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Good Goodbyes and Happy Hellos: The TCK Transition to Postsecondary Education

Sarah R. Hoverson
Bethel University

Good Goodbyes and Happy Hellos

The TCK Transition to Postsecondary Education

By

Sarah R. Hoverson

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Approved by:

Advisor: Dr. Cheryl Bostrom

Reader: Dr. Mary Whitman

Reader: Dr. Jeanine Parolini

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to discover the lived experiences of Third Culture Kids transitioning to postsecondary education in the United States, and what role social media had in building or maintaining bridging and bonding social capital. All the participants in this study were Missionary Kids (MKs). MKs, a subgroup of Third Culture Kids (TCKs), spend a significant part of their developmental years outside their passport culture due to the nature of their parents work. The participants of this study grew up in different regions of the world, including: South America, Africa, Eastern and Western Europe, the Middle East, and SE Asia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted utilizing the videoconference application, Skype, with seven MKs who attended postsecondary education in the U.S. Through the data analysis process, four essential themes emerged: (1) Preparation is Key, which included the emotional and logistical preparation of leaving the host culture to attend university; (2) Relationship Central, which included the need for emotional and practical support from family, faith communities, and other TCKs and social media use to assist in maintaining ties with previously built offline social networks; (3) Transition is a Rollercoaster, which outlined the anticipation and excitement for university life, first year transition experiences, and isolation; and (4) I Am Complex Now, which included experiences of forming identity. The results of this study were used to develop recommendations for TCK stakeholders, including international schools, U.S. postsecondary institutions, parents of TCKs, sending organizations, and for TCKs themselves. A recommendation for further research included a mixed methods study with a larger population of TCKs of the same topic.

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This dissertation is dedicated in memory
of my friend and ministry partner,
Rebecca Long.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

2 Timothy 4:7

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Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.

1 Corinthians 16:13-14

Thank you, Father God, for your unending love, grace, wisdom, and mercy.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

As each new school year approaches, U.S. colleges and universities welcome new students of a variety of backgrounds. Each student arrives with unique perspective, a set of experiences that have defined who they are, and hopes and dreams for the future. For one particular group, this prior experience includes living overseas in one or more countries of a period of their formative years. While the students are U.S. citizens who hold U.S. passports, they may not fully grasp the mainstream culture of the U.S. These students, often referred to as Third Culture Kids (TCKs), have spent a portion of their formative years living in a country or countries outside of the U.S.

Pollock and Van Reken (1999) posited, "TCKs are raised in a neither/nor world. It is neither fully the world of their parents' culture (or cultures) nor fully the world of the other culture (or cultures) in which they were raised" (p. 6). As students return to the U.S. to attend postsecondary education, they are often not fully prepared for what they will encounter. Having had unique experiences with a broader worldview, they come back to the U.S. and are often required to adjust to a new normal.

Patterned after a study conducted by Purnell and Hoban (2014) of 12 TCKs transitioning through university life in Australia, this study sought to explore the college transition of U.S. TCKs who have returned from a country outside the United States to attend postsecondary education and what role, if any, social media has in building social capital to foster a sense of belonging. The first chapter includes a background and statement of the problem, purpose, relevance, and significance of the study, the research questions, key terminology, and assumptions and limitations, and nature of the study.

Background of the Study

TCKs are the children and adolescents of parents who move their families overseas for employment assignments or opportunities. They encompass five primary subgroups based on the occupation or sponsoring organization of their parents. These subgroups include: business, government (diplomat), military, missionary and other, which includes university personnel, the World Health Organization (WHO), and self-employed Americans (Cottrell, 2002; Gerner, Perry, Moselle, & Archbold, 1992; Hervey, 2009; Useem & Downie, 1976). It is estimated there are 8 million Americans (not including military personnel), who live abroad in more than 160 countries (http://www.aaro.org/about-aaro/6m-americans-abroad). The move to other countries can be for many different reasons, however, many move for a work or career opportunities.

A phenomenological qualitative study was utilized in order to give voice to TCKs who recently transitioned to the U.S. for postsecondary education and what role, if any, social media had in the transition process to foster a sense of belonging. To provide a framework of the current issue, reviewing past research was essential. These categories include the TCK transition to postsecondary education and the role of social media in social capital.

The Third Culture Kid. Dr. John and Dr. Ruth Useem first introduced the term Third Culture Kid (TCK) in the 1950's while observing the unique characteristics of westerners in India. Useem and Useem began using Third Culture Kid as a generic term to "cover the styles of life created, shared, and learned by persons who are in the process of relating their societies, or sections thereof, to each other" (Useem, 1993, p. 1). TCK became a term to refer the kids who accompanied their parents to the new culture. Though TCKs have lived in foreign countries during their formative years, they may not have fully integrated with the host society. Alternatively, since they lived in a foreign culture, they may not have experienced life in their

home or passport country. As a result, Useem and Downie (1976), promoted TCKs are likely to be most comfortable in a place in-between referred to as a "third culture" (p. 103), which is a blending of the host and home cultures.

In 1999, Pollock and Van Reken coined the commonly accepted definition of TCK in the book, Th*ird Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds* (1999*).* A TCK is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years in a culture(s) outside the parents' culture. They develop relationships to all of the cultures, "while not having full ownership in any" (p. 19). These elements form the TCK's life experiences, and ultimately lead to a sense of belonging with those of a similar background.   Widely cited in research studies and TCK literature, Pollock and Van Reken's term summarizes the complexity of the third culture in which these adolescents inhabit. TCKs are also referred to as global nomads (McCaig, 1996; Schaetti, 1998), internationally mobile adolescents/children (Gerner et al., 1992), and sacredly mobile adolescents (Keuss & Willett, 2009). For the purpose of this study, TCK will be used, as it is the most widely accepted term.

Third Culture Kids spend a considerable portion of their childhood living outside the country of the origin of their parents. This may occur when they travel with their parents for extended periods of time or when they are born in a foreign country and remain there during their developmental years (birth to 18 years). Because of the experiences TCKs encounter, they tend to appreciate diversity and have an expanded viewpoint of the world due to exposure of different cultures (Selmer & Lauring, 2014).

TCKs share common experiences of high mobility (Cockburn, 2002; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009), which often provides a broader worldview (Useem & Cottrell, 1993). Many define their sense of home not by a location, but by the relationships

they have developed (Gilbert, 2008). They also share characteristics of rootlessness, lack a sense of belonging (Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004), and encounter loss and grief (Davis, Suarez, Crawford, & Rehfuss, 2013; Gilbert, 2008; Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999; Storti, 2001).

TCKs often come from highly educated families. Useem and Cottrell (1993) attributed the high level of education achievement to cultural resources including parents with high levels of education and high educational expectations, access to excellent international schools, and the variety of experiences while living and traveling abroad. As a result, they achieve higher academic achievement scores than the overall U.S. population (Sharp, 1985; Wrobbel & Plueddemann, 1990) and are encouraged to attend higher education (Cottrell & Useem, 1993; Useem & Downie, 1976).

TCK transition to postsecondary education. The TCK transition to postsecondary education is often the first major transition they experience in their passport country. It is also frequently the first major transition without parents. This time can prove to be a greater challenge as they are faced with reacculturation issues and obstacles as well as finding a balance between American culture and the other cultures they have been exposed to or immersed in. This process of reentry, also referred to as reverse cultural shock, describes the process of individuals readapting to their home or passport culture after an extended stay in a host culture (Adler, 1981; Gaw, 2000; Martin, 1986) and is assumed to start when the sojourner has physically returned to the home country and concludes when the sojourner is readjusted (Adler, 1981; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963).

Social media and Internet technology. As people process through cross-cultural adaptation, they employ a variety of coping mechanisms to deal with the psychological stress

and other difficulties. Key coping resources are social support (Adelman, 1988) and social networks to create a positive impact on cross-cultural adjustment (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Recent studies show that the Internet has positive impacts on social adjustment and psychological well being for international students, who often face tremendous acculturation challenges (Kim, Yun, & Yoon, 2009; Ye, 2006). The Internet provides support to existing offline social networks by allowing connection across time and space (Ye, 2006). The Internet also allows for new and unique connections that provide alternative ways to connect with others (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Gomes, Berry, Alzougool, and Chang (2014) offered that students' social networks are not necessarily connected to the home nation, but to their individual identities such as culture, language, religion, and interests.

Statement of the Problem

With the ease of international travel, there are greater opportunities for work overseas. This access provides opportunities for children to accompany their parents to a wide variety of cultures. While the experiences students have overseas are rich and beneficial, being away in a host country can prove to be difficult when transitioning back to the United States for postsecondary education (Bikos, Kocheleva, King, Chang, McKenzie, Roenicke, Campbell, and Eckard 2009; Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001; Klemens & Bikos, 2009; Purnell & Hoban, 2014).

