmed as a person.
2. Leaving stage – this begins the moment they find out they are about to leave. TCKs begin to loosen emotional ties and distance themselves from others. They may also begin to relinquish their responsibilities. They typically experience conflicting emotions – excitement at the impending change and fear of loss.

3. Transition stage – begins when the TCK actually leaves the first place and enters the second place. The TCK decides, either consciously or unconsciously, to settle in. This stage is filled with chaos and ambiguity.
4. Entering stage – the chaos begins to calm down but the TCK still feels marginalized and uncertain. The desire to settle in and connect with mentors and friends is strong as the TCK seeks to build meaningful relationships.
5. Re-involvement stage – the settled feeling becomes stronger and the TCK feels a sense of belonging.

Not everyone progresses through these stages at the same pace or in the same order. Some may double back or get stuck in one stage or another until they can develop the confidence to progress to the next stage. What is important is to recognize is that transitioning is a process, one that is important, individual, and crucial to becoming comfortable in the “home” country.

Each transition involves the attempt on the part of the TCK to fit in to the new culture or environment. Fitting in is explored in the following section.

### **Fitting In**

Cultural cues abound in any society in the world. These are basic assumptions that all societal members expect for everyone to know and to practice. Whether this is a handshake or a kiss on both cheeks for greetings, not recognizing the cultural cues given off by society can lead to exclusion and alienation. When a TCK arrives in a foreign culture, they typically hang back and use their powers of observation to pick up on the cultural cues before they engage the local culture. This is a skill that they have developed over many moves and many cultural transitions that enables them to slide into another culture with as little attention or disruption as possible. TCKs are less likely to use this skill upon repatriation because they “- expect -” that they will

automatically fit into the cultural scene (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). This causes the TCK to feel, as Quick (2010) insightfully describes, “terminally unique” (p. 102). They feel as if they exist on the margins, which heightens their already existent feelings of self consciousness. The cultural signs they are used to looking for in their host culture do not work at “home” and they become afraid to risk social interaction, fearing that they will only be misinterpreted.

Further complicating the task of fitting in is the fact that the TCK feels like they must always introduce themselves in the very place they are supposed to feel at home (Quick, 2010). The TCK has some incredible knowledge and has had wonderful experiences that they wish to share, only to find their home-country peers marginally interested at best and skeptical or suspicious at worst. The TCK may find that interest turns into disbelief when they recount their experience on safari or eating exotic foods to their monocultural peers (Quick, 2010). This type of interaction can lead the TCK to believe that their home-country peers are narrow and shallow, and the peers to believe that the TCK is arrogant, pompous, and overly confident. TCKs are desperate to fit in and the more they try the more devastated they become. Quick (2010) enumerates several ways that TCKs feel differently from their home-country peers. These include: holding world views that are 180 degrees different from their peers who have not lived outside their home country; understanding that there are many ways of doing things; expecting diversity in their relationships; relating differently; being more worldly, mature, well-versed in places, peoples, cultures, and languages of the world; and having more in common with internationals than with domestic peers. TCKs are hidden immigrants and have no shared experiences with home-country peers.

The term “hidden immigrant” accurately portrays the cultural re-entry experience of the TCK. They look like those in the home culture but are drastically different. Some TCKs, in an



effort to appear different so that their cultural faux pas can be “explained,” will readopt the accent of their host country. This allows them to ask questions that would otherwise make them appear foolish (Quick, 2010). In fact, this “acting” like someone they are not in order to fit in can cause the TCK to feel like they have not remained true to themselves, resulting in further issues with identity formation (Mortimer, 2010). TCKs have been referred to as “cultural chameleons” for their apparent ability to wait and watch and then alter their behavior to fit in – something that doesn’t help them claim a singular identity.

This challenge to fit in is particularly acute in the “home” country. When TCKs are overseas, they either assimilate into the local culture or stay somewhat separate by living in compounds and attending international schools. In international schools, everyone is “different” meaning that no one is (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). TCKs express that, as a result of this inherent difference, there were fewer incidents of labeling – putting people in categories and limiting their ability to define themselves. When they return “home” they immediately face being labeled as something other than a member of the home culture.

Once the TCK determines what they need to do in order to fit in, they begin to establish themselves in the new situation. Establishing is the topic of the next section.

### **Establishing**

Quick (2010) simply states, “Human beings bring order into their lives by creating routines” (p. 68). The college student has a class schedule and a time when they can eat either in the school cafeteria or cook for themselves. They also have appointed times for other campus activities. By establishing a routine, they also establish themselves within a social circle of those other students who share a similar routine. They may find that they take classes with certain individuals, eat at the cafeteria with others, participate in intramural sports with another group,

and socialize with an entirely different group. Each group provides the TCK an opportunity to emotionally establish themselves in the home culture.

In addition to the emotional establishment that occurs, the TCK must also establish themselves physically within their new environment. They must figure out the banking system, arrange for basic services such as a phone, and learn the ins and outs of transportation such as the local bus routes. When entering university, their home-country peers likely only have to worry about emotional establishment while the TCK must add on those things necessary for survival in the new environment (Quick, 2010).

Part of the TCK establishing themselves is forming relationships. The unique challenges faced by the TCK in forming lasting relationships will be explored in the next section.

### **Forming Relationships**

TCKs have difficulty forming relationships with home country peers for several reasons. They struggle with identity development (Mortimer, 2010) which may delay adolescence and cause them to barely know themselves at the same time they are trying to form friendships. They may also experience what Erikson terms “role confusion” and not be able to extend themselves to form bonds with others. The TCK also tends to view home-country peers as shallow, boring, and immature (Quick, 2010). Insular thinking, as demonstrated by their peers, is anathema to the TCK who is much more aware and concerned about world events. While TCKs make excellent bridge builders, the difference created by their more global perspective can make them shun relationships with their more “immature” or “insulated” peers.

TCKs tend to want to form relationships more quickly than the home-culture allows (Quick, 2010). They come off as forward or “too intense” and can drive potential friendships away. They can give away “too much information” too early and appear too eager. Sometimes

their maturity, worldliness, and good listening skills that they have developed as a result of their global upbringing can also lead to a different type of misinterpretation. They may be viewed as having a romantic interest in the person they are relating to, when in reality they have merely an interest in friendship (Quick, 2010).

Dealing with problems in a relationship are also extraordinarily challenging for the TCK. Because of the frequency of their moves, the TCK in the past has been able to leave problematic relationships behind rather than fixing the issues. This means that the TCK does not adequately develop their problem solving skills, and struggles with what to do when a relationship breaks down. They seem unable to recognize what to do to make a relationship healthier (Mortimer, 2010).

After Erikson's identity formation stage discussed earlier, comes the "intimacy vs. isolation" stage. This typically happens after adolescence and during young adulthood. This is usually the time when individuals learn to develop and maintain longer-term and more intimate relationships by working on skills such as problem solving. However, this developmental stage may also be delayed for the TCK as they are still working through identity development during adolescence. So, when their home-country peers are beginning to establish long term relationships, they are still trying to figure out who they are.

The constantly mobile lifestyle of the TCK may also create attachment problems as adults. John Bowlby in the 1940s studied attachment and its implications for healthy human development. Attachment studies show that a strong emotional urge is part of the biological need for proximity with others. This need develops from birth and individuals tend to demonstrate the same attachment style in adulthood that they develop as children. Thus the ability to form intimate adult relationships can be determined by the type of attachment

experience the individual has as a child. According to Mortimer (2010) “Because TCKs have little sense of familiarity during their developmental years, it makes sense that they often continue to display anxious-avoidant attachment as adults” (p. 7). She goes on to state “The greatest struggles faced by adult TCKs, though, are relational problems. Summed up in two words, rootlessness and restlessness during the formative years cause TCKs to have identity problems and commitment problems for the rest of their lives” (p. 3).

Attachment is a fundamental need of human beings. Individuals attach not only to other humans such as family members and friends, they also attach to “place.” Reflected in the writings of Henry David Thoreau, the sense of place, or attachment to place, helps to define the individual. Some TCKs do not experience the same attachment to place as their non-mobile peers, since they move often. As a result, they tend to over-attach to people. However, these people, and the TCK move so frequently that this attachment frequently fails. Even though TCKs may appear to have many more friends than their home-country peers, they get so many that it becomes impossible to maintain them all. The TCK also desires a deeper relationship which only causes the pain to intensify when one or both individuals move. As adults they may end up with a fear of loss that paralyzes them and they may develop a fear of intimacy (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

Basically the “picture” of the TCK is incomplete – they have relationships, but they are frequently broken, they exist but have no complete sense of identity, and they do not stay anywhere long enough to develop a sense of belonging. They are a conglomeration of little pieces that cannot seem to make a complete picture (Quick, 2010).

Learning the rules is important in any social situation. The repatriation of the TCK is no different. Learning the rules and the difficulty that accompanies this task will be explored in the next section.

### **Learning the Rules**

Learning the basic cultural rules of society as children is a developmental task important to successful transition to adulthood. It is from assimilation of these rules that internalization of principles that guide thought and life decisions occurs. These principles later guide the direction the adult chooses for their lives (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). It is difficult to learn the rules when they are constantly changing. Every society has a unique set of rules that must be learned and the TCK ends up with a conglomeration of norms and rules, very few of which may “translate” into the “home” culture.

Other rules that must be learned are more pedestrian – such as the normal operating hours for stores and businesses, the appropriate amount to tip a waiter or waitress, or how to access public services. Even these can add stress to the TCKs repatriation experience as oftentimes, by returning for university, they are repatriating without their family and must discover this information on their own (Quick, 2010).

No matter what situation an individual is about to face, training and preparation is helpful. The type of training and preparation that the TCK needs to successfully repatriate will be examined in the following section.

### **Training and Preparation is Helpful**

Research has shown that cross-cultural training and re-entry seminars assist in the transition experience (Davis, Headley, Bazemore, Cervo, Sickinger, Windham, & Rehfluss, 2010). They can help prepare the TCK for the emotional shifts they will experience and also

help them get a handle on all of the mundane transitional tasks they have to accomplish in order to survive. The transition experience is like a roller coaster with multiple ups and downs. Training and preparation reduces the severity of these ups and downs, making the ride a much smoother experience. It will not entirely eliminate the emotional fluctuations the TCK will experience, but it will reduce their impact and also make them an “expected event” rather than a surprise. Knowing what to expect, allows the TCK to feel more “normal” in their experience (Quick, 2010).

The third and final major topic category in this review concerns the university experience and follows.

### **The University Experience**

A common reason the TCK repatriates to the home country is to attend university. As the transition to college is already a stressful time, making another major life change at the same time can be a daunting experience. While this major step toward adulthood can be exciting, filled with promise and anticipation of a hopeful future, it is also filled with chaos and upheaval. The unwritten rules of the home cultural may be difficult for the TCK to abide by, especially considering they may not know what they are. Parents are unlikely to explain the rules as they may assume that the TCK is well-prepared. All of these stress factors can severely impact the feeling of contentment of the TCK at their university.

Life contains many transitions. Possibly one of the most jarring of these is the transition from high school to college. Many factors are in play during this period including the move, in many instances, from living at home to living on a campus in a dormitory or apartment. Additionally, the student must learn to make independent decisions and become intrinsically motivated. Certain habits that, in the past, were closely monitored are not supervised at college.

Some classes are so large that students find themselves competing for space in a huge auditorium or lecture hall. Other classes are taught online and the student must learn to become an expert in time-management. From meeting people and making new friends to learning to negotiate the university bureaucracy, the student's life is full of "firsts."

It is not surprising to discover that many students do not transition well from high school to college, especially TCKs. Forty-five percent of TCKs attend three or more colleges, with some attending as many as nine institutions during their undergraduate academic career. The less than fifty percent who actually persist to degree completion typically take five to nine years to finish (Quick, 2010). Some are not mature enough to be able to handle life on their own, others are not good decision-makers, and some have never developed effective study habits. A portion of TCKs become homesick for their host culture, and others do not understand the requirements of functioning in this new environment. Add to this the whole repatriation process of the TCK and the odds seem to be stacked against them.

The university experience has changed dramatically in the past few years. In the not too distant past, the majority of students lived on campus and interacted, on a daily basis with their peers, classmates and professors (Laird, Chen, & Kuh, 2008). In recent years, this situation has changed. More and more students commute, hold off-campus jobs, live at home, or participate in other activities that limit their contact with others at the university to classroom interaction (Laird et al.). This not only affects students' feelings of involvement at their universities, but also hampers the assimilation of values, norms, and an acceptance of a naturally developed social order (Laird et al.).

Some institutions have taken steps to help prepare TCKs for college (Wyse, 1998), but some will still face difficulties in adjustment (Cockburn, 2002). Significant correlations exist

between childhood transition patterns and successful adjustment in college. TCKs who had more negative experiences as children also experienced difficulty transitioning to college – experiencing a higher rate of depression and suicide than the general population (Mortimer, 2010; Useem, 1971). Beliefs, values, religion, world view, life purpose, and reason for being will all be questioned in college during the time when the TCK is likely also struggling with identity (Mortimer, 2010). The TCK can end up feeling small, incompetent, and not up to the challenge because they find themselves surrounded by others they perceive as being brilliant, well-rounded, qualified, and ambitious. This feeling of insignificance and inadequacy is new to the TCK who, in their host culture, enjoys status and position (Quick, 2010). They experience not only a cultural change, but a lifestyle change as well.

Many students experience despair as relationships change and are sometimes replaced (Paul & Brier, 2001). Researchers have found that the first-year university transition can be especially difficult for TCKs as they are adjusting to new social norms at the same time they are experiencing geographic distance from family and friends (Quick, 2010). They suddenly find themselves in an alien culture which requires significant adaptation (Quick, 2010). Both the international student and the TCK experience culture shock, but the international student *expects* it while the TCK does not (Quick, 2010). TCKs can have a particularly difficult time at college – with a lack of enjoyment and a desire for it to be over (Quick, 2010).

Part of the university experience is choosing a college. In the next section, settling in will be examined.

### ***Settling In***

When living abroad the TCK developed an accepting and open world view. They became proficient at a variety of languages and grew to appreciate different peoples, customs,



traditions and places (Quick, 2010). However, they typically never learned what it meant to be an American. TCKs struggle with crossing over to their home culture. They are no longer Americans – they are really not even members of their host culture – they are citizens of the world (Quick, 2010). Returning to live in their “home” culture tricks the TCK into thinking that settling down and settling in will be easy and comfortable. Instead it can be a jarring experience especially when combined with the transition to university.

Several psychological factors are involved in the transition to university. These will be discussed in the following section.

Settling in well provides a solid beginning. Now the challenge becomes retention of the TCK to degree completion. In the next section, factors affecting retention will be examined.

### ***Factors Affecting Retention***

Many factors interact to increase the likelihood that a student will either remain at their university or drop out. One of the most comprehensive studies of student retention was the “Tinto” study. According to M. Abdul Mannan, the Executive Director of UPNG Open College, University of Papua New Guinea, Papua, New Guinea,

“Tinto’s model posits that students enter into higher education institutions with a variety of attributes, family and community backgrounds, educational experiences and achievements, skills and value orientations. These background characteristics and individual attributes develop educational expectations and commitments, which the individual brings with him/her into the universities and colleges. As a member of the community, students interact with the academic systems of the college, which determines persistence or dropout. The higher the degree of integration of the individual into the

college system, the greater will be the commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion leading to persistence” (Mannan, 2007).

There is some degree of disagreement in the academic community on which factor has the greatest effect on retention. Some place the emphasis on social integration, while others posit that academic integration is the more powerful factor (Mannan, 2007).

The Tinto model focuses on the compensatory relationship between all retention factors. It is a combination of effects that amalgamate to create the “perfect storm” of condition and opportunity that contributes to the decision of the student to drop out. Some of these factors include psychological factors, familial support and generational status factors, and factors related to student satisfaction with their degree institution, or with instructors (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993).

In an attempt to address these retention factors, some universities have developed retention programs. In the next section, the concept of retention programs will be explored.

### ***Retention Programs***

Very few institutions offer programs specific to the TCK. One of the universities that is committed to serving this population is Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon. The leadership of this institution has recognized the TCK phenomenon and has developed special programs designed to meet the unique needs of the repatriating student (Quick, 2010). Other institutions do not pay the same attention to this growing population. TCK retention and the various programs that service this population is an area in need of additional study.

However, this lack of attention is not the case when discussing general student retention. As a result of the myriad of studies that have been completed regarding overall student retention, universities have implemented a variety of programs to address the general problem of student

drop-out. Despite the large number of TCKs repatriating to the U.S. for university, however, very little has been targeted to their needs (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Some of the general retention programs are highly targeted and specific to populations other than the TCK, while others take a more holistic approach that denies that the TCK has unique characteristics and needs.

Students drop out for a number of reasons. Sometimes they feel disconnected. Sometimes they are dissatisfied with their experience at the university. A percentage of students do not finish because they lack the monetary or emotional support to complete their degree. Each of these reasons has an accompanying retention program designed to address that specific issue.

The first year experience has become the target of many of these programs. By making the first year experience more successful for students, universities are enhancing retention rates (Trotter & Roberts, 2006). Research indicates that the first year is the one most critical to student persistence (Trotter & Roberts) and what information that is available on TCKs indicates that the same is true for them (Quick, 2010).

One of the most successful retention tools or programs is subject matter tutoring. When universities provide tutoring or mentoring to students, they increase retention rates. The more closely these tutors are tied to the academic coursework the student is enrolled in, the more successful the program is at improving student persistence (Trotter & Roberts, 2006). Additionally, the “professionalism, idealism, and commitment” of the tutors positively impacted student performance and retention (Trotter & Roberts).

Another highly effective program for the general population is one that makes significant effort to integrate the student into the university community (Trotter & Roberts, 2006).

Programs that were high on interaction and activity positively correlated to increased persistence. When students were actively engaged with other students and university personnel, they were more satisfied with their college experience and more likely to remain at the university.

The most common factor shared by highly effective retention programs was an expectation of attendance. This expectation was communicated with the student, and the student was required to provide an explanation of any absences that occurred. With a higher rate of attendance comes a greater understanding of the course material, a better relationship with the instructor and other students, and a feeling of comfort in the classroom situation (Trotter & Roberts).

Supplemental instruction is increasingly popular as a retention tool. Supplemental instruction is instruction provided by the university outside the normal classroom. Attendance at supplemental instruction opportunities, if consistent, increases the probability of “timely graduation.” One student documented this increase at eleven percent (Bowles, McCoy, & Bates, 2008). Generally speaking, supplemental instruction is provided for large or more challenging courses, and consists of informal instruction, often by experienced peers (Bowles, et al.).

A final retention tool used in the university environment is small group learning. Research has identified balancing academic and social responsibilities and integration as one of the challenges faces by students (Cartney & Rouse; Hsieh et al.). According to Cartney and Rouse (2006),

“Social – as well as academic – integration in university life is noted as an influential factor. This appears especially pertinent now as wider participation has created a more diverse mix of ages, social, educational and cultural backgrounds that may militate against such integration. Learning is by its nature an unsettling and challenging process which stimulates

anxiety. The emotional context of learning, therefore, needs to be recognized and accommodated within the educational environment” (p. 80).

The instigation of small academic groups is one method for dealing with this dilemma. One advantage to small group learning is the natural integration of individuals from different social levels. By putting students into small groups, deficits can be identified and remedied by both peers and the instructor (Cartney & Rouse; Hsieh et al.). Social interaction in the small group setting also promotes racial and socio-economic harmony. In general, students who feel a part of a small group are more likely to persist, especially if the group depends upon their participation (Cartney & Rouse; Hsieh et al.).

### **Conclusion**

The TCK who is repatriating to their “home” country for university faces many unique and daunting challenges. Not only must they handle the typical issues facing all students navigating this jarring transition, they must also negotiate a cultural balance in this country that doesn’t feel much like “home.” They face many of the same retention issues such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, sense of belonging, connectedness with faculty and peers, satisfaction with the university, and general satisfaction with their experience, but also issues dealing with identity development, role confusion, and inability to form deep attachments. Erik Erikson addresses identity development and attachment in his psycho-social stages of development, specifically in stages five (identity development vs. role confusion) and six (intimacy vs. isolation). Very little research has been done on implications for the important and growing TCK student population. It is the intent of this study to shed additional light on the transition experience of the TCK as they repatriate to their home country for university.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter contains a review of the problem statement, the statement of purpose of the study, the research questions, an overview of the design of the research, a discussion of qualitative methodology, a description of phenomenology, a description of the participants and the methods employed in the study, the means of data collection and analysis, explication of the trustworthiness and validity of the study, and ethical considerations. The chapter concludes with a summary.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Many Third Culture Kids (TCKs) who are American citizens repatriate to the United States to attend university. It is expected that, since the TCK is returning “home,” that the adjustment will be smooth, that they will find a solid cultural fit, make friends, assimilate easily into the fabric of the university, and experience satisfaction with their university experience (Quick, 2010).

However, upon returning “home” for university, many TCKs fail to establish a sense of belonging, have difficulty building friendships, feel like misfits, become depressed, and are so dissatisfied with their university experience that they transfer institutions multiple times, or drop out of higher education (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Few university retention programs address the unique needs of the TCK (Quick, 2010).

This apparent contradiction in expectations versus experiences could be explained by the fact that these TCKs do not fully identify as being “American” save in name only, having bonded more with their “host cultures” than the “home culture” of their parents.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this applied research study (Patton, 2002) is to explore how factors may affect Third Culture Kids (TCKs) and how they transition to, feel about, and persist to degree completion at university. With an emphasis on retention of this population, this study will focus on TCKs with American citizenship who return to U.S.-based colleges or universities with the intent of completing bachelor's degrees.

## **Research Questions**

1. How do Third Culture Kids (TCKs) relate to the concept of culture, and how do they characterize their relationship to any specific culture?
2. In the adjustment to college, what transition experiences do TCKs consider significant?
3. What factors influence the TCK's decision to persist at their university to degree completion?

## **Overview of the Design of the Study**

When an infant first reaches for their toes shortly after birth, they are involved in research. The capacity for wonder and reasoning, both central components of research are inherently human, and drive the species to discover better means of survival and to explore knowledge for its own sake. Commonly accepted research designs include quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Creswell, 2009). In the social sciences, qualitative research seeks to explore and is open-ended and evolving in nature. According to Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2007, p. 96) it is a "systematic, empirical strategy for answering questions about people in a particular social context...it is a means for describing and attempting to understand the observed regularities in what people do, or in what they report as their experience." Context

is of utmost importance in qualitative research and is affected by the researcher, the location, the time period, the social conditions, and the participants (Locke, et al., 2007). While quantitative research seeks to number and measure, the qualitative researcher realizes that there are events and experiences that cannot be quantified (Locke, et al., 2007). Subjective in nature, qualitative research is emergent, continually evolving as the conditions, participants, even the context shift over time.

Qualitative research is inductive in nature, generating ideas and theories in an effort to understand data or phenomena (Locke, et al., 2007). Qualitative research typically has a smaller number of participants, resulting in the collection of thick, rich data. The researcher serves as the instrument of the study – so rigor and skill play a role in the credibility of the study (Patton, 2002). Because of the more intimate nature of qualitative research – the study of the meanings that individuals make of their world – emerging data and responses are as varied and the individuals participating in the study. Context is everything; different environments, participants, or time periods can have a significant impact. Good qualitative research can be compared to a river that ebbs and flows and it progresses toward the ocean. It is at once a constant but changing entity that is alive and is molded and formed by the terrain through which it travels.

The guiding epistemology – “how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8) – for this qualitative research study is constructionism which disputes that there is objective truth that can be discovered with correct research. This philosophical worldview portends that “truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). Meaning is constructed, not discovered. Creswell refers to the worldview (referred to as paradigms by Lincoln and Guba, 2000) as “a general orientation about the world



and the nature of research that a researcher holds” (2009, p. 6). This orientation of the researcher provides a cohesive fit that contributes to the validity of the study.

Many authors have contributed to the concept of constructionism including Schwandt (2007), Neuman (2000), Berger and Luekmann (1967), and Crotty (1998). Constructionism is built on the concepts of understanding, relationships, interaction, and meaning. The researcher with a constructionist worldview uses broad, open-ended questions to encourage the participant to make meaning of their situation and the world around them. Since each individual is making their own meaning and interpretation of objects, things, and experiences, there are usually multiple perspectives and many answers to every emerging question (Creswell, 2009).

The theoretical perspective that determined the methodology of this study (Crotty, 1998) was phenomenology. According to Crotty (p. 12) “Constructionism and phenomenology are so intertwined that one could hardly be phenomenological while espousing either an objectivist or a subjectivist epistemology.” The intentionality of phenomenology “posits an intimate and active relationship between the conscious subject and the object of the subject’s consciousness. Consciousness is directed towards the object; the object is shaped by consciousness” (Crotty, p. 44). The subject and the object interact. Phenomenological research involves what Moustakas terms an “essence description” (1994). Thick, rich description is the foundation on which qualitative inquiry, and phenomenological research rests (Wolcott, 2009). The researcher invites the reader to “look through” his or her eyes (Wolcott, 2009, p. 27) and through the art of descriptive storytelling attempts to convey the lived experience of the participant.

Phenomenology is a rigorous and, according to Patton (2002), scientific approach to qualitative research that attempts to determine meaning from experience and interaction. It involves the “lived experiences” of persons and assumes context is created by the reality of the

participant (Patton, 2002). As such, there are as many interpretations, as many meanings as there are people. Even though care must be used when attempting to apply findings of phenomenological research to a broader population or in a different context, it is useful in developing an understanding of the phenomenon of interest and can contribute to the body of current research.

The roots of phenomenology can be traced to Germany and the writings of Edmund Husserl and is the search for *verstehen*, or understanding. Husserl was involved in phenomenological research in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was on his initial philosophy that Heidegger, Moustakas, and others developed modern-day phenomenology (Hershey, 2007).

According to Husserl, there are four philosophical tenets that undergird phenomenology that include: a return to the traditional tasks of philosophy, the pursuit of a philosophy without presuppositions, the intentionality of consciousness, and the refusal of the subject-object dichotomy (Archer, 2010). Phenomenology, by Husserl's standards is concerned with a meaning that evolves from the relationship between the individual and object and that object and individual are hopelessly intertwined – one does not exist without the other. According to Van Manen (1990), the phenomenologist is more concerned with the meaning made by an individual about an event than the facts surrounding that event – when it occurred or how long it lasted.

Husserl was concerned with epoché as a means of recognizing the inevitable effect of researcher as lens upon interpretation. Also known as bracketing, epoché involves reflexivity on the part of the researcher – recognizing and admitting personal experiences – not only to make the researcher more aware, but to also allow readers to judge for themselves how the background

and experiences of the researcher might influence the meaning-making of the phenomenon being researched (Patton, 2002). .

