

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Third Culture Kids (TCKs) are a rapidly emerging student population within colleges and universities. TCKs must balance the myriad of experiences of growing up among worlds with the amplified implications that it entails as college students (Van Reken & Pollock, 2010). This study attempts to fill the gap between the TCK literature and the college student literature, by providing narratives from TCK college students on their interpretation of their own TCK identity. This results in implications and applicable recommendations for Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA). Collaborative Research (Engard, 2010) and Grounded Theory (Glaser et al., 1968) were used to highlight the autonomy of participant voices to give the reader a clearer understanding of TCK student experiences. The results of this study can help student affairs divisions in colleges and universities recognize the surfacing TCK college student population, which has characteristics and needs that can be addressed and accommodated for effectively.

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Third Culture Kids (TCKs) and their Sense of Belonging on U.S College Campuses

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Weam Elsheikh, Author

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Bismillah Al'Rahman Al'Raheem. In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. I start my acknowledgements with this sentence to show appreciation and gratitude to the blessings that Allah (swt) has blessed me with, one of which is the ability and the opportunity to receive an education and produce this analysis and contribution to knowledge through this thesis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

What does it mean to grow up internationally and interculturally? Why can it be extremely difficult for some individuals to identify where their home is? How is it possible that individuals may lack a sense of belonging to the country that is named on their passport? Though these questions may seem unusual, they represent a population of individuals that is increasingly growing as the effects of globalization and worldwide interconnectedness continue to take place. This is the Third-Culture Kid (TCK) population. As more parents travel for work purposes with their children and immigration becomes more prevalent, more TCKs emerge by being immersed in cultures and experiences that have a large impact in who they are and how they navigate the world as they grow older.

So, who are TCKs? The traditional definition of TCKs was introduced by Useem (1950) and was later refined by Pollock & Van Reken (2009). Useem, Pollock and Van Reken were each a parent of TCKs themselves. As they learned about the TCK experience, they decided to introduce and publish this term and definition to the world. As they observed characteristics and traits in their own children when they travelled abroad, they noticed that TCKs had different skills and traits than other children who did not have the same international and intercultural experience growing up. As a result of their research, the following standardized definition for TCKs emerged:

Third Culture Kids (TCKs) are people raised in a culture other than their parents' or their passport country (country of nationality) for a significant part of their early developmental years (Van Reken & Pollock, 2010).

To explain the term Third Culture Kid further, I ought to clarify why they are considered 'third culture' kids in the first place. The first culture refers to the country or culture that their

parents belong to or the one they hold a passport from. This can be considered their country of origin. The second culture refers to the host country or culture they were once, or currently are, located in for a period of time usually without citizenship. The third culture is one that lies within the individual. It is an abstract, transient, in-between “culture among cultures” that is a mixture of their passport, and host countries (Van Reken & Pollock, 2010). The third culture is essentially a feeling associated with relating to more than one culture as one’s own and struggling with a sense of identity to either one of those countries.

A common misconception is that TCKs have to have lived in three countries to be considered TCKs. However, this is not necessarily true. Some TCKs have only lived in one place other than their passport countries growing up, while other TCKs may have lived in 7 or more countries growing up. This study argues that a more fluid and comprehensive interpretation of the TCK term is currently underway encompassing a wider variety of experiences that fall under the TCK umbrella.

This study reveals that although the participants resonated with the traditional definition of a TCK on some level, they each described their experiences in ways that did not completely align with that definition. When asked, the participants all agreed that learning about and identifying with the traditional TCK term provided a sense of relief and comfort in their sense of self, however, that traditional definition no longer applies to all TCKs. This may represent a challenge to the standardized definition and could lead to a shift in literature that pushes back against the traditional definition of a TCK to encompass a wider variety of experiences and identities. This study shows that it is worth exploring a new or emerging definition that more closely aligns with contemporary views of TCKs.

In this study, the term *traditional TCKs* will be used to refer to participants who have had experiences travelling and living abroad in multiple countries as a result of their parent(s)' work. *Non-traditional TCKs* will be used to refer to participants who still relate to the TCK experience because of the duality of cultures they experienced growing up even though they may not have travelled as frequently as their other TCK peers. Second generation immigrants who identify as TCKs will be considered *non-traditional TCKs*. Finally, in instances where the general term 'TCK' is used, without the 'traditional' or 'non-traditional' labels, I refer to all TCK individuals, encompassing all individuals that traditionally and/or non-traditionally identify with the TCK experience.

Current literature pertaining to TCKs as students in schools before entering colleges or universities. These include the characteristics and traits that distinguish TCKs from other individuals, as well as the unique challenges that they may endure as a result of their experiences (Bodenhorn, 2005; Fail et al., 2004a). However, apart from studies by Bodenhorn (2005) and Fail et al. (2004), minimal literature explores TCKs as college students navigating the campus climate and their college careers. Understanding TCKs and their needs as college students will become increasingly crucial for colleges and universities as more TCKs enroll and populate college campuses. In this thesis, research questions regarding the latter aspect of TCKs will be discussed.

Research Questions

The three main research questions that initiated this study are;

- What is the TCK definition of sense of belonging?
- What factors influence sense of belonging for TCKs?

- How does their sense of belonging influence their level of engagement with campus activities?

These questions will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters. Six major themes arise as a result of this study: Personalized TCK Experience, Identity Influence on Life Choices, Campus Specific Impacts, Identity Related Challenges, Identity Related Assets, and Sense of Belonging.

Background

The core reason for my fascination and interest with the TCK world is being a *traditional TCK* myself. The International Students Social Justice Retreat (ISSJR) in 2017 was where the initial spark for this thesis project emerged. Little did I know that it would be the reason I would decide to come back to grad school and to research Third Culture Kids (TCKs). As an international student, I wanted to make use of the most opportunities that I possibly could during my limited time in the United States. I found it absolutely fascinating and started being prouder and more confident in how I viewed and interpreted the world based on my own experiences too.

On my second day of the retreat, during a conversation with one of the facilitators, I was asked, “Where are you from?” At the time, this question induced a lot of anxiety and confusion for me because I was not sure how to answer it. He seemed interested and willing to listen and so I decided to give him the long story of my background instead of the short answer; “I’m from Egypt” that I gave most people who would ask. Here is the long story; I was born in Alexandria, Egypt, and I currently hold an Egyptian passport, but my parents travelled to Oman soon after my birth for work. My parents are both first-generation college students. My father is a pediatrician and my mother is a dentist and they made the decision to emigrate out of Egypt in

search of better work opportunities. They took this decision to provide me and my siblings a better state of living in hopes of opening doors and opportunities for us that my parents did not have access to in their childhoods. We stayed in Oman for around 3 years before we moved again to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where we stayed for another 13 years. Both of my younger brothers were born in the UAE and I spent most of childhood there. Then, we moved again to Saudi Arabia, and this time I was old enough to be aware that we were moving our entire lives yet again, and that I had to say goodbye to my school and the friends that I made. We stayed in Saudi Arabia for 11 years and we tried to visit Egypt every summer to keep contact with our family members there. My parents still work and live in Saudi Arabia.

Six years ago, in another life-altering move, I left to come to OSU to start my bachelor's studies, and a couple of years later my brother joined to start his. I consider each of the countries I have lived in to have a piece of my heart. Now, I consider Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia and, now Oregon, to hold different pieces of my heart and places that, in one or another, I can still call home. So, clearly, answering the question "where are you from?" is not as linear as it could be for other people.

Soon after hearing my answer, the student told me "You do know you're a Third-Culture-Kid right?" to which I responded, "Third-culture-what?". I had no clue what he was referring to. When he explained the term to me, I started laughing hysterically and burst into tears. I became so emotional to learn that there is a phrase that described my exact experiences and confusions growing up. There is a phrase that resonated with how I interact and view the world. There is a phrase that described why I felt the way I felt growing up, and it wasn't because I was eccentric or different. There was a phrase that understood me and my odd experiences. I wasn't alone in this. It all made sense.

That was where it all started. When I returned home from the retreat, I went on lengthy researching phase where I started looking up anything and everything related to the phrase Third-Culture Kid (TCK). As I read, I found out that all of the common challenges and characteristics were similar to my own. The challenges made sense and the characteristics felt relatable. It felt as though I finally claimed and regained an identity that was missing and ambiguous for most of my life. As I learned more about TCKs, I started being more comfortable identifying with it and calling myself a TCK when introducing myself to new people. As a student researcher and a TCK, I knew I wanted to talk with current TCK college students to learn more about their experiences on campuses, particularly as it related to sense of belonging. I wanted to learn what sense of belonging looked like and meant to them and learn about their needs as college students. Knowing that I am also a TCK, I was excited to hear of other TCK stories and hear about how they grew up in an international world and how that affects them now.

This study was a process of giving TCK college students the opportunity to use their voices to identify who they are and how they described themselves. It is a demonstration of the new and emerging shift in relation to the traditional TCK definition. The following study sheds light on the TCK college student population, their experiences navigating the college campus, including assets and challenges, and concludes by discussing what sense of belonging means to TCK college students. The implications and recommendations discussed in Chapter 5 explain what higher education institutions and student affairs professionals should implement to promote an inclusive campus, with efforts focused on the TCK student population to promote diversity and cultural engagement within the student body. More TCKs will continue to enroll in college and universities due to the increasing effects of globalization and international travel, thus, Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) must be proactive in learning about this emerging

population, as well as implementing strategies to ensure their holistic success and wellbeing as college students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

With the rise of globalization and interconnectedness as a phenomenon in this day and age, a new population of individuals has also emerged. A generation of individuals that has spent the larger majority of their developmental childhood years in one or more countries that are different from their parents' or their passport countries. This population of individuals are called Third Culture Kids (TCKs).

Universities and higher education institutions strive to induce efforts ensuring that their campus is welcoming and equipped to support their students, particularly ones that come from minority backgrounds and marginalized groups. These efforts can be in the form of cultural resource centers, events, support services, allocations of funding, recruitment, retention efforts and more to support these students intentionally. However, these efforts often fall short for Third Culture Kids (TCKs). This failure to serve TCKs in Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) can be attributed to the invisibility of this student population (McDonald, 2010). Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) should work towards identifying TCK college students to recognize their needs and provide intervention strategies to increase their sense of belonging and overall wellbeing. The specific problem and literature gap lies in the lack of recognition in addition to the lack of support for TCKs on college campuses by Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA).

While the current bodies of literature provide exemplary information on the characteristics of TCKs and their experiences, as well as on the importance of sense of belonging for traditional college students, the TCK college student population remains unrecognized. This literature

review will address the topic of TCKs as college students via three distinct disciplinary bodies of literature; sociologists introducing TCKs as a non-homogenous “invisible” minority, psychologists describing characteristics of TCKs and mental health challenges faced by them, and student affairs professionals highlighting transition experiences and the importance of student support services on the sense of belonging for all college students, and concluding with a case study about Lewis & Clark colleges and the programming efforts they hold for TCKs. `

TCKs as a Non-Homogenous Population

According to Pollock and Van Reken, TCKs are “...people raised in a culture other than their parents' or the culture of the country named on their passport (where they are legally considered native) for a significant part of their early development years” (2010). This is the most used definition of TCKs and the one that is most referred to in current bodies of literature. Third Culture Kids (TCK) could also be referred to as Global Nomads, Transnationals, Transculturals or the “In-Betweens” (McDonald, 2010; Bell-Villada, Eidse, & Orr, 2011), The generic term Third Culture Kid (TCK) will be used throughout this literature review. TCKs experience travel and relocation across countries multiple times throughout their developmental years as they typically move with their parents who travel for work (Van Reken & Pollock, 2010). Common examples of individuals who may be TCKs are children of missionary, military or diplomat parents as well as children of businesspeople who travel constantly. However, some TCKs could have a parent(s) who is a teacher, journalist, doctor or any other profession that may require travelling abroad. Essentially, there is not currently a standardized description of TCKs, the commonalities lie in the side effects of their multiple relocations on their developmental years. For this reason, it can be very difficult to identify a TCK exclusively from their physical or outer appearance. Similarly, the TCK population can be distinct from children of immigrant

parents as they are typically expected to repatriate to their passport countries since their moves are usually not permanent (Cockburn, 2002). Each TCK story is unique, with little overlap, making them even more so difficult to identify and recognize by Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA).

Because TCK students may have spent a significant amount of time living outside of the U.S, they are often included within the international student population in terms of needs and support services. Additionally, due to them being treated as one bulk population that has an international background, regardless of what it may be, a homogenization of this population has occurred (Abe, 2018). However, I would argue that the international student population, as well as the TCK population, are not the same; and the two groups benefit from different types of support services. It is important to note that TCKs could be domestic students holding U.S passports, or international students who have the additional TCK identity carried with them. This places TCKs in the middle between both populations, contributing to their invisibility.

TCK Characteristics and Challenges

Each TCK story and experience is different from the next because of the vast and global nature of this identity. However, there are some commonalities that exist within those differences that unite the TCK population together. Current bodies of literature primarily focus on TCK characteristics as it is a relatively new concept and phenomena that social scientists, psychologists and student affairs professionals are only recently being introduced to. For example, sociologists have argued that TCKs are known to be open-minded, flexible and adaptable because of their unique exposure to diversity and difference quite extensively during their developmental years (Van Reken & Pollock, 2010). Often times, TCKs may be bi- or multilingual and are equipped with inter-cultural communication skills (Van Reken & Pollock,

2010). TCKs are also shown to have significantly higher intercultural sensitivity levels than mono-cultural individuals (Lyttle et al., 2011).