The TCK transition to postsecondary education differs from the experience of students who have lived in the U.S. their entire lives. Often, the college experience is the first time TCKs re-enter and are immersed in their passport culture long-term. TCKs are coming "home", though it may be a home they have never known (Sussman, 2000). Many TCKs who enroll in college in the U.S. have not seen the setting before they arrive. The decision about which college to attend

often happens through consulting family and friends who have attended the same campus (Cottrell & Useem, 1993). While overseas, TCKs interact with those who are experiencing similar situations, but when they return to their passport country, may feel separated from others who understand them and instead interact with others who may not understand their cultural experiences. Downie (1976) noted that students who lack cultural understanding and/or experiences often described TCKs as different or strange.

The current body of research regarding TCKs transition to postsecondary education does not include the impact social media and Internet technologies may have on the transition process. There is, however, a growing body of studies concerning international students studying in the U.S. and the impact social media has as they go through the transition process. Online groups, such as Facebook, are an important part of international students social networks as it allows them nearly instant communication with those in their home countries.

Intensive use of social networking sites is significantly associated with bridging and bonding social capital. Social networking site usage helps college students achieve higher levels of satisfaction with life in college, high self-esteem, and greater engagement with their college community. In their empirical study of Facebook use by American university students, Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) found that intensive social networking site use helped students maintain connections with existing close friends and family and also allowed them to keep in touch with high school friends and build a large network of new acquaintances. This current study will focus on the potential connection between the transition process, what role social has in building social capital, and if they merge to promote a greater sense of belonging.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe the lived experiences of Third Cultures Kids as they transition into and through postsecondary education in the United States and what role social media plays in building bridging and bonding social capital to foster a sense of belonging. The purpose for using a qualitative method is to capture the essence of TCKs experiences, which will potentially assist future TCKs in transition and the stakeholders who work with them. Despite the data that has been collected about TCKs, including transition to postsecondary education, little is known how social media factors in the process to foster a sense of belonging. Participants were selected through a qualifying background questionnaire and data collection occurred by conducting personal interviews with American students who are attending or who have recently attended postsecondary education in the U.S.

Rationale

Past studies concerning TCKs have focused on reentry and the stress associated with reentry (Adler, 1981; Berry, 2008; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Kano Podolsky, 2004; Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960; Sussman, 2000), sense of belonging (Bikos et al., 2009; Cockburn, 2002; Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; McLachlan, 2005), the grief and loss associated with reentry (Barringer, 2000; Davis et al., 2013; Gilbert, 2008; Schaetti, 1998; Schaetti & Ramsey, 2006; Storti, 2001), and the success or failure of programs to assist with transition (Davis et al., 2013; Bikos et al., 2009). Other studies have been conducted concerning the TCK transition (Dixon & Hayden, 2008; Stelling, 1991) transition issues (Bikos, et al., 2014; Fail, Thompson & Walker, 2004) and the TCK transition to postsecondary education (Eakin, 1998; Fail, Thompson, Walker, 2004; Gaw, 2000; Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001; Klemens & Bikos, 2009). Studies have

also been conducted on the role of social media in building of bridging and bonding social capital on college campuses (Cemalcilar, Falbo, & Stapleton, 2005; Ellison, Steinfield, Lampe, 2007; Kim, Yun, & Yoon, 2009; Lin, Peng, Kim, Kim, & LaRose, 2012; Phua & Jin, 2011; Ye, 2006). Rarely, though, have the topics been merged though it has been offered as a recommendation from past researchers (Choi, Bernard, & Luke, 2013; Choi & Luke, 2011). As social media has become a more prevalent form of communication, collecting data on the topic of how social media is used to maintain ties, as well as build new ones, adds to the current body of TCK research.

Research Questions

Interviews were conducted with TCKs currently enrolled or who recently attended postsecondary education to identify common themes in response to the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Third Culture Kids transitioning through postsecondary education in the United States?

    a. What expectations and challenges did Third Culture Kids experience during their reentry into the U.S. and throughout their transition during postsecondary education?

2. How does the use of social media foster a sense of belonging through the transition process of postsecondary education?

    a. How did social media impact the transition process?

    b. What role did social media play in building bridging and bonding social capital during the postsecondary education experience?

Significance of the Study

The transition to college can be a challenge for any student, but for TCKs, there are commonly unforeseen additional challenges. Ample research is available to define the TCK, their characteristics, their feelings of loss and grief, the reentry process, and transition to postsecondary education. Additionally, there are studies that have been conducted concerning Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) and their past experiences (Stelling, 1991; Useem & Cottrell, 1993). There have been a number of studies conducted concerning the TCK and postsecondary education (Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001), yet little research exists concerning how technology communications/social networking sites, such as Facebook, impact the transition process. Past studies have built a foundation for understanding TCKs and the transition process. Studying the impact social media may have through the transition process provides additional rich data to the currently body of research.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined for the purpose of this study.

Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs): Third Culture Kids who are aged 18 or older.

American Culture/U.S. Culture: A term used by TCKs to reference the United States of America.

Biz Kids: A subset of Third Culture Kids, whose parents are working in the business sector.

Diplomat Kids: A subset of Third Culture Kids, whose parents are working as a diplomat (an official representing a country abroad).

Expatriate: A person who leaves his or her home country to live in another country.

Global Nomads: This term, created by McCaig (1996), is used in reference to Third Culture Kids and also appears in the literature.

Home Culture/Home Country/Passport Culture: The country or countries in which the family holds their passports.

Host Culture/Host Country: The foreign culture or country in which the family resides.

Internationally Mobile Adolescent: This term, coined by Gerner, et al. (1992), is used synonymously with Third Culture Kids. Though not as common as Third Culture Kid or Global Nomad, it occasionally appears in the literature.

Internet: an electronic communications network that connects computer networks and devices worldwide.

Military Brats: A subset of Third Culture Kids, who grow up outside the U.S. because of their parents' work with the military.

Missionary: a member of a religious group who is sent into an area to perform ministries of service such as education, social justice, health care, or economic development.

Missionary Kid (MK): A subset of Third Culture Kids, who grow up outside the U.S. because of their parents' work as missionaries.

Reacculturation/Reentry/Repatriation: The process of TCKs returning to their passport country.

Sending Organization: An organization that coordinates international volunteer or missions roles and projects.

Social Media: Forms of electronic communication where users create content to share online.

Third Culture Kids (TCK): "A Third Culture Kid is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside of the parents' culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any" (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999, p. 13). TCK is the most common term used in the literature.

Assumptions and Limitations

There are several assumptions and limitations identified for this study. It is assumed there is a need and desire among TCKs, and stakeholders who work with TCKs, to better understand the postsecondary transition process. Stakeholders include, but are not limited to, sending organizations who provide oversight to families while overseas, educators, and postsecondary education institutions, particularly individuals who strategically recruit or often accept TCKs. While the current body of research and literature provides context for the reentry process and the transition to postsecondary education, there is little research to identify how social media helps or hinders social capital on campus or how all these factors come together. Secondly, while this study is limited to a small sample of the TCK population, it is assumed the text provided by the research participates will benefit the TCK population and their stakeholders. Thirdly, it is assumed the participants in this study will respond in an authentic and truthful manner.

Limitations include a small sample size, a reliance on participants to be truthful, and the role of the researcher as part of the research. Because the requirements for this study are specific and the study is qualitative in nature, a small sample is represented. The responses provided by those in the study provided insight to the TCK transition, but are limited to the participants in the study. Participants volunteered to be a part of the study, so the assumption is that they were honest with responses, however, a limitation is not knowing their level of truthfulness. Additionally, as Skype was used to conduct the interviews, participants ultimately made the choice of their interview location. Their location may have had a role in their level of truthfulness depending on how private or public their location was. Lastly, in a phenomenological study, the researcher is a primary research tool. A limitation exists within

potential bias and previous experience of the researcher. Potential biases and experiences will be challenged and bracketed before and after conducting each interview. Lastly, social media use may be limited by geographical location; therefore, some TCKs may not have had access in their host countries or may not be able to communicate via social media with friends and family remaining in the host country.