Within the large tent of phenomenology, this study will rely on “heuristic” research as outlined by Clark Moustakas. In investigating the human experience, Moustakas also focuses on the internal search of the researcher. As the researcher is the lens, is in contact with the participants, and therefore “present” in the process and in the phenomena, he or she cannot emerge unchanged from the experience - untouched by epiphany (Moustakas, 1990). The process of the research itself – the unfolding and the emerging of the discovery creates within the researcher not only new meanings of the phenomena but also a deeper understanding of themselves, their experiences, and their dialogue with the world (Buber, 1965). Heuristic research uses creativity and self-discovery as a way of making meaning of phenomena (Moustakas, 1990).

Heuristic phenomenology is a searching – a personal process that is both disciplined and evolving with discovery. It may evoke feelings of doubt or challenge but results in a deepened knowledge of the phenomenon and the inner self. Relationships, conditions, perspectives, qualities, and awareness all exist beneath the surface and provide context for the fundamental questions being asked by the researcher (Moustakas, 1990). On page 11, Moustakas states “In heuristic investigations, I may be entranced by visions, images, and dreams that connect me to my quest. I may come into touch with new regions of myself, and discover revealing connections with others. Through the guides of a heuristic design, I am able to see and understand in a different way” (1990).

Heuristic research seeks to create a “story” of meaning of “universally unique” experiences (Moustakas, 1990). By delving deeper into human experience, the researcher comes

to know the participants and understand, on a more significant level, their experience. This story is related in order to transform the self – of the researcher, of the participant, and of the audience (Moustakas, 1990). The heart of heuristic research beats to the rhythm of the researcher’s intuition, and relies on their internal frame of reference to search for the meaning that indwells the phenomena (Moustakas, 1990). In the poem “To Look At Anything”, Moffit eloquently states “To look at anything – If you would know that thing, you must look at it long...you must be the thing you see...you must enter in to the small silences between...you must take your time and touch the very place they issue from” (Moustakas, 1990).

Even though heuristic inquiry is immersive, rigorous, and involves a careful collection of data and a “thorough and disciplined analysis. It places immense responsibility on the researcher” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14). The researcher “seeks to understand the wholeness and the unique patterns of experiences in a scientifically organized and disciplined way” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 16). As Bronowski states like any other science it is a “search for hidden likenesses” (1965, p. 13).

Phenomenology, and specifically heuristic phenomenology, is appropriate for this study as this research is about the lived experience of the TCK. It is a search for understanding of the transition during repatriation for university and the persistence of the TCK to degree completion. The researcher cannot avoid being drawn into the story of these individuals and will explore the meaning of the phenomenon recognizing their own past experiences but also realizing that they will be forever changed by the research. As the researcher’s statement in chapter one indicates, I am married to a TCK and will be changed by conducting this research study.

## **Procedures and Methods**

This study consisted of a series of focus groups, formal and informal observations, one-on-one interviews, and an examination of documents and artifacts (including photos, websites, blogs, yearbooks and other materials) produced by groups associated with TCKs and the universities that they attended. The study population was from three universities – a small, religiously-affiliated Midwestern private university, a private university in the Northeast, and a large public land grant university in the middle part of the United States.

### **Study Sites**

Stratford College (pseudonym) in Roanoke, Pennsylvania was chosen as one of the three sites in this study because of its prominence in the existing literature about the TCK experience. Located on the East Coast of the United States, this institution is chosen by TCKs because of the emphasis on acculturation assistance. Stratford has a vibrant and active international program and serves the unique needs of TCKs at the college as a function of that program. When contact was made with Stratford, they were very enthusiastic about the study and volunteered to be a participating site. The staff in the international studies program offered to locate potential participants and to provide assistance in contacting them. Site access was obtained from their director of international student services.

When investigating which universities to approach about participating in this study, a student at Midwestern State Land Grant University (pseudonym) asked to participate, thus leading to the inclusion of another site. The university is known for its friendly and supportive atmosphere, large international population, and program offerings in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Midwestern State Land Grant University has a large and growing

international community and offers generous scholarship assistance to qualified students. Site access was obtained from the university's IRB office.

Baird Christian University (pseudonym) was chosen as the third site for this study because they sponsor an internationally known transition workshop for TCKs every year. TCKs from all over the world travel to Midwestern City (pseudonym) to participate in acculturation and transition classes, specially designed activities to ease anxiety and stress associated with change, counseling, and other, more light-hearted events such as sporting competitions between TCK teams and teams consisting of international students or Americans. Johnathan and Regina Hartsfield (pseudonyms), who were long-term missionaries in Australia and who raised their children as TCKs, head the program. Their experience in the mission field and then watching their children repatriate to attend university motivated them to offer the workshop so that others can benefit from all that they learned. When the Hartsfields were first contacted, they not only offered to help with the study, they wanted to get started immediately. They expressed that this type of research was needed, and were very enthusiastic about participating (Regina Hartsfield, personal communication, December, 2010). Site access was obtained from the university's vice president of academic affairs.

All interviews and focus groups were drawn from TCK student populations at these three participating universities, and all artifacts and documents originated from these institutions and other independent (but associated) groups that serve the TCK population. An approved IRB for the total study was procured through Oklahoma State University (Appendix A).

### **Study Participants**

Participants were recruited at Stratford via email (email solicitation script is in Appendix B). Participants at Midwestern State Land Grant University were recruited by email and

telephone (telephone solicitation script is in Appendix B). Baird Christian University participants were recruited by email, telephone, and face-to-face conversation (face-to-face solicitation script is in Appendix B). All participants were fully informed as to their rights and responsibilities with regards to the study and all IRB requirements have been met in full. Participants received no compensation for participating and they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without penalty or repercussion. A consent form explaining participants' rights, responsibilities, and protections is included in Appendix B.

Confidentiality was protected by assigning each participant a number and coding all data associated with each participant with that number. The list connecting names of participants and associated numbers was stored separately from data. This list and the associated data was stored separate locked cabinets in the office of the researcher and on a password protected laptop computer owned by the university that was not docked to an institutional mainframe.

Selection of participants was purposive. Purposive sampling is important to ensure that the individuals selected meet all of the criteria for the study. The set of desired characteristics included: having spent their developmental years outside of their parents' passport culture (while this could mean anyone having spent any amount of time between birth and age eighteen outside of the passport culture, this study will focus on those individuals who were at least ten years old before repatriation), having American citizenship, be repatriating to the U.S. to attend university. Purposive sampling can also be based on a specific purpose (Archer, 2010) and in this instance that was to explore the transition and persistence to degree completion of individuals meeting the criteria of selection based on characteristics. Individuals, once identified as fitting the criteria of the study were asked to participate. Those who agreed were included in

the sample population. Participants were TCKs with American citizenship who repatriated to the U.S. to attend university.

### **Data Collection**

One-on-one interviews included open-ended questions, prompts initiated by the researcher, and participant-produced drawings with interpretation by the participant. The interview guide is in Appendix C.

Focus group participants answered open-ended questions, participated in group discussion, and during the course of the discussion chose to illustrate their conversation by drawing on a white board on the wall of the interview room (presented in chapter 4).

Participant-produced drawings and interpretations were chosen to be included in the interviews in an effort to facilitate dialogue and unlock emotional responses (Kerri Kearney, personal communication, May, 2009). Drawings can be used as the basis of the open-ended interview process and, as in Kearney's study (2002) on the emotional effects of employees who remain through organizational change, participants were asked to create a drawing and then provide their own interpretations. According to Kearney, in a study co-authored by Adrienne Hyle (2003) and referenced in a book authored by Anfara and Mertz (2006), "Participant-produced drawings appear to create a path toward participant feelings and emotions, making them viable tools for researchers who seek access to this type of data." When participants draw their experiences, the presentations can sieve the data and contain keystones of meaning that might evade discovery during an interview due to quieter emphasis or the sheer amount of data covered during the interview conversation. Participant interpretation is critical to understanding the drawing as data presented from the point of view of the participant. The process of drawing



adds to an atmosphere of openness and honesty not only during the interaction between participant and researcher, but also the participant with himself/herself.

During the drawing process, a large sheet of paper with sticky glue at the top was “posted” on the wall of the office opposite of the place where the interview took place. The participant was given a set of crayons and was asked to represent their transition experience with a picture or pictures that used images rather than words. The researcher, after giving the instructions moved to a different part of the room to give the participant physical and emotional “space to draw and to observe the participant during the drawing process. The participant was allowed to draw for as long as desired; participants then provided their own interpretation of their drawings. These outcomes of the drawings and accompanying interpretation are in Appendix E.

Focus groups and interviews occurred March – May 2011, and document and artifact collection extended March through June 2011. There were two focus groups of five (5) individuals at Baird Christian University. Fifteen interviews were conducted with volunteer participants at BCU, additional interviews were conducted with volunteer participants at Stratford University and Midwestern State Land Grant University. Data analysis of interviews, focus groups, observations, documents and artifacts was ongoing throughout the data collection process.

### **Data Analysis**

Kearney (2003) states “One of the greatest challenges in qualitative research is finding a starting place for sorting the masses of data that are collected.” This research is no different. With the huge amount of data that was gathered during interviews, focus groups, observations, and the collection of artifacts, an appropriate construct adds order and can create a starting point

for the analysis. Erikson's (1963) stages of psychosocial development were used apriori as a theoretical construct to begin the data analysis. This scaffolding provided organization and an initial starting point. As data analysis progressed, the initial scaffolding adapted and it became apparent to the researcher that an additional theoretical framework was necessary to address the depth of the data. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross' (1969) stages of grief provided refinement to the process and was particularly applicable to the experiences of the participants.

The actual data analysis process had several stages. First, all interviews and focus groups were transcribed by the researcher. Each transcript was analyzed and coded in a three step process. Initially, transcripts were "closed coded" looking for themes of identity development, role confusion (using Erikson's [1963] developmental stage five as guide to identify codes), intimacy, and isolation (using Erikson's developmental stage six as a template to identify codes).

The transcripts were analyzed a second time looking for recurring themes and threads not addressed by Erikson. This open-coding process identified tentative themes that were examined with other theoretical lenses including Kübler-Ross (1969). These themes were then verified by re-reading the transcript and comparison with subsequent interview transcriptions.

All documents, observations, and artifacts were examined for thematic elements in the same manner as the interviews. These were compared to the list of themes from the interviews and focus groups to examine for similarities and differences.

Participant-produced drawings and the participant-provided interpretations were first close-coded using the codes explained above from the work of Erikson (1963), and then open-coded to determine recurring themes and threads. Emerging themes were identified and coded. This list of codes was used to analyze and code all interview and focus group transcripts; all participant-produced drawings and interpretations; and all observations, documents and artifacts.

Emerging data was analyzed by methods including “Pursuing Members’ Meanings” – examining interview data through the lens of Emerson’s categories (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

Transcription analysis used the Gee format with Mishler’s co-construction (Lu Bailey, personal communication, December, 2010) to organize the data into manageable constructs providing a “map” for analysis to discover thematic elements within the data that might otherwise remain hidden. Analytic statement and integrative memos (Emerson, et al.), divided the data into “chunks” and established threads. Statements from the data were organized onto note cards and divided up into thematic elements to identify similarities and trends. Data was displayed in narrative textual form with most prolific thematic elements visually depicted in a table.

Lincoln and Guba’s (2000) evaluative criteria for naturalistic inquiry was used to establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The following table outlines the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness and validity.

Trustworthiness Table

Technique	Results	Examples
Prolonged Engagement	Gather accurate, “wide scope” data Relationships built on trust Rapport with participants Recognize patterns	Will enter the field in March 2011 – will remain in the field until June, 2011
Persistent Observation	Accurate and in-depth data Recognize relevancies from irrelevancies Recognize inaccuracies	Purposeful, comprehensive, and meaningful investigation. Observe individuals, groups, formal and informal gatherings. All levels of hierarchy.
Triangulation	Verify data by comparison	Many sources of data: interviews, detailed field notes from observations, document reviews, photos, websites and blogs.
Referential Adequacy	Garnering data points – a “slice of life”	Reviewed yearbooks, brochures and universities’ catalogues.

Peer Debriefing	Discovering alternative explanations Explore emerging understanding and themes Check for bias and protection of participants	Informal discussions with sponsors of TCK and International Student organizations and fellow professors. Reviewed process, procedure, initial results. Received suggestions.
Thick Description	Provide data base for transferability Provide a vicarious experience for the audience/reader	Thick rich descriptions of setting, culture, participants, classroom interaction, informal interaction, data gleaned from the study.

## Summary

Qualitative research involves exploration and understanding. It is the attempt on the part of the researcher, as lens, to examine emerging questions and themes drawn from observations, interviews, document analysis, focus groups, and other means for the purpose of interpretation and meaning making (Creswell, 2009). Inductive in nature, qualitative inquiry is a study of complexity, and the researcher should not be satisfied with superficial analysis (Wolcott, 2009). The researcher should seek complexities and deeper layers, always asking more and more meaningful questions (Dr. Lu Bailey, personal communication, December 16, 2010).

Fieldwork is of primary importance in qualitative research and the researcher needs to spend time in the setting and with the participants being studied (Patton, 2002). Fieldwork in this study included interviews, observations, focus groups, and document/artifact analysis. Participants were TCKs and were volunteers chosen from three universities in the U.S.

Constructionism is the guiding epistemology and heuristic phenomenology is the theoretical perspective. The phenomenon being studied is the transition experience and persistence to degree completion of TCKs with American citizenship repatriating to the U.S. to attend university.

Due to the nature of the study, interviews were open ended and data analysis was ongoing throughout the study. All participants were American TCKs who repatriated to the U.S. and attended university. All were volunteers and fully informed of all of their rights as participants.

This chapter explained the methods to be used in this study, and presented an overview of the study design, the problem under consideration, the purpose of the study, and efforts by the researcher to ensure trustworthiness and confidentiality. Chapter 4 presents the results of this study and Chapter 5 engages in analysis and discussion of the data.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Data Presentation**

This chapter focuses on the presentation of the data collected over a series of twenty one-on-one interviews, five observations, two focus groups, and analysis of documents, artifacts, drawings and photographs. First, the researcher's statement, initially presented in chapter one, will be revisited with emphasis on implications that emerged during the process of the study. After the reflexive discussion, findings will be presented. Amalgamated stories will be presented which will provide further context for the reader and will be convenient method for sharing the lived experiences of the participants.

As explained in detail in chapter 3, all data presented in this chapter – including all interviews, focus groups, artifacts, drawings, and participant interpretations - was closed coded and then open coded (for a detailed description of this process please reference methodology in chapter 3). An important part of phenomenological research is the exploration of the lived experience of the participant. In order to further elucidate themes, the researcher used Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (1995) categories – Naturally occurring members' descriptions; Members' stories; Members' terms, types, typologies; Indigenous contrasts; and Members' explanations and theories – as a part of the data analysis process. This process provided additional hues of understanding, further enhancing the contextual depth of the data. Smaller, but consistent themes, termed "strand themes" by this researcher, were identified which allowed for the emergence of larger, more complex theme groupings termed "tapestry themes." These tapestry themes are presented in this chapter with one example of a supporting statement, and for the convenience of the reader, expanded statements are listed with the tapestry themes in Appendix

D. The experience of having the participants create drawings and interpret their creations educed shades within the data that will be highlighted and then followed by a summary of the chapter.

In the following section, epoché, reflexivity, and the realization that the researcher is present in the phenomenon will be revisited in acknowledgement of the emergent nature of the study.

### **Researcher's Statement Revisited**

Phenomenology is the search for *verstehen* or understanding. As with any journey, the experience unfolds and the traveler/researcher is witness to ever-emergent design, process, and data. The transcendental nature of being present in the phenomenon acts upon the researcher, touching and changing them. Just as the Native American proverb that you can never step into the same river twice, phenomenological research is context specific and data is emerging, flowing, changing.

Knowing that I have relationships with some TCKs, and travelled internationally to some of the places they moved from, made it especially important to constantly acknowledge how these relationships and my personal experiences related to these individuals could influence my perceptions and understanding of the phenomenon under study. The reader is directed to Chapter one where the researcher's statement is presented.

In the following section the findings of the study will be presented. These experiences will be told as individual's lived stories.

### **Population Demographics**

The TCK population is very diverse. They come from varied family backgrounds and familial composites and experience a global lifestyle for a variety of reasons. In order to

facilitate context and provide, for the reader, a convenient format for presentation of the backgrounds of the TCKs in this study, Table 1 presents these TCK characteristics.

**Table 1. TCK Characteristics**

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*TCKs in this study have the following family situations*

Parents in the military

Parents are overseas missionaries

Parents are teachers in international schools

Parents are students in school abroad

*TCKs in this study have varied heritages*

Some were born in the States and then moved overseas

Some were born in a foreign country to American citizens

Some were adopted as infants by American parents living overseas

*TCKs in this study have varied college experiences*

Some were students at a faith-based university in the Midwest

Some were from the East Coast

Some were students at a state school in the Midwest

One was a college drop-out who attended multiple institutions

One was a student and then an adjunct professor

Being aware of the population demographics allows for greater understanding of the findings as presented in the following section.



## **Findings**

Through the process of closed and open coding, described in chapter 3, and the use of Emerson's categories (1995), several smaller themes presented themselves. These smaller strand themes, as described earlier, coalesced into more prominent tapestry themes. Tapestry themes will be presented that will coalesce into amalgamated stories that became representations common across the data. The use of stories allowed for a succinct presentation of TCK experiences in a manner that is interesting for the reader. Five amalgamated stories will be presented in an attempt to elucidate the wide variety of lived experiences of TCKs.

### **Tapestry Themes**

Using both open and closed coding, sixteen tapestry themes emerged from the data. These tapestry themes are representative of typical themes in qualitative research. Termed "tapestry themes" by this researcher, these larger themes occurred broadly across the data and appeared most relevant to the phenomenon as they existed within participants' lived experience.

These sixteen emergent tapestry themes are presented with one selected participant statement to provide depth and color. For convenience, additional associated participant statements are listed in Appendix D.

The themes are presented in sections, or paragraphs, with each one titled by the theme as represented by participants. Some themes include figures for enriching understanding.

#### **I don't know where I belong**

"I feel a gap – I don't know where home is."



Figure 4.1 - Mirror located in a missionary's office who serves as a "touch point" for TCKs on campus at his university. Participants describe this as indicating that home is where you find yourself.

**I feel depressed and angry.**

Several TCKs expressed that they felt angry and depressed, sometimes experienced to the point that they did not want to leave their rooms or interact with people. As one TCK expressed, Essentially denial was my initial reaction, so then when we actually left, my reaction was surprise because I just believed so long it was just not going to happen. And then after that, just anger. I was angry at everyone. I was angry at my parents because I believed that they had been the ones to say we're leaving now. I was angry at God because my whole life had been taken away from me. It was just horrible. And then from there I was just angry for like two years.

### **I lost everything**

Many TCKs spoke of the staggering loss they had experienced. One stated, “My whole life was changed and put upside down. I lost everything and everyone. Sometimes it feels like the bad overwhelms everything.”

### **I don't understand relationships**

In transitioning from their host culture back to the United States, many TCKs expressed frustration with relationships. They mentioned things like they perceived American relationships as superficial, or that their attempts at forming relationships were misinterpreted. One TCK expressed his frustrations this way,

American-wise I have a lot of people I know and hang out with but they're not 'friend' friends – best friends or whatever you want to call it. They're not the people I go to and say I'm having a hard time or something exciting happened to me and I'd like to share it with you. Um, I have a hard time making friends with Americans because from what I've seen they are very superficial and shallow.



Figure 4.2 - This picture was shared by a participant who described this as representing the difference in relationships in the United States and Brazil. The participant is in the middle, her American boyfriend is on the left, and her father is on the right. This picture was taken during a visit her parents made from Brazil. She pointed out how the manner in which she has her arm around her father represents how relationships are very “touchy” in Brazil. She also pointed out how the physical distance between her and her boyfriend was, in her mind, typical of how Americans handle relationships.

### **I understand the world**

Several TCKs expressed that they felt they had an expanded world view and that this was not shared by their American peers. This frustrated them and they believed it not only led to misunderstandings, but also affected their ability to find common interests with their American peers. One TCK expressed it this way;

Just because you have different points of view. I feel like because you go overseas – the thing that you get – the biggest blessing – from that is an open mind and being open to new things and being allowed to debate, I guess. You can see different points of view and different interests, and different ideas and not necessarily judge them as right or wrong but just comprehend and understand.



Figure 4.3 - Artwork done by TCKs and posted in the office of the missionary on campus who helps TCKs. It represents the expanded worldview of the TCK and the many cultures they perceive as shaping their lived experience

### **I feel like I am two totally different people**

Dual selves is a theme that emerged when several of the TCKs and participants in the focus groups talked about identifying with culture. Many TCKs spoke of being one person when around one set of people, or culture, and then being someone totally different when in another

cultural setting. They described having to be careful which “self” they “brought out” in certain situations in order to avoid rejection. One TCK succinctly stated, “I have a Japanese self and an American self.”

### **I feel very alone**

Feelings of isolation and loneliness were common threads through the data. Participants described these feelings as sometimes being debilitating – causing them to further withdraw from those around them. One participant described her feelings this way, “At the beginning whenever I came here I felt lonely – I was keeping myself from other people because I just wanted to think about what I’d left behind.”

### **I get annoyed - culturally annoyed**

One participant coined the term “culturally annoyed” that represented the feelings of annoyance also reported by other TCK participants. This feeling usually was the result of a build-up of little inconveniences, misunderstandings, or annoyances that occurred over a period of time. The TCK would then begin to attribute everything that did not go perfectly to a defect of the culture. Also, the TCK would constantly compare the two different cultures causing them to become more frustrated with the one they were currently living in. One participant stated it this way,

You can see beyond what most people can. Because you’ve seen things done differently – not necessarily always better – but you’ve seen other ways. In other words, you have been the outside perspective – looking from the outside in you can see things differently. That can be good but it can also be a challenge because you’ll see people doing things one way that is probably the norm of that particular culture and then you’ll think – you know there’s really a better way to do that. But people aren’t necessarily interested in hearing that. So you can see them doing it and you can think, well, that’s really not the

best way to do it or there's a quicker way or you can see the fault in the way they're doing things. Well, like I said the culture's not going to change just because I see a better way but it can make you kind of annoyed sometimes. Or irritated at it. And when I went back to Brazil this last time – I don't know how much reverse-reverse culture shock I had but I was "culturally annoyed" a lot. I'd be in a bank and there's like 5 different lines and I thought – there's such a better way to do all of this - but yet they're still going to do it this way – they're not going to change the whole banking system because I think there's a better way. So I just have to sit in line again and be annoyed all of the way through it.

### **I feel like a hidden immigrant**

One of the biggest frustrations expressed was that the TCKs felt like they were not "cut any slack." Because they looked like everyone else around them – in other words in appearance they looked very American – no one expected them to act differently. This caused many uncomfortable situations when the TCK lacked important foundational cultural information that others around them shared by virtue of having grown up in the States. As one TCK stated, "I visually fit in – I don't look international, but nobody was interested in knowing me. The teachers were pleasant but I don't think they grasped what all I might have gone through."

### **I feel I can never go home**

Some TCKs felt that by the very act of repatriating to the States, they could never go home to their host culture. Many people had told them that it was impossible to feel at home in a place once you had left, and they believed this to be true. This feeling added to their sense of loss and their feelings of rootlessness. Several had experienced the feeling of not belonging in their host country and one TCK expressed it this way, "I go home [host country] and it's like I feel out of place. I'm not the same person I used to be."

### **I feel the differences are overwhelming**

Many TCKs spoke of the sheer number and the type of differences between the two cultures (their host country and the United States) as being overwhelming. Even such basic things as how far to stand from people when talking to them was different and had to be learned. The fundamental nature of many of the differences coupled with the amount of learning that had to take place was challenging for them. One participant stated, “I had to learn to talk to people. It’s different here than back home. People have bubbles here...when we talk to people back home we get up close to each other – like face to face and talk and that’s normal. Here you don’t get up close to someone.”

### **I feel lost**

This theme initially emerged during an observation and then also appeared in several interviews and one of the focus groups. Many TCKs spoke of the panic that resulted from feeling lost. They expressed feeling lost all of the time, and that this heightened state of emotional distress was physically draining. One TCK put it this way,

I was lost – all of the time. You know that feeling- that overwhelming surge of adrenalin that you get when you’re going somewhere and all of a sudden it dawns on you that you have no idea where you are that you are completely and utterly lost? Well, that is how I feel - all of the time.

### **I am constantly embarrassing myself by committing cultural faux pas**

One of the most heart-wrenching experiences shared by TCKs was the committing of cultural faux pas. They would say or do something that was culturally unacceptable and then suffer embarrassment or ridicule. When they would commit these faux pas, it would cause them to withdraw in an effort to avoid experiencing the pain again. Several TCKs spoke of the



immense effort it took on their part to “try again” once embarrassed. One TCK related the following,

I had to learn that an eraser is called an eraser and not a rubber. Because I asked people to borrow their rubber when I was in class and got in trouble for it. Things like that – there’s no way that you can – unless you’ve been told – there’s no way you can know that’s come across wrong.

**Just when I think it’s better, I experience the shock over again**

The cyclical nature of shock was a common theme through the data. Many TCKs related stories of how they would think they were “better” and had progressed past feelings of culture shock, only to be confronted with some experience that would trigger all of the “old feelings” again. One TCK related, “I’ll be just fine and then I’ll come out of the cafeteria and something will hit me, some smell, or the temperature of the air, something and then the feelings will wash over me again.”

**I have difficulty fitting in**

Another common thread throughout the data was “fitting in.” Many of the TCKs expressed that they had difficulty fitting in, and some went so far as to say that they had not fit in since repatriating. This feeling of not fitting exacerbated their feelings of isolation and many had difficulty making themselves continue to try to become more acclimated with others around them. One female TCK stated,

I am bad at hanging out. People just ignore me because they don’t think I’m very fun. Like some part I didn’t watch any American TV show and American culture like even though they make jokes I don’t get the jokes. And they always make that kind of joke and they are

like so tired of explaining me that kind of stuff so I was like you don't need to explain me I will just hang out with other people or by myself. I guess that was very hard.