Moreover, the unique and positive characteristics and traits that TCKs have do not exempt them from certain challenges they could experience, as well. Because the TCK population is a non-homogenous population, they are considered an “invisible minority” (McDonald, 2010). Similarly, TCKs can sometimes be referred to as ‘hidden immigrants’ as they usually don’t have any strictly identifying features for their international experiences (Cockburn, 2002). Within a college and university context, this can mean that TCKs easily blend with the larger college student population. Since a majority of TCK college students repatriate to their passport countries for higher education, the move, in addition to starting their college careers, can take on a large toll on them as they experience a sense of marginality and sense of grief as a result of their move (Bonebright, 2010). Based on current bodies of social science literature, one of the biggest and main struggles that TCKs go through is the difficulty associated with locating where their “home” actually is (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011). TCKs often struggle with locating just one, or locating any one home at all because of the multitude of experiences, cultures, and countries that they may have lived in during their developmental years (Nette & Hayden, 2007; Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011). Nette & Hayden argue that the perception of home for TCKs can be affected by: length of stay in one place or country, the number of countries spent abroad, the passport country that TCKs hold, as well as the country of birth (2007). Their struggle with where their home is leads to their struggle with developing a sense of belonging in any new place they move to, including within the context of a college campus or university.

Psychology and Mental Health

Within their disciplines, psychologists and counselors have already started efforts in an attempt to understand and study this new group of individuals that have different experiences than the typical college student. The unique upbringing of TCKs can increase their susceptibility to mental health challenges at later stages in their lives, primarily within their college developmental years (Gilbert, 2008a). A challenge that TCKs may have are their experiences with “unresolved grief” (Gilbert, 2008a), which is the buildup of emotions that are associated with having to say goodbye to people and places multiple times throughout one’s childhood can affect their future ability to form new connections and build relationships (Cockburn, 2002). TCKs who have, or still do, experience unresolved grief often struggle with developing a connection and sense of belonging as they grow older. This continues to apply within the context of colleges and universities because many TCKs have to travel, nationally or internationally, to enroll into universities as college students. This means that TCKs often need specialized social support from student affairs as well as mental health professionals during their times as college students. Due to the distortion and uncertainty experienced during the developmental years, psychologists argue that it is likely that TCKs go through phases of confusion, anger, resentment as well as isolation simultaneously before and during their time as college students (Van Reken & Pollock, 2010; Limberg & Lambie, 2011). Because of their high adaptability skills, TCKs can appear as though they have a sense of belonging and community to the environment and people around them, however, often times that can be a defense mechanism equipped to avoid making deeper connections with people that are, yet again, uncertain (Limberg & Lambie, 2011; Stultz, 2002). Additionally, TCK college students are generally careful about which ‘self’ they bring out in different contexts due to their adaptability skills. This means they could experience confusion

with their identity in knowing which is their best or preferred self in which contexts (Smith & Kearney, 2016). Limber and Lambie (2011) address the concept of sense of belonging for TCKs within a school environment, rather than in higher education institutions. This remains relevant as it provides a larger understanding of the struggles that TCKs carry with them, often from a young age. However, this further addresses the gap in recognizing TCKs as college students within the Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) realm.

As discussed, the psychology and counseling disciplines have begun efforts to support TCKs, from a mental health standpoint. An example of a strategy that has been implemented is Relational Cultural Therapy (Melles & Frey, 2014). According to Melles and Frey, Relational Cultural Therapy (RCT) is a method that incorporates conversations with individuals around cultural upbringing and background, ideally with others who share the same or similar experience (2014). The theoretical foundation of RCT is based on building meaningful, shared connections with individuals to develop a stronger and more prominent sense of self (Melles & Frey, 2014).

While this strategy was introduced in the psychology discipline, I argue that it can and should be applied within the HESA discipline as well. This will provide a first step towards recognizing and supporting TCKs on the college campus in ways that foster and improve their overall wellbeing and success as college students. This can be done through conversations between TCKs and psychologists or counselors on college campuses who identify with or have a strong background of the TCK identity. This may also be implemented in the form of a support group specified for the TCK population creating a safe space for them to process their past or current experiences. While there may be some overlap in the challenges faced by all college students, TCKs experience unique challenges which can increase their likelihood of experiencing

mental health illnesses such as depression and anxiety, if healthy outlets are not found by them (Barringer, 2000). While psychologists and counselors have already begun efforts to support the TCK population, it is now necessary that HESA does the same.

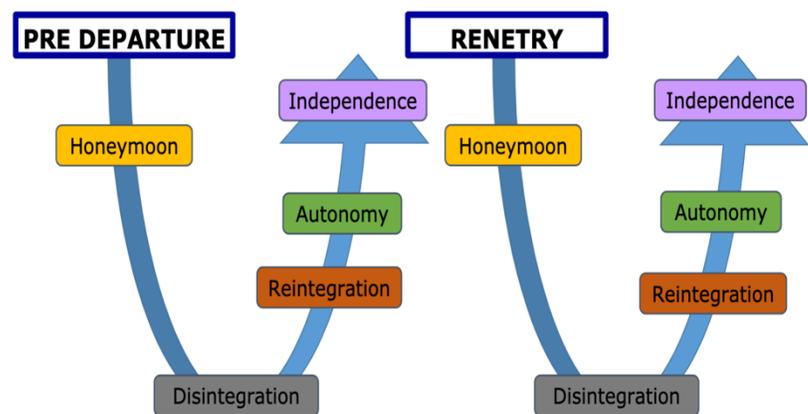
Transition Experiences

It is of no doubt that the international and globally mobile childhoods of TCKs have an impact on their transitioning and adjustment abilities into college or university. As mentioned earlier, even though a TCK may be repatriating into the U.S for their higher education, they may still experience unique demands such as navigating societal and cultural norms just as an international student would, even though the U.S would be their passport “home” country (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011). For international students who go through a transitioning process, maintaining a foundation with their families and with their home cultures has been found to help ease their transition experiences into the U.S and their college campus (Moore & Popadiuk, 2011). TCKs on the other hand may struggle with having that foundation in the first place since their childhoods involved multiple relocations leading to cultural homelessness (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011).

Two main transitional models can be used to describe the TCK transition experience into a new location that can be applied to university life; Pollock’s Transition Model (2010) and the W- Curve Model (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). Pollock’s Transition Model involves 5 stages that describe a TCK’s transition experience; Involvement which represents the stage where the TCK is settled and comfortable in the space or place they are currently occupying and are not experiencing any change. The second stage, Leaving, is where a new change is about to take place in a TCK’s life. This stage is generally coupled with anticipation, anxiety, stress and perhaps denial of this new change that is about to take place (Van Reken & Pollock, 2010).

Examples of self-protective denial or avoidance behaviors provided by Van Reken & Pollock include, denial of feelings of sadness or grief, denial of feelings of rejection, denial of “unfinished business” (in reference to mending relationships with people) and denial of expectations (2010). The third stage is Transit (or In Motion) Stage, which involves the actual move from one place to the next. This stage is typically coupled with feelings of anxiety and chaos when physically moving from place to the next. Stage four is the Entering Stage, which is when the TCK begins a new life in a new place or country, and is likely to experience loneliness, vulnerability and uncertainty as they begin to navigate their social position in this new community (Purnell & Hoban, 2014). The fifth and final stage is Reengagement, which is where the TCK begins to find success in being involved and developing a sense of belonging and comfort to the new place they are currently occupying (2010).

The W- Curve model is a depiction of culture shock that may be experienced by international students and potentially, by TCK college students, as well (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). Stage one of the W- Curve model is the Euphoria or Honeymoon phase and refers to the positive



Adapted from: Adler (1975) & Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963)

excitement and anticipation about moving to a new location. Stage two is Culture Shock which is when the student experiences disintegration and surprising negative situations and differences between their home or passport culture versus the one they are currently occupying. The third stage is Acculturation or Reintegration which is characterized by developing adaptation skills to

the new environment and acceptance of the differences. The final and fourth stage of this model is Stable or Independence, which is where the individual is settled and has adjusted almost completely to the new culture and norms they are currently living in. The second half of the graph refers to the individual's reentry into their home or passport country in the situation that they are a TCK or an international student.

Models and theories may not necessarily depict the exact transition experience of a TCK or an international student because of its fixed nature, which is unrealistic when honoring people's individuality and unique backgrounds. However, they can be used as references as we try to understand the TCK population and their transition experiences further. Using both of these models as references, it is possible to apply those same stages or concepts on TCK college students' transition experiences into a new college or university, regardless of whether they are repatriating into their passport country or are travelling as international students to attend university. While some TCKs do go through the same cycle of culture shock, others may not experience it at all. Rather, TCKs have been found to experience reverse culture shock when they repatriate to their passport countries whether or not the purpose of repatriation was to attend university (Fail et al., 2004b). As expected, it is not uncommon for a TCK college student that is just transitioning into university life for the first time to experience feelings of isolation, loneliness and anxiety as they go through this transition as though it is yet another move. It is then crucial to ensure that these feelings of anxiety and disruption do not last longer than normally would to prevent any negative consequences on their overall sense of wellbeing and success as a college student. Moving to a new country requires adjusting to the new cultural norms, individuals and ways of thinking in that new space and the same concept applies when TCK individuals enroll into university for the first time. They are expected to learn and adapt to

the new campus culture and people they meet in their new campus. In particular, if they are repatriating into their passport cultures to attend university, the re-entry stage of their transition has to be accommodated and paid attention to as well. On some college campuses, this may look like re-entry programs designed specifically for TCK college students via seminars or presentations that explain cultural norms or traditions, similar to an international student orientation. The main difference here lies in the fact that TCK college students need to be recognized as a separate population with particular characteristics and needs, even if they initially appear to be similar to the international student population.

For the reasons mentioned above it now apparent that the sense of belonging that TCK college students start to develop towards the new campus or culture they are now enrolled in can be dependent on whether or not they had a positive or negative transition experience into the country or college campus. Placing emphasis on understanding TCK transition experiences with a specific focus on transitioning into college, will be beneficial in learning the best methods and strategies to support their success and wellbeing as college students.

Student Support Services and Sense of Belonging on a College Campus

It is generally agreed by social scientists and anthropologists that having a sense of belonging to any place an individual is currently occupying, is vital to their overall wellbeing and thriving in that space (Limberg & Lambie, 2011). The same concept applies within colleges and universities. Extensive bodies of literature by student affairs and social science researchers have agreed on the importance of college students having a sense of belonging in the college campus they attend (Strayhorn, 2012). College students having a sense of belonging to their campuses was shown to also improve student retention (O’Keeffe, 2013). If students feel as though they are able to relate to the academics, people and the campus culture and are truly able to thrive

during their college years, they are more likely to continue on the same college campus and receive their respective degrees (Webber et al., 2013). Consequently, the resources and support services available to college students is a great contributor to their sense of belonging and holistic wellbeing (Stebbleton et al., 2014). TCK college students' success and wellbeing are then at risk if their needs are not recognized and supported by HESA.

While a multitude of social scientists and researchers have studied international students and their sense of belonging to college campuses, some of the findings do not apply to the TCK population. The TCK population specifically is more prone to having difficulties with developing a sense of belonging to the space and everyday life they live in, regardless of their age group. Useem and Cortell (2011) reported that only 10% of adult TCKs feel a sense of belonging or connection to their everyday lives in the U.S.

It is important to note that for a TCK, their sense of belonging is very unlikely to exist towards a certain geographic location, rather, their sense of belonging exists in the relationships they develop with other people who share some life experiences of being in an abstract transient community as themselves (Purnell & Hoban, 2014).

Because the concept of moving one's life elsewhere is normalized during their developmental years, TCKs may consider the starting of their college career, just like any other move (Stultz, 2002). This can be beneficial in allowing TCKs to start a new phase of their lives with an open mind and acceptability of the new place. However, the negative consequences of moving to yet another place, with a larger degree of independence and separation from their families during college can still impact their college careers (Purnell & Hoban, 2014; Hervey, 2007). Being bombarded by a sudden change in social, cultural and often times geographical difference for a TCK, potentially for the first time without their families, can induce a greater

likelihood of social isolation and confusion as they transition into university (Purnell & Hoban, 2014). Additionally, according to Useem & Cortell (1996) TCKs are actually likely to transfer colleges twice during an academic career, take longer to complete a degree, or drop out to pursue other opportunities. It is equally important to note that TCKs attend higher education institutions at approximately four times that of domestic U.S students (Stultz, 2002). Some leave the college because they never feel welcome, some because of the desire to travel, and some because they cannot connect to the institutional culture (Stultz, 2002). Third culture kids who remain at their schools tend to choose academic majors that support their need for change (interdisciplinary) and that affirm their international interests (Gerner & Perry, 2000). Therefore, providing support services for TCK college student is a necessary requirement to retain them and promote their overall success on campus.

Based on the current conversations in the literature, it is clear that even though TCKs possess skills and experiences that are beneficial to themselves and their surroundings, TCKs will be unable to thrive without adequate resources and support services to help them navigate those challenges. As mentioned earlier, the support services and resources provided by college campuses can be a great contributor to college students' sense of belonging on campus. The concept of cultural validation as argued by Maramba and Palmer (2014), is an integral component for ethnic minorities to have, especially as college students. This holds true in any context but even more so in institutions that are predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002; Maramba & Palmer, 2014). Similarly, the lack of support services and campus resources that identify TCKs as a special population that exists and one that has unique needs on campus can be a large contributor to the lack of validation and sense of belonging they experience.

Conclusion

In starting to mitigate the many challenges faced by TCKs, identifying and making TCK students visible is a first step in increasing their sense of belonging on university campuses. Next, current research literature about TCKs coupled with information about mental health, sense of belonging and transition experiences can be used to craft a plan of action toward helping these students complete their degrees and have a holistic college experience on their respective campus. In addition, future research needs to be conducted on this vulnerable and marginalized population to increase Higher Education and Student Affairs' (HESA) awareness and efforts in their different roles on campus. The next phase of research, that is currently lacking, is how to increase a third culture kid's sense of belonging on a college campus. This should be done through qualitative research, exploring third culture experiences and strategies that must be applied on a college campus to promote TCKs wellbeing as college students.