Nature of the Study

To answer the proposed research questions, a qualitative phenomenological research method was utilized. The phenomenological method was chosen because there is a gap in the literature concerning TCKs, transition to postsecondary education and the use of social media. The current study is a partial replication of a previous study conducted by Purnell and Hoban (2014) at Deakin University in Australia. The primary researcher granted permission to use the interview protocol for this study. Pollock's transition model (1990) and Putman's (2000) definition of social capital were used to identify themes as they pertain to the TCK transition to postsecondary education and what role social media plays into the process.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I introduced the study of Third Culture Kids transitioning to postsecondary education in the U.S. and what role social media played in the building of bridging and bonding social capital. The chapter introduced the background of TCKs and college transition, the purpose and significance of the study, and definitions of terms commonly used throughout the study. Chapter II presents an overview of the literature on Third Culture Kids, specifically focusing on who they are, common psychological attributes, the transition process, and the role of social media in building social capital among international students.

Chapter III included the research strategy, methods, and justification for use of the phenomenological qualitative approach. The sampling method and instrument development is described. This chapter also identifies the data analysis process and the methods of ensuring trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study.

Chapter IV presented the study findings in context of the theoretical framework. An exploration of participant demographic, the interview process, review of data analysis, and results were included. The emerging qualitative themes and subthemes were presented, with a summary concluding the chapter.

The final chapter, Chapter V, provides a discussion of the results, implications, and further recommendations, as well as draws final conclusions.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

As stated in Chapter I, the purpose of this research study is to describe the lived

experiences of Third Culture Kids transitioning to postsecondary education in the U.S. and what

role, if any, social media plays in the process. The literature review begins with the definition of

Third Culture Kids (TCKs) including an overview of their unique characteristics. Research

studies concerning TCKs and their transition from living abroad to returning to the United States

for postsecondary education have been highlighted to provide context for the present study. The

studies include the topics of loss and grief, reentry and reacceleration, and transition to

university. Lastly, an overview of the use of social media by international students is provided.

Third Culture Kids

Although there were Americans who lived overseas before World War II, increased

numbers of children from the United States began relocating with their parents to other parts of

the world after the war. The families arrived in other countries to serve as missionaries, military

personnel, financial, and international corporations (Gerner, et al., 1992; Useem & Downie,

1976). Useem and Useem first introduced the term Third Culture Kid (TCK) in the 1950's while

observing the unique characteristics of westerners in India (Useem, 1993). They began using

Third Culture Kid as a general term to "cover the styles of life created, shared, and learned by

persons who are in the process of relating their societies, or sections thereof, to each other"

(Useem, 1993, p. 1). The term was created to refer to the kids who accompanied their parents to

the new culture.

Third Culture Kids are identified as having spent a considerable amount of their

adolescence outside their passport culture (Cockburn, 2002). Though TCKs have lived in

foreign countries during their formative years, they may not have integrated with the host

society. Likewise, since they lived in a foreign culture, they may not have experienced life in

their home or passport country. As a result, Useem and Downie (1976) promote TCKs are likely

to be most comfortable in a place in-between referred to as a "third culture" (p. 103), which is a

blending of the host and home cultures.

In 1999, David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken coined the commonly accepted definition of

TCK in the book, *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds*:

> A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her
>
> developmental years outside the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of
>
> the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each
>
> culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in
>
> relationship to others of similar background. (1999, p. 19)

Pollock and Van Reken (1999) proposed that when a young person spends their

formative years overseas, rather than finding themselves lost between their passport country and

host country, they form a set of traits that stem from a combination of both cultures, into a "third

culture". TCKs may find that they are more contented in this space which occurs between the

passport country and abroad (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008). Similarly, Finn Jordan (2002) proposed

the third culture "is not a blended or hyphenated culture. It is a relating culture, a culture, of

linkages and networks" (p. 226).

Other labels for TCKs include global nomads (McCaig, 1996; Schaetti, 1998),

internationally mobile adolescents/children (Gerner, et al., 1992), and sacredly mobile

adolescents (Keuss & Willett, 2009). A global nomad is defined as "a person of any age or

nationality who has lived a significant part of his or her developmental years in one or more

countries outside his or her passport country because of a parent's occupation" (Schaetti, 1998,

p. 13). Gerner et al. (1992) posited the terms internationally mobile adolescents, internationally mobile children/adolescents, and international school students to provide more descriptive wording and to avoid confusion of a third culture kid reference to a third world country. Keuss & Willett (2009) devised the term Sacredly Mobile for missionary kids who make multiple cultural transitions as they suggest "to understand these youth is to embrace the fluidity of locale as normative for identity in Christ" (p. 9). Throughout this study, the term Third Culture Kid (TCK) will be used, as it is the most commonly referred to term in the literature.

  Subgroups of Third Culture Kids. Third Culture Kids are the children and adolescents of parents who move their families overseas for employment assignments or opportunities. TCKs encompass five primary subgroups based on the occupation or sponsoring organization of their parents. These subgroups include: business, government (diplomat), military, missionary, and other, which includes university personnel, the World Health Organization (WHO) and self-employed Americans (Cottrell, 2002; Gerner et al., 1992; Hervey, 2009; Useem & Downie, 1976). The parents and their sponsoring organization(s) are central in determining the host culture in which the TCKs will live, the type of school they will attend, and the level of involvement with the people of the host culture and other third culture kids (Useem & Cottrell, 1993; Useem & Downie, 1976). Before World War II, missionary kids (MKs) were the largest population of TCKs (Cottrell, 2002). Near the end of World War II, children of military personnel (30%) made up the largest number of TCKs, as compared to government (23%), missionary (17%), business (16%), and other, which includes teachers and researchers (14%).

  Gerner and Perry (2000) proposed each subgroup is unique. Missionaries are likely to live within the host culture, while military personnel live in restricted settings such as U.S. military bases abroad. Children of business and official government agencies typically attend

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larger international schools that often provide significant resources. Their peer group tends to be other TCKs in an environment that accommodates children of expatriates.

Useem and Cottrell (1993) found that life in a diplomatic community was different from that of a military base and the children of business people lived different daily lives than those of missionaries. Military kids lived abroad for shorter periods of time and transitioned often. Looking back at their childhoods, Military Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) encountered fewer challenges transitioning to the U.S. as they typically lived on Americanized military bases. They were less critical of the U.S. and least interest in being involved internationally. ATCKs in the "other" category, such as children of education professionals and United Nations personnel, were mostly likely to have lived overseas for a shorter amount of time, but were the most interested in going abroad again and had strongest desire to maintain international ties.

There is very little research on business and diplomat TCKs. The most notable was that of Cottrell (2002) who studied adult third culture kids and their career choices. Cottrell noted the sponsoring organization was an influence in the third culture kid decision-making process. It is often assumed the experiences of children of overseas business and government officials fall into similar categories of other TCK subgroups (McCaig, 1996; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999; Schaetti & Ramsey, 2006; Useem, 1993).

Pollock and Van Reken (1999) suggested that while each subgroup includes some differences, they share similar experiences in the following: being physically separated far from family and friends in the home country, the expectation that, at some point, they will return their passport country, a privileged lifestyle compared to others in the host country, and shared values of their particular sending agencies or organizations. The differences of the subgroups generally include length of time and exposure to a host country and home country norms.

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Characteristics of Third Culture Kids. To better comprehend the TCK transition, it is beneficial to review some of their common characteristics. In a study of nearly 700 American Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) from ages 25-80 year old who lived overseas for at least one year during their formative years, Useem and Cottrell (1994) found that ATCKs maintain a global perspective, easily adapt and feel different, but not necessarily isolated. However, they also discovered feelings of rootlessness, feeling misunderstood from others in their home country, and an inability to make commitments. Nearly 90% felt out of place with their age group over the course of their lifetime. It was especially difficult for them during their late teens and twenties when choosing big life decisions (Useem and Cottrell, 1994). Two-thirds reported wanting to maintain an international lifestyle, though they would prefer to reside in the U.S. Three-fourths felt different from people who did not have experiences in a different culture. As one participant perceived, "I don't feel different, I AM different" (Useem & Cottrell, 1993, p. 2). As another stated,

> There I am a partial outsider and they know I live a different life in the United States. If I make a mistake, they just say that is because I am a crazy American. In the U.S. I don't appear to be different, so if I openly deviate from my friends in my attitudes, opinions, ambitions, or even leisure pursuits, they don't say that it is because I am a crazy TCK who grew up in India, they just say I'm nuts. (Cottrell & Useem, 1993, p. 1)

The prevailing characteristics of TCKs include: worldview, education, and parental attachment. The following sections provide more detail of these areas and how they impact the TCK transition.

Worldview. TCKs are exposed to different cultures and countries, which provide opportunities to build their worldview. When TCKs return to their passport countries, peers who

have not travelled may see this worldview as arrogant. This can cause issues in building relationships with peers, which lead to the feelings of a hidden immigrant as the TCK may look like others, but not act in the same way (Cockburn, 2002). Additionally, TCKs typically develop relationships with multiple cultures, which sometimes means they are closer to the host culture than their passport culture (Hervey, 2009).