### **I'm a living paradox**

Many TCKs expressed, either directly or through comparison of experiences that they lived a paradoxical existence. One of these paradoxes was *wanting attention yet not wanting to stick out*. One TCK stated, "I want people to notice me, yet I don't want to stick out." Another paradox was *wanting lasting/deep relationships yet afraid to invest*. Some TCKs desired to have long-term relationships, yet because of their mobile background they were afraid to invest in others. This was not only due to fear of one of them moving, but also to a fear of it being too easy for them to discard the relationship and move on if it "wasn't working out." One TCK put it this way,

It's been such a struggle for me to be in a relationship. I have had to deal with fears of going long distance with someone – losing someone and allowing someone – because I put up barriers with people and that's just the way I've done it because we've moved so much – I've put up barriers with myself in letting people get to know me but not to the extent that it would cause me pain. And even though to most people I'm a very open person I know that I'm not. I had to come to terms with letting someone in so close that if I do move if he does move it would cause me extreme pain. It's hard for me because I move so much. But it's easy for me to make that an option to deal with everything – this isn't working out, you know so I'm just going to move. In the beginning of relationships, moving on is ready option for me.

Another paradox expressed was *desiring understanding and different standards yet not lower ones*. Many TCKs spoke of what they perceived as lower standards that applied to

international students yet not themselves. They expressed both envy of what they perceived as an “easier time” that internationals experienced while also stating that they did not want to have standards lowered for themselves. One TCK stated, “I want professors to know that I’m not from here even though I’m an American. I mean international students get extra help – get held to a different standard. I want to be held to a different standard – but I’m not saying a lower standard – just different.”

Many TCKs talked about the paradox of *wanting to go back home yet wanting to stay here*. This feeling of wanting to be two places at the same time caused them sadness as they were usually looking at the place they were not and wishing to be there. Some just generally wanted to be two places at once, and one participant talked of how her day-to-day experiences influenced her desire to be one place or the other,

Sometimes I wish that I had stayed home [in host country] and then sometimes I’m glad I’m here. A lot of that is just what I’m going to do with my life and then thinking of all the options I had if I’d stayed in Brazil and the options I have coming here. It really depends. And a lot of what’s going on in my life really influences that so if I have a bad day or something happens that’s related to culture I’m like why did I even come here, why did I move, why did I leave home – it would’ve been so much easier if I’d stayed home and gone to university there.

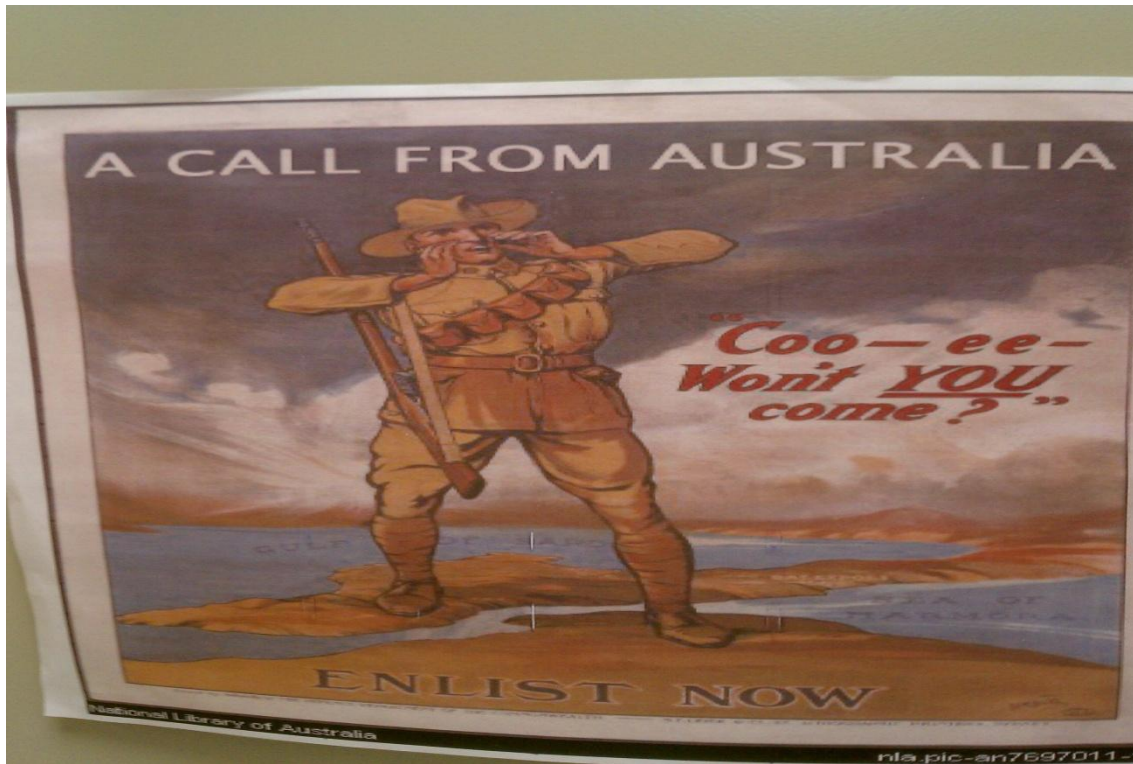


Figure 4.4 - TCK's poster that represents how his former country calls him to come back home.

Another paradox expressed by TCKs was *wanting to hang out with TCKs yet wanting to integrate*. Most of the TCKs shared that they understood the importance of integrating into the American culture and having American friends, yet their most important and influential relationships were with other TCKs. One participant stated, “I mean part of the reason I came here was to learn English better so I need to hang out with Americans. But I really feel more comfortable with other TCKs.”



Figure 4.5 - Place in the missionary's office where TCKs can "hang out" with each other.



Figure 4.6 - In the area where the TCKs “hang out,” many bring coffees and teas from their previous country as a reminder of “home.”

*Wanting to like it here yet afraid of being disloyal* was another paradox that was common among participants. When they found themselves really enjoying an aspect of American life they expressed feeling guilt that they were beginning to adapt and like life in America – they felt it was disloyal to their host country and their friends that still lived there. They also expressed a fear that by beginning to enjoy America, they would somehow lose the culture that had made them who they were. One participant stated simply, “I want to adapt but I don’t want to lose myself.”

Another paradox that presented in the data was *wanting to make plans yet realizing everything changes*. Many TCKs related feeling “burned” by plans they had made and the resulting disappointment when things didn’t turn out. TCKs perceived that they experienced many more frustrations of their plans than their non-mobile peers. It seemed that planning was a waste of time because something always ended up happening, such as a move, that would negate those plans. At the same time, they expressed many plans and hopes that they possessed, and they had a great desire to make plans in an effort to provide at least a perception of stability in their future. One TCK expressed, “But that’s as far as my planning has gone. Because I moved around so much I feel very much like a nomad. And so I don’t, necessarily – I don’t feel tied down. I do know that whatever I plan, it’s likely to change.”

One paradox expressed, not only by those TCKs whose parents were missionaries, but also others as well, was *thinking God has deserted them yet still having faith*. This theme not only came out strongly in some of the interviews, but also was a component in many of the drawings. Usually depicted by a cross, or rays of sunshine through a cloud, this “change of

perception” was described as an “acceptance” or a “maturational process.” One TCK expressed it as a realization, “I was angry with God but then I realized that He’s been there all the time.”

Another common paradox experienced by the TCK was *when here, critical of here yet, when there critical of there*. The TCKs found themselves unhappy in their current living situations and would recall romanticized memories of where they used to be. However, this was not limited to when they lived in the States. Once they were back in the host country they would experience fond memories of America. One TCK stated,

When I’m here I miss the things in Brazil, when I’m in Brazil I miss the things here. And then when I’m here there are things that I’m critical of here. When I’m in Brazil, there are things that I’m critical of or I’m annoyed at.

One paradox expressed by TCKs was feeling *critical of Americans in general yet fond of individuals*. Similar to when Mrs. Banks, in the movie *Mary Poppins*, states that she loves her husband and respects him, but thinks that men, as a group are “rather stupid,” many TCKs spoke of their individual American friends fondly, yet disparaged Americans as a whole. Most even had romantic interests with an American and had plans to marry them one day, but then would express later in the interview that “Americans were shallow” or some other criticism of their peers. One young male TCK expressed it this way,

I think I’m much more open minded than Americans. I have a greater sense of understanding of the world around me. I know how things work a lot more often than, say, my cousins or friends that live here...My girlfriend is from Edmond [Oklahoma, USA]. She lives here, she’s always lived here – she’s gone out of state maybe 3 or 4 times in her entire life.

The final paradox included in the themes was that TCKs were *independent yet need others*. Many TCKs talked about how their lived experiences made them more independent than their peers and that they were very proud of their independence. Yet, later in the interview they would speak about how much they needed the support of others, and how they relied on their family, for example, when making important decisions. One TCK, when he realized how he stated two opposite feelings, stated,

This is going to sound like it contradicts what I said earlier, but I like it that here when you're eighteen your family backs off and you get to be independent. But I think that's a different situation than when I said earlier that I need my family.

While these themes were evident in the data analysis, it should be noted that some of these themes are not exclusive to TCKs. Transition during adolescence is challenging and some of these themes are present in research associated with non-TCK adolescent transitional experiences.

In the next sections, amalgamated stories that evolved from the tapestry themes are presented. These stories represent common and interconnected themes across the data. Each story is presented under a person's name, a pseudonym, and background, common representations of the participants that were created by the researcher. The stories present the data within context and serve to allow the reader to experience the transition of the TCK through their own eyes. Racial identification in selected stories is made for the purpose of furthering story and analysis. When race is identified, it was as occurred when the repatriated TCK was identified by others within the cultural context of the United States, which differed from the host country. This identification furthered the classification of the TCK due to physical characteristics which was then assumed by others in the United States culture to identify the



TCK with certain social concerns associated with that subgroup which was exterior to the TCK's lived experience.

*Abigail's story (missionary parents, born in Brazil)*

Abigail arrived at the interview just a few minutes late, sweeping through the office door with textbooks in hand and a purse slung over her shoulder. After greeting everyone in the outer office, Abigail introduced herself, sat demurely on the edge of one of the chairs in the inner-most office, and brushed her long chestnut hair away from her face with a professionally manicured hand. Petite (not over 5'4" in height) and stylish, Abigail was a Caucasian female student who the males on campus would term a "knock out." After a brief exchange of pleasantries she began to tell her story.

Born in Sao Paolo, Brazil to missionary parents, Abigail grew up in and around church activities with other children – some from the local population and others who were the children of parents on the mission team. She described many times, late into the evening, playing with her friends up at the church building while the parents held various meetings. When she described the Brazilian culture, Abigail virtually beamed – her eyes lit up and her smile broadened. She recalled how when greeting friends, both new and old, they would hug and kiss as it was a very open and outgoing culture.

Abigail's parents put her in private school where everything was taught in Portuguese. Instruction in this school was rigorous with only core curriculum taught during the school day. Other activities, such as music or sports, occurred after school, which usually ended around noon.

Abigail loved school and excelled academically earning outstanding marks in all subjects. She described herself as popular, having lots of friends at school, at church, and in her

neighborhood. As the daughter of the missionary who was the pulpit preacher at the congregation, she was also the center of attention at church.

This “center of attention” status also held true when Abigail and her family were on furlough in the States, which occurred every two years. During their trips to America, the family visited the churches that sponsored their mission work. Church members would invite them to dinner every evening and take them on outings to special places like “Six Flags Over Texas” or to sporting events. Abigail described these trips as a whirlwind of activity – a “Disneyland” sort of experience. Also, she and the other children would bring back toys that had not yet arrived in Brazil, making them the subject of much local envy. Abigail was often amazed at how easily her parents interacted with different people in the U.S., and how comfortable they seemed no matter the situation. Things calmed only when the family boarded the plane to return to Brazil.

Even though she is an American citizen, Abigail referred to Brazil as “home” until later in the interview when she used “home” interchangeably for both Brazil and the United States. When referring to the United States, however, there was usually some sort of limitation, caveat, or explanation.

When Abigail proposed attending a Brazilian university in Rio de Janeiro, her father encouraged her to instead consider his alma mater, a small, private Christian liberal arts institution in the Midwestern United States. Abigail reluctantly agreed to give it a try if the family would buy, in advance, an airplane ticket home (to Brazil) for Christmas after her first semester. She made no guarantee she would return to school in the States the following spring.

As the time approached for Abigail to leave Brazil for university in the States she was filled with mixed emotions, described as a roller coaster with huge mountainous highs and deep dark valleys. Sometimes she felt like time was flying past her so quickly that she couldn't

distinguish faces or events. She was euphoric about the opportunity to be out on her own and experience college, yet frightened about being so far away from her family, friends, and everything she had ever known. There were good-bye parties and send-offs from church friends, school friends, and family, and many expressed to her how jealous they were of her opportunity. For the first time, Abigail felt a bit of a gulf between her and her Brazilian friends as she acknowledged she was, at least by citizenship, American. Abigail's parents were openly excited about her going to the university where they had met and married. They described great times with friends and family and reminisced about the spiritual growth they experienced. There were times Abigail wanted to suggest that *they* go back to university in the States since they seemed so excited about it all.

As Abigail packed for college, she wondered how she would fit her life into the two checked bags and one carry-on she was allowed. In the end she packed only necessary things - there really wasn't room for things like the photo album she had made during her junior high and high school years. As she sat on her old-style hard back suitcase to fasten the latches, she laughed as she remembered a story she had read about another missionary family's arrival at an American airport after several years in Africa. They had gathered their luggage and were making their way through the terminal when they realized people had stopped to stare. The mother had done careful research and knew that they were appropriately dressed but soon realized the children were following dutifully behind in single file *with their suitcases perched on top of their heads African style*. Abigail wondered if people would stare at her as well.

When her parents took her to the airport, Abigail kept a stiff upper lip so that they wouldn't be disappointed in her or worry too much. She got a seat next to the window and cried into a pillow for the entire airplane ride to the States. Initially the nice lady in the seat next to her

made small talk in an effort to take her mind off her situation, but she eventually gave up and tried her best to ignore Abigail, choosing to lose herself in a Tom Clancy paperback.

By the time the plane landed, Abigail had cried herself out. She made her way to the plane's bathroom, put in eye drops to reduce the redness, washed her face as best she could in the cramped space, fixed her make-up, combed through hair with her fingers and emerged to face her new life in the States. Her uncle cheerily hauled her suitcases out of the airport, carefully placing the contents of her life in the back of his enormous Chevy Suburban before they headed for the college.

When Abigail arrived in Nestor Hall – the freshmen girls' dormitory – she was struck by how dark the building was compared to the light filled facilities in Brazil. Because she was the first to move in it was also deathly quiet which was unnerving for someone as bubbly as Abigail. As others began to arrive the next day, Abigail's loneliness subsided as she became involved in the hustle and bustle of helping them move in.

As classes began, Abigail tried to learn the new "rules of engagement." She looked very American so no one expected her to be "different." After a few days she developed a bit of a "reputation" as a flirt as her "huggy" nature was misinterpreted by not only the boys on campus but also the girls who were suspicious that she was out to get their boyfriends. This was devastating for Abigail, a girl who had hardly dated in Brazil, was raised in a strict family, and already felt like she stuck out like a sore thumb. Initially retreating into herself, she made a conscious decision to try again – this time being very careful to act only as others around her were acting. She described this as her "chameleon period" where she tried to fit in and not be noticed – blending in and not giving anyone a reason to talk about her.

Even though Abigail was now fitting in much better, she felt like the friendships she was developing were very superficial. In Brazil, it wasn't any time at all before you were spending a lot of time with new friends and even sleeping over at each other's homes. She missed Brazil where she and her friends would go to a park, walk through the town square, or just hang out and talk for hours on end. In the States, most of her friends preferred to watch movies or play video games and Abigail wondered why even bother to get together to do those things. Even going out to eat was different. In Brazil the process was leisurely and took hours; the first time Abigail was invited out to eat in the States, she was taken through the drive-through at McDonalds.

As the semester progressed, Abigail found and bonded with other TCKs. Finally she felt like she had a group of friends with whom she could share her innermost thoughts and feelings. As Christmas approached, Abigail was very excited to go back home to her family in Brazil. She took her final exams, excelled in her grades (as she spent a lot of time alone studying), and boarded the plane back home, still unsure if she would return in the spring.

Being a "good girl," she decided to return to the university for the second semester. This time the transition went much more smoothly although she described it as a cyclical experience – totally fine just before some little thing would happen or she would be reminded of something that would bring on heavy feelings and emotions. These times would almost incapacitate her, causing her to not even want to get out of bed to eat or go to class. In her classes she understood little of the slang or common expressions used by her professors and other students. Language faux pas were some of the sources of her greatest embarrassments, causing her to speak more quietly and less often.

Because of her isolation-induced academic achievement, Abigail will graduate with a degree in psychology in only three years. Originally planning to return to Brazil upon

graduation, Abigail was no longer sure what was next other than entering graduate studies at a state institution not far from her current university. Even though graduate school is a normal progression for psychology majors, Abigail wondered if she might just be putting off the decision of whether to stay in the States or return to Brazil – acknowledging there is an increased probability that she will never return to Brazil to live and this causes her emotional pain.

***Bernard's story (military parents, born in Germany)***

Bernard arrived exactly on time to his interview and walked quietly into the office so as not to disturb anyone who might be studying. He was a tall, physically fit and articulate African-American male - at least 6'4". He wore small wire-framed glasses, and appeared very studious in nature with his short hair and almost non-distinguishable moustache. He carefully placed his backpack on the floor and patiently waited for the first question to be asked. As he was soft spoken, it was at times difficult to hear his story. When Bernard realized this, instead of talking more loudly, he leaned forward so details could be picked up by the digital recorder on the desk.

Born in Germany on a military base to American parents, Bernard grew up with his brother and sister. He did not attend the school on base with the “military brats,” the International school in the nearby German town with the diplomats’ children, nor German schools with the missionary kids. His homeschooling limited his interactions with other children. Bernard’s mother was a conscientious home-schooler and he excelled in math and science. His days were filled with studies, and his parents made sure that he was academically prepared to enter university in the States. They were very protective of Bernard - he seldom left the base for the sake of safety. In fact, even though he grew up in Germany, neither he nor his family learned to speak German. He expressed that when he was off base he worried that people were talking about him because he couldn’t understand what they were saying.

Growing up as a young black man in Germany, Bernard felt he never fit in. He described the German population as being very white and European. He not only looked entirely different, but his mannerisms also identified him as “foreign.” He learned “not to wave the American flag,” metaphorically speaking, in an effort to get along with Germans.

When it came time for university, he was not given a choice - his parents decided where he would attend. His strict military and religious upbringing influenced him to not question their decision to go to college in the United States. Bernard’s parents encouraged him to choose engineering as a major because of his talent in math and science. He described his family as “being close,” but didn’t talk extensively about his parents.

Upon arrival at college, Bernard was shocked by the difference in how “church” and “Christianity” is conceptualized in the States. He described the typical American religious experience as revolving around church membership, regular attendance, and monetary contribution, while this was not the case with his family in Europe. Because Germany, and Europe in general was largely secular, his family developed their own deep religious faith that he described as more spiritual than his perception of the American experience.

When Bernard described Germany in one word he said “quiet.” The loudness of the Americans contrasted sharply with Bernard’s quiet and withdrawn nature so it was difficult for him to make friends. It was his senior year of college before Bernard felt he made friends who would “stick with him.” He stated that, in the States, you could be really good friends with someone and, in actuality, know very little about them. He puzzled for awhile about this, eventually coming to the conclusion that it must have something to do with the American independent spirit. He credited Facebook for his improved social life.

Although Bernard stated that growing up in Germany emboldened him so that he is not afraid to live overseas, he admitted that he was definitely more of an “American who happened to grow up in Germany,” rather than someone who grew up culturally as a German. However, growing up sheltered on the military base caused him “miss out” on American culture. He laughed and admitted that he had no understanding of fashion trends, and had to look for context clues for a frame of reference when people used cultural references in speech.

Since his family repatriated with him, Bernard can go home to visit on the weekends as desired. He did that more as a freshman than as a senior. He and his little sister chose to attend a different church than his parents.

Even though he blends in physically much better in the United States than he did in Germany, he described feelings of isolation and “not fitting in culturally.” He recounted many polar opposites between him and American culture. He was quiet – America was loud; he was introverted – America was extroverted; he desired close friendships – Americans were satisfied with superficial relationships; he was more mature – Americans were more immature, he had a large worldview – Americans were more ethnocentric. He didn’t feel he fits in either culture – American or German.

As he drew to the close of his story, Bernard spontaneously offered some advice to other TCKs repatriating to the States for university: “Reach out” to others – especially those who have a similar experience. He ended his story by telling other TCKs “Don’t hate where you are – it really isn’t as bad as you might think.”

***Catherine’s story (missionary parents, born in Brazil)***

It was late afternoon on a warm Oklahoma day, and Catherine appeared for her interview dressed in a light blue blouse and nice, freshly ironed khaki trousers. Her shoulder-length



perfectly straight blonde hair seemed to glow as it reflected the light from the high windows in the office. Like Abigail, she is from Brazil – but she is the yin to Abigail’s yang – straight golden blonde hair vs. curly chestnut locks; quiet and demure vs. bubbly and outgoing; tall and gracefully thin vs. petite and active; and blue eyes vs. deep brown. Yet they both shared some common characteristics – they preferred to hug affectionately when greeting others, were very articulate, were stunning in appearance, and were eager to tell their stories.

As Catherine settled into a chair in the office, she apologized that she may only be able to stay for two hours as she has club meeting to attend - she was an officer. After initial small-talk she told her story. As with the others before her, it was like watching someone puncture a balloon filled with water. The story, bittersweet and filled with wisdom and knowledge that belied her youth, gushed out seeming to have a will of its own.

Born just outside Rio de Janeiro, Catherine lived with her family in a house with a yard and a dog. She attended Brazilian schools and learned all of her academic subjects in Portuguese. Growing up in a bilingual household had its advantages according to Catherine, who related times when she and her family would switch languages to discuss something privately. Catherine was the middle child and had one older brother and a younger sister who was still in high school in Brazil.

While in junior high and high school, Catherine took a lot of classes in history and geography. When she would talk with her cousins in the States, she was shocked by the differences in curriculum. In Brazil, history and geography were taught in a global context, while her cousins learned about historical events and geography that directly impacted the United States.

When Catherine talked about growing up Brazilian, she spoke lovingly of the warmth of the Brazilian people. She talked about the closeness she felt with her friends, and the long evenings they would spend together. It seemed to Catherine that her home was always filled with people and that her parents never met a stranger.

As she approached high school graduation, Catherine's parents were preparing to move back to the States. They began to disengage from Brazil and started to talk more about their ties to America. Her brother, who was one year older, graduated high school the previous year and still lived at home with the family. Her parents decided it was time to move back to the States so that she and her brother could attend university.

The family loaded everything they had in a giant shipping container and several suitcases. As Catherine talked about leaving her friends, her home, her neighborhood, her school, and her dog, she began to cry. Unprepared for how much loss she would feel upon leaving her life behind, she took a long time to "come around" when the family arrived in America. She was surprised and disappointed that reality did not live up to the expectations created by her parents. Catherine stated that she believed the transition is easier for TCKs who make their own decision to repatriate rather than having that decision made for them by their parents.

Catherine felt that repatriating with her family made it easier because she could go home anytime she wanted – her family lived in the same urban area as the university she attended. However, her parents were so busy dealing with their own grief that they did not notice hers, or if they did, they did not know how to help her. She spoke of the resentment she felt that her parents and others expected that she would be thrilled to go "home" to the States, even though it was not hers – it was the home of her parents.

Starting university was a blessing, according to Catherine, as it gave her the opportunity to make friends. She was careful not to fall into the same trap as Abigail, and consciously made an effort to take two steps back from the distance that she would normally stand from others. She would smile and wave at the other students, but would wait to speak until spoken to.

The weather at the time that she and her family moved to the States was similar to the weather in Brazil so she felt comfortable. She was not prepared, however, for the fact that at unexpected times, some smell, or the temperature of the air, or the level of humidity, or the way the sun was shining would suddenly remind her of Brazil and feelings of loss would wash over her. She still experienced those occasional feelings but learned to cope with them by allowing herself a few moments to reminisce before emotionally “moving on.”

Entering the university at the same time as her older brother gave her an “ally” to whom she could vent when things became overwhelming. After her freshman year, she joined a service sorority. This enlarged her group of friends and she was felt like she was contributing to the community, which was very important to her. She became involved with other TCKs early in her freshman year and continued to regularly associate with them throughout her time at the university.

As Catherine adjusted to life in the States, she found less of a need to visit her family. She began to spend her weekends on the university campus, only going “home” for special events and holidays. She spoke of feeling more like a “normal” college student throughout this process.

One of the things that Catherine had to get accustomed to when she moved into the dormitories was that her window did not have burglar bars. In Brazil, the bars on her bedroom window made her feel safe. Even though she knew “in her head” that crime was not as big of an

issue in the States as it was in Brazil, she initially experienced fear and had trouble sleeping. She also learned that it was safe to wear her jewelry in public and to walk without an escort in the evening. Learning to trust was a big issue and this was compounded by feeling insecure in a place that felt “foreign.”

Catherine was frustrated with ethnocentrism exhibited by many people in the States. She expressed that being a part of two cultures gave her a broader worldview and helped her understand that just because things are done a certain way in either of the two countries doesn't make it the only way. She learned to keep quiet in certain classes taught at the university as neither her professor nor her peers shared her belief that America wasn't always right. One thing that deeply troubled Catherine was the fact that students, faculty, and administrators said the American pledge of allegiance during chapel. She viewed this as another example of Americans believing that their country was somehow favored over all others by God. She refused to participate, believing that nationalism and religious faith had nothing to do with each other.

Even though Catherine will graduate next year, she was uncertain of her plans. She realized that she will probably not go back to Brazil, except on an occasional visit – that chapter of her life is closed. With her major in family studies, she may go to graduate school, teach English as a part of a language program in China, or she may get married to her American boyfriend and be a stay-at-home mom. She acknowledged her mixed feelings about leaving Brazil. She sometimes wished that she could rewind time and stay in Brazil forever, and other times she was happy to be in America.

Catherine left her interview with a list of advice for other repatriating TCKs: “Don't automatically think Americans are being rude or unfriendly – that is just their culture; make an effort to make friends keeping in mind the manner those friends are made in America; eat

healthy even though there will be a lot of unintentional peer pressure to snack on junk food, burgers, and fries; know the difference between a friend and an acquaintance; tell your story *once* to those who are interested – after that it becomes boring to people; realize that you might appear arrogant because of your mannerisms, speech, and worldview; learn to relax and don't put so much pressure on yourself to always fit in; realize that other college students – not necessarily just TCKs – are going through their own transition problems and episodes of homesickness – so cut them a break; say goodbye properly before leaving your “home”; don't be afraid to take risks; don't be afraid to cry but don't spend all your time doing it; get out of your room; have a good attitude because your transition depends on it; and never hide from your unique background and experiences.”