Colleges and universities may not need to start from scratch when it comes to programming efforts for TCK college students, they can start by finding out who of their existing student population identifies with the TCK identity. More often than not, they would find that a significant percentage of the student population identify as TCKs, but have never really disclosed it because they never found the need to. As mentioned earlier, they can be considered an invisible minority (McDonald, 2010), but that does not mean they don't exist.

Student affairs professionals now have the responsibility to understand TCKs and their experiences and backgrounds, as this will be crucial to offering them the necessary support to facilitate their success on the college campus. By providing TCK college students the recognition and support they need, HESA will be moving forward with identifying and recognizing the

different student populations that exist on their college campus and advocating for a welcoming and inclusive environment for their college students.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The following chapter will explain the methodology and process utilized in this research study, the campus from which participants were recruited, the recruitment and sampling process for this study, interview protocol, transcription and coding process, as well as my role and positionality as a researcher.

Methodology and Process

Collaborative Research (Engard, 2010) and Grounded Theory (Glaser et al., 1968) were the methodologies I maintained throughout my data collection process. Grounded Theory will be described later. Since this was a qualitative research project, my goal was to highlight and give autonomy to students' voices and stories, and this was done by involving participants throughout the data collection and analysis process. Collaborative research is a form of relational research that invites rich dialogue between and among participants and the researcher. It particularly highlights the strength of the voice of each individual participant in addition to considering the power that their stories collectively provide (Engard, 2010). This also allowed for overcoming the traditional power dynamic and binary between the researcher and the researched (Engard, 2010).

During every interview I ensured to work with participants throughout and after the data collection phase. During each interview, I made sure to go over the main points in the consent form, even after they have already read it, and allowed them the chance to ask any and all questions they had. Participants were also sent the completed transcripts for their interview to check for edits and to further confirm the information they shared with me. I was adamant to include participants in the study by remaining transparent about the process and about my

positionality. I noticed that this actually increased participants' desire and excitement to talk about their TCK experience without any feelings of intimidation or discomfort.

The reason I chose collaborative research for my project is because it fit in with my goal to allow TCK college students the opportunity to express themselves and talk about a personal identity that they may not usually get the chance to talk about. Giving them the platform to express themselves the way they wanted was coupled with excitement and surprise when they were talking about stories and experiences, they have never thought they would end up talking about at any point in their lives.

Description of Campuses From Which I Recruited

Two main campuses were utilized to recruit students from for this study - a large public state university, Oregon State University (OSU) and a small private liberal arts college, Lewis & Clark college (L&C), both located in Oregon. This was done to compare responses from both types of institutions, particularly since L&C has efforts already in place that are dedicated to TCKs.

Oregon State University, hosts about 30,000 students and is Land Grant R1 university located in a college town. In addition to OSU being the institution I attended and was recruited from out of convenience and necessity, it also did not have any formalized efforts that are geared towards the TCK population. OSU was an ideal institution to recruit from because of the diversity of the student body that did result in students identifying as TCKs and participating in this study. Therefore, the implications and recommendations of this study proved to be applicable for OSU and its student body.

L&C hosts about 4000 students located closer to the city of Portland. According to the L&C website, the events that they hold for TCKs include: TCK Thursdays, which is a bi-weekly

social gathering at various venues on campus; Dinner Trips; TCK Symposium, a Keynote and Panel discussion which focuses on a specific topic within the TCK realm, which is held every spring semester; and English Conversation Partners, a program that pairs proficient English speakers with students that are striving to improve their English-language skills ("Third Culture Kids / Global Nomads", n.d).

After conducting an interview with a staff member at L&C, who is also in charge of the TCK programming, it came to my attention how much of the campus culture and norms can and do have a large impact on the programming efforts, as well as the services that are provided to their students. This conversation informed me that their TCK program was created by his predecessor after being asked a question on what their school did for TCKs at a recruitment trip. At the time, the director was not familiar with the TCK population and once they learned about, they acted upon providing them services on campus right away. The decisions to create programming efforts were not met with much resistance since the program was not very costly and the services already existed in some fashion for other college students on their campus.

He also mentioned that there are about 100 to 130 undergraduate TCK students at their college, and although not all of them may stop by their office or participate in the TCK related programs or events, the students consider the mere existence of these programs a “security blanket” as he had referred to it. They provide a sense of comfort to TCK college students to know that there are efforts in place that acknowledge their existence as a population and provides support when needed or the opportunity to meet other TCK folks as well. He also talked about the sense of community these efforts create by making sure TCKs find each other on campus. Additionally, another important element mentioned was the college’s decision to include an identifying question in their common application for the school that asks “Have you ever lived

outside of your passport country?” He expressed that having a simple question as that provides a starting point that helps the college identify incoming TCKs and to code them in their systems as such to be able to reach out to them and identify them upon their arrival. Having a system in place as the one described, assists the college in keeping track of their TCK college student population and to later analyze their data in relation to the programming efforts held in place.

The TCK programming efforts are used as a retention and persistence tool for the TCK college students, which is considered an immense advantage for the school. By providing services that create a sense of community and acknowledgement for the TCK population, they would be less likely to continue experiencing feelings of cultural homelessness or having thoughts of dropping out or transferring colleges (Bonebright, 2010).

L&C is one of few colleges and universities that recognize TCKs as a separate population from the international and domestic student population. The director’s concluding thoughts at the end of the conversation highlighted how crucial it was for colleges and universities to have an “institutional advocate” for the TCK population. This increases that sense of comfort and security for students in knowing that there is someone or a group of individuals who can understand their unique experiences. Not only was this a reason many of the TCKs I interviewed chose L&C as they were applying to colleges, it was also the path through which the TCK college students were solidified in their identity and their sense of self at later stages in their lives (Bennett, 2014).

Recruitment and Sampling

The eligibility criteria for participation in the study included:

- 18 years or older

- Currently attending a college or university in Oregon
- Self-identified as a TCK

I designed a flyer that stated my eligibility criteria, as well as my contact information for students to contact me. Students who matched all of the eligibility criteria, voluntarily reached out to me asking to be interviewed for the research project.

The venues utilized for recruitment were Facebook, Instagram, Email listservs for students attending OSU, Snowball Sampling (Goodman, 1961) and word-of-mouth. Email recruitment occurred mainly through the Cultural Resource Centers (CRCs), after I reached out to them to inform their pool of students of this opportunity. The other university that I recruited students from was Lewis & Clark College (L&C). Students from L&C were recruited after reaching out to director of the International Students and Scholars Office who spread the word and informed students of this opportunity. The reason I chose L&C was to get their students' perspective on having a TCK club, as well as programming efforts in place specifically towards the TCK population.

I interviewed a total of nine participants both from OSU and L&C. Eight of them were U.S citizens and one was a green card holder (permanent resident). The racial identities that participants identified with are White, Hispanic or Mixed. All nine participants were on a spectrum from freshmen to senior.

Interview Protocol

As mentioned earlier, a semi-structured interview process was conducted for this research. Five general demographic questions and seven topic-specific questions were included in the interview. Follow-up questions were asked as warranted. The topic-specific questions were divided into two main sections: TCK related questions about their experience and their TCK

story, and the impact of the college or university on their sense of belonging as TCK college students. The list of questions asked is available in the Appendix.

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured by asking for edits and recommendations from participants after each interview and transcription was completed. Additionally, the confidentiality of participants was honored and maintained by utilizing pseudonyms that they chose for themselves. If they did not choose a pseudonym for themselves, I assigned a pseudonym of my own. This allows participants the comfort of knowing that no self-identifying information would be used in the final thesis, and thus, the information they shared and later proofread was valid and approved.

Transcription and Coding

A pre-approved transcription software was utilized to transcribe my interviews. I listened back to every interview and edited the transcripts again to match the recordings verbatim. After the first round of edits, the transcripts were sent to each of their respective owners to ask for edits and to make sure that the transcripts matched the meaning and intention that was delivered by them during the interview. Two of the nine participants asked for specific changes and edits to be made to their interviews. Each interview took about an hour to an hour & thirty minutes to proofread and edit after the transcription software created the first draft for the transcript.

The coding process was started as soon as the transcripts were approved by its participants. No software was used for the coding process. The transcripts were printed and read individually as themes and codes were extracted. I re-read the interviews two more times to confirm the codes extracted and to combine them into overarching themes with different sub-themes. Two cycles of coding were conducted, the first was a form of structural and holistic coding (Saldana, 2009) where all of the data was read and coded for overarching themes. The

second cycle of coding entailed focused or pattern coding (Saldana, 2009), which involved looking for sub-themes and patterns that fit under each of the larger overarching themes. A total of 6 overarching themes were extracted with 2-4 sub-themes within each. Any drastically different codes or ones that I did not identify initially were re-read and included or excluded as appropriate into the overarching themes and sub-themes (Saldana, 2009).

In terms of analysis and interpretation, Grounded Theory (Glaser et al., 1968), was utilized in the coding and grouping methods of data. Grounded theory is a process of utilizing inductive reasoning while analyzing the data points through methodological gathering and creation of theories based on the results (Glaser et al., 1968). This method was particularly utilized to accommodate the small sample size of this research study, however, it gives importance and prioritized participants' stories and shared experiences that provide applicable themes to the larger TCK population.

Role of Researcher and Positionality

As an international student and third culture kid (TCK) myself, I was well aware of my biases and how they may have shown up during the interviewing process. Using a notebook where I hand wrote my feelings and experiences after each interview was a method I utilized to process the thoughts and feelings I developed during each interview. I noticed this allowed me to remain objective and to prevent my own experiences and biases to project onto the participant, especially since many of the examples and experiences provided by participants were ones that I related to.

It is equally important to note that my visible and invisible identities were factors that may or may not have impacted participants in one way or another. As mentioned earlier, not only am I a TCK, but I am also a Muslim woman of faith and woman of color who wears the Hijab

(headscarf). Being aware of my visible and invisible identities was important since most of the participants had few shared identities, other than of being a TCK, with me.

All in all, being aware of biases in addition to asking questions while remaining as objective as possible, not only ensured the participants' comfort, but also maintained the validity of the data collected as the data was not influenced by me as a researcher. This was further confirmed after each of participants confirmed the completed transcript before my coding process.

Chapter 4: Results and Findings

This chapter will demonstrate the main findings and results of this research study by first describing the participant demographics, followed by the interpretation of the six major themes that emerged.

For ease of exposition, terms specific to this study are used as follows. The word, *home* (italicized) will refer to the abstract, ambiguous place where TCKs feel most authentic and at peace. All other uses of the word home will refer to physical locations or places where one lives in for a prolonged period of time, and not necessarily where one feels a large connection with.

Interviews with nine participants yielded 6 major themes, with 1-3 sub-themes for each major theme, as given below:

(1) Personalized TCK Experience

- a. Parental Influence

(2) Identity Influence on Life Choices

- a. Impact of Childhood School(s) on College Experience
- b. Life & Career Choices
- c. Connection Through Identity

(3) Campus Specific Impacts

- a. Choice of Campus
- b. Availability of Support & Resources
- c. Mentorship

(4) Identity Related Challenges

- a. Identity Confusion
- b. Lacking Sense of Community

(5) Identity Related Assets

- a. Intercultural Sensitivity
- b. Adaptability & Assimilation
- c. Expanded Worldview

(6) Sense of Belonging

Participant Demographics

Each participant was asked a standard set of demographic questions that provided more background information related to and outside of their TCK identity. First, the category “Countries Lived in / Identified With” are the countries participants expressed as the ones they felt a sense of belonging towards and a relationship with. Next, the languages listed indicate which language(s) participants considered their native language and which ones they were fluent in and are able to communicate with. Some participants could understand a certain language but were not fluent enough to be able to write or communicate with it and so, those are indicated as ‘not fluent’. Additionally, the ethnicities listed are the exact words participants used to describe their race and/or ethnicity. Current academic information is also included. Participants indicated their current majors, as well as the Institution they attended. The institutions included either Oregon State University (OSU) which is a large, public institution, or Lewis & Clark College (L&C) which is a small, private liberal arts college. Summarized below in **Error! Reference source not found.** is the demographic sheet describing each participant using their self-chosen pseudonym.

Table 1

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Countries Lived in / Identified With</u>	<u>Language(s)</u>	<u>Race / Ethnicity</u>	<u>Citizenship</u>	<u>Major</u>	<u>Higher Ed. Institution</u>
Eleanor	India, Cambodia, U.S.A	English (native language)	Caucasian	US Citizen	International Affairs	L&C
Sanjay	India, U.S.A	English (native language) , Hindi (not fluent)	Indian	Indian & US Dual Citizenship	Computer Science	OSU
La Fabiola	Bolivia, U.S.A	Spanish (native language), English	Mixed (White & Latina)	US Citizen	Sociology & Anthropology	L&C
Malik	Pakistan, U.S.A	English (native language), Urdu (native language), Spanish (not fluent), Arabic (not fluent)	Pakistani - American	US Citizen	Public Health	OSU

Fabiolo	Mexico, U.S.A	Spanish (native language), English	Latino / Hispanic	Permanent US Resident, Mexican Citizenship	World Languages	L&C
Joanna Eriksson	Japan, Germany, Indonesia, England, US	German, Italian, English (native language), Japanese (not fluent)	Caucasian	US Citizen	Environmental Studies & Japanese and Theatre Minor	L&C
BYS	China, Philippines, U.S.A	Spanish, English (native language)	Asian American, Ethnically South Korean	US Citizen	Asian Studies Major and focus in China region	L&C
Julius	Guatemala, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Spain, U.S.A	Spanish, English, French	Multiracial / Hispanic	Guatemalan, Mexican & US Citizenship	Computer Science & Mathematics Double Major	L&C
Connor	Singapore, Thailand, U.S.A	English (native language), Thai	Mixed (Quarter Japanese, Quarter Chinese and Half White)	US Citizen	Computer Science Major & Entrepreneurship Option	OSU

In the next section, the overview of emerged themes is provided with the emphasis being on the obtained results. These themes will be revisited in more detail in addition to their implications in Chapter Five.