Dewaele and van Oudenhoven (2009) promoted that studies often focus on the negative side of the TCK lifestyle, including issues of depression, acculturative stress, homesickness, loneliness, and a loss of identity. They asserted that being multilingual and multicultural must also have a positive side. In their study of 41 TCKs living in London, they found TCKs were more open-minded and had higher levels of cultural empathy than non-TCKs, however, they appeared to have lower emotional stability.

Stelling (1991) studied the acculturation process of children of Lutheran missionaries who had repatriated to the U.S. The participants scored themselves as less emotionally independent, less self-confident, less likely to use alcohol or drugs, and less able to make friends than their American peers. However, they viewed themselves as more concerned about social and environmental issues, more aware of international events, unique, more interested in foreign work, more idealistic, and more likely to encourage cultural awareness in their families (Stelling, 1991, p. 93).

Gerner et al. (1992) conduced a large-scale study of 1,076 adolescents, including 222 U.S. students from the Midwest who have always lived in the U.S., and 854 students from a large U.S. international schools in Thailand and Egypt. The predominant sample was adolescents of business people (33%), and official government agencies (24%), followed by children of those in technical (13%), military (6%), education (4%), and missionary (2%) fields. The authors sought

to have students rate their feelings toward nationalities, family relationship, peer relationship, cultural acceptance, travel orientation, language acceptance, future orientation, and stereotyping (pg. 203). They discovered U.S. adolescents who lived overseas felt more culturally aware and were more interested in traveling and living abroad than U.S. students who had lived only in the U.S. (p. 207). They theorized this might be due to the opportunity to not only travel within the country they are living, but to surrounding countries as well. These experiences provide young people opportunities to be immersed in many cultures.

Sharp (1985) submitted that Missionary Kids (MKs), a subgroup of the third culture, have been exposed to an extended world perspective, developed cross-cultural skills, acquired other languages and the ability to relate to other nationals as peers. He suggested that MKs would do well as "link people who can play a role as mediators on the world human relations scene" (p. 73). Their experiences promote resiliency and allow unique opportunities to build communication and problem-solving skills than that of their home country peers as they are often required to adapt to new environments (Bates, 2013). TCKs engage in life-experiences that are rich with a variety of unique opportunities, which helps them to communicate more effectively in culturally diverse groups (Al-Issa, 2004).

Education. TCKs often come from families who are well-educated. As a result, they tend to achieve higher academic scores than the general U.S. population (Sharp, 1985; Wrobbel & Plueddemann, 1990) and are encouraged to attend higher education (Useem & Cottrell, 1994; Useem & Downie, 1976). Ender (2002) conducted a study of adult military children. Of those surveyed, more than 95% had finished some postsecondary education and 29% had obtained an advanced degree. Useem and Cottrell (1993) found similar results after surveying nearly 700 ATCKs. In their study, nearly 90% had completed some postsecondary education, 81% had

earned a bachelor's degree, and over half who had earned a bachelor's degree also earned a graduate degree.

Useem and Cottrell (1993) asserted the ATCKs high level of education achievement were due to coming from families where parents had similar educational experiences and expectations. Additionally, the ATCKs had access to excellent international schools, and the variety of experiences while living and traveling abroad. In their study, 43% stated childhood experiences affected their college choices greatly and 27% said their childhood affected them somewhat. About a fourth chose a major with an international influence, while others looked for opportunities to go overseas through study abroad programs. Many had to choose a college sight unseen and so chose to attend where their parents or friends had attended. MK's were more likely to choose a church-related school where they were offered a free or reduced tuition rate.

Parental attachment. The high mobility of third-culture families, multiple moves, shared experiences of moving to a foreign country and providing each other support through the process bring families closer together. Parents are often the only people with whom TCKs have a continuing relationship as they move from one location to another. TCKs generally do not resent strict parental controls, because the community in which they live often comes under the same sponsoring organization and, therefore, many are expected to abide by the same rules (Useem & Downie, 1976). Contrary to Useem and Downie, in the study conducted by Gerner et al. (1992) found U.S. adolescents living abroad did not assert closer parent and family relationships than those in the U.S. The exception was missionary kids who identified themselves as being closer to their families in comparison to the other subgroups.

Peterson and Plamondon (2009) posited parents influence how well their children transition in life overseas. In their study conducted with 170 male and female TCKs between the

ages of 18-25 who had returned to the U.S., positive feelings for parents impacted their transition process. The authors determined close relationships with parents may help lessen the stress of living abroad. Additionally, those TCKs who enjoyed living in a foreign country may have more appreciation for their parents who provided them the opportunity.

As noted in these research studies, TCKs inhabit a unique space, are likely to have a broad worldview, come from highly educated backgrounds, and maintain close ties with their parents. As they prepare to make a transition, particularly to postsecondary education, these factors impact how they proceed through the transition.

Third Culture Kids and Transition

For many TCKs the transition experience involves grieving process that, if left unresolved, can lead to problems. Gilbert (2008) submitted TCKs encounter unique challenges, in part, because the expatriate experience focuses more on the adult transition than the needs of children. Pollock and Van Reken (1999) highlighted the need for healthy closure before each transition. They presented the acronym RAFT, which includes reconciliation, affirmation, farewells, and think destination (p. 200). Adler (1981) offered five stages of transition after the initial culture shock, which included: contact, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy, and independence.

Lastly, a five-stage model created by Pollock (1990) has been utilized to identify the transition process specific to TCKs. Stage one of the model is involvement, which is when a child feels a sense of belonging and commitment to where he or she is living. Stage two is leaving, which is characterized by feelings of anticipation, distancing from friends and denial. Stage three is transition or the actual physical move. This can be a crisis phase as everything (home, friends, school, scenery, etc.) may change in a short amount of time. This time can also

be viewed positively, as there is an opportunity to start over. The fourth stage involves being

uncertain of position in the new community and can harbor feelings of disappointment and

isolation. For those who successfully navigate the four stages, the final stage, reinvolvement,

again creates a sense of belonging and commitment.

Utilizing Pollock's transition model, Dixon and Hayden (2008) conducted a mixed

methods research study utilizing semi-structured interviews to interview a small group of parents

from 13 different countries whose children had recently begun attending an international school

in Bangkok. Additionally, the authors created a questionnaire to use with the 30 children of the

parents interviewed. The researchers found the children identified with the fives stages of

Pollock's model and determined the model aligns with the experiences of students attending

international schools.

Purnell and Hoban (2014) conducted a qualitative research study of the lived experiences

of university students in Australia. They also utilized Pollock's transition model to identify

where students were in the transition process and to identify how universities might assist in a

healthy transition process. Of the twelve students interviewed, eight had some preparation

before they left from either the school they were attending or from their family. Half of those

who received training beforehand felt inadequately prepared for university life upon arrival in

Australia. Of the total participants, half dreaded leaving their host culture to attend university

and experienced some level of emotional stress upon arrival. Many reported receiving practical

and emotional support from family and friends and found the most security in friendships with

other TCKs. The authors concluded that there is still a gap in the literature concerning how to

adequately prepare TCKs for the transition process.

Prior studies provide rich data concerning the TCK stages of transition and the potential challenges they encounter, including fostering a sense of belonging, mobility, identity development, grief and loss, the reacculturation process, and reentry stress issues.

Sense of belonging. One of the greatest life obstacles TCKs encounter involves establishing identity and a sense of belonging (Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999). Learning to live between and among cultures can be a complex and difficult challenge.

Maslow's theory of Hierarchy of Needs (1943) consists of a five-stage pyramid model. Included in the five stages are physiological (or basic) needs, safety and security, a sense of belonging, love and affection, esteem needs, and self-actualization. Maslow promoted that in order to reach self-actualization; the other needs must be met first. TCKs may not move through Maslow's hierarchy in the same way as those who grew up in the U.S.

TCKs encounter numerous challenges as part of identity development. Among them is identifying a home location (Bikos et al, 2009; Gerner et al., 1992). "Where are you from?" is often asked to gain a better understanding of someone's background or to better understand a person. For TCKs, the challenge to answer is often difficult or results in multiple answers. Many have transitioned numerous times, not only between home and host cultures, but also between multiple host cultures. TCKs may have to discern if the person asking wants the long or short story of where they are from. Those from the passport country may assume the TCK is bragging about the places he or she has been (Cockburn, 2002; Gerner & Perry, 2000).