***Desmond's story (missionary parents, born in South Africa)***

After missing his first interview, Desmond arrived twenty minutes early to the rescheduled time. Dressed in “skater” shorts, a pacific sunwear t-shirt, flip-flops, and several ankle and wrist bracelets, he entered the office, quickly sat down on one of the chairs and took off his flip flops, crossing his legs underneath himself so that none of him touched the floor. Looking much like a flower child of the sixties, his long curly hair hung loose to his shoulders and he wore a mischievous smile that matched his blue-green eyes.

Speaking with a striking South African accent he began to recount his story. Born and raised on the east coast of South Africa, Desmond attended a private school in Durbin. Schooling in South Africa, he explained, was different from the United States. Each student had their own desk with dividers that made each one resemble a tiny cubicle. Learning was self-paced and the student would raise a flag on the desk if he had a question and the teacher would come to the student. Desmond excelled in his studies because as soon as he was finished with

his work for the day, he was rewarded with release to play soccer, a sport that had become “his life.” Many times he completed all of his assignments by ten o’clock in the morning and would happily leave the school, quickly making the short jog to the soccer fields down the street. He would play soccer until 6:00 in the evening. All of his friends played soccer. Their team often competed in regional meets and tourneys and brought home trophies which further bonded the players to one another as “brothers.”

Desmond was the youngest of three children with a much older brother and a sister about his age. A self-described socialist, he appeared extremely well-educated and knowledgeable about history and world events. Although he dropped out of college after transferring institutions four times, he demonstrated knowledge of the Stoic philosophers that would likely put to shame many college graduates in the U.S.

One day, a group of people came to his home from their family’s sponsoring congregation in Texas (Desmond’s family served as missionaries). They went into a room with his parents and closed the door for several hours. Desmond didn’t think much about it, and his parents didn’t mention anything about what they had discussed. It wasn’t until a year later - four months before their move to the States - that his parents called a family meeting and explained. Fourteen years ago, Desmond’s parents had signed a contract to stay in the mission field in South Africa for fifteen years – the amount of time that his older brother would be in school. Those fifteen years had come to an end, and it was time for them to move back to the States so that his brother could attend university. Only fourteen years old, Desmond paid little attention to the implications of what his parents were telling them. He refused to believe that they would actually leave South Africa - after all, his soccer team was practicing for the championships and

he had been chosen to represent South Africa in an academic tournament in America later that year. He couldn't leave.

As the rest of his family prepared for the move, Desmond refused to help. He did nothing to pack his room, nor did he make any efforts to say goodbye to his friends. About four days before the family was scheduled to fly out of Durbin, a giant shipping container arrived and was unceremoniously deposited in their front garden. It was impossible to go into the house through the front door without going around the shipping container. All of a sudden it hit Desmond that the move was real – that he would very soon be leaving the only life and friends he had ever known. He became extremely angry and lashed out at his family and at God. He continued to furiously practice soccer until the day before leaving.

In the interview, Desmond cried when describing how his soccer team left practice to help load the shipping container. He recounted missed opportunities to properly say goodbye because he refused to accept the inevitability of the move to the States.

When Desmond and his family arrived in Texas, they settled into a house loaned to them by a member of the church. The house had two bedrooms, the first with three mattresses on the floor for his brother, his sister, and Desmond, and the second with an air mattress for his parents. In the “lounge” was one plastic folding chair and a small television set with “aerials.” Since they arrived during the summer, long before school began, Desmond, his brother, and sister wiled away the hours watching soap operas and other daytime television shows.

When the time to begin school approached, Desmond's mom took her three children to the mall to shop for school clothes. Desmond's brother paid attention to the clothing styles worn by the people on the TV and in the mall, and bought similar clothing. Desmond, who was still angry about the move, didn't bother; he found one store with clothing that he felt comfortable

wearing and he bought five pairs of shorts and six t-shirts. He purchased nothing for the air-conditioned school buildings or the fall and winter months in Texas which were much colder than Durbin.

The week before school, Desmond went to the high school with his mother to speak with the school counselor about a class schedule. South African school credits were not recorded the same way as the United States so Desmond was not allowed to transfer many of his academic credits. Additionally, he was required to take Spanish even though he had several years of multiple languages including Zulu, Swahili, and Afrikaans. He was thrilled to learn that the school had a soccer team, although he thought it strange that it met as a class during the school day. Horrified to learn that school began at 7:45 in the morning and lasted until 4:00 in the afternoon, he comforted himself that a portion of this time would be spent playing soccer.

On the first day of school, Desmond made it to every class without major difficulty. When he showed up to soccer “class” the coach was sitting in his office while the students congregated in the gym. One by one, the coach called the students into his office for an interview. When it was Desmond’s turn, the coach asked him for information, like his name, but couldn’t understand Desmond’s strong South African accent. It seemed apparent to Desmond, as this West Texas coach eyed his long hair and his “skater” apparel, that the coach was forming a very negative impression of him. Thankful to be dismissed to join the others in the gym, Desmond was afraid to ask the coach what he meant when he asked Desmond to “dress out” for tryouts. Having left his “boots” and his “kits” in South Africa, Desmond couldn’t have “dressed out” even if he had understood what he was being asked to do. When the coach finished the interviews, he singled out Desmond as being insubordinate for not having put on his uniform. Desmond didn’t have the opportunity to explain that he didn’t own a uniform. The next day



Desmond was dropped from soccer, and the sport he had considered “his life” evaporated before his very eyes.

Devastated, he joined the school choir because his sister was in that class. He discovered that he had a real love for singing and it helped to know that he had an ally in the class. Even though he did not make many friends while in high school in Texas, he bonded more closely with his sister and found a place in the theatre program at the school. He was chosen for the lead in one of the plays and felt that when he was acting that he was accepted. He also excelled at giving speeches, and participated in many different forensic activities.

However, Desmond continued to struggle socially. He committed many cultural faux pas, especially in the area of language. One day he asked a student sitting next to him if he could borrow his “rubber” – meaning eraser in South Africa. The class erupted in laughter and Desmond was absolutely mortified.

When it came time for the “TAKs test,” Desmond had no idea what that meant – hearing instead the word TAX. He was prepared to bring money to school, when he learned it was a standardized test.

Desmond’s parents forced him to get a job in hopes it would help to bring him out of his shell and give him a little spending money. Even though he dutifully reported to his job sacking groceries, having to do so only made him angrier. He got tired of people asking him how he felt because he never smiled.

Desmond struggled with how to address issues regarding race. In South Africa, Blacks were called black; Whites were called white; Indians were called Indian; and “Colored” referred to a specific ethnic group descended from Hottentots, in Malay, and French Yugonos, primarily from the Cape. “Colored” was considered a racial slur in Texas.

When Desmond drove through Texas traffic, dealt with customer support in a store, or interacted with some of the “West Texas” personalities he encountered, Desmond became “culturally annoyed.” Little things that would “niggle” at the edge of his consciousness would suddenly take on increased importance and cause him irritation. These annoyances would build up to the point that he would eventually “blow” at the smallest push.

Desmond graduated high school and he stated that he felt an enormous sense of relief when he saw “Texas in the rearview mirror.” Even though he faced various new challenges, such as compulsory class attendance, university was a “glorious” experience. For the first time he had friends, and even though some of his friendships were superficial, he had good friends as well. Some of the professors who knew his parents would ask him how he was doing, making him feel special. His grades, however, were not good as he was sometimes so depressed that he would not attend class. He was suspended from the university and was forced to move back to Texas to attend junior college. After one “dreadful” semester at the local “juco,” he transferred to a state university within driving distance of his parents’ home. He spent a year there raising his GPA so that he could, once again, leave Texas and go back to his original university. Once there he still struggled with depression, which affected not only his attendance but also his ability to concentrate when in class. He eventually dropped out of school, worked for awhile, tried school again for a short time, and then took a job at a sandwich shop close to the university. Desmond still works at the sandwich shop, trying to make enough money to go back to college.

When asked about his plans for the future, Desmond laughed and responded that he no longer makes plans – they have never worked out for him in the past so he considers them a waste of time. He explained that having your entire world yanked away causes one to view plans with suspicion. He described feeling “almost afraid” to make them because “hopes will only end

up being dashed upon the rocks of life.” He ruminated about the possibility of working on a micro farm that his brother might start, going to “bush school” in South Africa and becoming what would be termed in the United States a “park ranger” but in much harsher conditions, or someday going back to school. In his mind, each of these options seemed as likely or unlikely as the other.

Desmond expressed the hope that other TCKs and their families can learn from his experience and not suffer as much. He stressed that families should NEVER move when they have children in high school – explaining that it can be a cruel time of life already without the additional persecution that will happen when the TCK is put in the “foreign” environment. He said that it would be better to wait until time for university because, even though it will still be difficult, the student would have more time to develop his or her identity before transitioning to the States. He continued with advice to not be afraid to try new things – stating that is the only way you will find out what you might enjoy about your new home. Desmond admonished the TCK to hold onto at least part of their “old” culture because it made them who they are. Most important of all, according to Desmond, is to say a proper goodbye to everyone and everything at home before departure. If one fails to do this, Desmond said it is impossible to move on.

Finally, Desmond expressed deep gratitude for the opportunity to share his experiences in the interview, stating that it is extremely helpful to him and provided a necessary emotional release. As he exited the office he hugged the researcher goodbye and asked if it would be possible to read the dissertation once it is completed.

***Elise’s story (English teacher parents, born in Japan)***

It was a rainy Tuesday afternoon, and Elise had asked to meet in the coffee shop of the library at the state university where she attended. The place was bustling with activity as

students filled the tables and spilled into the meeting rooms, hot cups of steaming coffee and mid-afternoon snacks in hand. Elise made her way through the crowd and sat at the table, carefully placing her well-worn red backpack on the floor next to her chair.

A very petite African American, it was shocking to hear her introduce herself in imperfect English with a Japanese accent. She politely explained that she was born in Japan to American citizens, and that her parents were English teachers in Ibaraki prefecture. The only home she had ever known, prior to coming to the States to attend university, was Kaschi City in the Ibaraki prefecture. She quickly went on to relate that, although she was extremely worried when at first she could not reach her parents after the earthquake and resultant tsunami, she now knew that her family was safe and that the area of the city in which she lived was not severely affected. Extremely soft spoken and polite, she appeared to choose her words carefully so as to convey the meaning she desired.

Elise's father was a graduate student in California when he first learned of a teaching position in Japan. Upon graduation, he moved his family to Kaschi City where both he and his wife began teaching. Elise and her brother were born there, and the family lived in that one city in Japan for over 30 years. She explained that the decision for her parents to get married and move to Japan happened rather suddenly – the wedding was on Christmas Eve and they moved to Japan after graduation in May.

Although she felt privileged to have been a part of two cultures, Elise acknowledged that being a “minority of a minority” in Japan was a double challenge. She explained that there really aren't many black people in Japan; and even though she had Japanese friends, her best friend was her mother. Elise spoke very fondly of her parents, especially her mother, whom she

described as being more like a sister than the more authoritarian role that she attributed to mothers.

Elise talked about the negative effect of living so far away from relatives in the States. She said that she regretted not being close when her grandparents died and not being able to attend family events. She described feeling disconnected from her extended family, stating that even though they kept lines of communication open, she perceived them more as acquaintances than relation. Elise's brother came to the States during her sophomore year of college, but chose to move to California - a long way away from where she now lived in the Midwest.

When asked about her repatriation experience, Elise spoke about how excited she was to see America with her own eyes. She had heard her parents speak about it often, but had never actually been there. Even though she fully expected to be homesick, Elise did not experience severe homesickness. She attributed this to her parents hanging onto American culture in their home while living in Japan.

During her sophomore year in college, Elise spent a semester studying abroad in the Asian Pac-Rim program and her group spent several weeks at Ibaraki University. She talked about how strange it was for her to study "abroad" in Japan during her undergraduate studies. She spoke about how her perspective changed and that she now viewed Japan as technically a "foreign country." It felt more like an exotic vacation spot than "home."

One of the most difficult things for Elise was learning to speak up. In Japan, she explained, the culture respects group harmony. Everyone learns from childhood that you should not speak up to your teacher – you should not refute what your teacher says even if it sounds wrong. She went on to relate that she had to learn to speak up in the States in order to survive – advice, she said, that came from her mother.

Elise spoke of the advantage of a multi-cultural background when relating to students in the classes she taught as a graduate student. Her enlarged worldview made it easy for her to understand her multi-cultural students and also made her appear more approachable. Many students felt comfortable with her, and believed she understood their situations. Her background enabled her to readily accept differences, and she was known as a “bridge builder” to her international students. As a result, her students felt comfortable and accepted.

Having a very “American” name made for an interesting paradox for Elise while she was living in Japan. This included difficulties dealing with the Japanese government, and retrieving her mail from the post office. She found herself constantly spelling her name. Once she returned to the States, she appeared to be African American and so people assumed she shared the African American perspective and concerns. Feeling more Japanese than anything else, she often felt conflicted and wondered why people did not understand why she did not feel more closely bonded with the U.S. African American community. She went on to relate that people have thought she was lying when she told them she was from Japan. Elise attributed this to being one of the few TCKs at her state university campus in the Midwest, and explained that if she was in California, Washington, Hawaii, or New York it wouldn’t be as much of an issue.

Elise spoke lovingly of the Japanese culture, and listed the beauty of people, the food, the fashion, and her perception that their Buddhism and Shintoism was interwoven with the culture rather than being viewed as separate and apart, as some of her favorite characteristics. She reported that strong religious belief forms the foundation for many of the traditional customs and celebrations that are embraced in Japanese culture.

Elise said TCKs in America should reach out to their family and to others in their situation. She expressed her belief that, even though they might be thousands of miles away,

family can be a strong support system and will give advice closely aligned with familial principles. Her most important piece of advice was to relax – don't pressure oneself to fit in. This might be the one chance in a lifetime to live in another culture so every effort must be made to allow it to flow in and around oneself.

### **Additional Observations from the Drawings**

One of the more intriguing and enlightening components of the interview process was the participant produced drawings. This activity elicited responses from the participants that shed additional light on their lived experiences for both the researcher and the participants. When creating their drawings, many participants emotionally responded to new understandings that the process uncovered about their experiences and about themselves.

Every participant who was interviewed appeared enthusiastic about drawing and seemed to enjoy getting the opportunity to use the crayons and paper to re-present their transition experience. Drawings routinely took at least 30 minutes as each participant responded with a common series of steps: draw for a bit, step back and examine the drawing, continue to add to the picture, step back and re-examine, put the finishing touches on the work. Eight participants became emotional to the point of tears during their drawings, but when asked if they wanted to stop replied that they needed to finish and that this process was actually helping them. At the end of the drawing exercise several participants hugged the researcher and said thank you for the opportunity to put their feelings on paper. One of the participants remarked that this was the best artwork he had ever done and that he was quite proud of his drawing.

The participant interpretations of their drawings was very helpful in further elucidating themes, specifically for shedding light on the emotions that were experienced by the participant, not only during the transition process itself, but also in recalling their lived experiences from the

present day. It seemed that while participants were drawing, they were not only “experiencing it again,” but also viewing their experiences from a different perspective. This exercise added depth to the emotional data, clarified for both participants and the researcher what was experienced. Although not instructed to do so, many participants explained that they used colors to represent emotions associated with the transition experience, the country from which they moved, the United States, and their relationships. They often drew themselves with different expressions and using different colors depending on the stage of the transition they were representing. Many stated that the process was very therapeutic. The drawings also gave a frame of reference that could be used as a type of language between the participant and the researcher.

Drawings and the accompanying participant interpretations were coded in the same manner as the interviews, focus groups, and artifacts. The drawings themselves were first open coded and then close coded as if the images were text. Erikson’s (1963) stages 5 and 6, and Kübler-Ross’ (1969) stages of grief were used. Participants’ interpretations were transcribed and then coded in the same manner as the interview and focus group transcripts. Participant drawings and interpretations are included in Appendix E.

In a focus group, two TCK participants spontaneously collaborated to provide their explanation or theory about why TCKs have the relationship model that they do. They described how Europeans typically are more reticent to allow people into their outer circle of friends but, once allowed into the outer circle, one was quickly allowed into the inner circle – representing a more intimate relationship. The American model, however, was the opposite: many people allowed into the outer circle and very few becoming intimate friendships (inner circle). This, they explained, was why many TCKs perceived American relationships as being “superficial.”



In another depiction, the inner and outer circles of relationship were drawn as porous for the TCK – allowing for quick entry into the outer circle and the quick forming of intimate relationships. They theorized that this was due to the compressed time available for the forming of relationships when moving was a constant and imminent possibility. Figure 4.7 shows their drawing.

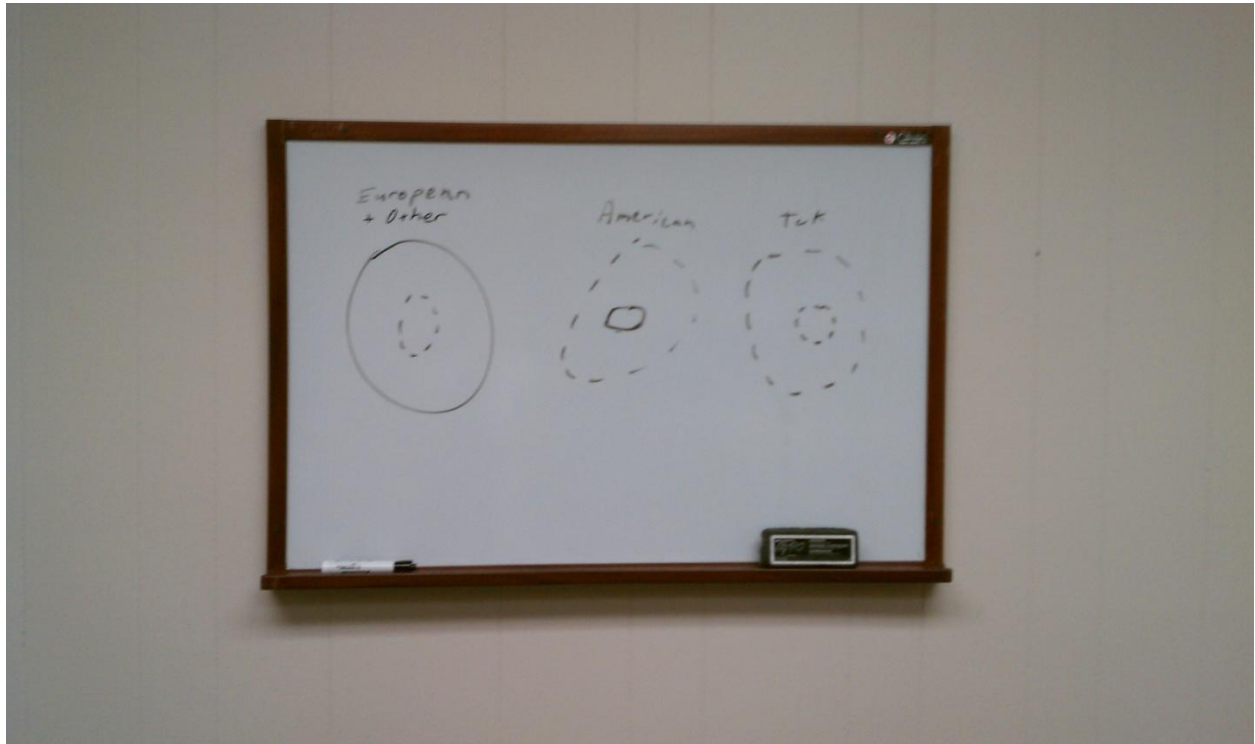


Figure 4.7 - The European model is on the left, the American model is in the middle and the TCK model is on the right.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented data gathered during this study. Using closed and open coding, as described in chapter 3, and Emerson’s categories (1995), various smaller themes, termed “strand themes” emerged. These strand themes coalesced into larger tapestry themes that were pervasive in the data. The tapestry themes were presented with one representative supporting statement from the participants. Additional supporting data is presented in Appendix D. These themes

were developed into amalgamated stories that were representative of the data. The stories presented the data within context and served to allow the reader to experience the transition of the TCK through their own eyes. Finally, additional observations from drawings were presented including the impact on the participant and their reactions – drawings and interpretations listed in Appendix E.

Chapter 5 will begin with an overview of the research questions. The findings of the study will be discussed with consideration of literature and theory, and implications for the future of research will be examined. Limitations of the study will be presented and the chapter will be concluded with a summary and a final conclusion.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Discussion**

In the previous chapter, the findings of the study were presented, giving voice to the data and the participants as they re-present their life experience as related to the third culture kid (TCK) phenomenon. In this chapter, these findings will drive theory-based discussion create new understanding of the phenomenon and implications for TCKs, other stakeholders, and research.

First, the research questions are revisited.

#### **Research Questions Revisited**

In this study, three research questions were developed to explore the lived transition experience of the TCK repatriating to the United States and attending university. These three questions are:

1. How do Third Culture Kids (TCKs) relate to the concept of culture, and how do they characterize their relationship to any specific culture?
2. In the adjustment to college, what transition experiences do TCKs consider significant?
3. What factors influence the TCK's decision to persist at their university to degree completion?

#### **Participant Experiences**

In order to orient the reader, in this section participant experiences from chapter four are revisited in summarized format.

Repatriating to the home country of parents can be an emotionally confusing time for TCKs. TCKs reported an initial mixture of excitement at the prospect of experiencing something

new – an adventure to a place about which they have heard wonderful things – and sadness to be leaving their family, friends, and possessions. During the move, the TCKs reported feeling anxious and frightened because they were in a strange place, and often did not understand cultural cues to regulate their behavior. It appeared the reality of repatriation may not have matched the expectations set by the imagined experience; this leads to extreme disappointment and homesickness. Alone and missing everything familiar, TCKs noted they became angry and slipped into depression, further isolating themselves from contact with others for fear of ridicule for making cultural mistakes.

In order to fit in, some TCKs reported attempting to become chameleons, losing their own identity in an attempt to blend in and not draw unwanted attention to themselves. They described feeling guilt – guilt for not being happy to be in the place that their parents call home, guilt for leaving friends behind to pursue opportunity, and guilt if they begin to like their new country – feeling that they are disloyal to the place from which they moved.

Some TCKs related that little annoyances would build up until they felt like they would explode – acting out in behaviors that are off-putting – or implode, becoming clinically depressed. They expressed feeling like they have cut their connection to their previous home – realizing that they can never really go home – while at the same time feeling out of place in their new home. TCKs related difficulty in relationship building because of cultural confusion over appropriate relationship building steps, being developmentally delayed because of their move during adolescence, or the impact of their nomadic existence on their belief in the possibility of a long-lasting relationship. They expressed concern that the lack of strong relationships further complicated their transition experience and caused the TCK to distance themselves from their peers and their home country.

Some TCKs acknowledged that their own perceptions of their enlarged world-views, can cause them to appear arrogant to others, who misinterpret their positions and their approaches to discussion. This, in addition to cultural differences in relating to others further may exacerbate the gulf that reportedly exists between the TCK and their American peers.

Most TCKs acknowledged the enhanced opportunities afforded to them by repatriating to attend university and felt conflicted about whether they preferred to return to their former home or remain in the States after graduation. They expressed great hope for the future, and believed that they were adjusting better as time progresses, but they also expressed reticence to make plans realizing that in the past, their plans have not worked out for them as they would have desired. The TCKs related that they continue to attempt to adapt to life in the States and are constantly developing their identity to include their American self in coexistence to the self representing their former culture.

Some TCKs related that their perceptions regarding their transition experience directly influenced their acculturation. They related that separation from their homes, families, friends, and other aspects of their former lives, people and things, that brought them comfort and feelings of belonging, emptied a part of their selves and left them feeling less than whole. Descriptions of the feeling of emptiness alluded to a state of inner conflict. Missing home yet wanting to fit into their new environment, many described living a paradoxical existence that exacerbated role confusion. Some literally described themselves as a paradox, wanting one thing at the same time as desiring the opposite. They reported feeling stuck in neutral, unable to move forward or reverse course. They further reported that the increased level of anxiety caused by feeling perpetually lost became their existence and was a constant reminder of how uncertain they felt

all of the time. Some TCKs related being unable to relax and be themselves, and that they may have lost who they used to be without firmly developing who they will potentially become.

TCKs expressed that having access to others who share their situation is a great comfort and those who were at a university with a well-defined group of these individuals seemed to be more satisfied with their situation than those who perceived themselves as being alone. Most TCKs reported that relationships with other TCKs take on increased significance and provide a “safe place” for the venting of frustrations associated with repatriation and other cultural annoyances.

From participant responses, several themes emerged related to these questions that shed light on the TCK situation and their transition experiences. These experiences appeared to directly impact the third-culture student’s decision to persist to degree completion.

TCKs appeared to relate more closely to their host culture – where they lived prior to repatriation – than to American culture. During the interviews, some even became confused when referring to their “home culture” switching between using “home” to refer to the country from which they moved and to the United States, where they hold citizenship. They often related difficulties interpreting American culture, committing many cultural faux pas, and having difficulty fitting in. They seemed to struggle with adjustment issues – adjustment to life in the United States in addition to adjustment to college. Some of their transition experiences included homesickness for their host culture; grief and loss associated with losing everything – family, friends, status, home, school, etc.; loss of self-confidence; depression and sadness; feeling like they are two separate “selves”; difficulty establishing relationships; feeling completely lost all of the time; not knowing where they belong; and living a paradoxical existence that is unsettling and confusing.

The decision to persist at their university appeared to be influenced by several factors, the most significant being a TCK community of friends to which they can relate. The TCKs who were interviewed expressed that their closest friends were other TCKs and that these relationships provided support and an avenue through which to vent their fears and frustrations. They related that these TCK friends gave them the confidence they needed to feel that they could succeed at college and made them feel like they had a group to which they could belong. Even those TCKs who experienced more highly elevated levels of stress associated with family tragedy, or severe culture shock and homesickness, appeared better able to find the stamina to persist if they had TCK friends on whom they could depend for support. TCKs without this support network were more likely to switch universities, and some even withdrew entirely from pursuit of post-secondary education. One TCK in particular, switched institutions four times before dropping out entirely.

In the next section, tapestry themes will drive the discussion of findings, theory, and application.

## **Discussion of Findings**

In this section, prominent tapestry themes will be explored and examined through the lens of existing theory.

### **Themes Through Lenses**

#### ***Of Grief and Loss***

For the death and dying literature, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969) developed a series of stages that an individual progresses through when grieving. Her five stages of grief include: denial and isolation; anger; bargaining; depression; and acceptance. In order to successfully progress to the stage of acceptance, it is important that the other four stages be traversed in some form or order.