Personalized TCK Experience

The most prominent theme in this study emerged to be the nuance within the TCK definition itself. Each participant tailored the standardized definition to their own experience, highlighting that there should not be a customary or rigid description of who a TCK could be. The only sub-theme in this category is *Parental Influence*.

Perhaps these differences are due to the participants having had drastically different life experiences from each other; most of them had spent their childhoods in more than one country in different parts of the world before coming to the U.S for college, whereas others never left Oregon. However, all of them self-identified as Third-Culture Kids and found affirmation in the TCK identity:

“For me being a TCK is there’s your parents’ culture and the culture you’re living in and then this weird third culture that you create, and when I read about it, it just clicked, it was perfect for me.” – Eleanor, L&C

It was not uncommon among participants to note the confusion they have experienced as a result of their TCK childhoods (Moore, 2011) . BYS commented on how her TCK background actually influenced her morals, beliefs, and cultural background. It is more than just living in a different culture or country, rather, as BYS said, it is “belonging to more than one culture, as well” (BYS).

Due to the complexity of the TCK experience and definition introduced by Pollock and Van Reken (2010), it quickly became apparent that each of the participants resonated with and defined the TCK term in their own way. For example, BYS considers her adoption a TCK experience because she looks a certain way but does not necessarily relate with any or all of the cultural standards of her “home” country or her current host country. Fabiolo and La Fabiola, were both questioning if they were even TCKs themselves because they saw their TCK peers were either US citizens or have lived in the U.S for a couple of years before attending university. Neither of those conditions applied to them, which further complicated their own definition and identity of being a TCK.

It can be argued that the current standardized definition is insufficient because each participant had different variations of a TCK experience causing them to interpret their TCK identity in different ways. Based on the participants in this study, who all self-identified as TCKs, it became obvious that each TCK individual interprets the TCK experience differently. Some resonate with the geographical and international travel and others, like Malik and Sanjay,

relate more to the cultural boundaries and “cultural travel” as Sanjay refers to it, that they experience during their childhoods as children of immigrant parents.

Parental Influence

It is not uncommon for TCKs to have a strong bond and connection with their families (Kortegast & Yount, 2016). This may be because, for many of the participants, their parent(s) were usually the ones who have introduced the TCK term to them. For others, it may be because their families, often times, are the only constant element of their developmental years (Cohen, 2010). Many TCKs, experience their intercultural childhood as a result of their parents’ decisions to either work abroad or move their family elsewhere. Eleanor, Joanna Eriksson, and BYS were all first introduced to the TCK term via their mothers.

“My mom was actually the one who told about TCKs, I think she found it on some “expat bloggers” website or something [laughter].” – Eleanor, L&C

Their parents were also often times the only individuals that they felt comfortable talking about their TCK experience with. Their parents were the ones who were present with them during that time and were the only individuals who completely understood the experiences they would reference. For example:

“I only talked about TCK related issues with my family when we moved back, I didn’t talk about it with my peers.” – Eleanor, L&C

In contrast, some TCKs grew up with a sense of loss towards their cultural background(s) also due to the influence of their parental figures (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011). Malik, for instance, grew up with a single parent, and thus, was heavily reliant and accepting of all the traditions and cultural exposure he received as a child, regardless of whether or not they were accurate or authentic according to their culture. Whether or not those traditions correlated with

his country's traditions were questions he seldom gave much significance to. Similarly, Sanjay spoke about how he did not feel exposed to the Indian culture, even though it is technically his home country because his father did not cultivate the Indian cultural values and traditions in the household. Sanjay says that because his dad was not religious, he grew up with a sense of disconnect from the Indian culture and values, particularly after their move to the U.S.

Many TCK individuals learn about the TCK term through one or more of their parents or through their school or campus when applying to colleges. These findings also indicate that the immediate family members for a TCK are often times the most trusted and only source of comfort and security during their developmental years (Hayden, 2006). As mentioned earlier, this is because those individuals may have been the only constant element of their highly mobile childhoods. All in all, it is apparent that parental figures in one way or another have a large influence on participants' understanding and exposure to their culture(s) and identity. This influence may be positive or negative and may impact their life choices and decisions later on in their lives.

Identity Influence on Life Choices

TCKs feeling a strong sense of identity and occasional pride with their TCK experience was found to be correlated with the life choices and decisions made by them at later stages in their lives. Three main sub-themes emerged under this category: *Impact of Childhood School(s) on College Experience, Life & Career Choices, and Connection Through Identity.*

Impact of Childhood School(s) on College Experience

The first sub-theme was the influence of the school(s) participants attended during their childhoods on their current college experience. Some participants attended international schools that allowed them to travel to different countries as part of a club or a school sport, which

allowed them to meet other TCKs like themselves. Others went to local schools with local curricula in the countries they lived in prior attending university.

Most TCKs have grown up in environments that are different from their or their parents' backgrounds – racially, ethnically, and culturally. This may cause an increased intercultural sensitivity and awareness that becomes more apparent when TCKs repatriate or move to a place that is not as diverse as they were once used to. Eleanor said she joined a Diversity, Leadership, and Awareness club when she repatriated into the U.S in high school as she felt that her school was not as diverse or culturally aware as she had been used to. The TCK background is often times a catalyst for life choices and for decisions of involvement and change.

“I was part of this class or club called Diversity, Leadership and Awareness. The big reason I got into it was because I wanted to help build a culture for my school that may be normal White American kids didn't have access to, like I did growing up.” – Eleanor, L&C

La Fabiola sheds light on the importance of colleges to recognize the diversity of experiences their TCK college students are coming with. Some may have attended international schools all their lives which provided them the ability to learn and practice the English language starting from a young age, and some may have not. Based on the conversations with participants, it is apparent that attending an international school is a privilege that not all TCKs experience. It is a privilege to be able to attend a school that has an international curriculum with a strong education system and network of TCKs. Having access to an international school is commonly related to the type of work TCKs' parents are involved in as well as their economic status, making it a privilege for families that have access to those schools. Furthermore, some TCKs may have attended local schools, as is the case with La Fabiola, where English was not the primary language which had an impact on the type of support services she needed as a college

student. Primarily, La Fabiola expressed how important the Writing Center was for her academic success as it was wrongly assumed that she was a fluent English writer because she held a U.S. passport and “looked like an American” (LaFabiola).

“I didn’t do my schooling in English, so that was a different struggle that I had.” – La Fabiola, L&C

Some participants were homeschooled, which could have had an impact on their abilities to develop connections and friendships with other students in their age group. BYS was homeschooled and said:

“Being homeschooled had us miss the interaction with other students our age, but it made my bond with my parents really strong because they were the only people around me, and it allowed us to travel more too.” – BYS, L&C

Another impact of schools on TCKs stems from the demographics of classmates or peers they interact with during their childhood. Some TCKs interact with individuals of the same race or ethnicity, while some do not. Six out of nine participants were People of Color (POC) and three identified as White. Some of the POC participants expressed that their schools hosted many white identifying folks which created a dynamic that impacted how they viewed themselves, as well as how they made friendships during their college years. Similarly, those who went to schools during their childhood that hosted many students from different parts of the world who were also TCKs, developed intercultural sensitivity due to being exposed to differences at a young age in their lives. The type of environment a TCK grows up in, particularly during their time in school, has a large influence in how they navigate and experience their college campus later on. For instance, Malik and Julius went to schools that had a large proportion of White individuals who they described as “wealthy and elite”.

“I did come from a more affluent neighborhood, so the people I went to school with were pretty well off, and they were all White, and I wasn’t...so that was interesting” – Malik, OSU

“I went to an international school who had a lot of Embassy kids and a lot of wealthy white families.” – Julius, L&C

La Fabiola on the other hand did not attend an international school because, according to her parents, international schools only host elite children coming from wealthy families. La Fabiola recalled that her parents did not wish for her to interact solely with that population.

“American and international schools are very expensive and elite, and my parents did not want me to be in that environment.” – La Fabiola, L&C

On the other hand, Fabiolo, Joanna Eriksson, Connor, and BYS had the opportunity to go to international schools that they described as more diverse and expressed that it has impacted how they see and experience their college campus and the world overall. Going to an international school is often contributing to the intercultural sensitivity and expanded worldview TCKs grow up to have.

“Because I went to an international school with people from all over the world, a lot of my friends were also TCKs, but we did not have that term at the time, but we accepted each other easily” – Fabiolo, L&C

“I went to an alternative boarding school in England founded by an Indian philosopher that placed a lot of emphasis on questioning and self-inquiry and like choosing your own path of learning.” – Joanna Eriksson, L&C

“Living overseas was so cool. I went to this really amazing international school and I played a lot of sports. Over there, the schools competed with each other and we always flew to

different countries and it was always awesome to be able to experience even more cultures and just be flying all the time.” – Connor, OSU

“Going to an international school for the first time was such a valuable experience because I met other students that had also grown up around the world. I gained a sense of like, that there are also other people in the world that looked like me.” – BYS, L&C

All in all, TCKs childhood experiences will inevitably impact how they navigate and experience their college careers regardless of the kinds of schooling their parents had them attend or the environments they were exposed to as children.

Life & Career Choices

Lewis & Clark (L&C) participants expressed that they chose their current major because of how much their TCK identity is considered an influential component that impacted their major and career preferences. Some participants from Oregon State University (OSU) said they learned about their TCK identity after self-exploring to intentionally find out more about their own experience and background. Participants who are enrolled in L&C chose that institution because of the TCK programming efforts that was advertised for by the college. Those TCKs were eager to be on a college campus that had professional staff members as well as fellow students who had prior awareness of the TCK experience. They looked forward to engaging and being in community with individuals who understood their backgrounds.

Often times, their decisions to choose a particular college campus emerged as a result of their current experiences as they look for a place that values cultural experiences and appreciates difference and connectedness. For instance, BYS said;

“I realized that I had to get out of the Midwest. I had to be at a school that appreciates cultures and realizes that other cultures exist, and that’s why I came to Lewis & Clark.” –

BYS, L&C

Others, like Joanna Eriksson, choose to repatriate and return to their passport country for college. Some choose to repatriate for one of two reasons; either they repatriate with their parents if they choose to return home, or to independently repatriate out of curiosity for what the experience could be for them. The latter was Joanna Eriksson’s reason to repatriate:

“I wanted to come back to the US for college, because it always felt like a missing puzzle piece that I was curious about. All of my friends back in Germany were confused on why I wanted to come back.” – Joanna Eriksson, L&C

Moreover, other students made decisions related to their major(s) in college based on their TCK experience. For example, Eleanor chose a major in International Affairs and Chinese. She felt that she would not be interested in that major if it were not for her experiences abroad. Similarly, Fabiolo has decided to pursue a World Languages major to fulfill his passion and interest in this topic, that he affirms would not have existed if it were not for his international and TCK experiences.

In one way or another, the TCK identity and experience has an influence on decisions relating to the futures of TCK individuals.

Connection Through Identity

As mentioned earlier, developing connections through conversations surrounding similarities among individuals can present a real challenge for TCKs due to the uniqueness of their experiences growing up. The TCK phrase provides feelings of comfort and relief for TCK students because it connects them with one another based on shared experiences and struggles

(Choi et al., 2015). It gives TCKs the ability to have an identity that resonates with who they are and what backgrounds they came from. Eleanor for example, said;

“I didn’t really know what I was or who I was, but now that phrase [referring to TCK term] sort of defines me in a way. It was a relief to finally know how to describe that feeling of being in that ‘in-between’ culture, if that makes sense.” – Eleanor, L&C

Similar to Eleanor, almost all participants described a sense of relief and comfort when they found out about the TCK term. They described that learning about the TCK term was like finding a missing puzzle piece that they have been unintentionally searching for. Even if they related with the TCK definition to a small extent, participants were still excited to know that the TCK term exists should they choose to engage fully with it or not.

The TCK term is more or less a label which could confine individuals to boxes that would not encompass all of their life experiences. Even though that label may not be affirmative for all TCKs, it still provides a sense of security for individuals like Fabiolo and Joanna Eriksson:

“When I learned about TCKs, I felt such a relief, like I was able to breathe now. The TCK term now makes me more comfortable because people now understand right away who a TCK is instead of having to go into the long story of where I was born and where I grew up and all that. It is like a shortcut for an explanation of my identity.” – Fabiolo, L&C

In addition to internal adjustments, TCKs also felt pressure in how they identified themselves to others. Many TCKs would either simplify where they are from and provide a shortened answer instead of trying to explain their whole story and background that not all individuals would understand or would be interested in (Trąbka, 2014). Joanna Eriksson

described this process as giving a “band-aid answer”. Instead of explaining her whole TCK story, she would usually say she is from Germany as that was the country she lived in the longest. Now, she is able to proudly say that she is a TCK and would expect her peers or staff members at L&C to understand her background without having to further explain who a TCK is.