Adolescents who grew up with the same set of customs and values throughout his or her whole life naturally process these customs without question. However, TCKs may not have the same opportunity to develop customs since the cultural rules fluctuate depending on where they

lived. They may need to focus on what the customs and values actually are, as opposed to how to challenge process, and internalize them, which can lead to a prolonged adolescence (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999). Identifying a sense of belonging may be of more importance to TCKs than some physical needs, as Maslow (1943) would suggest.

Fail, Thompson, and Walker (2004) conducted a study involving eleven participants who attended international schools between 20 and 50 years ago. Participants completed a questionnaire and participated in an interview focused on identity, sense of belonging and the formation of friendships. Through this qualitative study, they found several of the participants did not feel a sense of belonging in their communities. Additionally, they discovered TCKs either have a multiple sense of belonging or no sense of belonging at all (Fail, Thompson & Walker, 2004). Similarly, Fail (1995) found that a sense of belonging was more strongly linked to relationship than to a physical place. She concluded that for some TCKs, home is everywhere and nowhere.

Gilbert (2008), guided by the question, "What is the nature of loss and grief among Third Culture Kids?" (p. 97) interviewed 43 adults (31 women and 12 men) between the ages of 19 and 61 from various parts of the world. Gilbert posited losses could be primarily categorized as "persons, places, pets, and possessions" (p. 98). The results of the study suggested the most common loss relating to safety and trust was that of a sense of belonging. This was most often reported as occurring when high school or college age students returned to their passport country for school. Gilbert described the reactions of one of the study participants,

> One young woman described how her parents had told her that she was an American, the
> country of her citizenship. Yet, when she came to the U.S. for college, she felt out of
> place and felt she might better fit in Singapore, where she had spent much of her

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childhood. Returning to Singapore after college, she could no longer live in the

diplomatic compound, a setting that was culturally different from life out in the city. As

a result, she felt she had nowhere where she could be who she thought she was. (p. 105)

 Some TCKs settle on defining home as within, or wherever they were, where their

family is, within their faith community, or view themselves as global citizens (Gilbert, 2008).

Because TCKs are highly transitional, they may not stay in one place long enough to develop

emotional security (McLachlan, 2005). Their sense of belonging is usually in relationship to

others with similar experiences rather than a particular culture or country (Storti, 2001).

Keuss and Willett (2009) conducted a phenomenological study of 40 participants who

averaged 14 years overseas. Every participant noted a distinction between home and location.

For the participants, location was where they happened to be while home was more a sense of

purpose found in relationships (Keuss & Willett, 2009). They found that the high rate of

mobility took a toll on the identities of TCKs, who they term sacredly mobile. As a result, TCKs

can experience a delayed adolescence in which they deal with the issue of identity well after

what would be normally expected (Schaetti, 2002; Useem & Cottrell, 1993).

Likewise, Useem and Downie (1976) quote a TCK with Asian experience, who said,

I guess I could live anywhere and be comfortable. I have always liked to think I get

along with all different people. I don't feel bothered by a lack of roots, and I don't think

I have a lot of problems because of that. (p. 105)

For others, the experience of "constructive marginality" provided a positive and

enthusiastic response because they were able to utilize the ability to feel at home in different

places through utilizing "various cultural frames of reference" (Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004,

p. 333).

Mobility. There are two significant influences on the lives of TCKs: being raised in a cross-cultural environment, as they travel among their passport country and host country or countries and growing up in a highly mobile world. Moving is a common experience for TCKs (Cockburn, 2002; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009) as they encounter more life transitions than those who remain in the same country (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999; Schaetti & Ramsey, 2006). A highly mobile lifestyle may prepare them to be more independent at a younger age, but may hinder connections with others. As a result, TCKs tend to experience more social detachment than those who are not TCKs (Huff, 2001; Schaetti & Ramsey, 2006).

Having experienced repeated relocations and life in transient communities, it is common for TCKs to feel a desire to move every few years. Some do not establish themselves to any one place or in relationship with others. TCKs have made so many transitions that they feel at home everywhere and nowhere (Fail, 1995; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999; Schaetti & Ramsey, 2006).

High rates of mobility can be a disadvantage as it becomes more difficult to build intimate relationships. This may result in keeping an emotional distance from others as a protective barrier to lessen the pain from future separation. Experiencing high mobility during their developmental years denies TCKs a sense of home, roots, and a stable network of relationships that add to the process of self-definition (Downie, 1976). Similarly, Schaetti (2002) noted, "the primary source of continuity for the TCK is discontinuity" (p. 109). However, many find belonging in relationships rather than a location (Fail, 1996; Hervey, 2009).

Identity. Identity is typically defined by values, belief, behavior, and what influences our interactions with others (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). The identity formation of a TCK is not as straightforward or uncomplicated as those who grew up in a monoculture. In a study conducted by Fail, Thompson, and Walker (2004), the results indicated TCKs are able to cope

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and adapt to a new setting by putting aside their third culture experiences, but as a result, had unresolved feelings regarding home and roots.

When adults go to another culture, they may experience a period of adjustment, but because they lived in their passport country during their developmental years, have already established a sense of identity. Children who move to a new culture have yet to form their identity (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999). As a result, TCKs encounter a variety of cues, rules, and values from the various cultures they have experienced which makes identity formation more difficult (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). TCKs form a sense of personal and cultural identity in the same way as others, by "catching it" from their environment and cultural cues. However, they often move between cultures before they are able to complete the process (McCaig, 1996; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999). Upon returning to the passport country, TCKs may experience feelings of isolation and distancing from peers.

When in the host culture, some TCKs find comfort in identifying themselves as coming from their passport country, however, upon returning to the passport country, find comfort in recognizing themselves as belonging to the host culture (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999). TCKs may not associate themselves from their passport country and, rather, identify with the country in which they live. They may feel a sense of ownership of both, without total ownership of either. Some TCKs do not have the opportunity to visit their home country during their adolescence, yet maintain an unrealistic view of what that country is like (Gilbert, 2008).

Walters and Auton-Cuff (2009) utilized a qualitative research method to learn about the identity formation of women who grew up as TCKs. Eight women between the ages of 18 and 25, who had lived in one or more countries outside their passport culture for at least three years during the second half of adolescence, were interviewed. Four of the participants were MKs and

four were children of business people (BKs). Transition was central in the lives in the participants and through which identity was developed. The authors found transition affected identity development as the TCKs needed to focus on surviving and adjusting rather than developing a sense of self. Many who were interviewed made a transition to postsecondary education. One, Jeannette, described her experience:

> I was in a new culture, but it's not that new. I know the language and I've read the books and seen the movies . . . so I knew this culture but actually living here was a totally different thing, so about a month in I just kind of completely broke down. I have no idea what I'm doing here, I don't know how people think and I was just completely overwhelmed . . . (p. 763)

Another participant, in reference to feeling different stated, "I'm scared of people who lived in North America all their lives. I'm not scared, it's just I don't know how to identify with them" (pg. 764). Another, Violet, explained, ". . . our identity is an anti-identity, the only way we can define ourselves is how we are not" (p. 764). Walters & Auton-Cuff (2009) found mobility was a shared theme throughout each research participant's story and was the context in which identity was formed. The authors suggest that during the transition process, a disruption occurs in identity development occurs. Interestingly, they found that the developmental question changed from "Who am I?" to "How do I act and behave?" (p. 763).

International school students face psychological and emotional issues as a result of their multinational lifestyle. They are not always able to fully assimilate into their passport culture, therefore look for those who share similar experiences. The feelings of disconnect can lead to issues of identity in adulthood (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008). These issues often spring from the roots of grief and loss.

Grief and loss. In her 1969 book, *On Death and Dying*, psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced what has become known as the "five stages of grief." Though the stages of grief were based on her studies of the feelings of patients facing terminal illness, they have become generalized to understand other types of negative life changes and losses, such as the death of a loved one or a break-up. The five stages include: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

As TCK's make multiple transitions, they often experience grief and loss throughout their duration overseas and when they return to their passport culture (Davis, et al., 2013; Gilbert, 2008; Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999; Storti, 2001). The unending process of grieving may incur feelings of depression, anxiety, and stress (Davis et al., 2013; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999) rootlessness, alienation with an inability to make commitments (Barringer, 2000), prolong adolescence (Schaetti, 2002), or create a perpetual state of liminality (Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999).

TCK loss is a factor of the high mobility of their lifestyle. TCKs often say goodbye to friends, mentors and caregivers, who may have played a significant role in their lives. Saying goodbye to physical places is also common among TCKs. The smells, tastes, culture, unique-to-the-country opportunities, and physical aspects of where they live can be as meaningful to them as the people they've met or encountered (Gilbert, 2008; Huff, 2001).