Kübler-Ross' stages of grief have since been used as a model for grief circumstances other than dying such as job loss, organizational change, moving, leaving home and family, the loss of status, and many other types of situations where individuals or groups of individuals negotiate major change. Several of the emergent themes discovered during data collection either directly mentioned something associated with a stage in the grieving process or were closely related to the loss that TCKs experience. Thus the Kübler-Ross model appeared to also have some applicability to the transition process of TCKs.

The theme of “staggering loss” was mentioned in every interview. The TCKs reported the accumulation of losses. When they repatriated, they sometimes lost what they perceive to be “everything” – their home, pets, possessions, friends, foods, places, languages, schools, lifestyle, status, reputations, sights, sounds, smells, events, history, celebrations, and their entire world. Even though they experienced loss, many times those around them did not seem to recognize it as loss, therefore the TCK missed out on the support that can be available to those recognized to be grieving. Some TCKs even struggled to understand their own reactions because of the failure to self-identify their personal grief. Most TCKs reported that even their parents appeared to be prone to “not be aware” either as an attempt at denial or simply being ignorant of the need of the TCK to grieve for their losses. The parents appeared to view the transition experience as a happy time – a time when the TCK will be returning to the place that the parents perceive as “home.”

Several TCKs related that they slipped into “Anger and depression” – another major emergent theme. Many TCK participants recounted being angry – at God, at their families, at America, at themselves – and not recognizing it for what it was so that it could be dealt with. One TCK lamented that his anger had cost him the opportunity to say a proper goodbye to those he left behind in his host culture – causing him no end of grief. Several TCKs mentioned being



so depressed that they did not want to get out of bed and one mentioned not knowing if she could “go on.” During one of the interviews, the participant identified several of the stages of grief and spontaneously labeled his own transition experience as a grief process.

Isolation, both culturally initiated and self-imposed, resulted in what many TCKs described as feeling “Alone” – an important theme in all of the interviews. Several participants expressed that they felt isolated from others and that no one was able to understand them other than fellow TCKs. This isolation was a vicious cycle – initial isolation caused them to be culturally unaware resulting in committing cultural faux pas which, in turn, caused them to further withdraw in an effort to avoid the pain associated with ridicule and rejection.

Two themes fed off each other. Being “Culturally annoyed” resulted from the “Differences” the TCK perceived between the “host culture” and American culture, and between themselves and their American peers. This exacerbated feelings of isolation, anger, and depression as they were constantly reminded that they do not fit into their new environment.

One of the final realizations that the TCK mentioned as being important to acceptance is that “You can never go home.” This theme was compared to a river by one of the TCKs who talked about the fact that you can never step into the same river twice – the water is constantly flowing so when you place your foot back into the water it is not the same water that was there before. Even though the thought of this caused pain to some TCKs, they mentioned the necessity of acceptance in order to avoid disappointment if they would attempt to return to their host country expecting it to be exactly the same as when they left.

When one young male TCK participant reported carrying on “life as usual” prior to his repatriation and the shock he felt when the international shipping container was delivered to their home a few short days before the move, it appeared to represent Kübler-Ross’ (1969) stage of

denial. Every TCK participant expressed feeling isolated and alone, paralleling isolation as outlined by Kübler-Ross. Many TCKs related feeling angry at many individuals including their parents, professors, and God. Anger is one of the five stages Kübler-Ross identified and it appeared born out in the data that the TCK participants experienced this stage. Bargaining, another stage of grief identified by Kübler-Ross was not as evident in the data as the other stages, but still appeared in statements by TCK participants. One young female not only bargained with her parents regarding a guaranteed “right of return” to her host country after her first semester at university, but also bargained with God that if she chose a certain plan of study at her university that involved service, that she might be able to return to her host country upon completion.

Every TCK participant expressed feeling depressed, another Kübler-Ross (1969) stage. One even went so far as to express that at times, he felt as if he did not want to get out of bed for any reason, even to eat. The intensity of depression experienced and expressed by the participants varied from individual to individual, with some expressing the feeling as one of sadness and others more as a dark and oppressive feeling that consumed their every thought.

TCK participants related differing levels of acceptance. Not only was this acceptance different from others who shared their TCK experience, but also differed depending on current circumstance, their level of physical activity, or even the weather. Many expressed feeling “OK” about the transition sometimes while at other times falling back into depression. This appears to directly correlate to Kübler-Ross’ (1969) explication of the stage of acceptance and the reality that individuals slip in and out of stages, and sometimes have to “re-progress” through stages that they had previously completed.

Grieving, though perhaps unrecognized by many, was a very common thread throughout the TCK experience. Every TCK participant mentioned at least one, if not all, of Kübler-Ross’

(1969) stages and related several experiences that bore out their journey through the grieving process

### ***Who Am I?***

Erik Erikson, a prominent social psychologist, proposed that individuals must successfully complete sequential developmental stages in order to become emotionally well-adjusted adults. He developed eight stages of development that encompass various “tasks.” These eight stages include trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. role confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, and ego integrity vs. despair (Erikson, 1963).

These eight stages can be roughly divided into two categories. The first four deal with an individual’s development that relates mostly to self and family. The last four, starting with stage five – identity vs. role confusion – are when the individual begins to look to peers for landmarks and signposts from which to build their development (Erikson, 1968). TCKs experience frequent moves that inhibit their ability to draw sufficient developmental cues from their proximal peers. The TCK begins to struggle with development, starting with stage five and may be developmentally delayed.

Stage five is very important in the course of human development because it is the beginning of learning “self.” One must know and understand “self” in order to be able to successfully complete subsequent stages, especially stage six during which the adolescent begins to form relationships that will last throughout their lives (Erikson, 1963). It appeared that the mobile lifestyle of the TCK compounded by the timing of their moves, caused TCK participants to report several themes that coalesce around Erikson’s stages five and six. These seemed to be

rooted in either the inability or delay in forming their identity, or their unsuccessful attempts to form lasting relationships.

Erikson's stage five – Identity vs. Role Confusion – appeared to related to several of the interviews as many TCK participants expressed that they did not know if they were American or were affiliated more strongly with their host culture. Physically they appeared to be American, but emotionally they felt more “native” to their host country. Many spoke of feeling foreign in America and, after moving to the States, like they no longer belonged in their previous host country. The theme of “Where do I belong” emerged in the interviews as TCKs questioned their identity from the aspect of their cultural “roots” – their multiple moves or the timing of those moves causing confusion about who they are and what their role in their cultural environment was supposed to be. Some even went so far as to propose that they no longer belonged anywhere and were like the infamous “man without a country,” cut off from their former self as represented in the host culture and yet unable to put down roots and assimilate into the new.

This incompleteness of identity formation and the resultant role confusion, led into another of the major themes related by the TCKs who were interviewed. Erikson, in stage six – Intimacy vs. Isolation – identifies not only the need for individuals to form healthy relationships, but that in order to do so, they must first have successfully completed the prior stage and have formed their own identity. In every interview that was conducted, the participants related their disappointment with relationships. Many were unable to form solid and deep relationships with American peers calling them shallow or superficial. They mourned the “loss” of intimacy and spoke of feeling “Alone” (another major theme mentioned previously).

Several other emergent themes appeared to impact the TCKs ability to form relationships, in conjunction with Erikson's sixth stage. Because of their “Expanded worldview,” TCKs

related having a condescending attitude toward their American peers for what they perceived as American ethnocentrism. In turn, they felt that their American peers tended to view the TCK as arrogant and self-important. This lack of cultural understanding on both parts seemed to negatively impact the forming of deep relationships.

According to Erikson (1963), in order to build successful relationships, individuals must know who they are. Again, referring back to not only Erikson's stage five – Identity vs. Role Confusion – but also stage six – Intimacy vs. Isolation, this appeared to directly relate to instances when several TCKs related that they view themselves as two separate “selves” – one immersed in the former culture and the other a nascent self emerging in the new. This theme of “dual selves” came out in several ways including when some TCKs related not being able to predict which “self” would emerge in certain situations – in some situations the “host culture self” would represent the TCK while in other situations, they felt that the “American self” was stronger.

When the “wrong” or “inappropriate” self was represented (described as such by the participant), some TCKs reported being more likely to commit “Cultural faux pas,” - another of the major themes. The committing of these acts was particularly harmful to identity development (outlined in stage five by Erikson) as the participant, upon being ridiculed for committing the faux pas, would typically withdraw to avoid further pain or embarrassment, further complicating their ability to develop themselves and their relationships. According to Erikson (1997), individuals who fail to establish loving relationships begin to live in an ever-shrinking world, as their circle of intimacy collapses around them.

Feelings of not belonging, or confusion over role appeared to come as a surprise to many TCK participants. Many related that their situation was not recognized by those around them

because they appeared to be Americans but, in fact, behaved more like international students. This situation was representative of another major theme “Hidden immigrants,” and participants reported not receiving the support or understanding they needed because others did not perceive their need for this support or understanding. Many repeatedly mentioned another theme – feeling “Pangs of shock” that went unrecognized by those around them. These shock waves would wash over them at unexpected times, prodded into life by some little nuance within their environment. Oftentimes a smell, or the whisper of a breeze would call to mind their former culture and they would become temporarily lost in painful remembrance. These reports also appear to fit within stage five of Erikson, as the individual struggles with developing their own interpretation of who they are, and then the resulting confusion if they struggle with this identification.

Adding to the stress level reported by many TCK participants and depleting their emotional reserves that are necessary to develop an intimate knowledge of themselves and to form deep relationships built on understanding (stages five and six of Erikson), is another of the major themes – the constant panic associated with feeling lost all of the time. One TCK described it as the moment you realize that you are totally and hopelessly lost in an unfamiliar place being stretched out over time. The feeling, as he described it, became his “new norm of existence” and he was constantly emotionally drained by the expenditure of adrenaline caused by the lost feeling. Some TCK participants related experiencing a need for “control” similar to the Mann-Gulch fire fighters who refused to drop their tools even though the keeping of these tools impeded their escape. The tools represented their “control” over a situation that they had no real control so to abandon those tools would be to admit that they did not have that control. The TCK’s tools include a “brave exterior” that they show to others around them. Holding onto this

“tool,” even though it impedes building relationships with others, helps them to deny that they do not have control of their situation. Without a feeling of control, panic takes over (Weick, 1996) destroying the TCKs ability to make well-reasoned decisions.

Every TCK participant related that their emotional reserves were further depleted by the struggle to fit in and to be accepted. “Fitting in” was one of the most prominent themes and is closely related to the theme of “Where do I belong.” TCKs developed coping mechanisms to deal with not fitting in including becoming a “chameleon” and changing themselves to attempt to fit in to whatever situation they find themselves. Some TCKs specifically mentioned that this tendency to try to blend in to the “wallpaper” caused them to doubt who they were and created confusion about their identity – again a reference back to Erikson, stage five. One even mentioned that he felt developmentally compromised in forming his identity because of the constant changing he was doing in order to fit in.

Seemingly presenting the greatest challenge to the development of a healthy identity is the final major theme “Paradoxical existence.” Every TCK participant would describe themselves one way and then would almost immediately describe themselves as the opposite. They recounted a need for attention yet at the same time would talk about not wanting to stick out. There were many instances of the paradoxes inherent to the TCK existence and this further confused their identity and, more importantly their role within their new culture.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings, as summarized previously in this chapter and presented in detail in chapter four, provided insights about the connections among the research questions and the meaning made by participants.

### ***Groups***

The third research question asked what factors influenced the TCK's decision to persist at their university. TCKs who reported being able to identify with a somewhat formalized group of other TCKs appeared more likely to persist to degree completion. The support network provided by their TCK peers seemed to be most important in maintaining their desire to work through their challenges and remain in their academic program. If they were in a TCK-related group, they spoke of being able to relate their concerns and know that they were being understood and appreciated. At one institution, there was a formal TCK group and those TCK members appeared more positive about their transition experience than those without a support group. The TCKs in a group spoke of the camaraderie and acceptance and that they felt that they had more in common with others in the group than with peers from either their "host" country or the United States. Many of them spoke of the desire to "spread the word" about TCK groups and the hope that other institutions would form groups of their own.

### ***Recognition***

The second research question addressed experiences in the adjustment to college that TCKs considered significant. Several TCK participants spoke of the desire to be recognized for their unique characteristics. They wanted others to know that they were from another culture even though they did not appear different. Many related that this transition experience of being a "hidden immigrant" was significant for them. This also directly related to the first research question that probed how TCKs relate to the concept of culture and how they characterize their relationship to any specific culture. Many TCKs related that they felt that culture was acquired as they lived in their host country and that they felt more like a member of their host country culture than they did the American culture. They also wanted to be able to contribute to their



new (American) culture and to be recognized for doing so. Some of the TCKs mentioned that they would like to be able to formally share their experiences with others in order to educate them about the global nature of human existence. Other ways they wanted to contribute included service to other people groups who they perceived to be struggling, such as the impoverished or the disadvantaged. They viewed themselves as having life experiences that made them more cognizant of suffering and of the opportunities to be of assistance.

### *Understanding*

Most frequently mentioned was the strong desire on the part of the TCK for understanding. Most TCK participants in this study felt fundamentally misunderstood. Not only were many of their behaviors and actions misinterpreted, but they often felt victim to what they believed to be unrealistic expectations placed on them by others. When the TCK might be experiencing depression they were expected to be active and involved, continuing to excel in the classroom. When English was not their first, or primary, language they were expected to immediately communicate at a level comparable to their American peers – not receiving the “grace” that they perceived was given to their international peers. The need for understanding translated especially poignantly in their relationships – many longed for friendships or romantic relationships where the “other” was able to understand their background, situation, and challenges. This need for understanding related to all three research questions. First, many of the TCKs reported a lack of cultural understanding, not only by their American peers, but also a lack of understanding they felt for American culture. This included not only understanding of “pop” culture experiences but also fundamental cultural building blocks such as the formation of relationships. Related to question two, many TCKs related that the need for understanding and the lack of understanding resulted in many transition experiences that were significant –

situations that affected their satisfaction with their repatriation experience. This factor of “understanding” appeared to contribute so significantly to many TCKs’ feelings of satisfaction, that it directly affected their decision to persist at their university or to transfer or drop out. One TCK participant who transferred four times before eventually dropping out related that his search for understanding was difficult, and in fact, was still ongoing.

### *Longing for voice*

When I first was considering the transition experience of the TCK as the topic of my research, I happened to mention it to a student at one of the institutions included in this study. This student looked me in the eye and said “I am your study.” He then proceeded to talk to me every week, asking me if I had received permission to being the study and if he could be interviewed. Before long, others began contacting me, asking for the chance to be interviewed. As word of the research got out, the field of potential participants virtually exploded and I had many more individuals volunteering to be interviewed than I could possibly include in the scope of this study. I modified the IRB application three times to expand the study population so as to include more of the people who wanted to participate and appeared to offer unique data for the study.

This phenomenon also occurred regarding the research sites. All sites that I contacted were enthusiastic about participating, volunteering in many instances to help arrange the interviews. In fact, I ended up with too many sites for the study so I chose three of the original four, saving the fourth (which includes a potential of 35 participants) for a future study.

This “longing for voice” may mean several things. First, it may indicate that this “population” is not only virtually ignored by current social research, but that they also may be cognizant of the need to share their experiences – not only to “heal” but to also help others, like

themselves, who are repatriating. It may mean that they feel desperate for understanding and are willing to extend themselves and to take risks in order to fill their perceived needs. Erikson (1963) spoke of the formation of identity as being fundamental to an individual's happiness and ability to progress through life. The experiences related by the TCK participants may be a part of this identity formation and because many of them are still working through their experiences, the felt need to share those experiences aides them in this work. Kübler-Ross (1969) identified stages of grief that appear to help to explain the TCK experience. By finding an avenue to express themselves, TCKs may be able to "name their losses," identify their grief, and receive the support they need to reach acceptance.

### *Subcultural dynamics*

The fact that I was contacted by TCKs whom I did not know and that I had not attempted to contact pointed to the possibility that TCKs represent their own subculture. They seem to know who they are, identify others who are TCKs, and communicate on a regular basis. Some of them would arrive at the interview and would happen to mention that they had heard that they were going to get the opportunity to draw about their experiences. I had not shared this information so it must have come from other TCKs who had interviewed previously. In fact, one of the TCKs who contacted me volunteering to be interviewed was someone at a different institution and I would have had no reason to identify her as a TCK or to know to initiate contact. Participants sometimes used similar language to refer to things during their interviews that was unique to the TCK population – words that would not be chosen by such a wide range of people had they not shared a common frame of reference and close association. The TCKs who were a part of this "subculture" were the same ones who had either persisted to degree completion or were well on their way.

## **Absent Themes and Eureka Moments**

### **Absent Themes**

As is the case with any study, there were some themes that I expected to find during this research that never appeared, or if they did, they were different than I had expected them to be. Six particular themes presented themselves – four of these were “absent themes” and two were “eureka moments.”

### ***Semper Paratus – Always Prepared***

It is often related that no one is more familiar with the challenges associated with moving than families in military service. Thousands of military families live overseas in various bases and other installations. These families are always faced with the imminent possibility that they will be uprooted and moved to another country or back to the United States. Because of the frequent moves, the armed forces make available transition preparation training and support and counseling services.

Because of these services, I thought that I would find that military kids handled repatriation to attend university much more easily than their non-military TCK friends. That did not appear to be the case. The military TCKs whom I interviewed – some from Japan, others from Canada, and still others from Germany - appeared to struggle with the same emotions and feelings as their non-military TCK friends. In fact, since some of the military families were also dealing with separation from military service upon repatriation, it appeared that they struggled with even more emotions including feeling cut-off from membership in an organization that gave them their identity. Missionary TCKs had their sponsoring congregations to return to, but military TCKs appeared to have nothing similar that functioned as a built in support group. Even though many missionary TCK participants expressed disappointment in the experience with their

sponsoring congregation, they were still grateful for having a group to belong to and someone they could lean on for support.

### ***Fabulous Furloughs***

Missionary families routinely made trips back to the United States to visit family and travel to their supporting churches to make reports. These trips, called furloughs, usually happened once every two years and lasted one to three months at a time. Families were hosted by relatives or members of their sponsoring church and had opportunities to experience vacation-like activities such as amusement parks, movies, beach trips, hiking, and anything that one might imagine a family might do on an extended summer trip.

Initially I thought that furlough trips would ease the transition of missionary TCKs because they would acquaint them with American culture, help them to build relationships with people stateside who might serve as supports upon repatriation, and, in general, make them feel more comfortable upon returning to the States for university. However, many TCKs who were interviewed described their furlough trips as setting unrealistic expectations for their repatriation experience that actually led to feelings of extreme disappointment that exacerbated homesickness and culture shock.

According to TCK reports, when the TCK returned to the States for university, they were no longer the celebrities they had been when on furlough. Instead of people signing up to host them for meals, or to take them on a fun outing, they never heard from those same people who had acted so thrilled to be with them previously. The TCK was now “old news” - nothing new and exotic like previously. Many TCKs expressed that they felt abandoned by the very people who they thought would be supportive and enthusiastic about their return.

These “Disneyland expectations” appeared to erect another emotional hurdle for the missionary TCK participants to overcome. Additionally, those families who remained in the mission field while sending their children to the States for university had to be careful how much they depended on the supporting church to help with their children. Some church congregations were better than others about helping the TCK with mundane tasks such as trips to the grocery store, or setting up banking accounts. I had expected that those relationships established during furlough would ease the transition and this did not seem to be so; in at least some of the cases, it appeared that furloughs in the United States increased the stress of TCK repatriation.

### ***College Catastrophe***

The transition to university can be difficult for students, even those who attend institutions in their home state. With this in mind, I expected those TCKs who repatriated immediately prior to beginning university would have a more difficult time than those who, either because of older siblings attending college, or the need to time the move to satisfy job requirements, repatriated earlier, during high school. I interviewed four TCKs who were younger than brothers or sisters, and whose entire families repatriated for the purpose of the older children attending university. Because these families repatriated as a unit rather than sending the kids by themselves, and they were not required to immediately deal with the realities of the university experience, it seemed their transition would be easier than those repatriating just a few weeks, or even a few days prior to beginning university classes. This appeared to not be the case in many instances. All four of the TCK participants who moved during high school reported a far more negative experience than those who repatriated just in time for college.

TCKs who repatriated during high school described heightened feelings of isolation and outright rejection by high school peers. Additionally, some teachers and counselors in high

schools were not only unsupportive but in a few instances downright hostile to what they perceived as special treatment the TCK might receive. While some professors at the university level were ignorant of the TCK experience, none of the participants interviewed reported incidents of hostility or harassment. Perhaps because of depression and general feelings of insecurity, high school-aged TCKs were perceived as being stand-offish, lazy, or insubordinate by secondary teachers and administrators. When the TCKs were teased or harassed by other students, these adults rarely came to the defense of the TCK, instead leaving them at the mercy of their tormentors – actions that now would be considered bullying.

TCKs appeared to experience many challenging transitions when attending university, however, transitioning during high school appeared to be particularly brutal.

### ***Time Heals All Wounds***

Time and distance is usually considered to be a healing factor when someone is grieving or otherwise in emotional distress. Initially I thought that during the interviews, I would discover that those with more recent repatriation would display more raw and painful emotions when relating their experiences than those who had been in the States for a longer period of time. This did not appear to be the case. Of the eight participants who broke down into tears during their interview or during the drawing exercise, half were recently repatriated and the other half had been in the States for up to six years. One young man in particular had been in the States for five years and had attended several colleges. I had expected that these frequent “adjustments” and the fact that he had repatriated with his entire family when he was in high school would have removed some of the emotional “sting” of telling his story. Instead he became emotional several times during the interview, each time apologizing. When I offered to stop the interview he asked

to please go on, that telling the story, however painful, was helpful to him in sorting out how he felt about his experiences.

So, instead of “time heals all wounds,” it might be more appropriate to say time allows one to reconsider and redefine their lived experience as they travel the road toward emotional healing. The rawness of the emotion related by many of the TCK participants may be due to the lack of recognition and support for transition grief, thereby delaying the normal grief processing perhaps causing emotions to feel raw even five to six years later.

### **Eureka Moments**

There were times during this study I was literally “blown away” by something that happened or something that came out during one of the interviews or focus groups. These “eureka moments” were not only external to myself as researcher, but some involved my own internal search for meaning.

### ***Please Hear My Voice***

As I related earlier, I was still in the process of considering this research topic for my study when I was approached by the first TCK asking to be interviewed. I am not exactly sure how this young man found out about my study, but he immediately contacted me through Facebook. In a chat window he said that he had heard that I was considering researching the TCK repatriation and transition experience. When I confirmed that I was he begged me to consider doing so. His exact words were “I am your study.” He volunteered to be interviewed and to help me locate others who would be willing to share their experiences. He continued to get in touch with me until I received permission to begin the research process. He then immediately scheduled his interview and showed up twenty minutes early when his time arrived. He has contacted me several times since checking on my progress and volunteering to do



whatever he could to help speed up the process, including proofreading my study, so that the message would be told without delay. Routinely he encourages me to not give up and to get this done for the good of other TCKs who will repatriate in the future.

This behavior would have been surprising had it only been this one young man, but it was even more surprising that I was constantly inundated with TCKs wanting to participate in the study. Some days I received as many as five requests from TCKs wanting to share their stories. They volunteered to come in any time and interviews that were supposed to last only 45 minutes to one hour often turned into marathon sessions of 1-2+ hours with only occasional interruptions by me to ask another question.

During these interview sessions there were times that I would ask one question and the TCK would literally launch a monologue – words spilling out in a flood of emotion as they took the interview question and ran with it. Some responses to individual questions would last 20 minutes and, when transcribed, would fill three to four single spaced pages of text. At times it was like watching someone puncture a balloon filled with water as the stories gushed from within, almost seeming to have a life of their own. I was reminded of the words of a song that described the composer as writing the song not necessarily because he wanted to, but because if kept inside, the song's message would threaten the very life it belonged to.

I was equally surprised at the response to the drawing exercise. Even the older male TCKs were enthusiastic about the opportunity to draw about their lived experience and some took more than 30 minutes to complete their picture before beginning their interpretation.

Every TCK interviewed thanked me for the opportunity to tell his or her story. I found this shocking as I felt that I was the one to be thanking them for participating. Telling their stories ended up being a very emotional event for some of the TCKs and for them to express

gratitude for going through the interview process was surprising. They related to me that telling their story helped them to bring their experience out into the open so that they could begin to process what they had gone through. Perhaps the practical burdens of repatriation and unrecognized grief causes their grief to go unprocessed, leading to both what appears to be raw emotions years later and also causing the interview process to become a trigger for processing.

### *Transformation*

While I knew that this process of study would likely change my attitude or awareness of the TCK experience, I was unprepared for the degree of transformation I would experience. Not only am I more aware and sensitive to the phenomenon, I can more easily identify TCKs without being told they are TCKs. Mannerisms and characteristics now seem apparent to me, and I pick up on nuances of behavior and speech that were hidden to me before.

My life has changed because of this research. I now am routinely visited by TCKs who want to share something with me or simply want to invite me to participate in some event. I have been invited to several gatherings and have been accepted into their community. Even though I know that I cannot fully understand their experiences, they still graciously include me in what seems to be their own unique subculture.

TCK participants regularly drop by my office, and one young lady has asked me to help her become more familiar with graduate programs and to apply to study at a school that I have attended. TCKs who are new to me will introduce themselves and ask me about my research. I have received so many expressions of thanks for the opportunity to share TCK experiences that I feel humbled and compelled to broadly share what I have learned. While the purpose of this study was to inform and discover, I have been changed through this process into an advocate. I

hope to use what I have learned to benefit TCKs and their families as they make the challenging transition to university upon repatriation.

## **Conclusions**

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the discussion of the findings of this study.