“I feel like I kind of discovered another part of my identity in life that I couldn’t really explain before. I usually just said I’m from Germany as like Band Aid answer.” – Joanna Eriksson, L&C

How TCKs introduced themselves to others and their connection with the TCK term is inevitably related to the friendships and community they try to create on the college campus. Learning how to identify oneself and being certain in an aspect of one’s identity facilitates making friendships and connections with others – particularly with culturally ambiguous individuals, such as TCKs (Luke, 2011). For example, Eleanor described connecting with other TCKs as starting an “instant connection” – having that inherent and immediate understanding of the unique experiences a TCK would normally hold.

“I don’t know a lot of people who are TCKs but even the few that I knew it was just like an instant connection like you become best friends almost right away.” – Eleanor, L&C

In contrast, having a lack of community with other TCK individuals can become a challenge for TCK folk as they may struggle with making friendships and developing a social circle (Jang, 2010). Not only due to the lack of TCK individuals or awareness of TCKs on campus, but because of a natural difficulty they may have with forming connections in the first place due to their highly mobile childhoods. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the concept of unresolved grief is a contributing factor for the challenge TCKs may have with starting new friendships and relationships (Gilbert, 2008b). In fact, some TCKs may intentionally avoid

starting new friendships out of fear of losing or ending that relationship yet again. This defense mechanism emerges as a result of their highly mobile childhoods and their repeated experiences of ending friendships and relationships that they developed each time they moved to a new place or country (Gilbert, 2008b; Luke, 2011)

When college campuses provide opportunities for community building, particularly for individuals who share one or more of their identities, it facilitates students building their social circles and developing a community on campus (Choi et al., 2015). Connor, for example, said that if it were not for the involvement opportunities that he had joined on campus, it would have been quite difficult for him to make friends during his time in college.

“Growing up, I didn’t really have friends outside of my family because we only visited the U.S every summer. When I came back here it was hard to make friends when I was still in high school, but it was not too hard to make friends in college because I joined a fraternity. But outside of like the groups that I joined, like I don’t make friends too often outside the groups I am familiar with.” – Connor, OSU

Having a stronger sense of self and being sure of one’s identity facilitates the process of making friendships during TCK students’ college careers. If the campus community becomes more aware of the TCK identity and develops a process to identify them, it allows existing TCK college students to be affirmed in their experiences and allows them to easily find other TCKs like themselves to develop a connection and community with them.

Campus Specific Impacts

The third overarching theme is focused on the college campus impacts on the TCK college student. This included choosing the college campus they wanted to attend as well as the

kinds of support, resources, and mentorship they felt they needed. The four main sub-themes that emerged are; *Choice of Campus, Availability of Support & Resources and Mentorship.*

Choice of Campus

Participants spoke about choosing their college campus because of certain features that are specific to the college itself while others due to external factors such as proximity to family members. Eleanor and BYS both chose to attend Lewis & Clark because of L&C's efforts in place to support their TCK college student's community and to meet fellow TCKs like themselves.

"A big part of coming to Lewis & Clark for me was because they have a such a big TCK population. I was really excited coming into L&C because I had huge expectations of meeting TCKs and being able to bond with them over these like totally different but totally similar experiences." – Eleanor, L&C

"One of the main reasons I came to Lewis and Clark was that I was immediately welcomed and informed of the TCK identity and all of the programs on campus that were for TCKs and I think for the first time I was able to fully identify what that means to me. I was able to meet so many other students who are now my friends who also identify in that way." – BYS, L&C

La Fabiola, on the other hand, chose L&C because she wanted to be close to her grandparents and extended family members. She expressed that she wanted to rebuild that relationship with them especially because she was unable to have that close relationship during her time growing up abroad. Additionally, she found that L&C was the only school that truly understood what being a TCK meant, what the term entails and what kind of experiences she may be coming to campus with.

“In all the other schools I toured, they didn’t know what category to put me in because I would say I am from Bolivia, but I am still a U.S citizen...it was confusing for them. Some people would consider me an international student, but others would treat me as a domestic student because I had the passport. So, L&C was the only college that really understood my situation.” – La Fabiola, L&C

This experience is an indicator that the number of international students and programming efforts that are international or TCK focused on campus do have an impact on whether or not TCK college students choose to attend a certain college or university. This is a thought-provoking concept because some of these programming efforts may not necessarily be relevant or applicable to all TCK students. However, the mere availability of those opportunities and resources on campus provides a sense of comfort and security in knowing that TCKs will be able to find an international community that would understand their experiences, should they choose to look for it.

Availability of Support & Resources

Results indicate that the cultural validation that TCKs received or hoped to receive on campus is often expected from staff or faculty members. Particularly, that cultural validation is expected from staff or faculty outside of the spaces on campus that would normally be familiar with the international and TCK population (Holdren, 2013). Cultural validation can often be as simple as processes in place that identifies existing TCK college students and by providing opportunities on campus for them to find community with one another. As BYS mentioned;

“It is really important that the entire school as a whole as well as the office and adults that work in the school realize that the third culture kid population at any university is bound to be quite large.” – BYS, L&C

The availability and impact of support services and resources available to students, regardless if they were specific to the TCK population or not, have a large impact on TCK students (Holdren, 2013). For example, participants have expressed that many of the resource centers or spaces on campus are where they were able to form connections, make friendships, and develop a sense of belonging to their college campus and community (Patton, 2010). Eleanor finds comfort in both the TCK club as well as the international student activities as those usually host people that she “relates to the most” (Eleanor, Time Index). Moreover, the degree of involvement of TCK students with campus leadership opportunities had an impact on their overall wellbeing and sense of belonging. La Fabiola says that her involvement with the college campus through activities and work, correlated with the sense of belonging she had towards L&C. This was also evident in Malik’s case who goes to Oregon State University. Malik said;

“The cultural resource centers here at OSU played a huge role with my sense of belonging here at OSU because I got to know more people of different identities.” –

Malik, OSU

This ties into the following sub-theme; *Mentorship*.

Mentorship

It is apparent that most of the experiences where they felt they were supported and encouraged as college students stemmed from areas or individuals on campus who were culturally sensitive and aware of the TCK population and/or had some level of understanding of their experiences. Consequently, the lack of support from the academic affairs as a sector or the institution in general had significant impact on TCKs. Students expressed that it is often difficult to find a mentor figure whom they trust as someone who has a clear understanding of what they are going through, and why their experience is unique and different from the traditional college

student. Malik, for example, wished he had a mentor figure within his field of study to provide guidance and advice. He recalled:

“I feel like I haven’t had any faculty members that I could connect to and consider as a mentor. I don’t think I have that mentor figure because I haven’t found someone who understood or even shared some of those interests with me.” – Malik, OSU

A similar perspective was provided by a student-affairs professional at L&C. That professional described that their role was almost as though they were the “TCK Advocate” on the L&C campus. TCK college students know their name, even if they have never actually met. Additionally, TCKs know that if they had a question or concern related or not related to their TCK identity, they were the person they would reach out to. That professional explained that their impression was having a TCK point person on campus provided a sense of comfort and relief to the TCK college student, which further increases their wellbeing and retention on the college campus. That professional essentially serves as the TCK mentor figure that they need throughout their college career. Lack of mentorship on the college campus, particularly in relation to the TCK identity can impact the experiences and wellbeing of TCK college students.

Identity Related Challenges

Due to the myriad of experiences TCKs go through, particularly at a young age, they endure unique challenges that have an impact on their college experience and, potentially, careers in the future (Jang, 2010). As discussed in the section Identity Influence on Life Choices, many TCKs choose their majors and involvement opportunities based on their backgrounds as well as what they intend to do in the future. The two main kinds of challenges participants mentioned as ones they faced were *Identity Confusion, and Lacking Sense of Community*.

Identity Confusion

TCK college students experience confusion within and amongst themselves in relation to their identities and sense of self (Moore, 2011). This may be contributed to the disconnect with navigating their new environments while making meaning of the backgrounds they carry with them. In addition, their background experiences have an impact on how they approach and navigate their new environments. Their identities may be challenged by how individuals and the larger society interact with them. For example, Sanjay feels disengaged from his Indian background because of the detachment he experienced from that culture growing up. He attributed this disconnect to not practicing the language or the cultural traditions as often in his childhood.

“When I go back home in India, it can still be kind of like a culture shock, even though I am technically from there. And I also lost my Hindu fluency because I didn’t practice it enough.”

– Sanjay, OSU

Similarly, TCKs are often susceptible to multiple identity crises (Navarrete & Jenkins, 2011), amplified when they grow up unsure of how to identify themselves. Many TCKs experience feelings of not being enough for any one of the countries or cultures they feel they have had life experiences in. Because the third culture experience is essentially a transient, abstract culture and *home*, it is often difficult to explain that to people as well as to rationalize for themselves, where they truly belong. BYS and La Fabiola both commented on how they did not fully belong to one culture or the other because they lived in each one for a temporary period of time. It is of equal importance to note that there is not a specific timeline or period where TCKs experience an identity crisis. It is entirely dependent on the context and experiences they are going through at that point in time.

“No matter where I go, I don’t fit in completely. I’m never going to be considered Korean, but I am never going to be considered American either, like...it’s weird. And I still have moments where I am like whoa, who am I? Like do I really belong here? Am I supposed to be at school in the United States when like, I’ve grown up all over the world? [pause] You know what I mean?” – BYS, L&C

“My identity struggle was always in relation to being ashamed of my privileged side, which is my White side and having grown up with a White mom in Bolivia and feeling like I was never Bolivian enough.” – La Fabiola, L&C

The following quotes demonstrate the difficulty TCKs have when they try to explain where they are from. Here, TCKs may utilize defense mechanisms to avoid having an identity mental block every single time they explain their experience (Jang, 2010). Julius has a long answer and a short answer, and he provides either one depending on his mood. If he has the energy and feels up to it, he would explain where he was born, the countries he lived in, and why he identifies as a TCK. Other times he would only provide a short answer of one country he has previously lived in to avoid having a long-winded conversation about this topic.

“Explaining where I’m from is hard [laughter]. And depending on how I am feeling I’ll give them either a long or a short answer.” – Julius, L&C

“The sense of identity is the most challenging for me. Like yea I am technically American, but I never grew up here. So, I don’t necessarily know all of the references, but I also don’t identify with Thailand per se. So, it’s kind of hard to say where I’m really from.” – Connor, OSU

Similarly, several participants expressed that they also often struggled with explaining their TCK background and international experience specifically when their outer appearance is

considered contradictory to a common stereotype. For example, Eleanor was not often asked about her international background as she identified as and appeared White. Interestingly, she was often faced with resistance and shock when she continued to explain that she lived in India and Cambodia for several years of her childhood. La Fabiola, on the other hand, is White passing but describes herself as mixed race, which leads to confusion within herself as she navigates her own identities as well as confusion with others when introducing herself to new people.

“Lewis & Clark considers me a student of color. I don’t know if I can call myself a student of color because I am White passing here. People listen to me speak and they look at me and would never assume that I haven’t grown up here.” – La Fabiola, L&C

Similarly, Joanna Eriksson is also White passing and has struggled with relating to the American culture ever since she has moved back into the US for college. Although she is a U.S citizen and is considered American by her peers, she still felt more at home around the international student community as opposed to the domestic students. This is an important factor to consider highlighting that the passport an individual holds may not always resonate with where ones feels like they truly belong.

“Most people never assume that I am a TCK. Like I was walking past a TCK event that was happening on campus and some people were like “Oh do you want to come and meet some international and TCK students?” and I would be like “I am also a TCK!” and they would be pretty surprised. I guess it is because I don’t look or sound like a TCK? I am automatically assumed I am American” – Joanna Eriksson, L&C

Many TCKs go through culture shock even though they would be considered in their home country if they repatriated to attend university. Joanna Eriksson talked about the culture shock she experienced during orientation before starting college. She remembered having

difficulty understanding the jokes and movie references that were used in social setting. Some people expected that she would understand them easily because they assumed she grew up in America. The TCK identity is not a visible identity, which often contributes to them being an “invisible minority,” as discussed previously (McDonald, 2010)

In addition to individual dilemmas, the uncertainty by TCKs highlights a much bigger, problematic issue: the social construct of race. It reflects the stereotype that associates White with America, and any individual that does not fit within that box is an anomaly. TCKs having to navigate that individuality of social constructs when returning to the U.S after growing up in environments that are more open, is the epitome of the struggle they endure.

Lacking Sense of Community

A challenge that is related to the TCKs’ identity confusion is the difficulty with creating a sense of community and belonging, particularly on a college campus. This is tied to the culturally fluid and mobile childhoods they experienced in addition to their struggles with their sense of self. As mentioned in the sub-section, Connection Through Identity, a lack of belonging is tied to struggling with forming friendships and relationships on the college campus (Choi et al., 2015). Sanjay attributes the “literal and cultural distance” between himself and his extended family members as a cause to the difficulty he experiences with developing a community that shares one or more of his identities and cultural backgrounds.

“Having family on the other side of the world and not being able to hang out with them or see them as much is hard. It’s the literal distance and also the cultural distance.” –

Sanjay, OSU

Having difficulty with developing a social network is associated to the temporary experiences TCKs often have growing up. Moving from one place to the next with the inherent

intention that they would eventually move again impacts how they view social relationships and creating a community (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011; Navarrete & Jenkins, 2011). Consequently, if they repatriate into their passport countries, possibly for the first time as a permanent move, a dissonance often emerges with the expectation to form a community to last a longer period of time (Collier & Petty, 2006). Both BYS and Connor describe their moves back into the U.S as a lot harder than they initially expected. Even though the U.S is their passport country, they had trouble adjusting back into the culture and forming relationships with people, particularly on campus.