The difficulty for TCKs is that they may relate to Kübler-Ross's grief stages, but not in the same sense as those grieving a death, which, in turn, is difficult for others to understand. TCKs encounter socially ambiguous losses that may not fit into the cultural norm of grieving. Because many losses TCKs face do not include death, their feelings of grief may not be taken seriously. Some may be told to move on, stop acting foolishly, or to let it go (Gilbert, 2008).

Alternatively, TCKs may feel a sense of responsibility toward their parents and may hide their feelings from adults or may not feel they have permission to grieve. As Pollock and Van Reken (1999) point out, TCKs encounter more significant losses before they reach adulthood than most people experience throughout a lifetime (p. 166). Sometimes goodbyes are extreme, particularly in the case of a natural disaster or military coup. For several participants in Gilbert's (2008) study, the absence of home was most noticeable when they returned to their home country, particularly when they returned to attend college or university.

Unresolved grief is an often-reported issue among adult TCKs (Barringer, 2000; Cockburn, 2002; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999; Schaetti, 2002). Upon reaching adulthood, some TCKs struggle with unresolved grief, feelings of isolation, rootlessness and loss, as a result of difficulties from their highly mobile lifestyles as adolescents (Kano Podolsky, 2004; Useem & Cottrell, 1993). Pollock & Van Reken (1999) observed TCKs are not always able to process their feelings of loss, which, in turn, may result in grief that can remains unresolved into adulthood. Because losses are often hidden by TCKs, others in their lives are not able to acknowledge the loss. The resolution of grief is possible, though. Often, the process comes through connecting with other TCKs who have shared experiences (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999; Storti, 2001).

TCKs often find themselves "culturally marginal" as they do not belong completely to one culture. They belong nowhere and everywhere. On the positive side, this allows TCKs to internalize more than one culture (Barringer, 2000; Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999; Storti, 2001). Fail, Thompson, and Walker (2004) suggested that settling in a new country can bring feelings of excitement and freedom.

Schaetti and Ramsey (1999) offered that while TCKs have different experiences, most TCK experiences have four common traits: change, relationships, worldview, and cultural identity. Change is one of the few constants in the lives of TCKs. An advantage, this provides great ability to be more flexible and adaptable. One of the difficulties, however, is the continuous goodbyes build a sense of rootlessness. TCKs develop communication skills get to know each other quickly. They also have a tendency to enforce certain distances to protect themselves. Through their cross-cultural experience, TCKs gain confidence in their understanding of the world, which may prove to be a challenge when conversing with those of less international understanding. Lastly, because of the TCKs cultural identity, when they return to their passport country, they may experience being "culturally marginal". They often find themselves to be "hidden immigrants" and experience themselves as "terminally unique" (Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999, p. 3).

The authors also posited that internationally mobile young people live in a state of liminality, which is defined as the intersection of cultural experiences and identities. Or, in other words, they are in the space between the ending of one set of connections and the start of the next. Schaetti and Ramsey (1999) suggested this space becomes the most common lived experience and that living in liminality "encourages complex, multiplistic perspectives" (pg. 5).

The following poem, written by a TCK finishing high school, portrays the emotions often experienced in the transition process:

Jetlag

The plane flew faster than my mind could comprehend

Leaving behind all that was "home"

Though the time raced after me trying to stay in sync

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It was repelled at the borders

The humming of the plane, as it held back the sky, thundered in my ears

I released my imaginative hold on the future as we entered a different world

The sun did not greet me as it did everyday, I greeted the sun instead crossing over into its

territory

I came as a stranger offset by the curvature of the earth

A fish out of water

Drowsiness overcame me, a side effect of my body refusing to let go

I had left behind my home, my friends, my life

Why could I not let go of time?

Headaches, stupor, nausea, jetlag

The traveler's sickness of sorrow

The body's attempt to maintain the circadian rhythm of a familiar life

Even though there are so many other aspects to miss

Why dwell in the time?

Jetlag is closure

The way of coping with a painful transition

A prolonged goodbye over a span of time

Holding on to the bare threads of the past

So that one does not have to say goodbye to everything all at once

The one memory of life you can physically bring along

The temporary souvenir

As you adjust and adapt to a new life

The jetlag disappears

As you let go, your body lets go

Time to be redefined

This is your awakening

Bidding goodbye to the sleepy past

Greeting a bright future, refreshed and ready to go

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The previous section discussed the current literature concerning the TCK perspective of a sense of belonging, mobility, identity, and grief and loss. The following sections provide foundational and empirical research concerning the reacculturation process, reacculturation and adolescence, reentry stress, and repatriation programs for adolescence.

Reentry/Reverse Culture Shock

Reverse culture shock, also referred to as reentry, re-acculturation, and repatriation, are terms that describe the process of individuals readapting to their home or passport culture after a lengthy stay in a host culture (Adler, 1981; Martin, 1986). It is assumed reentry begins upon returning to the home country and concludes when the individual is readjusted (Adler, 1981; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). Reverse culture shock is the "process of readjusting, re-acculturating, and re-assimilating into one's own home culture after living in a different culture for a significant period of time" (Gaw, 2000, pp. 83-84). Gaw submitted culture shock and reverse cultural shock are similarly defined, but the actual adjustment process is different. Reverse culture shock focuses more on the process of re-adapting to the home culture after an extended stay in a host culture. (p. 85).

The preparation to transition is important (Martin, 1986; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999; Sussman, 2000), as the transition process itself can be stressful. Preparation is essential to avoid additional stress during the reentry process. As Sussman (2000) suggested, those who encounter readjustment encounter a "dizzying array of experiences collectively labeled as culture shock, adjustment, cross-cultural adaptation, or acculturation" (p. 355). When the experiences of acculturation cause problems for those in the acculturation process, the phenomenon of acculturative stress occurs (Berry, 2008). Berry theorized that those who are short-term residents for a specific amount of time in another culture may encounter more problems when returning to the home country than those who are permanently settled. Storti (2001) reflected the transition can be a bittersweet time. There are feelings of excitement of going to the home culture to see family and friends, but also feelings of sadness at leaving the host country. Storti forewarned these feelings may induce mood swings.

In a previously stated study, Useem and Cottrell (1993) reported of the almost 700 adults surveyed, the majority incurred mild to severe difficulties with reverse culture shock and some never fully adjusted. They adapted, found niches, took risks and became involved in jobs, friends, and family, but often disguised their personalities in order to fit in to their surroundings. Werkman (1980) noted, when people return from living in a foreign culture, they leave a part of themselves behind in the host culture. They must adjust to living without friends they've met and customs they've created, while at the same time, learn to adapt to the home culture. This process often brings out feelings of grief, alienation, and anger (p. 239).

Empirical research. Lysgaard (1955), Oberg (1960), and Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) were the first to introduce culture shock and reverse culture shock as intercultural adjustment through the use of qualitative research methods.

Oberg (1960) defined culture shock as "precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (p. 177). When an individual enters a different culture, most or all familiar cues are removed. Oberg described four stages of cultural transition. In the first stage, feelings of euphoria and an excitement about the new environment are evident. He offered this stage might last from a few days or weeks to six months depending on the circumstances (p. 174). The second stage is characterized by a hostile or aggressive attitude towards the host country, which may prompt some to "take refuge" among others from the home country. Interestingly, he noted this may lead to a "cocktail circuit which often becomes the fountain-head of emotionally charged labels known as stereotypes" (p. 178). Once people start to adjust to the new cultural environment, they enter the third stage, which is recovery. During this stage, people may take on superior feelings towards the people of the host culture. Lastly, in the fourth stage, the adjustment is about as complete as it can be. The person engaged in the host culture will start to take on the norms of the host culture. For young people, it is through culture that they learn to adapt to their surroundings. Once learned, culture becomes the lens through which they navigate life (Oberg, 1960).

The U-Curve Model, proposed by Lysgaard (1955), included three stages or phases of the sojourn. The first stage is excitement about being in a new culture. The second involves feelings of culture shock caused primarily negative experiences that were unexpected, which prompted feelings of depression. The third is the process of acculturation and adaption into the new environment (Lysgaard, 1955). Lysgaard interviewed 200 Norwegian Fulbright scholars, with an average age of 30, to study their adjustment process of living the United States. He found that the U-curve described the initial culture shock adjustment over time.

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The most prominent work within the theory of reentry is that of Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) who submitted a reverse culture shock model referred to as the W-curve theory. Gullahorn and Gullahorn based the model on the previously created U-curve model developed by Lysgaard (1955). Gullahorn and Gullahorn conducted a study which included both interview and survey data of 5300 returning scholars to the United States. They determined the reverse culture of adjustment was similar to Lysgaard's (1955) U-curve model, in that it described the initial culture shock adjustment. However, expanding on Lysgaard's U-curve, by adding a second U-curve, Gullahorn and Gullahorn, formed a W-Curve, theoretically accounting for reverse culture shock when returning to the home country (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963).