- The reports by TCKs and the analysis of the data showed that TCKs seem to face several challenges with transition upon repatriation.
  - They struggled with identity formation
  - They felt isolated and alone
  - They were frustrated by cultural misunderstandings
  - They did not feel as if they fit in
  - They lived a paradoxical existence that causes confusion and self-doubt
  - They felt like hidden immigrants
  - They sometimes struggled with language
  - They further isolated themselves when they inevitably committed cultural faux pas
  - They sometimes did not understand the currency
  - They oftentimes did not have transportation
  - They had no place to go during holidays and summer break
  - They became homesick, angry, and depressed
  - Their depression sometimes led to feelings of hopelessness
  - Their lack of roots negatively affected their ability to form lasting relationships
  - Their lack of roots made it easier for them to give up and move on prematurely
  - They experienced grief but many times did not recognize this

- TCK participants reported many strengths and analysis of the data also seemed to indicate
  - They expressed hope for the future
  - They felt independent
  - They were not afraid to take risks
  - They had an expanded worldview
  - They were open-minded and accepting
  - They were willing to consider other opinions
  - They were able to discuss issues without becoming upset
  - They let others “in” quickly
  - They were friendly and outgoing
  - They were expressive
  - They wanted to use their experiences to help others
  - They wanted to contribute to their new culture
- TCK participants expressed that they felt they could successfully transition and that factors contributed to success.
  - It helped to have a supportive and close family
  - It helped to have recognition
  - It helped to have other TCKs with which to share and bond

### **Limitations**

Recognition of study limitations assists the reader in applying the findings in an appropriate manner. As is the case with all qualitative research, this study is context specific. The insights and intuitions discovered during this study are unique to these participants in this

moment in time. Similar to a snapshot or photograph, this study represents the lived experiences of these twenty participants, as reported, during the time the study was conducted. Like the previously mentioned river analogy, once the study is completed, the river moves on and the experience will never be exactly the same.

Even though the sample population was larger than many other studies of TCKs, an increasingly larger sample would produce increasingly richer results. The interviews were in-depth and much was discovered, but it would have been even more interesting to be able to collect data from other geographical regions of the United States (such as the far North, the Deep South, and the West Coast). Institutions in the study represented the Midwest and Northeast, and were either public or private.

Many countries were represented as host cultures, including Kenya, Ghana, Brazil, South Africa, Canada, Germany, Japan, Mongolia, Liberia, and the Dominican Republic. However, no participants were found to represent host cultures in the Middle East including countries like Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Having data collected from predominantly Muslim cultures would have added depth and color to the study.

Rather than prescriptive or all-inclusive, these findings are intended to shed light on the experiences of repatriating TCKs. Caution should be practiced when attempting to use these findings as a template for predicting the behaviors or experiences of other TCKs.

## **Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice**

### **Theory**

The outcomes of this study have important implications for theory, research, and practice. Current theories could serve as foundations for understanding the unique situation of the TCK. There might exist a dual track of Kübler-Ross' (1969) stages of grief, and Erikson's (1963)

stages of psycho-social development that is unique to the TCK. It appeared from the responses of the participants that they experienced multiple cycles through the grieving process. Many times they returned to an earlier stage in the process and repeated the cycle again and again when prompted by a sight, a smell, or some other nuance in their environment. While this is a commonly identified characteristic of the grieving process (Kübler-Ross, 1969), because of the frequent changes experienced by the TCK this process appeared to be re-initiated over and over again for an extended period of time. At the time of this data collection, some TCKs had never successfully reached the stage of acceptance. The same could be true for Erikson's stages of psycho-social development. Many TCKs seemed to get "stuck" in stage five, taking far longer to complete this stage than their peers. Some of the older TCKs who were well into their thirties still struggled with their identity formation and this appeared to affect their ability to form relationships (Erikson, 1997).

This research further exposes the non-linearity of development as some TCKs appeared to successfully complete Erikson's stage 6 while still struggling with their own identity, a hallmark of stage five, indicating that it is possible that some individuals may approach these stages independent of each other. Further research is needed to determine if these cases can be typical or were outliers. This might indicate a need to revisit certain aspects of both Erikson and Kübler-Ross as they pertain to individuals who experience disruptive change and transition during critical stages in adolescent development. The grieving process also appeared to have additional dynamics unaccounted for in theory. Many TCKs experienced profound recycling that would continue even after apparently reaching acceptance. Additional depth regarding identity and attachment theory is a possible outcome from this research as TCK's attachments appear to occur differently than their home-country peers, attaching more to those who share

their experiences rather than those who share physical, racial, spiritual, or geographical characteristics (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). The “sense of place” that is an integral part of the identity development of the non-globally mobile individual appears to be different from the TCK, providing an opportunity to explore theoretical implications for identity formation. Additionally, the importance of cultural stability, peer group stability, and comfort level during crucial breaks in Erikson’s stages, particularly 5 and 6 – the first stages where the individual begin to look to peers for developmental cues – appear to have significant impact.

### **Research**

As related in chapter one, there is a dearth of research available, both quantitative and qualitative into the TCK phenomenon. TCKs appear to face many unique challenges, including those to degree completion, and this would be an area of beneficial inquiry. Many interesting and insightful studies could branch out from this research. Future exploration could include the incidence of mental illness in the TCK repatriating student population; research regarding identity and attachment theory; the effect of repatriation on the physical health of the TCK university student; the effect of repatriation on education; retention factors in the TCK population; studies regarding the repatriation experience of families who are changing careers; the effect of repatriating alone vs. repatriating with family; the experience of those who lived indigenously with the host population vs. those who were part of an ex-pat community; the effect of loss of status on identity; transitioning from a foreign school system to school in the United States; the effect of furloughs upon eventual repatriation; when family tragedy strikes during or after repatriation; what institutions can do to ease the transition of repatriating TCKs; the effectiveness of international programs on the TCK transition; and how recognition of the TCK phenomenon impacts TCKs, their peers, and the institution - just to name a few.

This research may not only help prepare TCKs for the stress of repatriation coupled with the transition to college, but also reduce the likelihood that the transitioning TCK would transfer or drop out. This research could be expanded to related populations such as international or gifted students in an effort to help them deal with the stresses of being “different.”

### **Practice**

Perhaps the greatest benefit from this study is in the area of practice. If universities and other institutions recognize the transition challenges faced by TCKs during repatriation, supports could help the TCK face those challenges. This study’s findings suggest that facilitation of community among the TCK population could help them develop supportive relationships that would be self-sustaining and further enable persistence to degree completion. If professors were aware of the academic challenges faced by the TCK, they could assist in overcoming those challenges by meeting the TCK “where they are” and helping them develop a plan to remediate any deficits they may have in their educational background. Practice will also benefit from this research as learning about the unique needs of this population will enable university counselors, professors, student affairs personnel, and administration to better serve the TCK population. All departments from the Office of Freshman Experience to International Programs could enhance their practices regarding the TCK phenomenon to include not only social support but also psychological supports to ensure the TCK population is socially and emotionally healthy.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of the TCK who is repatriating and transitioning to university in the States. Chapter one provided an introduction to the study, stated the problem under consideration, provided the reader with the purpose of the study, presented the research questions guiding the study, briefly addressed the orienting



theoretical and conceptual framework undergirding the study, reflexively considered the researcher as lens, gave an overview of the procedures and methods, addressed the significance of the study, and explored implications for research, theory, and practice.

An extensive review of the literature was presented in chapter two covering topics such as who TCKs are, TCK subpopulations, the TCK experience, U.S. TCKs, Adult TCKs, The challenges of re-entry, Identity development, What is identity, Why identity development is important, The importance of the developmental years, Schaetti's TCK identity model, Identity and the sacredly mobile youth, leaving, experiencing loss, homesickness, unexpected shock, Pollock's five stages of transition, Fitting in, Establishing, Forming relationships, Learning the rules, Training and preparation, The university experience, College choice, Settling in, Factors affecting retention, and Retention programs.

Methodology was explored in chapter three and a description of qualitative research – specifically phenomenology was presented to provide a research framework to approach the study. An overview of the design of the study further examined phenomenology with particular emphasis on “heuristic” research as developed by Clark Moustakas. This branch of phenomenology acknowledges the presence of the researcher in the study and focuses on not only participants but also on the internal search of the researcher. The inevitability of catharsis on the part of the researcher is expected and accepted as an outcome of the research. The procedures and methods of the study were explained and a virtual “roadmap” of the study was outlined. Finally, trustworthiness was explored and a “Trustworthiness Table” was presented to outline the safeguards put into place to insure the veracity of the study.

Chapter four presented the findings of the study and explored the “strand” and the “tapestry” themes that were discovered. Discussion of the various methods of data analysis

placed particular emphasis on the means used to explore the data including phenomenological reduction, closed and open coding, and the use of the categories developed by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw to pursue members' meanings. The researcher's statement was revisited to reflexively re-examine how the experience of the researcher could impact the study, and additional attempts at epoché included bracketing and acknowledgement of previous experience related to the phenomenon of interest.

Findings were discussed in chapter five in light of theory and in recognition of the researcher as lens. Tapestry themes were grouped for presentation within associated theoretical frameworks. Limitations of the study were presented, and recommendations for further research were made. Finally emergent and context-specific conclusions were drawn with the admonition of caution when applying to other participants in other contexts.

### **Final Conclusion**

This research was a process – not only a process of exploring the transition experiences and persistence of TCKs – but also a process in which I, as a researcher became as much a part of the TCK community as is possible without actually having grown up in another country. Like was stated previously, because of my association with TCKs and the manner in which they included me in their world, I now have a greater understanding and affinity for their unique challenges – even to the point where I can identify most TCKs after only a few moments with them upon meeting.

If there is one thing that I wish that universities and the people who work there would take away from this study, it would be that TCKs do, indeed, face a unique set of challenges. It would not only be beneficial for TCKs but also in the best interest of universities to recognize this and offer support to them as they not only face the same challenges as other students

transitioning to university, but also the compound nature of transitional adjustment affected by cultural shifting during crucial stages in their personal development. An advocate on each campus could provide opportunities for social interaction and support within the TCK community and education for others to minimize the ostracizing that can occur when expectations are not met, either on the part of the TCK as pertains to their experience, or the expectations of the culture regarding TCK characteristics and behavior.

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## **Appendix A**

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Documents

IRB Approval

First Modification Approval

Second Modification Approval

**Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board**

Date: Wednesday, February 23, 2011  
IRB Application No ED1127  
Proposal Title: Retention of Third Culture Kids Repatriating to Attend University

Reviewed and Exempt  
Processed as:

**Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 2/22/2012**

Principal Investigator(s):

Virginia Jennison Smith	Kerri Shutz Kearney
133 Landon	315 Willard
Edmond, OK 73013	Stillwater, OK 74078

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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, [beth.mcternan@okstate.edu](mailto:beth.mcternan@okstate.edu)).

Sincerely,



Shelia Kennison, Chair  
Institutional Review Board

**Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board**

Date: Tuesday, March 29, 2011 Protocol Expires: 2/22/2012  
IRB Application No. CD1127  
Proposal Title: Retention of Third Culture Kids Repatriating to Abene University

Reviewed and Exempt:  
Processed as: **Modification**

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): **Approved**  
Principal Investigator(s):

Virginia Jennison Smith                      Kerri Shutz Kearney  
133 Landon                                      315 W Lard  
Edmond, OK 73013                              Stillwater, OK 74079

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The requested modification to this IRB protocol has been approved. Please note that the original expiration date of the protocol has not changed. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. All approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB.

- The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. Those are the versions that must be used during the study.

The reviewer(s) had these comments:

The modification request to expand the sampling population and increase the subject numbers to 25 is approved.

Signature :

  
Shella Kohnisch, Chair, Institutional Review Board

Tuesday, March 29, 2011  
Date



**Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board**

Date: Thursday, March 03, 2011 Protocol Expires: 2/22/2012  
IRB Application No: ED1127  
Proposed Title: Retention of Third Culture Kids Repatriating to Attend University

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt  
Modification

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): **Approved**

Principal Investigator(s)

Virginia Kennison Smith                      Kerri Shutz Kearney  
123 Landon    315 WBar4  
Edmond, OK 73013                                      Stillwater, OK 74078

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The requested modification to this IRB protocol has been approved. Please note that the original expiration date of the protocol has not changed. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. All approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB.

- The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

The reviewer(s) had these comments:

The modification request correcting the application to state sampling will occur at Geneva college is approved.

Signature:

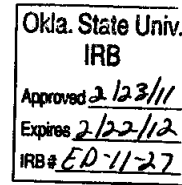
  
Shelia Kennison, Chair, Institutional Review Board

Thursday, March 03, 2011  
Date

## **Appendix B**

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approved Documents

Participant Consent Form, Email Solicitation Script, Face-to-Face Solicitation Script, Telephone  
Solicitation Script



## Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Retention of Third Culture Kids Repatriating to Attend University

Investigator: Virginia M. Jennison Smith, M.B.A.; currently a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University

Purpose: To explore the transition experience of the repatriating TCK in an effort to shed light on the experience of the TCK and to possibly identify strategies to assist persistence to graduation.

**TCK definition: An individual who spent their developmental years outside of their parents' passport culture**

**Contact information for advisor: Dr. Kerri Kearney, Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership, Oklahoma State University, [kerri.kearney@okstate.edu](mailto:kerri.kearney@okstate.edu), 405-744-2755.**

Procedures: Participants will be asked to:

- Participate in an interview lasting approximately 1 hour
- Participate with the researcher in a closing discussion at the end of the study – 30 minutes
- Any additional interactions with participants will only be for clarification. No additional interaction is anticipated. If they occur, they will be completed within one year of initial contact.
- The coded data linking names and codes will be retained for five years in case clarification is needed. This list will be locked in a secure, locking cabinet in the office of the researcher, Cogswell-Alexander Hall room 110 at Oklahoma Christian University. Only the researcher will have access to this list.

**Interactions and conversations with the researcher will be audio-taped and the researcher will keep hand-written notes. Interviews will take place in CAH 110 on the campus of Oklahoma Christian University. If distance prevents a face-to-face interview, the interview will be conducted over the telephone. General topics of discussion will include the transition experience of the TCK, repatriation to attend university, and the challenges faced regarding persistence. If the participant chooses to participate in the closing discussion, this will be conducted one-on-one in CAH 110 or by telephone, and will cover any additional insights that the participant may want to add to the research. Participants will NOT be provided with any raw data that might identify another participant.**

All interactions and conversations with the researcher are confidential.

Risks of Participation: There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily university life.

Benefits: Participants are expected to benefit as a student from real-time discussion and coaching from the researcher who is the Director of the BRIDGE program and the instructor of Success Strategies. Participants will later benefit from strategies that result from the findings of

the study. This study is expected to contribute to our knowledge about the TCK repatriation and university transition experience and add to the toolbox of professionals such as university counselors and professors, and others with an interest in the TCK experience such as parents and friends as they attempt to help the TCK persist to graduation.

**Confidentiality:** The confidentiality of your participation in the study as well as all materials associated with your participation will be protected. The coded data linking names and codes will be retained for five years in case clarification is needed. This list will be locked in a secure, locking cabinet in the office of the researcher, Cogswell-Alexander Hall room 110 at Oklahoma Christian University. Only the researcher will have access to this list.

The records of this study will be kept private and participants will be identified by an assigned number only. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research consent forms will be stored separately from raw data and in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office or on a password-protected laptop that is not docked to any organizational system. Raw data may be kept up to 5 years. Only the researcher and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by university research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

**Contacts:** If you have any questions about this research, please contact Virginia Smith, Oklahoma Christian University, Cogswell-Alexander Hall 110, Edmond, OK 73013, 405-425-5337 or [Virginia.smith@okstate.edu](mailto:Virginia.smith@okstate.edu).

If you have any questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

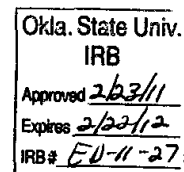
**Participant Rights:** Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may discontinue your participation and your related activities at any time without reprisal or penalty.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant                      Printed Name                      Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher                      Date



Email Solicitation Script

My name is Virginia M. Jennison Smith and I am a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University. I am employed at Oklahoma Christian University.

I am conducting a research study on repatriation experience of the Third Culture Kid and their transition to university. This study is expected to contribute to our knowledge of this experience and what challenges they face that impact their persistence to graduation.

**Third Culture Kid definition: an individual who spent their developmental years outside of their parents' passport culture**

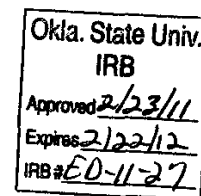
**Contact information for advisor: Dr. Kerri Kearney, Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership, Oklahoma State University, [kerri.kearney@okstate.edu](mailto:kerri.kearney@okstate.edu), 405-744-2755.**

**Interviews will be audio-recorded.**

For the purpose of this study, I am interested in interviewing Third Culture Kids who have repatriated to the United States for the purpose of attending university.

You will be interviewed one time, and this interview will last approximately one hour. Should you choose to spend additional time, you and I would collaborate in reviewing aspects of your transition experience. As a foundation, we will use knowledge gleaned from literature pertaining to retention and the TCK population. A closing discussion will be conducted one-on-one at the close of the study if you choose to participate. This discussion will last approximately 30 minutes.

If you are willing to consider participation, I will email you a consent form which further outlines the study procedures and what would be required of you. [if yes, email the forms and follow up to answer any questions; if no, thank the person for their time and consideration]



In Person, Face-to-Face Solicitation Script

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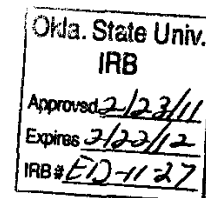
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## Telephone Solicitation Script

My name is Virginia M. Jennison Smith and I am a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University. I am employed at Oklahoma Christian University.

I am conducting a research study on repatriation experience of the Third Culture Kid and their transition to university. This study is expected to contribute to our knowledge of this experience and what challenges they face that impact their persistence to graduation.

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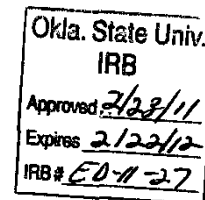
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## **Appendix C**

Interview Guide

Instructions for Drawings



## **Interview Guide**

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why did you live overseas? (also what ages, where, and other details)
  - a. How do you feel this experience has impacted you personally? (who you are, your future opportunities, etc.)
  - b. How do you feel this experience has impacted your family? Did members of your family repatriate with you?
3. How did/do you initially feel about repatriating to attend university?
  - a. Tell me about your repatriation experience.
  - b. What went well?
  - c. What new things did you have to learn?
  - d. What challenges are you still facing?
  - e. How do you now feel about your decision to repatriate for university?
4. Describe how you feel about the university(ies) you attend/attended.
  - a. Why did you choose this/these university(ies)?
  - b. Describe your transition to (each) university.
  - c. What did you have to learn?
  - d. In what ways has your international experience been embraced?
  - e. How do you believe you are experiencing the university differently from your home-country peers?
  - f. In what ways do you fit in/not fit in?
5. How has your life changed since repatriating to the United States?
6. What is strange about your “home” country?

7. Tell me about your friend in the United States. What about those in your “host” culture(s)? (Stay in contact? Not? Miss them?)
8. Tell me about your “host” culture(s)—what you learned, loved, disliked.
9. Tell me about your “home” culture – what you are learning, loving, disliking..
10. What are your plans regarding graduation and post-graduation work? (plans to go international, stay in U.S.?)
11. What advice might you give to someone who is repatriating to attend university?

### **Instructions for Drawings**

Draw a picture or pictures of what your transition experience to the United States has been like for you – what you have experienced. If at all possible, try not to use words in your drawing, focus on images. Artistic talent is not important and will not be evaluated. You may use whatever type of drawings you like – stick figures, for example are fine.

## **Appendix D**

### Tapestry Themes with Expanded Participant Statements

## Tapestry Themes with Expanded Participant Statements

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### *I don't know where I belong*

“People think that just because I’m black that I’m here from Rwanda and I’m like not I’m not, I’m from Kenya, but then I think, I’m really American but I don’t feel American. I mean I’m black and when I see them – the Rwandans – sitting together, I don’t feel like I fit in because I’m not of that culture – I have no idea what they’re saying and it frustrates me because we are both Africans.”

“I feel a gap – I don’t know where home is.”

“Before I come here I felt really scared. My sister and brother still live in Japan. My dad is Irish. I grow up in Asian and Irish cultures but now I live in America.”

“America is my parents’ home, not mine.”

### *I feel depressed and angry*

“And so the transition of me coming from one culture and going to another was really difficult and I don’t know what to do sometimes. I miss my home. I miss Brazil. I miss my family, my dog, my church, my friends, my street – you know – my room, what I’m used to which is my comfort zone.”

“But it’s been sad and at times it’s super hard. There are times, honestly, when you just don’t want to get up and some days you’re just like I’m tired of having to deal with this every day and through each day – you know wondering what thing am I going to get rebuked or something for today – it’s hard.”

“It took me an entire semester to get over ‘I hate it here.’”

“Essentially denial was my initial reaction, so then when we actually left, my reaction was surprise because I just believed so long it was just not going to happen. And then after that, just anger. I was angry at everyone. I was angry at my parents because I believed that they had been the ones to say we’re leaving now. I was angry at God because my whole life had been taken away from me. It was just horrible. And then from there I was just angry for like two years.

“I was probably enough if not completely upset or angry. And thank God there are lots of good things here. I’ve managed, I’m surviving, I’m alive, you know. But I was still angry. There’s still anger some days but there are also good times.”

“One of the biggest things is anger. I still have a lot of anger and some of it is towards God and some of it is towards my parents, but I think anger is one of those obvious things that I try to cover up from getting everything – getting everything taken away from me.”

“And so once I looked and I was like I still have 3 years to go and I can’t – I just couldn’t keep living like this.”

“I was very angry and frustrated and very hateful towards the whole situation, I didn’t want to talk to my parents.”.

### *I lost everything*

“My whole life was changed and put upside down. I lost everything and everyone. Sometimes it feels like the bad overwhelms everything.”

“I was angry at God because my whole life had been taken away from me.”

“Everything just evaporated.”

### *I don’t understand relationships*

“American-wise I have a lot of people I know and hang out with but they’re not “friend” friends – best friends or whatever you want to call it. They’re not the people I go to and say I’m having a hard time or something exciting happened to me and I’d like to share it with you. Um, I have a hard time making friends with Americans because from what I’ve seen they are very superficial and shallow.”

“Friendships back home are deeper. My friends here in America are superficial.”

“And because of relationships here, and there being so many superficial relationships, it was very much a struggle for me. So having gone from not having many superficial relationships to the majority being superficial relationships was definitely the thing I struggled with the most.”

“In American people don’t know their neighbors, at least that’s true in New Mexico. The relationships are superficial – mainly just wave at each other. In Japan we knew our neighbors even though they spoke Japanese and we did not. Our downstairs neighbor even gave us eggplants.”

“Kenyan culture is family oriented actually more like Mexican in that the bigger family cares about each other. One of the things I really admire about the Kenyan culture is that if you’re a stranger and you need help you could pretty much go into any home and they will welcome you. In America if I went to somebody and they would look at me like what are you doing but in Kenya it’s OK to talk to strangers and ask them about their family and get deep and try to know more about them and also them knowing more about you but in America it’s different like you just don’t do that. Even for example the neighbors. I used to know my neighbors but now I don’t think I would feel comfortable going to their home and just hanging out because I don’t know them, but in Kenya you know your neighbors – the culture – you talk to each other. It’s not just about locking yourself in your home.”

“Like we get into friendships back home like deep, deep friendships. I meet someone in Brazil, you could that same day, if you invite them over to sleep at your house that is not weird. Things are fast.”

“Here just the way you go about friendships is different.”

“People in Brazil are very friendly and talk about things – it’s almost like you’ve known other for awhile – or that’s how they go about it. And then often the way you’ll do it is then you’ll just basically invite them to your house or invite them to go do something together and then they’ll come to your house and you might invite them for lunch and they might stay 4-5 hours at your house and then connecting to dinner and so. And then you just do a lot of things together. So it’s really just the matter of you meet almost immediately finding something to do together. And it doesn’t seem, sound creepy or anything if you just met the person and you invited them over to your house, or even inviting yourself over to their house – that’s alright too.”

### *I understand the world*

“I’ve gotten to experience Brazilian and American life so I have a broad view of life. So I think when I come to a new situation or change in life I accept it more easily.”

“It’s always tough because I have more life experience than everyone else. I understand different cultures and I am way ahead of everybody else and when people do certain things I don’t understand I can tend to think they are so ignorant.”

“Just because you have different points of view. I feel like because you go overseas – the thing that you get – the biggest blessing – from that is an open mind and being open to new things and being allowed to debate, I guess. You can see different point of view and different interests, and different ideas and not necessarily judge them as right or wrong but just comprehend and understand.”

“It’s so different because like people who have never been abroad are really very narrow-minded and everybody will think America is the best or like so proud of their own culture and cannot accept other culture. But the people who have been abroad, they experience like how hard it is and who experience that culture difference try to help the people who have been struggling with culture difference.”

### *I feel like I am two totally different people*

“I’m a pessimistic person, but I try to be very optimistic.”

“When I’m in Kenya I try to be Kenyan, when I’m in the States I try to be American.”

“I’m actually more Brazilian than American, but I’m American.”

“I have this weird Japanese politeness, but then I speak out like an American.”

“I really regret that my parents didn’t get me dual citizenship when I was younger. Um, but it’s hard to understand because I wanted to be a German citizen even though the United States is my country. I need to be thankful for the country that I’m a citizen of – I need to, you know, love my country but it’s hard when I don’t identify as an American.”

“There are people on campus I get along with really well. But, I feel like – I can never really put my finger on what it is but like I said my whole life I’ve always felt like there’s a disconnect there. Never been sure if that’s just me or the result of being two things in one.”

“I’m half Philippino and I’m very proud, but I act more Philippino when I’m there, when I’m here I’m more American.”

“Even though I look like kinda white, because my father is white, but like my heart is Japanese and whatever I do is Japanese.”

“Well, I think I’m to the point where I can kinda click and go more American and then more Brazil when I’m there. Even Rhonda (pseudonym) has told me that – when you’re in Brazil you’re different. Well, I guess I am because I’ll just kinda go back to acting that particular way when I’m here.”

“I have a Japanese self and an American self.”

### *I feel very alone*

“There have been a lot of challenges lately. I’m all on my own and that’s hard. I’ve got some health problems going on and having my family more than 1500 miles away is pretty difficult during this time.”

“Some people make fun of me.”

“My parents, it looked like they weren’t having any problems at all, and my sister was too young to really feel the impact, but me...I was all alone. I felt like I was going through this just a mess all one my own.”

“At the beginning whenever I came here I felt lonely – I was keeping myself from other people because I just wanted to think about what I’d left behind.”

### *I get annoyed – culturally annoyed*

“It hurts a lot when people disrespect my cultural background. When someone hurts something that’s yours, that’s special to you, um, that hurts. And a lot of people, you know, I educate them – I tell them that’s not how it is or I’m not doing anything to be rude, that’s just how I was raised so if you would accept me that would be great, but if not that’s fine.”



“People don’t really understand. They just say things that they don’t mean to be harsh but I perceive it so hard sometimes so those are some hard things that I struggle with. People being insensitive. People not being nice because of my background.”

“People don’t know anything about Brazil. You hear people say ‘Oh, you’re from Brazil? The Amazon? No... we have electricity back in Brazil, we have road, we have interstates and people are like oh wow I didn’t know Brazil was anything like that.’ It’s annoying.”