“I don’t know but going from a place that you’ve been living in for six years back to your home culture, that’s a totally different experience than what people initially tell you...it’s much harder than I thought it would be.” – BYS, L&C

“Coming back to the U.S and going to a public school before college was hard because everyone had their group of friends so it was very hard for me to fit in where I thought it wouldn’t be that hard because I’m kind of multicultural and have different aspects of myself, but it was still hard to fit in and make a lot of friends. I don’t go out and seek a lot of friends because I like to keep a smaller group of like really close-knit people.” – Connor, OSU

These quotes indicate that the TCKs’ experiences in their developmental and formative years inevitably have an impact on their college experience. For example, TCKs may have difficulty navigating their own identities within themselves and with the larger society, other will struggle with approaching individuals to start friendships, and some will struggle with feeling a sense of community and belonging to the place they are occupying. Some TCKs will struggle with being confined to one location for a prolonged period of time with the expectation of

settling down after they have gotten used to travelling and moving around frequently. Challenges come in different kinds and manifestations and they differ from one TCK to the next, however, it is crucial to be aware and understanding of the different array of challenges they may experience to develop a more productive and understanding environment for them on college campuses and beyond.

Identity Related Assets

The TCK identity is not solely a challenge. In fact, it holds tremendous value and integral assets inherently held by TCK individuals. The three main sub-themes that emerged as valuable assets and characteristics were: *Intercultural Sensitivity, Adaptability & Assimilation and Expanded Worldview.*

Intercultural Sensitivity

TCKs usually grow up within and amongst difference. Difference in culture, food, language, music, clothing, or all of the former combined. Inevitably, the early exposure to this degree of difference at a young age impacts how they view and interact with individuals who come from different backgrounds and cultures than themselves when they grow older. They grow up to normalize that each individual has their own background and socializations even if they do not align or resonate with their own (Lyttle et al., 2011). Learning to respect and appreciate other cultures and traditions is a skill many non-TCKs are placing a conscious and current effort to acquire. Participants mentioned they felt a sense of openness towards other cultures and towards difference in a variety of different contexts and situations that they were placed in including during their times on college campuses (Dewaele & Oudenhoven, 2009).

“I have way more respect for other people who are different than me.” – Eleanor, L&C

Adaptability & Assimilation

The second asset is the ability of TCKs to adapt and assimilate to new changes fairly quickly. They attributed this to their habit of travelling and relocating frequently from a young age, which caused them to grow more resilient and more receptive to large changes in their lives (Allen, 2018; Appel-Schumacher, 2015). Eleanor says that her TCK identity made it much easier to travel and relocate when she grew up. Joanna Eriksson describes her ability to adapt and assimilate to new cultures, individuals and/or places as “chameleon-like”.

“It became much easier to travel.” – Eleanor, L&C

“It is very chameleon-like, which is also nice sometimes.” – Joanna Eriksson, L&C

Consequently, TCKs adaptability and assimilation skills serve to be of great importance when TCKs transition into college or university. BYS said that her transition to college was much easier than she initially expected because of her mobile childhood experience.

“To many extents being a TCK has actually made my transition to college so much easier.”

– BYS, L&C

Similarly, Julius has developed a sense of resilience and acceptant to his mobile lifestyle to the point where he adapts very quickly to any new place or location he travels or moves to.

“Moving to college was less impactful that I thought it would be because I have moved pretty much all of my life pretty regularly. Whenever I move somewhere now, I completely accept that okay this is my new home now, you know? When I moved here to Portland, for me, it was from day one I was like this is my home, I am here now. Chicago was in the past, I’m focusing on my new home, here and now. I think assimilation is an important skill that I learned during my experiences travelling.” – Julius, L&C

Expanded Worldview

Related to Intercultural Sensitivity and Adaptability, having an Expanded Worldview was another sub-theme that emerged. Participants mentioned that not only do their prior experiences provide with them with rich educational as well as life skills, they are also now equipped with the skill of perspective. The ability to see how large the society and world truly is, whether it be geographically or culturally. Perspective is crucial in making connections and relationships with people while being mindful that difference and diversity is inevitable, and when celebrated, can be powerful. Joanna, for instance, said that it is now quite hard for her to judge or feel uncomfortable with people who are different from her because she grew up learning that interacting with people of different backgrounds was the norm.

“The exposure to different cultures and diversity at such a young age really opened my worldview so much, and now it is a lot harder for me to judge or feel uncomfortable with people who aren’t similar to me in a way. I feel like there is so much more understanding that I have for other people.” – Joanna Eriksson, L&C

Eleanor said that she/they feels very lucky being a TCK because of the greater sense of understanding she now has for individuals and her open-mindedness with how large the world truly is.

“Even with these feelings of not feeling like a belong anywhere, I feel really lucky. It is really eye-opening to be a TCK, like, you kind of see just how different cultures can be around the world.” - Eleanor, L&C

TCKs are a product of globalization and a more connected and shrinking world. More TCKs are needed in this world to foster and develop greater understanding and communication between individuals of different backgrounds to foster harmony and growth (Appel-Schumacher,

2015). Although the transcultural experience TCKs have growing up can impact how they develop a sense of community, it is of no doubt that they are equipped with assets such as intercultural sensitivity, adaptability and having an expanded worldview from a very young (Dewaele & Oudenhoven, 2009). These assets can be considered skills that are actively sought after in professional and larger workplaces and organizations.

Sense of Belonging

Participants were asked what their understanding of a sense of belonging was, particularly within the context of college campuses. Each student used their own vocabulary and terminology to describe sense of belonging. The following components of sense of belonging emerged from their definitions:

- Community
 - Having Support from People
 - Connecting with other TCK students
- Authenticity
 - Not having to hide one's true self
 - Connecting cultural background with involvement opportunities on campus
- Comfort
 - Living environment
 - Affinity Spaces on campus

Eleanor has summarized all three components in what sense of belonging means for her:

“Sense of belonging is feeling comfortable sharing who you are with others. And knowing that you have support from people, especially on campus. Connecting with other TCKs has made my college experience so much better.” – Eleanor, L&C

La Fabiola emphasizes the community component as she values the collective group when feeling a sense of belonging on campus:

“It’s a feeling of like being part of a group and learning from others but also sharing your experience so that other people can learn from you. Sense of belonging can come from a group that shares one or more similar interest as you.” – La Fabiola, L&C

Malik highlights the community and authenticity components of sense of belonging by saying;

“I feel like there is social and academic aspects of sense of belonging on campus. It’s like finding people who either look like you or share the same identities that you can relate to. Academically it might be more that we have similar interests or goals. I found that it is really important for me to connect to my culture and now I really try to bring that into my role and how I get involved on campus.” – Malik, OSU

Fabiolo’s most integral component of feeling like he belongs somewhere is authenticity and comfort with who he is and not having to pretend to be someone else to belong:

“Sense of belonging is feeling like you are comfortable with who you are and that you don’t have to fake or pretend to be another person. The TCK club and board makes me feel really welcome because I know there are other people with similar experiences as me.” – Fabiolo, L&C

Joanna Eriksson provides a slightly different angle of what sense of belonging to her and that is her living learning community:

“My sense of belonging on campus is very related to my dorm to be honest. I live in a living learning community for like Environmental Action and Outdoor Pursuits and that’s something that I am really passionate about.” – Joanna Eriksson, L&C

BYS, Julius and Connor all emphasized that their sense of belonging originates from the groups they choose to be involved with on campus that they resonate with the most:

“I have a sense of belonging with my group of friends here who also identify as a TCK or international student.” – BYS, L&C

“Academics, the Crew time and the international student group are my three spheres of belonging.” – Julius, L&C

“Sense of belonging has a lot to do with who you are and what you’re interested in. I once read this article that said people belong over the “languages you speak”, not necessarily spoken language but things that you do. So, for example, if I’m good at volleyball then that’s a language that I speak and can bond with people over that.” – Connor, OSU

Even though each participant had a slightly different definition and experience of their sense of belonging, they all had commonalities in the elements sought after to feel like one belongs. Those elements are Community, Authenticity, and Comfort. It is of no surprise that human interaction and connection increases one’s sense of comfort and belonging to the space or place they are occupying. That is the mere nature of the human race, we thrive on connecting and engaging in conversations with others. In addition, not having to pretend to be someone else around certain individuals and being comfortable in both the literal and abstract places occupied are also integral to develop a sense of belonging.

Conclusion

It is apparent that TCKs have a lot to say about their own experiences and their own backgrounds. This chapter summarized the main findings of this research study and has resulted in the following themes and sub-themes:

1. Personalized Experience & Definition
 - a. Parental Influence
2. Identity Influence on Life Choices
 - a. Impact of Childhood School on College Experience
 - b. Life & Career Choices

- c. Connection Through Identity
- 3. Campus Specific Impact
 - a. Choice of Campus
 - b. Availability of Support & Resources
 - c. Mentorship
- 4. Identity Related Challenges
 - a. Identity Confusion
 - b. Lacking Sense of Community
- 5. Identity Related Assets
 - a. Intercultural Sensitivity
 - b. Adaptability & Assimilation
 - c. Expanded Worldview
- 6. Sense of Belonging

The following chapter discusses the implications these findings have on student affairs professionals and the student affairs field at large and discusses applicable recommendations that ought to be implemented in the future of Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA).

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this final chapter, I will start by revisiting the research questions that guided this study, followed by the most prominent findings. This study focuses on Third Culture Kids (TCKs) as college students, with a particular emphasis on their sense of belonging on college campuses. Because of the dynamic upbringing of TCKs, the four-year college career might be one of the most stable timeframes in their lives so far. Anticipating this novel stability, the goal of the study was to understand how their previous experiences have influenced their current career choices, their relationship-building processes as well as their perspective of sense of belonging as college students. The following represent the three main research questions that initiated and have guided this study:

- What is the TCK definition of sense of belonging?
- What factors influence sense of belonging for TCKs?
- How does their sense of belonging influence their level of engagement with campus activities?

One of the goals was to inform student affairs professionals about sense of belonging from the perspective of a TCK, while highlighting aspects of the college campus that have an influence on that sense of belonging. In fact, the results of this study produce implications and recommendations that are applicable in the foreseeable future. Minimal literature exists regarding TCKs as college students and the different kinds of experiences they go through. To continue to build this literature, this study was geared towards hearing and learning from current TCK college students about their experiences on campus and the different elements that they prioritize for having a successful and holistic student experience.

The above questions were the initial and guiding framework for this study. The major takeaways pertain to the following themes:

- 1) Personalized TCK interpretation
- 2) TCK identity impact on college experience
- 3) Sense of belonging for a TCK student

The emerging discussion, as a result of this study, is questioning the applicability of the traditional TCK definition. The TCK experience, according to study participants, is a fluid and everchanging experience that should not have a singular, rigid explanation. Different TCKs are now describing their experiences in their own words, as demonstrated in this study, providing for a more accurate representation as they themselves are the ones providing the description instead of their parents. In this chapter, the abbreviation ‘TCK’ will be used to refer to a more comprehensive understanding of TCKs which includes both *traditional* and *non-traditional TCKs* as introduced in Chapter 1. The following section will provide a detailed discussion about the personalized TCK experience and interpretation by each of the participants.

Personalized TCK Interpretation

One of the largest findings of this study relates to the nuance between *traditional* and *non-traditional TCKs*. *Traditional TCKs* are ones that are commonly referenced in existing literature by scholars who talk about the TCK term (Bell-Villada et al., 2011; Cottrell, 2007; Van Reken & Pollock, 2010). As previously discussed, *traditional TCKs* are defined as children of parents who travel for work purposes and are exposed to the TCK experience as a result of the geographical relocation that they experience multiple times during their childhood. Although frequent travel is a common element among *traditional TCKs*, each TCK experience is different. In fact, even sibling TCKs will have different interpretations of their experience and where they consider their

home is even though they would have had the same upbringings, lived in the same countries, and potentially, attended the same schools as their siblings. This is perhaps related to the different stage of their life in which they lived the same experience, therefore, the emotional connections do differ. It is important to note that no matter the background experiences a TCK has, each seems to have their own, personalized interpretation for what being a TCK means for them.

This study introduces *non-traditional TCKs*; individuals who have not had the same experiences of travel and frequent geographical relocation as *traditional TCKs*, yet they still relate to many of the traits, assets and challenges that TCKs have. *Non-traditional TCKs* in this study were also second-generation immigrants. Whether they are *traditional* or *non-traditional*, *TCKs* feel united in the umbrella TCK experience and term. As mentioned in the introduction, in instances where the general term ‘TCK’ is used, without the ‘traditional’ or ‘non-traditional’ labels, I refer to all TCK individuals, encompassing all individuals that traditionally and/or non-traditionally identify with the TCK experience.

To begin with, three participants were children of immigrant parents and self-identified as TCKs even though their backgrounds and international or intercultural experiences differed immensely from one another and did not align with the standardized definition. Sanjay, Malik, and La Fabiola all spoke about feeling as though they are living in completely different countries when thinking about their interactions in their households versus their interactions with the outside world – and that is what they related to the most in the TCK experience. Malik, Sanjay, and La Fabiola are examples of individuals who have had an intercultural experience growing up, having to navigate their parents’ culture and the host culture they are currently in. That duality of experiences was the core reason why they related to the TCK definition. The challenges of trying to find out who they are and where they belonged, was a common factor,

especially when they were unable to relate to the culture they are currently in or the one their parent(s) are from.