Gullahorn and Gullahorn suggested expatriates experience excitement as they are introduced to a new culture. This is followed by a period of discouragement, which leads to the bottom of the u-shaped curve, referred to as culture shock. Following the culture-shock phase, positive adjustment usually begins and leads to the final stage of adjustment. The authors advocated that reentry adjustment also follows the W-shaped curve. The initial high period during reentry is very short.

Gullahorn and Gullahorn concluded the primary difference between reverse culture shock and culture shock was in the expectation of the persons making the transition. Often, those returning expected to return unchanged, however, often found themselves out of place with the home culture as a result of experiencing a new culture. Additionally, they found that those who had a greater sense of self suffered less. Those who were still in the process of developing identity before, during, and after their overseas experience found reentry more difficult. They also asserted that younger students had a more difficult transition period than older people after

returning to their passport country. Lastly, they found that changes in relationships with families added difficulty for adolescents returning to the U.S.

Adler (1981) and Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) noted that reentry difficulties are more severe shortly after being in the home culture rather than immediately upon returning. Some experience little to no impact, while others may face difficulties within a few months of arriving back to the host country that may continue for a year or longer. Adler found that returnees' feelings of reentry stress occurred more during the second and third months than immediately upon return.

Though the W-curve is often cited in the literature, Ward, Okura, Kennedy, and Koijima (1998) posited the W-curve has limited empirical research. They conducted a quantitative longitudinal study to examine the cross-cultural adjustment of Japanese students in New Zealand. Their findings represented a linear line of stress and, therefore, a coping model may be more appropriate in portraying the transition process. They asserted that participants experienced increased psychological distress upon initial entry into a foreign culture followed by a steady improvement over time. Sussman (2000) also challenged the curvilinear relationship of the W-curve model by stating that most of the 44 U.S. managers, who participated and repatriated to the U.S. and participated in her study, reported being comfortable in the U.S. twelve months after the initial transition with 15% remaining uncomfortable past a year.

Brislin (1981) cautioned the use of the W-curve model as it was introduced in the 1950's and the circumstances when entering and exiting a host culture may have changed. Additionally, many host countries have had opportunities to adjust to foreign visitors and become better equipped to accommodate sojourner needs.

Reverse culture shock and adolescence. Although reverse culture shock is difficult for adults, it has been regarded as even more stressful and challenging for children (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Huff, 2001; Martin, 1986; Szkudlarek, 2010, Uehara, 1986). The challenges of returning to the passport country may include: a lack of preparation for reentry, unexpected difficulties upon reentry, and feelings of loss for the expat life (Szkudlarek, 2010). Martin (1986) posited adolescents might have more difficulty transitioning, as they are more concerned about building new relationships in the home country while having developed higher cultural learning abilities overseas.

Huff (2001) found that the individual's age at the time of reentry impacted the adjustment process. Those who returned after the age of 15 felt a greater sense of loss about leaving the host culture and experienced greater interpersonal distance from peers. Sharp (1985) also noted the potential problems of social adjustment for MKs when they return to North America after years in another culture. He attributed the difficulties in relating to those in the home country as home nationals may not understand multiculturalism or have little comprehension of cross-cultural transition.

Uehara (1986) studied the transition experiences of American students after a prolonged stay overseas. The author discovered a significant difference of reentry difficulty of the participants who traveled overseas versus those who traveled within the U.S. Those returning from abroad experienced greater reentry adjustment problems. Uehara found that a values change while abroad, highly influenced reentry adjustment. Uehara pointed out that people who were highly engaged in the host culture were likely to have acquired attributes of the culture such as values and characteristics, which added readjustment problems after returning.

Age did not highly influence culture shock upon reentry, however, those who were younger were more likely to incur readjustment problems than those who were older. Lastly, a greater length of time overseas did not necessarily mean greater reentry shock.

In a study of 134 children of Lutheran missionaries, Stelling (1991) discovered the following aspects related to higher ratings of reverse culture shock: the number of years lived as an MK, the experiences of being separated from parents while overseas, having a father who worked as an evangelistic missionary, and experiencing trauma during the first year of permanent return. MKs who considered the U.S. home while living abroad had lower mean scores on reverse culture shock. The author also found that the more recent the return, the greater the reported level of reverse culture shock.

Repatriation and reentry stress issues. Issues of psychological distress upon reentry in the passport country have been documented among students (Gaw, 2000; Huff, 2001; Uehara, 1986). Shared problems included academic difficulties, issues with cultural identity, and emotional stressors including depression and anxiety (Cockburn, 2002; Davis et al., 2013; Martin, 1986). For those returning to their home country after spending much of their lives abroad, there is an expectation of what they think home should be. Returnees do not always anticipate difficulties and expect friends and family will have remained the same and will be welcoming (Stelling, 1991). While living abroad allows for unique and rich experiences, the same cross-cultural experiences can also produce negative feelings and emotions upon repatriation to the passport culture (Adler, 1981; Davis et al., 2013; Martin, 1986; Pollock & Van Reken, 1999). Some reported experiencing emotional stressors such as anger, fear, and helplessness (Adler, 1981).

Bikos et al. (2014) quoted a MK:

People asked why I was just now taking driver's ed. When I told them I had lived in {developing country}, they said things like, "Wow, so you have never seen a car before?" I know not all people are like that, but it's really annoying. (p. 167)

Alternatively, Wrobbel and Plueddemann (1990) found that psychosocial development was higher for those who lived overseas eight or more years and who returned to the home country at an older age. Adler (1981) and Sussman (1986; 2000) discovered the unexpectedness of the challenges of transition back to the passport country intensifies the stress of repatriation. The sojourners appear to be unprepared for their changes in identity, self-concept, and the psychological distress (Sussman, 2000).

Sussman (1986) suggests reentry difficulties may be as a result of unexpectedness of reentry problems, changes in the individual as a results of spending time in another culture, changes in the home culture, friends, family and others expect returnees to exhibit "normal" or pre-sojourn behavior, and lack of interest on the part of friends. She noted, "Frequently, sojourners retain a mental "still camera" image of "back home" (p. 244).

In a study of 267 ATCKs who expatriated to Hong Kong, Selmer and Lauring (2014) found that ATCKs were more culturally adaptable on international assignments than other expatriates. They were more adjusted to general life in Hong Kong and utilized their multicultural abilities gained during adolescent to adapt. The international experiences gained by third culture kids could be central to their cognitive growth, especially during a key developmental period of life, such as adolescence.

Another factor that impacts the readjustment process is the level of contact with those in the home country. Maintaining relationships with those from the home country while living

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overseas helps alleviate reentry stress upon returning. Likewise, the perceptions of home country residents towards the returnees can influence the readjustment process. Lastly, the cultural differences between the home and host countries have an impact on the readjustment process (Szkudlarek, 2010).

Kano Podolsky (2004) developed a comparison between TCK research and the Japanese counterpart, called "Kaigai/Kikokushijo" or overseas/returned children (p. 67). Kano Podolsky found the TCK research primarily focused on the individual, the Japanese concept was more community based. The Japanese government, recognizing that those with cross cultural experience could benefit society, conducted research to better assist citizens in repatriating to Japan. As a result, government programs were created to support returning adolescents. Kano Podolsky noted TCK studies seemed more focused on reaching out to people who are still unaware that TCKs are a distinctive social/psychological phenomenon, whereas, Kaigai/Kikokushijos have long been recongnized s a "problem/challenge/blessing worthy of study" (2004, p. 76).

Sussman (2000) noted that repatriation tends to incur more stress for individuals than moving to a new foreign country. Sussman suggested that those repatriating compare their overseas cultural experiences overseas against those in their home country. Peterson and Plamondon (2009) promoted repatriating can be stressful because it "involves threats to an individual's past and present worldviews" (p. 756). TCKs do not have much choice in the transition process; however, they often have close parent relationships which provide a stable support system. Additionally, they have "status" such as being the child of an American diplomat.

Repatriation programs. Repatriation programs have been created to allow TCKs to explore reentry and the issues they may incur as a result of the transition (Davis et al., 2013; Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001).

In a three-year study conducted by Davis, et al. (2013), 186 MKs participated in a pre and post test to measure depression, anxiety, and stress before and after attending a repatriation program. Davis et al. (2013) administered the questionnaire at the beginning of a reentry program for MKs and then again on Day 12, which was the last full day of the 13-day seminar.