“Other people that are more acquaintances, they have more stereotypes planted in what they say and they don’t really want to learn about it they just want to throw comments like that’s just because you’re from Brazil or you must think that because you’re from Brazil – you MUST think this because there’s no other way. There’s a lot of stereotyping. And just because it’s a third world country and a lot of other stuff that happens in Brazil and what Brazil’s known for. People just associate you with that and think that you’re just like the media shows.”

“You can see beyond what most people can. Because you’ve seen things done differently – not necessarily always better – but you’ve seen other ways. In other words, you have been the outside perspective – looking from the outside in you can see things differently. That can be good but it can also be a challenge because you’ll see people doing things one way that is probably the norm of that particular culture and then you’ll think – you know there’s really a better way to do that. But people aren’t necessarily interested in hearing that. So you can see them doing it and you can think, well, that’s really not the best way to do it or there’s a quicker way or you can see the fault in the way they’re doing things. Well, like I said the culture’s not going to change just because I see a better way but it can make you kind of annoyed sometimes. Or irritated at it. And when I went back to Brazil this last time – I don’t know how much reverse-reverse culture shock I had but I was “culturally annoyed” a lot I’d be in a bank and there’s like 5 different lines and I thought – there’s such a better way to do all of this - but yet they’re still going to do it this way – they’re not going to change the whole banking system because I think there’s a better way. So I just have to sit in line again and be annoyed all of the way through it.”

### *I feel like a hidden immigrant*

“Even though I look like kinda white, because my father is white, but like my heart is Japanese and whatever I do is Japanese.”

“I don’t have an accent and so most people don’t see me as an international and don’t treat me like a foreigner and I also don’t look as if I couldn’t be American and so that to an extent initiates conversation is people thinking that I am American and so they treat me as such. Because of my looks and speech people don’t know I’m not from here.”

“I look like everybody else. I look like I’m from here. And I speak fine without an accent. I speak like everybody, I look like everybody and I have all of that internet

culture so I know about video games and I know about happenings. People don't have any idea I'm not American."

"I look like an American and so if I don't say anything people don't know I'm not from here."

"I visually fit in – I don't look international, but nobody was interested in knowing me. The teachers were pleasant but I don't think they grasped what all I might have gone through."

*I feel I can never go home*

"I don't see my future in Kenya...I see it more in the States...If I get a good job I really want to stay here – like – make something of my life but I don't feel Kenya has a future for me. Going back will just make things more complicated than they are already. Going back would just mean that I would have to settle for something less."

"I go home and it's like I feel out of place. I'm not the same person I used to be."

*I feel the differences are overwhelming*

"I had to learn to talk to people. It's different here than back home. People have bubbles here...when we talk to people back home we get up close to each other – like face to face and talk and that's normal. Here you don't get up close to someone."

"People here are very sheltered."

"People here have their own personal bubble."

"I come from a "huggy" culture. We hug and kiss when we greet each other. Here there is a lot more personal space."

"The thing that was hardest to deal with was being touchy. The distance between you and a person is very close and when I'm talking to you I will touch your shoulder or if you're sitting down I'll touch your knee. I'll always be in contact with you for the most part to show you that I am interested. Hugs and just that kind of thing. And so I remember when I first got here hugging people and them looking at me like I'm weird."

"I think people's personal space is strange. I was like...don't people want to be in more contact with folks. Here people have personal space."

"And my views changed and my eyes were opened and I became so much more open minded to everything not just issues inside the church but just everything. The cultural experiences and I saw things with a different point of view; I had a different point of view on things. And I didn't see things as right or wrong so much anymore but more as well that – trying to understand. A simple example – back home – back in Rio – back in Brazil, um they clap in church. Here, most people would view that as wrong. I had the

same view when I lived here. After going there I changed. The Bible isn't necessarily explicit."

"Here in America, it's important to go to church every Sunday morning, Sunday evening and Wednesday evening – you're a much better Christian if you do. In Brazil it's more spiritual. We would have church on Sunday morning and then meet in people's homes during the week to eat or whatever."

"I was very turned off by church here."

"Church was very much like I was surrounded by people that were there because their parents went there and they weren't doing it on their own."

"It was hard for me coming here and seeing such a mandatory belief system – it that makes sense. It was mandatory chapel and everyone, I mean had to swipe your card and get attendance for going and everyone expects you to go to church Sunday and Wednesday and it was just like – to me it felt like people were tallying this stuff up and once they got to heaven were just like hey check this out, perfect attendance type thing. And I didn't feel like – that was never important to me. I mean I liked going to church I liked reading my Bible, I did it because I wanted to and not because I had some sort of checklist."

"I wish Americans would practice their faith and I think that Japanese culture is so good at doing that."

"I didn't open up about my views because I felt that they were always turned down or looked down on. I felt so liberal even though I don't feel like my views are that liberal."

"Strange...I always think like most of the time I see people here that they don't like to go outside. They just like to be inside doing something – I don't know – watching TV or on the computer all of the time. At first, that was really strange for me because I'm more of the person that back in my country, back in the Dominican Republic, everyone goes to a place – they socialize. It's so nice to be out to just walk or do things outside – it doesn't matter."

"America is the opposite of Kenya – people are always busy, they don't have time for you – hey stop by – you always feel like you are taking their time – you know you can't stop by and say let's just talk for like five minutes – you gotta make it quick. In Kenya we have a like a theory, I mean a saying that says If you hurry too much there's no blessing in it. Which means that you should take the time and do things slowly – try to get to know people. Americans are "give it to me now," "do it right now" and I don't know how to blend those two together. I don't know how to do that so you just have to adjust. What can you do?"

"The funny thing about my country is that sometimes we'll be walking down the street – a lot of people walk, you know – there's public transportation but in front of the houses,

people will just be sitting there and neighbors will be talking. And life in America is so rushed – so timely – like there’s a time for everything and you have to be on time. People in Brazil are – couldn’t care less about being late – about time – they’re not in a hurry for life. They experience everything and I think they find happiness in small things and they value family so much. So family and friendship and spending time with people is very important.”

“America is so time-constrained. Everything has to be on-time. In the Dominican Republic, people are more flexible.”

“Brazil is more easy-going, relaxed.”

“Brazilians are a lot more flexible. I’m sure there are cultural reasons for that.”

### *I feel lost*

“I was so scared that I threw up. I think what I was most worried about was being accepted. Even though I might have looked confident, I was so lost. I didn’t know what to expect or how to act.”

“I was lost – all of the time. You know that feeling- that overwhelming surge of adrenalin that you get when you’re going somewhere and all of a sudden it dawns on you that you have no idea where you are that you are completely and utterly lost? Well, that is how I feel - all of the time.”

### *I am constantly embarrassing myself by committing cultural faux pas*

“That was hard for me because again I did come off as a flirt. Especially with the younger guys here at college I came off as a semi-flirty person even though to me I wasn’t being flirty at all. But just the fact that you know I talk to them – to a guy – one on one in the caf or something or I gave him a hug goodbye when I left was like oh my gosh is there something going on – and I’m like no.”

“My second semester freshman year I started dating this guy and I knew that I had to tone it down completely because I didn’t want to come across as a person that was unfaithful. And to me that was much more important than getting hugs from people that I like.”

“I would make jokes and they would be so Brazilian that no one would laugh.”

“I worry a lot how in Japanese culture it is right thing to do but in here it’s not really right thing to do.”

“Some people make fun of me.”

“I didn’t realize that having long hair as a guy meant you smoked marijuana.”

“If we told jokes that would’ve been funny there that are not funny here. Sometimes they just don’t translate well, but sometimes they come across as rude or politically incorrect.”

“There were several people I offended and I think they just all thought I was racist. Which is funny because I thought they were all racists.”

“I had to learn that an eraser is called an eraser and not a rubber. Because I asked people to borrow their rubber when I was in class and got in trouble for it. Things like that – there’s no way that you can – unless you’ve been told – there’s no way you can know that’s come across wrong.”

“The thing I don’t like is that there are so many words that I better not say like curse words or the racist kind of words and sometimes I don’t know that kind of words. I hear that kind of word and then I just say it and it sounds like really racist or it sounds very wrong and it really doesn’t mean anything but in American culture there is some meaning there. And I had a really hard time to learn those kind of words to not say. And they would say if you say that kind of word every American student here is going to be shocked. Every year they always increase that kind of word and I have to remember it – to not say it. It makes me tired. Why everybody wants to make this kind of words to make other people angry? I just don’t get it.”

“I remember when I first got here hugging people and them looking at me like I’m weird.”

“I knew English enough but slang was kinda interesting, and I think I often said things I shouldn’t have. I didn’t quite understand the slang here. I had to learn some of the differences in relating to girls – that was interesting. I had to learn how to be friendly without being intrusive. Especially into people’s personal space.”

“I am bad at hanging out. People just ignore me because they don’t think I’m very fun. Like some part I didn’t watch any American TV show and American culture like even though they make jokes I don’t get the jokes. And they always make that kind of joke and they are like so tired of explaining me that kind of stuff so I was like you don’t need to explain me I will just hang out with other people or by myself. I guess that was very hard.”

“I don’t get American sarcasm.”

*Just when I think it’s better, I experience the shock over again*

“I’ll be just fine and then I’ll come out of the cafeteria and something will hit me, some smell, or the temperature of the air, something and then the feelings will wash over me again.”

“I’ll think I’ve seen everything and then something else will surprise me and I realize that I will never belong here.”

“So it’s almost like a vicious cycle because friends would help you get through those things, but you gotta get through those things to make some friends. So you just kinda stumble through a lot of it.”

“And then all of a sudden it hurts all over again.”

*I have difficulty fitting in*

“I am bad at hanging out. People just ignore me because they don’t think I’m very fun. Like some part I didn’t watch any American TV show and American culture like even though they make jokes I don’t get the jokes. And they always make that kind of joke and they are like so tired of explaining me that kind of stuff so I was like you don’t need to explain me I will just hang out with other people or by myself. I guess that was very hard.”

“It was difficult because I got looked down on so many times because I’m different – I grew up in Brazil – thinking one way, dressing one way, acting one way, and doing things – you know – what I think are normal – what’s normal for *there* – and then come here and that’s not accepted, or it’s different which some people think is weird. But I’ve learned to be like a chameleon, like, even though I’m not like people here, I’ve learned to fit in but I want to know who I am but still fit in at the same time.”

“I don’t forget where I came from and the things I believe in. I might be here and act somewhat like everyone so I can fit in, but sometimes who I am comes out. I’m like ok, I’m tired of - not that I’m fake – but, you know, you learn to go with the flow, but still at the same time I try to go the other way. People think that I don’t act like everyone else.”

“I guess society decides when I fit in which I sometimes care and sometimes don’t, actually. I don’t fit in in ways of how my perspectives on life. I feel people’s pain a lot because I’ve seen a lot, experienced a lot – more than the people here.”

“I don’t know if I really fit in particularly in Oklahoma culture.”

“I’m always the odd man out.”

“My other TCK friends – they definitely – they understand the world. I feel like I could discuss anything that’s important with them – it’s not like let’s just talk about the weather it’s more like oh what’s going on or what’s your opinion on this. I can’t do that with my other friends because either they know about it or they don’t so like I feel like I could just pretty much discuss anything with my TCK friends.”

“With TCKs it’s really nice to be surrounded by people who come from the same situation that you do – that helps. They have experienced the same things that I have so I can look at them and look at myself and see how good that they’re doing and see how good I want to do.”

“Honestly it’s been kind of hard to make real friends here. Most of my friends, actually, are all internationals or TCKs.”

“It’s really nice to have Japanese students to be friends with.”

“When I don’t fit in it’s usually obscure references to stuff or the clothes I wear.”

“My brother watched daytime TV and people walking in the mall to see how they dressed.”

“I don’t understand American fashion.”

*I’m a living paradox*

*Wanting attention yet not wanting to stick out*

“I want people to notice me, yet I don’t want to stick out.”

“I wish people would think ‘oh it’s cool you’re from the Dominican Republic’ but I don’t want them to think of me like that all of the time.”

*Wanting lasting/deep relationships yet afraid to invest*

“It’s been such a struggle for me to be in a relationship. I have had to deal with fears of going long distance with someone – losing someone and allowing someone – because I put up barriers with people and that’s just the way I’ve done it because we’ve moved so much – I’ve put up barriers with myself in letting people get to know me but not to the extent that it would cause me pain. And even though to most people I’m a very open person I know that I’m not. I had to come to terms with letting someone in so close that if I do move if he does move it would cause me extreme pain. It’s hard for me because I move so much. But it’s easy for me to make that an option to deal with everything – this isn’t working out, you know so I’m just going to move. In the beginning of relationships, moving on is ready option for me.”

*Wanting understanding and different standards yet not lower*

“I want professors to know that I’m not from here even though I’m an American. I mean international students get extra helps – get held to a different standard. I want to be held to a different standard – but I’m not saying a lower standard – just different.”

*Wanting to go back home yet wanting to stay here*

“My heart’s in Brazil for sure – but I’ll go wherever God sends me – you know sometimes I want to stay here and maybe I will.”

“Sometimes I desperately want to go home and sometimes I’m ok with being here.”

“I want to go back but I’m engaged and I would never ask her to go there.”

“I wanted to be in two places at the same time.”

“Sometimes I wish that I had stayed home and then sometimes I’m glad I’m here. A lot of that is just what I’m going to do with my life and then thinking of all the options I had if I’d stayed in Brazil and the options I have coming here. It really depends. And a lot of what’s going on in my life really influences that so if I have a bad day or something happens that’s related to culture I’m like why did I even come here, why did I move, why did I leave home – it would’ve been so much easier if I’d stayed home and gone to university there.”

*Wanting to hang out with TCKs yet wanting to integrate*

“I mean part of the reason I came here was to learn English better so I need to hang out with Americans. But I really feel more comfortable with other TCKs.”

“I’m always hanging out with a lot of TCK kids or international kids or like those who are interested in internationals. I want to make other friends too.”

*Wanting to like it here yet afraid of being disloyal*

“I want to adapt but I don’t want to lose myself.”

“The first year I felt like I had lost myself completely. That I have lost that culture that made me be the person that I used to be. So I was struggling a lot.”

*Wanting to make plans yet realize everything changes*

“But that’s as far as my planning has gone. Because I moved around so much I feel very much like a nomad. And so I don’t, necessarily – I don’t feel tied down. I do know that whatever I plan, it’s likely to change.”

“Well, originally, my plan, before leaving Brazil, before having any friends here, because honestly I had nobody here, originally my plan and what I told my friends in Brazil was OK so I’m going to college and I’ll come back to Brazil afterwards. Then when I came here it’s not so bad. I made friends. And once I made friends it’s pretty much home.”

“I have no idea what my plans are. I really don’t know. I might do the China Now program or teach English in Japan. I don’t have a set plan – but I really don’t know what I’m going to do. I’m just thinking well I could end up anywhere. Wherever in the world an opportunity shows up I’m fine with moving there.”

“I don’t make plans anymore.”



*Thinking God has deserted them yet still have faith*

“I was angry with God but then I realized that He’s been there all the time.”

“I drew a cross because God was with me through all of this even though I didn’t know it.

*When here, critical of here yet when there critical of there*

“When I’m here I miss the things in Brazil, when I’m in Brazil I miss the things here. And then when I’m here there are things that I’m critical of here. When I’m in Brazil, there’s things that I’m critical of or I’m annoyed at.”

*Critical of Americans in general yet fond of individuals*

“I think I’m much more open minded than Americans. I have a greater sense of understanding of the world around me. I know how things work a lot more often than, say, my cousins or friends that live here....My girlfriend is from Edmond. She lives here, she’s always lived here – she’s gone out of state maybe 3 or 4 times in her entire life.”

*Independent yet need others*

“This is going to sound like it contradicts what I said earlier, but I like it that here when you’re eighteen your family backs off and you get to be independent. But I think that’s a different situation than when I said earlier that I need my family.”

“I know that I’m independent from my parents. I can make decisions on my own. I have my own schedule and that’s all I depend on. And also the individualistic culture and I miss being with my family so much. I miss having their opinion on things. I miss being able to discuss things than them playing a role in my decision-making.

## **Appendix E**

### Drawings and Participant Interpretations

Participant A

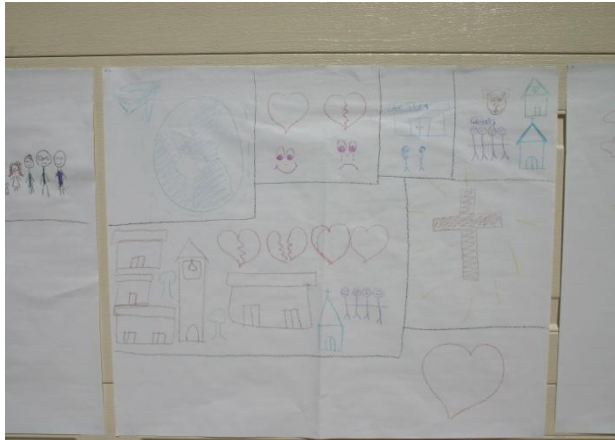


“So, OK, well the house, represents me moving away – and – I tried to do “peace” I was pretty peaceful, easy transition so the cross kinda represents peace. And, um – that represents me (pointing to a figure in the drawing) and these are my mom and dad and sister, and even though it was easy, pretty – the flower LOOKs pretty on the outside, on the inside it kinda like represents all of the confusion so that is why I did it in those colors – and another one was um the choices and decisions I had to make – so that’s me trying to decide should I get an orange or a banana or what kind of cereal should I pick (laughs) so that represents all of the choices and decisions that I had to make when I came to college.”



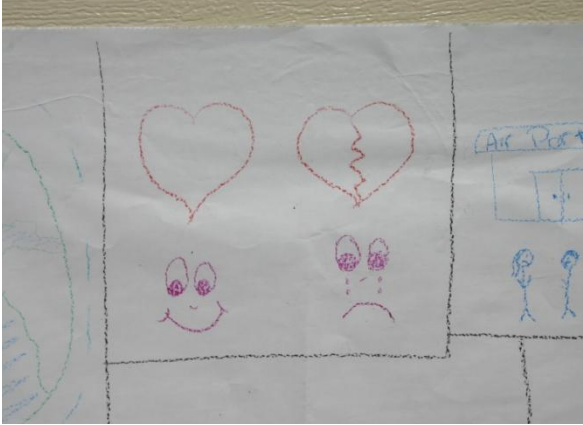
“I didn’t know if I should do it sad or, cause at the same time I’m very very happy that I’m getting to go to school but I can tell that they kind of wish that I was *there* (meaning Kenya) so they can see me all of the time – the expressions – the sad faces is them saying oh we’re so sad even though we’re glad that you got to come to school so I’m kinda sad for them – I am not sure to make a smile face or a sad face, so yeah.”

Participant B



Participant begins to draw with the crayons. After awhile, when drawing pictures of her family and dog, she begins to cry. She expressed that she wanted to continue. In the zoomed in photos she depicts her broken heart and her sadness at the airport when it became apparent her departure was imminent.

“This is where I came from, this is where I went. It made me really sad – what I had to go through (pauses and cries some more but wants to continue) (through tears) ...the things I left...my dog...my house...my church family...things that were important to me...and then coming to OC – how it really hurt and I thought I would never...never get over it. Then slowly I began to realize it’s actually ok – and I guess my heart began to heal and I guess I was like trying to process and I made new friends, new church.”



“But really through it all, through this whole time God loved me and was with me and I didn’t realize it. I thought I was alone...It’s been really hard and at times it felt like I couldn’t believe – but God was always there – I guess that was showing that he was through it all and then my heart gets healed, but I have a new life and new friends but that never means that I’m going to...I’m never going to forget where I came from and why I am who I am.”

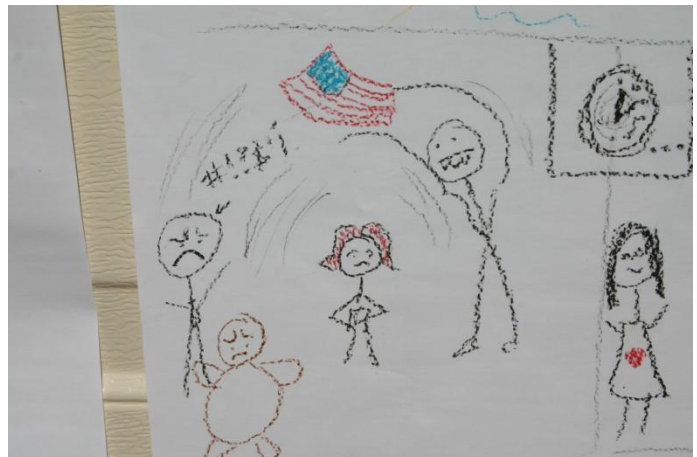
Participant C

“This is the house that we lived in in Japan. It was really beautiful and that is something I always think about when I think about Japan – it was *beautiful*. It’s filled with happy memories for me. That’s the plane and we were coming over to America and it was nighttime and we were all cold and miserable when we got off of the plane. That’s me and my brother and neither one of us was happy – my mom and dad were happy. And I got to America and I didn’t like anybody and they all seemed really mean and I’m angry all of the time. But then time passed...”



“Well, we were – my brother and I used to be really close and I think that is also something that has always bothered me that me and my brother were always really close when we lived overseas. When we got to America – but part of that was the timing...my brother’s five years older than me so he was getting to be 14, 15 at that time – when we got to America, we grew apart and he was less and less happy and we stopped being friends and that’s something that has always bothered me.”

“I kind of blame us moving for the reason that me and my brother aren’t friends anymore. My parents were happy to be back because they had a lot of family here in the States and it was easy to visit everybody and my mom grew up in one place her whole life – moving was very stressful and she didn’t really care for it.”



## Participant D



“Basically this one is I miss...the biggest transition for me was I miss having that Philippino food around me. That was my favorite part about being home. I also enjoyed Thanksgiving dinners. I don’t get to go home for that anymore. That was probably the biggest transition because Thanksgiving dinner at my house was like every single one of my friends comes over, it’s just a big festive event at my house. This one is music. We have a piano at our house and we don’t have a piano in dorm rooms and that was very difficult – I love to play and it was hard. This one is my 11 year old sister. Leaving her behind – I moved to Oklahoma when she was 8 – like leaving her behind – she had been so attached to me. I just remember the first night that my parents left and she got into the car and she shut the door and all you could hear was her crying and her sobbing and I was like I can’t do this I have to go home, I made the wrong decision.”

Participant E



“It’s like – It looks like really whole different world. It’s like even though sun should be same I can see the difference. I feel like even in Japan the environment is so different so even though sun should be same, is looks like different. Sky looks like different. And there is my parents (laughs and smiles). I look like a little nervous and I came here. Mainly what I do here is study because I need to study to make up the difference. The earthquake there was really scary. When the earthquake first happened for the four days I couldn’t contact them - my parents – phone line was messed up. And now the nuclear plant the radiation stuff is crazies so I was really scared.”

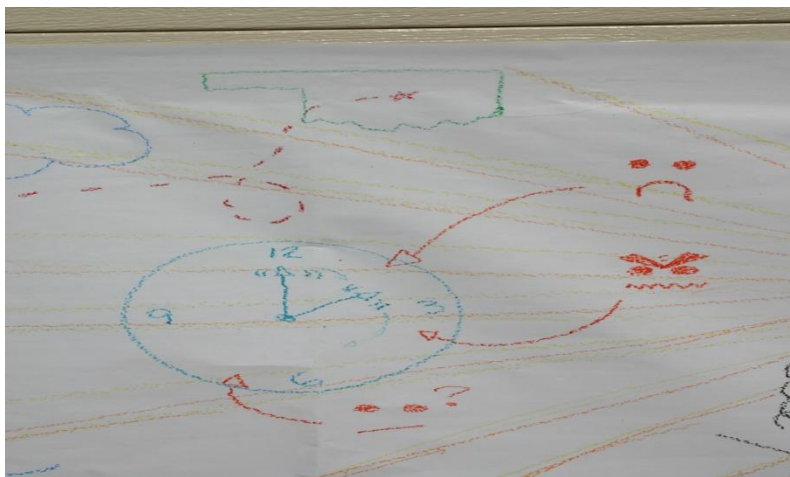


Participant F



“So it starts off with me leaving home. So that’s me. I’m crying – it’s very sad. It’s like filling up the ocean that we’re going over. This is our destination. So a lot of time goes by – a lot of time of sadness. That’s my anger face and confusion. That’s like time going by – that’s the only way I know how to draw it. Sad, anger, - it was kinda like a cycle. I would just have really sad days and I would just be really angry some days then confused a lot of the time of what I was doing here, why – like what was going on and why was this happening like why was I have such a struggle even.”

“Like why was I struggling so much. And this is me now. And this is I guess kind of like happiness and just coming to terms with things and how I can see...this is where I am today. I’m ok and I’m happy and I’m better situated here even though I don’t ever think I’ll call this home. But I can see the good things that came from all of this. So that’s why the sun rays go and reach the whole picture.”



“Because I can still see better that this was a worthwhile transition to get to where I am now. And that it was necessary.”



## Participant G



“At the beginning whenever I came here I felt lonely – I was keeping myself from other people because I just wanted to think in what I’d left back so I wasn’t actually trying to get involved with everyone around me because still was trying to find a reason why I came here. But then I wasn’t trying to explore, I was trying to think about what I left behind. I wanted to put like warm because I felt comfortable back home and then the reason why I made myself blue was because I was feeling cold – I didn’t have that warmth protecting me because everything was different – there was nothing actually protecting me from the world I was about to experience.”

Participant H

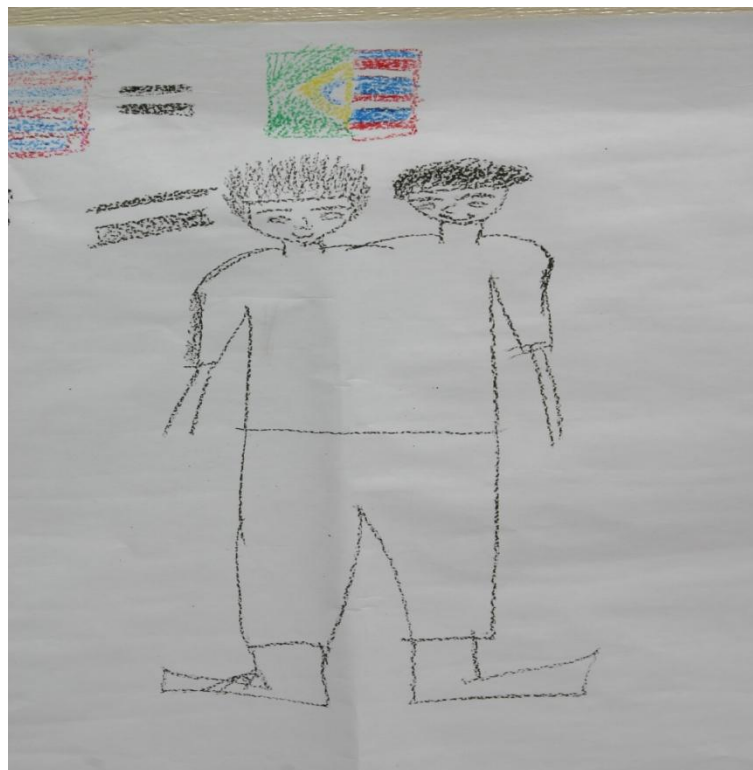


“Let’s say, for example, Brazil is red, the United States is blue, makes me purple. People in Brazil have certain interests and ways they do things. People in America have different interests, ways they do things. And I do both of everything. So, there is an American me and a Brazilian me which at the same time is a me me. So I do fit, but not completely in both because I know about things that most people don’t know. At the same time I know things that they do know...well...not everything.”