“For me, the TCK experience I relate to is the bicultural struggle of growing up with a white mom in a Latin American country and navigating that duality of cultures really.” – La Fabiola, L&C

“I identify as a Third Culture Kid because I feel like a Third Culture Kid is somebody who has kind of like two cultures that they have to balance between. Like I’m not Pakistani, but I also don’t think I am American.” – Malik, OSU

Malik provides an example of having to balance two cultures by saying:

“I never connected to people fully because I don’t think they could relate to the experiences that I have had. Like when I step out of the house, I am a different person than when I am in the house. Like I am eating different kinds of foods and celebrating different things and talking a different language, and that all changes when I step out of the house.” – Malik, OSU

When asked about his TCK identity Sanjay said:

“I spent a significant portion of my time in two countries and only one of which is the country that holds my passport. It’s like living in a place where those two cultures can sort of mix or clash or whatever. And I’ve lived in Oregon ever since the first grade, but every summer or every other summer, I’ll go back to India.” – Sanjay, OSU

As previously discussed, traditional definitions of TCKs applied to individuals who have spent their childhoods in different countries abroad as a result of their parents who travelled for work. However, as is evident from their testimonies, Sanjay, Malik and La Fabiola related to an intercultural struggle of being bicultural or being children of immigrant parents. Both kinds of

participants identified with the TCK experience and related to the challenges shared by other TCKs. I noticed the cognitive dissonance I myself experienced as I learned that some TCK individuals have never lived in more than one country, as I did in my childhood, yet they still related to a lot of the TCK experiences that I, and other *traditional TCKs* have had.

Therefore, it has become apparent that the common factor that united all of the participants for this study who identified as TCKs, was the transient abstract in-between culture that they found themselves growing up in. Having an international or intercultural background that resulted in confusion in where they are from and where they truly belong was the common element across all participants. Related to higher education, this allows student affairs practitioners and other educators to pay attention to the fluidity of the TCK experience and to be aware of the shift that is currently underway where individuals with different global experiences relate to the TCK identity for different reasons.

All in all, whether TCKs consider themselves *traditional* or *non-traditional*, it is definitely worth appreciating the beauty that lies within the differences that TCKs bring forth with them. Most TCKs show appreciation to the standardized TCK term as it provides a sense of comfort and relief to learn about the global TCK community, but it does negate the uniqueness of experiences and worldviews that each TCK has had in their childhoods.

TCK Identity Impact on the College Experience

In this study, the following themes emerged in relation to how TCKs sense of identity influenced their college experience: Personalized TCK Experience, Identity Influence on Life Choices, Campus Specific Impact & Dynamics, Identity Related Challenges, Identity Related Assets, and Sense of Belonging.

One of the main things that results show is that the TCK identity does have an impact on their college experiences, whether that was choosing the college campus they decided to go to or how they developed social connections with people. According to the study participants, the availability of support and resources on college campuses has been found to be an integral factor for TCK college students' success and holistic wellbeing.

Furthermore, as it corresponds to existing literature around TCKs (Appel-Schumacher, 2015; Bonebright, 2010), a set of challenges, as well as assets, were acknowledged by the participants. The most prominent assets included adaptability and intercultural sensitivity and an expanded worldview. Challenges included lack of sense of community and identity confusion. These examples of assets and challenges can all influence TCK students' college experience as they are considered vital for relationship building, problem solving, and developing perseverance and resilience in their personalities. These findings in this study confirm claims by researchers like Appel-Schumacher, Bonebright and Jang (2015; 2010; 2010). TCKs essentially have a head start in these life skills merely due to their life experiences. These assets will be beneficial as they navigate their college lives (Benjamin & Dervin, 2015; Jang, 2010) On the other hand, the challenges can also make their college experience more difficult as they navigate their own identity and sense of self, in addition to the burden of building a community and a social circle on campus.

Lastly, each participant described what having a sense of belonging meant for them. Interestingly, the elements TCKs found important for their sense of belonging on the college campus, were not ones that were novel or unheard of. The aspects of sense of belonging that they prioritized were developing a community on campus that understood their unique experiences and intercultural backgrounds. It became apparent that participants valued the ability to learn

about who they are and their own identities while being in community with others. This serves a great purpose in encouraging TCK students to be more involved in the college campus and seek out engagement opportunities that not only would increase their sense of community, but also equip them with life and professional skills during their time as college students.

Sense of Belonging for a TCK College Student

TCK college students choosing to participate in this study in itself is a method they vocalized as an opportunity to talk about their experiences and be affirmed in them and their identities. Needing to have conversations about their TCK backgrounds emerged as important for TCK college students. This makes sense of belonging for a TCK college student on campus slightly different from a monocultural individual. TCKs have considered certain elements to be important when feeling a sense of belonging to their college campus. Those elements are:

- Community
 - Having Support from People
 - Connecting with other TCK students
- Authenticity
 - Not having to hide one's true self
 - Connecting cultural background with involvement opportunities on campus
- Comfort
 - Living environment
 - Affinity Spaces on campus

The *Community* aspect was the most prominent across all participants. This was expected considering the natural human tendency to seek out social circles and communities in any space or place they are occupying. For TCKs, this component is further amplified especially because they are a population whose communities and social circles were constantly changing throughout their childhoods with many temporary and uncertain relationships. Therefore, it was expected that TCKs value community and long for relationships that provide support and genuine

connection with people they relate to. A need for a sense of community arises for TCKs because of the loss of community they experienced growing up (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011). As previously discussed, many TCKs suffer from cultural homelessness (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011) during their childhoods, not knowing where they come from or who they belong to. Therefore, developing a sense of community that includes support from other individuals, particularly those who understand their backgrounds (i.e. such as other TCKs), was found to be important in TCK college students' experience.

The second element was *Authenticity*. This refers to not having to hide their true selves, a feeling that was very prominent when TCKs talked about their sense of belonging. TCKs are often also referred to as “chameleons” or the “invisible minority” (McDonald, 2010; Trąbka, 2014). Since TCKs are generally equipped with the skills of adaptability and the ability to quickly assimilate to a new culture, country or environment, this can also be core reason for their susceptibility to identity crises at later stages in their lives (Killguss, 2008). Constantly adapting and assimilating to different environments can lead to TCKs losing track of their sense of identity and who they are as individuals (Killguss, 2008). When TCKs get the opportunity to connect their international backgrounds with involvement opportunities on campus, they felt a greater sense of belonging to their college campus. Students from Lewis & Clark college all commented on the existence of the TCK programming and events and the TCK community on campus to be one of the most important aspects of their college experience. This was because it provided a great degree of comfort in knowing that there are other people who understood their unique challenges and who they could relate to and share a community.

The Third element was *Comfort*. This was meant in the literal sense of having a comfortable living environment, and also in a more abstract sense of having spaces on campus

that can be considered affinity spaces for TCKs. Having spaces on campus where they can find others like themselves to connect based on their shared experiences was vital to their sense of belonging. These affinity spaces may be dedicated to TCKs only or could relate to one or more of their cultures or identities that may not necessarily relate to their TCK identity. Participants who went to Oregon State University expressed appreciation to the seven cultural resource centers (CRCs) on campus as those are the spaces where they found individuals who shared other identities that they belonged to and started to form their community on campus that way. The purpose of affinity spaces is to provide a *home* for TCKs considering their unique experiences of struggling with knowing where their *home* is. For most TCKs, the phrase Third-Culture Kid itself provides a form of *home*, as they know there are others who relate to and identify with being a TCK. Having a phrase that somewhat defined who they are and what their experiences looked like is as close as many of them will ever get to feeling at *home* - to feeling like they belong to *something*, even if that *thing* is a phrase. A transient, abstract community is what the term TCK provides, and that transient, abstract community is what TCKs have in common. Consequently, affinity spaces on campus can further support developing that *home* for TCKs which ultimately improves their sense of belonging on the college campus.

All in all, community, authenticity, and comfort are all important elements for college students to have on campus. However, for a TCK, the existence of these elements is crucial and can be a deciding factor for whether or not they continue with the campus they initially chose. These elements are all ones that they seek out at different stages of their lives considering the unique struggles that they may have endured. Therefore, these factors can be a significant and an integral component for how they experience their university or college campus.

Implications

Different TCK students' experiences and the emerging shift for a more fluid interpretation of the TCK experience give rise to several implications for higher education and student affairs. These implications will help in fostering diversity and inclusion within the student body and institution as a whole. Having inclusive and diverse practices within colleges and universities will reap tremendous benefits for the student, staff, faculty, and institution. This section will tackle the implications of learning about the TCK experience on faculty members, student affairs staff, student peers as well as departments on campus and the role that each of them has when it comes to TCK college students.

Like all college students, TCKs spend the majority of their time on campus interacting with teaching faculty members in classes, labs, or lectures. This places a large onus on faculty members as they are very likely to have the greatest level of interaction with TCK college students in their classes and should be expected to demonstrate a level of cultural awareness and understanding of the array of backgrounds, cultures, and experiences they may be interacting with on a regular basis. Therefore, faculty members can and should have a role with welcoming TCK college students into their classrooms. From the perspective of academic affairs, study participants voiced that they felt a disconnect between the communities they have started within the student affairs realm in comparison to the academic affairs realm. Hamza has mentioned that he feels he lacks the mentor figure that can provide their guidance and expertise particularly as it pertains to his major and career interests. Having faculty members or mentors who are also TCKs may be the ideal situation for TCK college students, however, faculty members who are aware of who TCKs are and are knowledgeable about the nuance that this identity brings forth into the classroom, will be sufficient to show support to the TCK student community. This will

allow TCK college students to feel comfort in reaching out to those faculty members and develop a mentor-mentee relationship with them on a professional level.

While faculty members are academic educators, student affairs staff are holistic educators and they take on the responsibility of educating the student from many perspectives that are different from the academic realm. Student affairs professionals and staff constitute the second tier of individuals on campus who have the highest interaction with college students. Depending on their roles on campus, it is absolutely crucial for staff members to demonstrate and apply the knowledge and awareness that they acquire about the different backgrounds their students may be coming to campus with. Therefore, learning about TCKs and their experiences is important for HESA moving forward. Many student affairs staff are considered mentors for college students when they find comfort in interacting with them on a regular basis. Staff members provide a level of support to students that is unique and separate from faculty members on campus. They also have the responsibility to inform and educate themselves on the different life experiences their students may be showing up to campus with and to take on the role of learning more to be of best support and become available for their students when they need them.

It is of equal importance to highlight the role of student peers just as much as the role of faculty and staff members on college campuses. Student peers need to be exposed to different perspectives and ways of being to effectively learn how to navigate a world with individuals of different mindsets and beliefs than their own. Universities have the unique role of not only providing a sound academic education to their students but equipping them with life skills to be utilized in their lives later on. Students have to be exposed to the concept of TCK to acknowledge this identity as emerging and prominent. Students also need to understand the nuances that exist within this identity for them to realize that they may be interacting with many

TCKs on a regular basis without even knowing it. This exposure would allow them to ask questions around TCKs to learn more and become more culturally aware. They need to be exposed to learning opportunities about TCKs to initiate a curiosity towards this population and what it has to offer on the college campus. Not only would these efforts widen their perspectives and understanding of how different people can view their world and interact differently, it would also provide them with a different perspective and empathy in understanding the different viewpoints and life experiences that TCKs bring forth as college students. This increases the intercultural sensitivity and awareness of the larger student population which further addresses building a stronger student community on the college campus as a whole.

Lastly, other departments on campus hold roles that affect TCK college students. These departments include, cultural resource centers, counseling services, student engagement and student life as well as housing services. Each of these departments on campus will benefit from having knowledge about TCK college students and the potential of providing specific services to that population as well. For example, counselling and psychological services on campus will benefit from having counselors or staff members who are either TCKs themselves or have a comprehensive understanding about TCKs and their experiences when interacting with TCK college students. This would allow TCK student to feel welcome, seen and heard on occasions they feel a lack of sense of belonging on the college campus. Affinity spaces on the other hand, such as cultural resource centers, serve as spaces where students feel more comfortable. The professional and student staff of cultural resource centers and affinity spaces on campus will benefit from learning about TCKs and their particular needs, not only from an educational perspective but because these spaces have the ability to potentially serve as a *home* for the TCK students they could host.

All in all, it is apparent that learning about TCK college students has implications on multiple levels of the institution, including but not limited to, faculty, student affairs staff, student peers, and other departments on campus. Changes made by the university at higher levels that are implemented throughout disseminate on all tiers of the institution. Therefore, change has to occur from the ground up and must be implemented in all levels of the institution. The following section will dissect the specific recommendations that should be implemented as a response to the implications on faculty, student affairs staff, student peers as well as specific departments on campus.

Recommendations

Shifting the narrative from the TCK college student onto ourselves as student affairs professionals, there is work that needs to be done moving forward. This research study provided data from current, TCK college students providing valuable insight relating to their own experiences and context onto what students needed the most during their college careers. We ought to ask ourselves how we should use this data and feedback to implement into existing processes and roles in higher education institutions. What elements are the most important to consider and should be prioritized in programming efforts for TCKs? How can we ensure that TCKs feel affirmed in their identities as TCK college students? The following recommendations arise as a result of conversations with study participants and analysis of the results of this study.

Identifying Process for TCKs on Campus

Developing identifying processes or structures for current TCKs on campus would be the first recommendations that arises from this study. TCKs can be an invisible minority on the college campus because of their high adaptability and assimilation skills (McDonald, 2010). It is common for TCKs to blend and fit in very well with the larger student body, whether domestic

or international, which makes it difficult to identify them and address their needs. A robust process must be in place for the college or university to identify and keep track of their TCK population.

The data collected through those applications are needed by the university for data collection and tracking purposes, and often times applications do not allow room for students to provide a more accurate description of how they would demographically identify themselves. The general idea of “boxes” (Johnston et al., 2014) and expecting students to be one thing or the other goes against the knowledge we have now about the plethora of races, ethnicities, experiences and fluidity of identities students come to campus with. This applies to TCK students as well. It is uncommon for colleges or universities to collect and keep track of information regarding their TCK students, therefore, providing an optional question right below the Ethnicity and Race sections on applications, asking if they identify as a TCK would be very beneficial. This question will remain optional and can be answered with a Yes/No drop-down menu with a space for students to elaborate if they wished. Consequently, this would avoid expecting students to place themselves in boxes and provides them with an option should they choose to provide that information and elaborate about it or not.