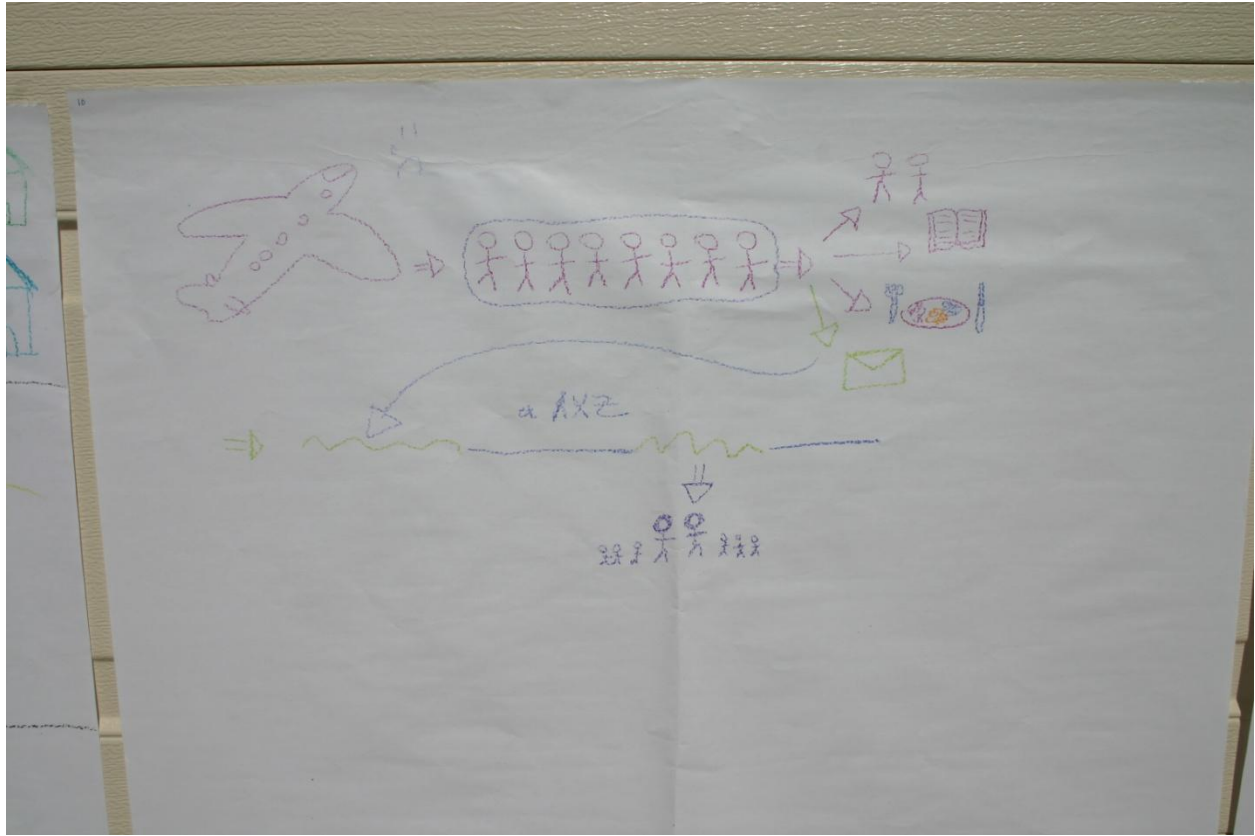
Participant I



“I drew this as a math equation. Brazil + United States = me. I have a Brazilian me and an American me. I’m different sometimes than other times.”



## Participant J



“I think I’m finished...I kinda went through the steps of adapting. The first picture is an airplane and the little sad face crying just because it was so hard to leave home. And when we first got here I didn’t come straight to school – I had about a month before classes started and so I went to my aunt and uncle’s house in Wyoming – we spent a couple of weeks there and just did fun touristy stuff. So it was good to get my mind off of it. I was just surprised that after a week or two like I wasn’t even crying anymore – just doing fun stuff all of the time. And so it was good to have a transition period between leaving home and starting to get used to everything – it was like a vacation for a little while. And then once I started school, then I had to take care of a lot of stuff all at the same time. I had to learn how to make friends and I had to keep my grades up and I had to get used to the food and the food wasn’t that bad, I just miss food from home sometimes. And it was also hard trying to keep in touch with everyone from home. I tried really hard when I first got here making sure I was keeping in contact with everybody and remembering everybody’s birthday and sending them a card. And then after awhile I was like, well if they keep in touch with me then I maintain contact with them – It’s just impossible to talk with everybody. And so that was like the first semester of the freshman year – I was like Oh my goodness I have to take care of all of this stuff and do OK in all of it. And then the second semester I think things – I wasn’t thinking of all of the things I had to work on anymore but still it was a little bumpy, I guess. The more I got used to it and the longer I’ve been here the less I think about it and the more I’m adapted to it. And then in between these transitions there were parts that were really bumpy and everything seemed terrible and I just wanted to go home because that would make it all better of course (smiles).”

Participant K



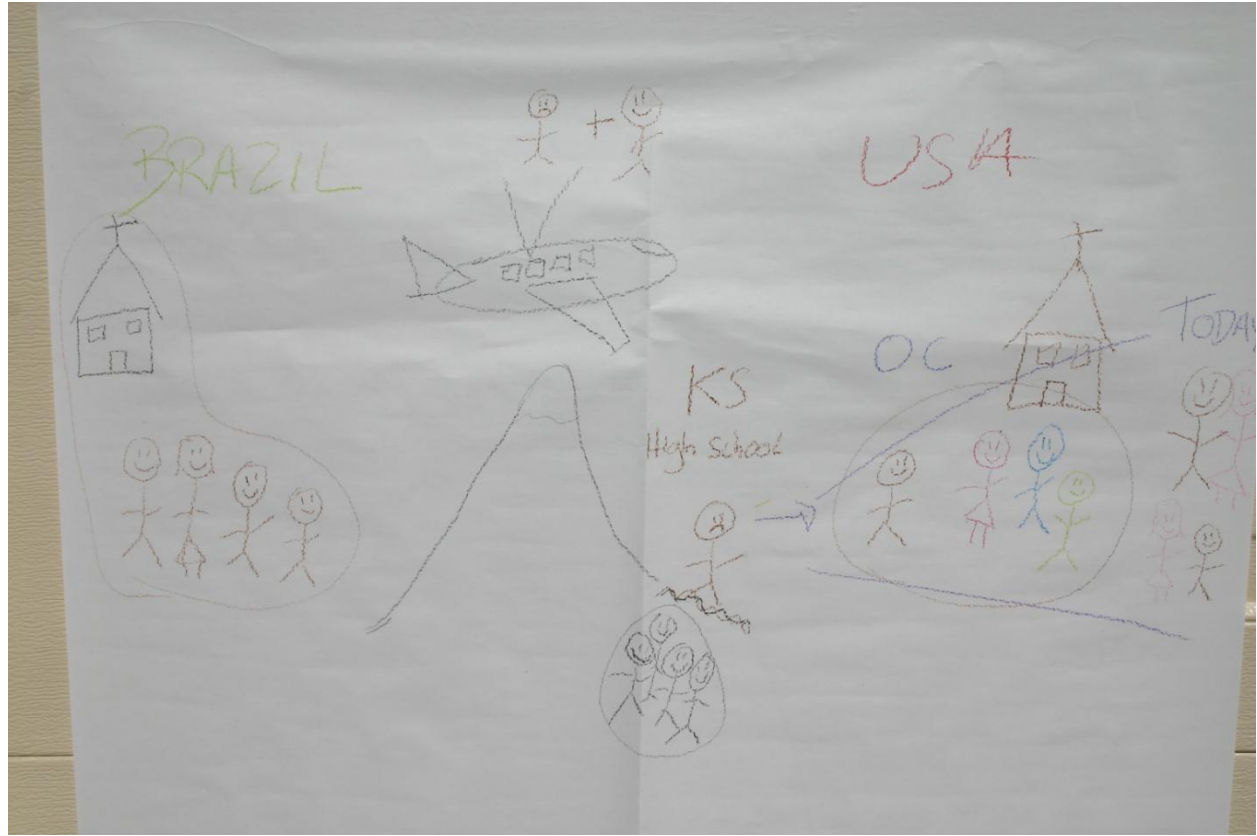
“I’m almost done. Let me just draw one more line here...OK (laughs)...so...it starts off with this face of me – as you see there are 2 faces – My American self is indicated by brown – my Japanese self is indicated by apricot and this is me getting excited to go to America at this point my Japanese culture is more dominant and then once I go you see a picture of me crying but still smiling. You know people walked in and say things like well so you’re from Japan – that’s part of China, right? Or they’d be like you don’t really act like an African-American girl or just say things without any intentions to hurt me but I’ll be crying even though I’m smiling. So that’s just little face of me being a little sad. But then I gained my confidence back and this is me again but it’s drawn in pink because pink is my favorite color. But this face kind of represent the time when I went on Pac-Rim and you see none of my American self or Japanese self is strong – the pink is like my favorite color so it’s kind of me finding the place I love to be like travelling and meeting different cultures – not only American and Japanese cultures but just meeting people from different cultures, learning new languages within a short time-span and so this is just like the highlight of my life so far. I have more cultural knowledge I guess, and that’s represented in more colors and then the next picture my eyes are actually smaller than the other face and this is because it represents the time I came to OSU as a graduate student and I was excited and happy but I’m kind of nervous so that’s me but again my eyes bigger and more experiences are attached to me. But I still have all of these faces so it shows that a little bit that my experience is unique. And I drew a heart at the end because growing up I always asked my parents why am I in Japan why can’t I go back to America before I went to OC. Because I sometimes didn’t enjoy being the minority in Japan. But my parents never really answered that question.”

Participant L



“It’s actually kind of a simple concept – it’s more like where am I going. This is actually like a scene that I remember. It’s a mountain that we lived by and there’s a strip of land with trees and the rest of the trees are all on the hill (in Germany). A lot of TCKs always remember - they have a hard time distinguishing where is home and after living here for four years I think I’ve finally given up on the where is home concept and ask where is home going to be and that is what this picture is.”

Participant M



“This is oversimplified but here’s our family in Brazil and because of the church we’re all happy there and it was just a positive experience. Then we came to the United States – I didn’t know how to put mixed feelings but that’s me mad and that’s me happy. I put a mountain here because I think it symbolizes it’s been quite a mountain to climb and I think now I’m finally on the valley of it but it’s been a process of growth. And here’s me in high school and here’s everybody else with their friends – that’s me not having friends. That was probably the most challenging time. But then at OC I came and I met some people they included me in there and that really opened the door for I think who I am today. And that’s me and my family – my wife.”

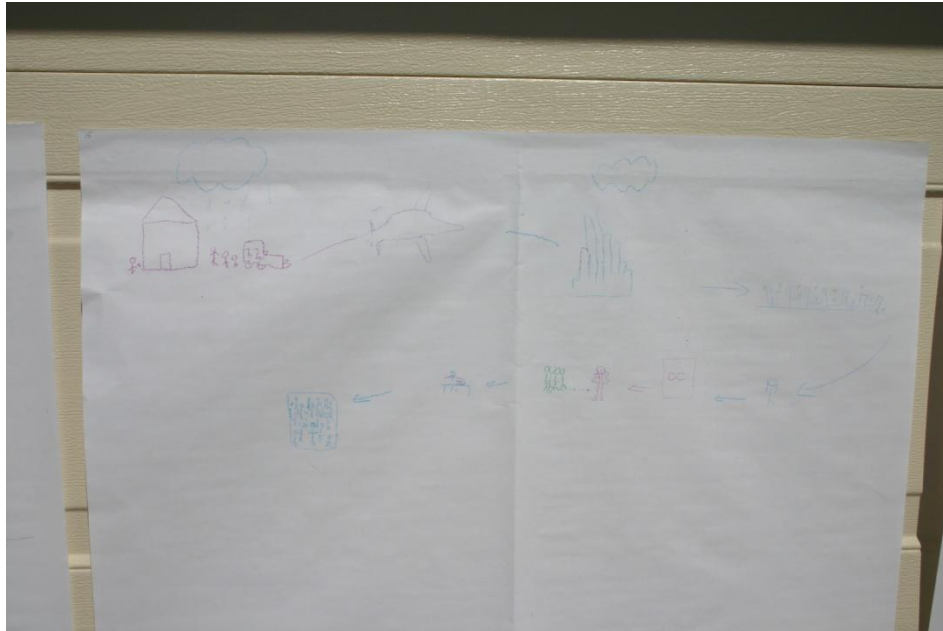
Participant N



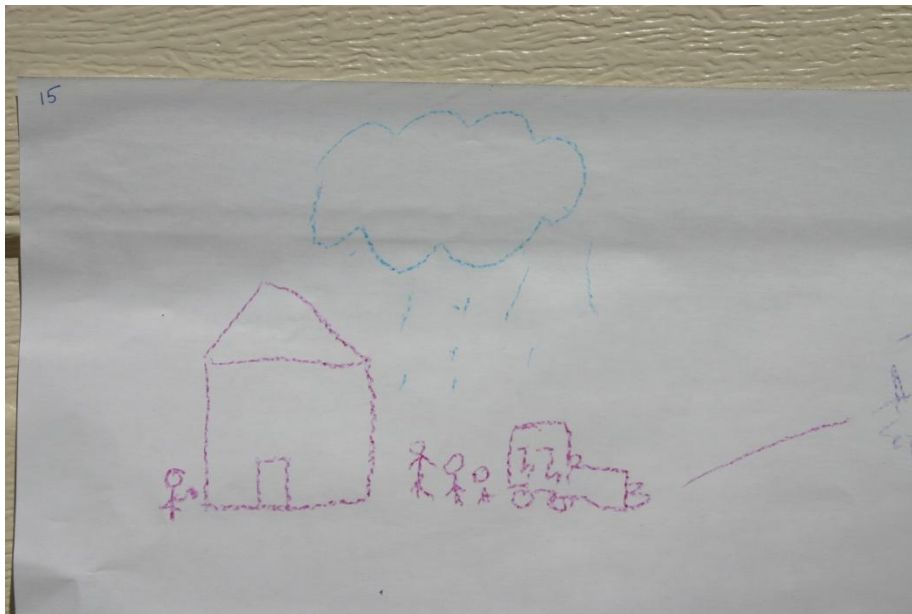
“Ummm well I got a little carried away. I guess I just did kind of like a whirlwind of things that are changing but stay the same. You have the two countries obviously and then my family and church and religion was a huge thing things that have stayed the same I guess – my family and religion. And New Orleans is a big part of it because I lived in Canada when Katrina happened and I had friends who were still down there and church and stuff so I put the Superdome and the crescent city connection – that was such a big deal to me – I thought I could hold onto it but then it wasn’t there or it wasn’t the same. Things I remember about it like music like the trees that used to be in our yard in Canada. The music is with both New Orleans and Canada – initially I thought New Orleans but there’s a lot of music from Canada that I listen to. The tear symbolizes pain and stress – the heart symbolizes the joy of it. And then there’s the globe because it’s more than just these two countries or one city.”



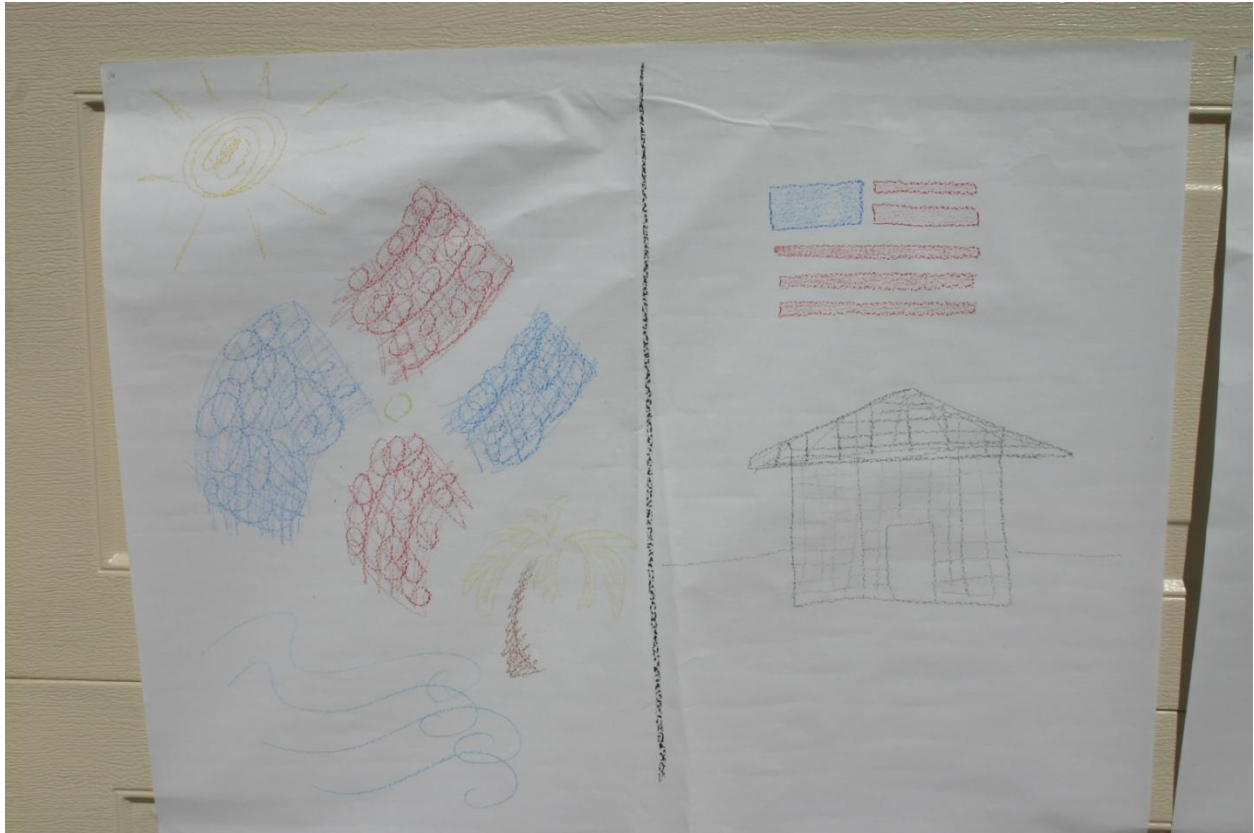
Participant O



“This is me leaving Ghana to come to the United States. It is raining as we are leaving because I am sad and everything is sad.”



## Participant P



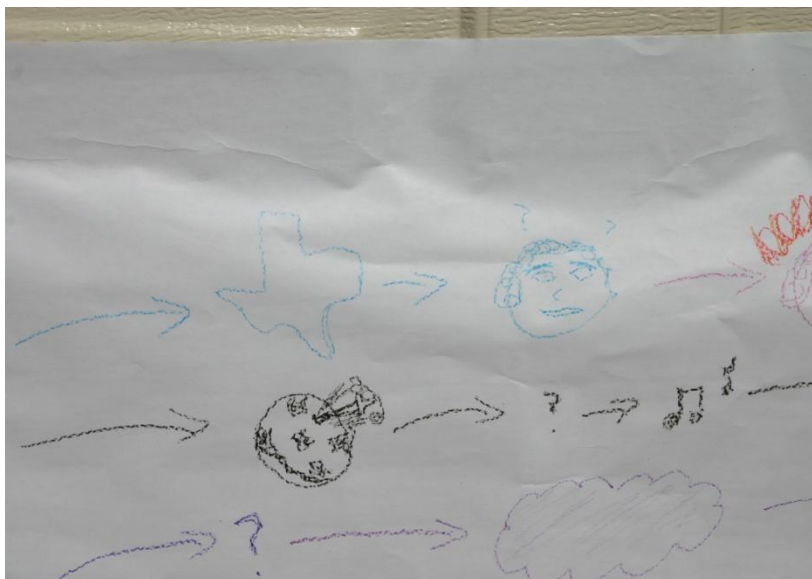
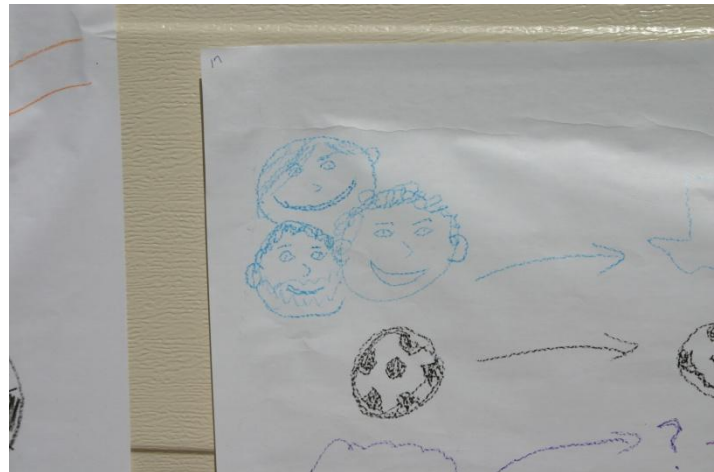
“Well I started with the flags because I’ve always found it funny that they are the same colors – they’re just laid out differently. I guess I’ve found an identity in both. But I drew this marked line – black line in the middle because it kinda symbolizes the big change and then each half kinda what it changed from/to. This side from when I was in the Dominican Republic is supposed to be very uncontrolled, very colorful. The lines are curved I wanted to show kinda free spirit versus this has lots of corners, lots of color inside the lines – this is very much structured and that’s kinda what the transition felt like to me. Even the flags. This one has the straight lines and the other they way the sections are colored in is more free-spirited and I guess that’s kind of the identity as a whole – the culture over there is a lot more free spirited whereas here it’s a lot more structured so I guess I was kind of playing with that a little bit. That building isn’t really supposed to be anything specific it’s just more controlled – although – and I didn’t even realize this – I associate the Dominican Republic with being outside more. Here I feel like everything is inside. This is grey and this is colorful and that just to me is a reflection of the cultures themselves – over there you have tropics, palm trees and everything’s colorful and lot of things that are native or artisan are very bright colors – that’s part of the culture. Here I made it grey because this is more controlled, not as colorful, not as vivid – I’m sure if I went to Louisiana it would be different.”

Participant Q



“I was describing my transition so I did myself and then I put my friends and then some things that were a part of my life. The soccer ball, the sun coming through the cloud represents God, and the beach represents feeling comfortable. And then I put going to Texas and I put the punctured soccer ball to represent that that was taken from me. I put this to represent that I questioned the existence of God and He didn’t seem to be there anymore for me. Then I put the stagnant dead hallway of the school to represent all of the nature and connection I had with earth was gone now.”

“And then I put what would replace soccer – I put music which was true. And then I put that I was now confused and then angry then I went to Oklahoma and that led to how I was still sad from all of this essentially and then I put myself looking FORWARD – being open to something new and then I put that God was still there all along and then He was the one that showed me that Christ has always been who he was and that was when I discovered grace.”



“I put the anger and the sadness there – represented by those drawings to point out that that is still a part of who I am or who I was and that that had its place in the journey even though it’s not necessarily part of the result anymore. I put the leopard to represent my individuality. And all the arrows going out start because if you let yourself get swallowed in self pity, and essentially learn not to be selfish anymore you can start giving to everyone else. Which I believe that to be true. I put the Southern Cross because it’s still home to me and it’s a double symbol.”

Participant R



“This side is the United States, this side is Brazil. There’s the plane, obviously. This side, the United States, I feel, there’s more greed and faces aren’t like...well they’re happy but fake happy but here they’re smiling normally and they ARE happy even though they don’t have as much. Soccer was big in Brazil. I’m glad that I was able to have soccer here and other opportunities as well like track and basketball and art. I see more color in Brazil – the rainforest and the people there – the Carnival – even though it’s not something that...but it’s still pretty. It’s very expressive and it’s beautiful I think.”

VITA

Virginia M. Jennison Smith

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: **THIRD CULTURE KIDS: TRANSITION AND PERSISTENCE WHEN  
REPATRIATING TO ATTEND UNIVERSITY**

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Consultant STRATA Leadership, April 2011 – present

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High School Orchestra Director, Allen High School, Allen, Texas 2002-2003

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Virginia M. Jennison Smith

Date of Degree: December, 2011

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: **THIRD CULTURE KIDS: TRANSITION AND PERSISTENCE WHEN  
REPATRIATING TO ATTEND UNIVERSITY**

Pages in Study: 205

Candidate for the Doctor of Education Degree

Major Field: Higher Education

Scope and Method of Study: This qualitative study used heuristic phenomenology and involved 20 interviews at 3 different sites, 2 focus groups, formal and informal observations, and the analysis of various artifacts including photos, drawings, and documents.

Findings and Conclusions: Third culture kids are a diverse group of individuals who spent at least a portion of their developmental years (from birth – 18 yrs.) in a country other than the one listed on their passport as home. These individuals reported experiencing challenges when repatriating including those associated with Erikson's stage 5, identity formation vs. role confusion, and stage 6, intimacy vs. isolation, and Kübler-Ross' five stages of grief. Upon repatriating to attend university, these challenges appear to intensify. Participants related struggling with identity, feelings of isolation, frustrations with cultural misunderstandings, feelings of "not fitting in," living a paradoxical existence, being hidden immigrants, struggling with language, committing cultural faux pas, not understanding the currency, not having transportation, no place to go during holidays, homesickness, anger, depression, relationships, and inability to put down roots. Participants also expressed hope for the future, pride in their independence, not being afraid to take risks, open-mindedness, accepting, and a desire to help others. Many related feeling "stuck" in Erikson's stage 5, or one of Kübler-Ross' stages of grief, unable to progress toward acceptance.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Kerri S. Kearney