In collaboration with the admissions department in colleges and universities, the most appropriate approach according to FERPA and other privacy guidelines will be implemented to add this question. The question may be;

“Do you identify as a Third Culture Kid (TCK)?”

Lewis & Clark College has the following question on their admissions application;

“Have you ever lived in another country for more than one year due to a parent’s work?”

This small change can shed light on the number of prospective TCKs that are incoming to the college campus. For current TCKs, they may be provided with a survey on an opt-in basis where they can choose to identify as a TCK. In this time-constricted study, I was able to easily identify 9 students in total between OSU and L&C. I reached out to participants via a flyer that was distributed through a few email listservs and word of mouth. This indicates that if OSU implements this small change in its admissions process, a more robust database will be created to easily keep track of TCK college students and can provide valuable data relating to the majors they choose, retention rates, and the trends associated with the TCK college students. L&C has a similar process for identifying TCKs in the admissions application process. Participants who attended L&C talked about how that was a favorable component and selling point for L&C that helped them make the decision to attend L&C. Having an identifying process such as this allows the university to deliver the message that they are aware of the different kinds of students they may host, including TCKs and their unique experiences and challenges.

TCK Hiring, Training, & Professional Development for Staff

Participants also identified the lack of mentorship and guidance on the college campus, particularly in relation to their TCK identity. They felt a lack of awareness about the TCK identity from faculty and staff members. For that reason, it proves crucial to provide TCK representation within staff and faculty members. Representation can include hiring TCK individuals in different roles throughout the college campus to provide that mentorship for students in different departments across campus.

For example, current hiring applications and job descriptions for International Advisor positions do not have language pertaining to TCKs. Common qualifications include phrases like “culturally aware” or “experience with foreign students”, with little to no emphasis on TCK

awareness or experience (*Job Descriptions of An International Student Advisor*, n.d.). Being a TCK individual will not be a requirement on different job descriptions and hiring applications, however, including language that acknowledges the importance of having an awareness of the TCK student population with all the nuances it entails is necessary. Hiring TCK individuals across the college or university staff body will allow for a more holistic representation of the student body, and thus provides greater opportunity for mentorship and guidance for TCK students. Characteristics that TCKs bring forth such as adaptability, having an expanded worldview, intercultural sensitivity, open mindedness, and tolerance to adversity are all necessary and applicable to the increasingly globalized and shrinking world that students are being admitted from. Staff members that represent those characteristics will induce a positive domino effect on other departments, colleagues and consequently students attending the university. Ultimately, there will not be a better representation for TCK students on campus other than TCK staff and faculty members. TCK students will benefit from the most guidance and mentorship with individuals that share a large component of their identity such as their TCK identity. Which makes it necessary to hire individuals that have TCK traits, TCK awareness and preferably, a TCK identity.

On occasion where TCK individuals are not readily hired by a college or university, providing training and professional or educational opportunities for staff members will be the next best alternative. Student affairs professionals will be better equipped with understanding TCK students' needs and supporting them by being exposed to educational opportunities to learn about the TCK identity and the TCK students they may be advising and interacting with on a regular basis.

Departments within the university such as Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Office of International Services (OIS), Student Life, Diversity & Cultural Engagement (DCE) at OSU would all benefit tremendously from including training about TCKs, so their staff are aware of this population. The educational efforts can include presentations, workshops, or seminars tackling the topic of Third Culture Kids as a professional development opportunity. This awareness will be reflected in providing support to any TCKs they may encounter in their work. Not only would this make TCKs feel more seen, heard, and affirmed in their identities (a prominent challenge declared by participants), but it would also help build the support and community that they seek out as college students. In turn, departments and student support services will embody and employ more inclusive practices across the board. In other words, these professional development and training efforts will also reflect positively on the institution as a whole as it would reflect the emphasis that is placed in creating an inclusive and well-rounded community via hiring, educating, and training their staff members on current best practices for interacting with an increasingly diverse student body.

TCK Events & Programming

In addition to identifying the number of TCKs on campus, it is of equal importance to provide programming efforts and events that are tailored to create a TCK community. As mentioned previously, developing a sense of community and belonging is one of the most pressing challenges for most TCKs, therefore, providing events and programming efforts allows TCKs to find other TCKs like themselves and connect with them on the basis of their identity. This increases their involvement levels on campus which loops back into increasing their sense of belonging and community towards their college or university.

These events can be as small as dedicating a certain time and day on campus for all students who identify as TCKs to meet and discuss their TCK identity if they wish or engage in recreational activities with other TCKs like themselves. The magnitude of the programming efforts does not need to be significantly large for them to have an impact on TCKs. These events can be in collaboration with other affinity spaces on campus as well. Including these programming efforts in different locations across campus increases the education and awareness of the TCK population which ties back into affirming TCK students in their identity, especially when they find that other students and staff know who a TCK is, without needing to explain their story all over again.

TCK Affinity Space on Campus

Lastly, providing a dedicated space on campus for TCKs would be the best and most impactful implementation that colleges and universities could have. This space would serve as the TCK Hub, where TCK college students could go to get their questions answered, meet other TCKs like themselves or individuals who have a transcultural experience or background, or self-reflect on their own experiences. Educational support and involvement opportunities would also be provided in this space such as holding groups or clubs that are of interest to students, to increase involvement and community in different avenues.

As with all visible or invisible minorities, the results of this research study indicate that TCK college students need to be affirmed in who they are as individuals to develop a sense of belonging to the college campus, this space would provide them the means to do so. Having an advisor or a professional staff working in the space can serve as the TCK Advocate on campus. This individual would be knowledgeable enough with this student population where they can provide guidance and mentorship for TCK college students. Regular conversations with this

advocate and the existence of a space such as this on campus would allow TCKs the opportunity to explore who they are as individuals holding the TCK identity. It would provide them a sense of security and comfort, knowing that there are mentors and professional staff on campus who know who a TCK is and can understand the challenges they may go through.

These services would allow TCK college students to be affirmed in who they are and their unique experiences, leading to an increased sense of belonging at their academic institution. This recommendation will definitely have a positive impact on the TCK population on campus. Not only would this retain existing TCK college students and impact their overall success and holistic wellbeing, but it would also serve as a selling point and advantage that Oregon State University would be equipped with to recruit prospective TCK college students. It delivers the message that OSU and the student affairs department is aware of who TCKs are and is working to accommodate their needs as college students.

TCKs Themselves

As with all adolescents, TCKs themselves will go through different phases of their lives where they start questioning themselves and their identities. It is common for TCKs to question how and why they view the world from the lenses they do and learning about how their past TCK experiences impact who they are and how they show up now. Most importantly, TCKs will also quickly realize how different they are from their peers. TCKs should take note of the advantages and privileges that being a multi-cultural individual and a TCK has on the world we live in today. It is important to take note of the acceptance and open-mindedness that TCKs bring forth so naturally while other individuals may be struggling with learning to adopt that kind of attitude at later stages in their lives. Additionally, I would recommend for TCKs to take ownership in how they define and identify themselves and their TCK experience. Some students

push back against the word “Kid” in “Third Culture Kid” and would prefer to call themselves a “Third Culture Person” or “Third Culture Individual”. College students are not kids anymore, and TCK college students should and do have the freedom to identify themselves in the way that makes them feel the most comfortable. While TCK is the most common identifier for this identity, it does not mean that a new shift in the phrase should not take place. Alternative phrases found in the literature for the same experience growing up include “Global Nomads”, “Transculturals” or “Transnationals” (Al-Issa, 2010; Jang, 2010; McDonald, 2010). However, TCK college students have the intelligence and absolute freedom to associate themselves and identify themselves in the ways that make them the most comfortable, and it is the role of professional staff to acknowledge and respect their choices to do so.

Limitations

In addition to being a graduate student researcher, I also identify as a TCK, Muslim, woman of color and have experienced conflicting thoughts and feelings as each participant described their TCK stories and challenges they experienced. This may have unintentionally impacted the conversations had with participants because some may have felt a greater sense of comfort when they found out I am a TCK and understood their experiences, while others may have not necessarily been as comfortable based on differing social identities. I knew some of my participants prior to the study. This may have caused them to answer the questions in the way they assumed I wanted them to, even if I remained as objective as possible without leading any of their answers throughout this study. However, my identity has also allowed me to explore questions and extend conversations based on our shared experiences. Furthermore, it allowed participants to bond with me over this shared identity creating a trust between myself as a researcher and them as the researched.

Furthermore, an aspect I wished I emphasized more as a student researcher is the intersectionality of social identities in relation to the TCK identity. Participants identified with different races, ethnicities, religions and cultural backgrounds and each had different worldviews as individuals related to their unique social identities. It would have served a great benefit to dive deeper into how their social identities affect or do not affect how they view and interact with their TCK identity and whether or not that had an impact on their sense of belonging on the college campus. Since some of my interviews were carried out remotely to accommodate students unable to commute, using a video conferencing software may have affected the interviewing process if students felt more or less comfortable during a remote interview. Lastly, the sample size and timeframe of this project was another limitation. Interviewing more participants during a longer period of time would allow for a more valid data set to be generated where more generalizations could be derived accurately.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study indicates that individuals with different international and intercultural experiences can all relate to the TCK definition; not necessarily for the geographical relocation aspect found in the traditional definition, but for the transient, abstract culture that individuals find themselves in as they struggle to identify their *home* and where they truly belong. Accepting the fluidity of this identity and the shift currently happening in student-constructed definitions of TCK is to be taken into consideration in future TCK research.

The main takeaways of this study include: Personalized TCK interpretation, TCK identity impact on college experience, and Sense of belonging for a TCK student. It is now apparent that the TCK term encompasses a wider variety of individuals and experiences and study participants provided a prime example of taking ownership of their experiences and defining themselves in their own terms. Additionally, the TCK identity was demonstrated to have a large impact on college students, including but not limited to: choice of campus, choice of major, mentorship and relationship building, and support and resources on campus. This all ties into the sense of belonging TCK college students find or do not find on campus and the impact it has on their college careers.

Three main elements were found to be prominent for TCKs and their sense of belonging: Community, Authenticity, and Comfort. Community is referred to having adequate support on campus from both faculty and staff in addition to developing social circles with student peers. Authenticity is referred to not needing to hide their true selves and identities and the opportunity to be seen and accepted for who they are. Comfort is related to the physical sense as well as a more abstract sense of finding spaces on campus where they feel like they are *home*.

As a result, the implications and recommendations that emerged from this study pertained to faculty members, student affairs staff, individual departments on campus, as well as student peers. The main recommendations derived from this study include: Identifying Process for TCKs on Campus, TCK Hiring, Training & Professional Development for Staff, TCK Events & Programming, TCK Affinity Space on Campus, and recommendations for TCKs themselves.

Implementing an identifying process on campus will allow institutions to keep track of their TCK student population to address their needs accordingly. Hiring TCK staff, in addition to providing TCK related training to existing staff members, will prove beneficial in providing the necessary and adequate support for TCK college students. Additionally, dedicating events, programming and affinity spaces on campus for TCKs will be the most ideal and ultimate solution to providing them with the opportunity to find and build their identity, community, and social circles. Consequently, these recommendations will be powerful in ensuring that TCK college students have the necessary opportunities to build a community and develop a sense of belonging towards their college campus. With an increased sense of belonging, TCK students are more likely to have an improved holistic wellbeing with a greater retention and success rate during their college careers.

Future research surrounding Third Culture Kids as college students and as adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) should continue to help us understand their identities and its implications on their lives. Noticing the shift in moving away from the traditional and rigid definition of TCKs to a more fluid identity that is self-described by TCKs is the leading way moving forward. It is absolutely necessary for future research to amplify and utilize TCK voices to describe themselves and who they are, for social scientists and researchers to understand the impact of their identities on an ever-changing, shrinking, and increasingly globalized world. This study has

demonstrated how TCK student voices can be used in that sense, and future research should continue to incorporate a larger number of voices to affirm the findings emerged.

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Appendix

Questions Asked During Interviews

The following is an example of some of the follow-up questions asked with the standardized questions for each participant;

- 1) Do you identify as a Third-Culture Kid (TCK)?
- 2) How did you know you were a TCK?
 - Can you tell me more about how it felt when you found out you were a TCK?
- 3) What childhood experiences do you most associate with being a TCK?
 - Are the TCK-related memories you recall positive or negative? Can you tell me more about that?
- 4) In your own words, how would you define sense of belonging on campus?
- 5) For you, what are the factors that influence your sense of belonging?
- 6) How engaged are you with on-campus activities?
 - Would you say that engagement levels on campus is related or not related to your sense of belonging as a college student? In what ways?
- 7) What kind of school did you go to growing up?
 - How big of an impact do you think it had / still has on your TCK identity?

Demographic Sheet:

- What is your age?
- What is your race/ethnicity?
- Are you an American citizen?
- Are you an International student?

- Are you bi-/multilingual?

Flyer Used For Recruitment

**Are you a Third-Culture-Kid
(TCK)?**

**Did you grow up in a country
different from your parents' or your
passport country?**

**Do you currently attend a
university in Oregon?**

If so, you are invited to participate in a Master's Thesis
research study titled:

**"Third-Culture Kids (TCKs) and their Sense of
Belonging on U.S College Campuses"**

**Principal Investigator: Dr. Larry Roper
Student Investigator: Weam Elsheikh**

If you meet the criteria outlined above and are interested
in participating, please contact
Weam Elsheikh (weam.elsheikh@oregonstate.edu)