The pre-test showed that MKs scored higher in anxiety, depression, and stress than the general population before participating in the reentry program. The post-test showed the participants level of depression, anxiety, and stress following the seminar there was significantly reduced (Davis et al., 2013, p. 133). The authors concluded MKs need more emotional and social support when transitioning to the U.S. than their counterparts who have grown up in the U.S. However, the results of the study did not identify which area: depression, anxiety, or stress, was most impacted. They theorized these feelings might really be responses to unresolved grief, which was not included in this study. Davis et al. promote the developmental transition to adulthood, which can already be stressful, is made extra difficult because of the feelings of depression and grief that are often associated with significant transition. They recommend sending organizations other organizations that support MKs and TCKs in general, would do well to support and provide assistance to assist in alleviating these feelings during repatriation (Davis et al., 2013).

Bikos, Kocheleva, King, Chang, McKenzie, Roenicke, Campbell, and Eckard (2009), conducted a qualitative research study with MKs who were repatriating to the U.S. and MK supporters. Participants included nine MKs (4 males and 5 females) and four MK supporters (1

male and 3 females). The MKs ranged in age from 19-28 and had spent between five and 19

years outside of the U.S. Of the four MK supporters, three were parents of MKs and one was a

dorm parent. Bikos et al. utilized the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) method to develop

interview questions related to experiences during the missionary assignment including transition

preparation, furlough experiences, first impressions of home country nationals, adjustment

issues, support systems, and factors that aided in a successful transition (pg. 737).

All the study participants revealed that trying to fit in to the home culture provided a

significant obstacle in their repatriation. Not knowing the cultural norms made the process more

difficult. Some MKs disclosed that because they looked similar to their home culture peers,

there was an expectation that they would act the same. The participants suggested that daily life

skills, such as calculating the unit of measurement, navigating transportation systems, and

making decisions about jobs and school, was difficult. Many expressed the shallowness of

relationships upon returning to the U.S. They felt that returning to their home country was like

being on vacation rather than coming home. They also commented on their emotional struggles

upon returning to the U.S. Some used descriptive works such as "a very dark time" and "I felt

numb and calloused" to describe their time upon reentry (Bikos et al., 2009, p. 743).

The results suggested that attending a reentry program would assist with the transition.

MKs suggested they longed for additional programming to help with the process. Some wished

they had been more proactive in their repatriation process and realized they maybe could have

been better prepared to handle the experience differently.

All the participants in the Bikos et al. (2009) study revealed having a support system was

vital in navigating the journey of repatriation. They noted that family was particularly helpful to

adjust to a new life and in providing financial support. Friendship was also deemed important.

Both friends from the host country and new friends in the passport country were helpful through the repatriation process. Some suggested that organization support was beneficial, whether it was through their sending agency or college and university clubs and services in the passport country.

The researchers also interviewed support people in MKs lives. The supporters observed that some MKs in the study felt they did not have support and were not able to figure out how to connect to people who could support them (Bikos et al., 2009). The supporters of MKs being repatriated noted that some support programs were patronizing as the focus was on very minor things students already were familiar with rather than on the emotional challenges they may face (Bikos et al., 2009).

Sussman (1986) upheld reentry training should support those repatriating with the cultural adaptation process and provide opportunities to develop and gain a deeper understanding of the emotional aspects of readjusting. Additionally, other information should include adaptation models (such as the U-curve and W-curve models), information about cultural shock and reverse culture shock, and general coping strategies. Lastly, the training should provide resources to help the adjustment process to work and home environments.

Sharp (1985) suggested the pressures faced by MKs could be minimized by appropriate actions at various points of intervention. Action include the preparation and training of care givers: parents, teachers and host parents, orientation, cross-cultural training spiritual emphasis ministries, guidance programs on the field, family life conferences, reentry seminars, care networks of counselors and legal/medical advisors, open homes in North America hotline networks, comminutes for MKs and MK outreach involvement programs in North America. Bates (2013) offered transition programs at the international school level could help with future

positive interactions, as the programs may help connect past experiences in the host culture with new life in the home culture (p. 86).

The previous section provided an overview of the reentry process, a review of the empirical research related to the reentry process, the impact of reverse culture shock for adolescents, and an introduction of the need for reentry programs. For many TCKs, the transition to postsecondary education is the first opportunity to be fully immersed in their passport country and is often the first big transition without their parents. In the following sections, current research on the postsecondary transition specific to TCKs, transition challenges, and college and career issues will be discussed.

The Postsecondary Transition

When TCKs return to their passport country for postsecondary education, the journey often triggers a sense of grief, loss, and loneliness, along with culture shock as a result of trying to fit in to the home culture where they may not have spent much time (Eakin, 1998; Fail, Thompson, & Walker 2004; Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001). Some have suggested that the combination of repatriating to the U.S. and the transition to college coinciding contributes to education and career-development-related difficulties (Cockburn, 2002; Hervey, 2009).

In an often-cited study, Hervey (2009) researched the potential relationship between multiple transitions during the adolescent years and the adjustment to postsecondary education. Participants included 109 undergraduate students who grew up overseas, with the majority (62.4%) being female. Hervey utilized three scales of the Cerny-Smith Adjustment Index: the Cross-Cultural Relationships Scale, the Emotional Connections Indicator, and the Supportive Relationships Scale. Students answered questions about their transition experiences to the U.S. Hervey reported that 25% of the MKs in the study moved 11 or more times. Yet, when MKs

compared their postsecondary transition with previous transitions, they ranked the college transition as more difficult than saying good-bye, making friends, and starting at a new school.

Hervey discovered the greater the perceived challenge of previous moves made by MKs the higher they scored in feelings of distress in the current adjustment process. However, the challenge of finding new friends, adjusting to a new culture, and starting a new school, did not show a significant impact in the transition process. Additionally, maintaining previous connections with home culture peers helped make the transition less challenging.

Hervey noted the more difficult goodbyes were for participants, the more likely they were to face difficulty in cultural transition. Furthermore, MKs rated the challenge of transition to the U.S. or Canada higher than those in other countries. Cultural adjustment was not ranked the most challenging, but did produce a long-term effect. However, another strong factor for forecasting a student's adjustment to college was in correlation to their ability to transition during their developmental years. For those who found earlier transitions traumatic, the adjustment to college was more difficult. Those who had more contact with peers from the home culture faced lower challenges in making the transition.

Hervey remarked that less support in returning to the U.S. lead to greater issues readjusting to the culture. The students academic year at university did not impact their level of adjustment. The author proposed that this response showed evidence that stressors continue throughout college, necessitating continued understanding and support. Family and friends should not assume students are completely adjusted after the first year. However, seniors found significantly less stress than freshmen in the areas of missing family and friends and dealing with unfamiliar surroundings and customs.

Hervey's findings were consistent with a similar study conducted by Huff (2001). Those who had transitioned eleven or more times, adjusted better than those who had ten or less transitions. Those who transitioned more were less likely to miss friends and family, were more socially stable, feared less about failure, felt more understood, and did not see transitions as stressful.

Huff (2001) conducted a study to compare MKs and non-MKs on the basis of parental attachment, perceived social support, reverse culture shock and college adjustment. In this quantitative study, 110 students, 49 MKs and 65 non-MKs, were surveyed. Huff utilized questionnaires to measure relationships with parents, levels of reverse culture shock and acculturation, and college adjustment. Huff hypothesized that MKs would score lower than Non-MKs on the measures of college adjustment and perceived support.

MKs reported receiving more independence from their parents than those who were non-MKs. There was not a substantial difference between MKs and Non-MKs in terms of social support, however, MKs reported greater cultural and interpersonal distance than Non-MKs. This result may be linked with an adverse response to U.S. cultural values and difficulty in adapting socially during the transition process, which was previously reported in Stelling's (1991) research. MKs who had experienced 11 or more transitions overseas adjusted better than MKs who experienced 10 or less transitions. Lastly, MKs who returned to the U.S. after the age of 15 reported distancing from peers and greater feelings of grief over leaving the host culture.

Klemens and Bikos (2009) proposed sociocultural adaptation would incur a relationship between MK status and psychological well-being. The MK and non-MK participants were between the ages of 18-25 and attended a Christian university. The MKs in the study reported

living overseas between three and 14 years during the ages of 5 to 18. Two measures were utilized to identify psychological well-being and cultural learning and social skills function.

The results indicated a significant difference in sociocultural adaptation and psychological well-being between MK and non-MK college students. MKs found difficulty understanding the American culture, values, and worldview and feeling understood by others. Klemens and Bikos concluded that if sociocultural adaptation skills can be improved, so can psychological well being. They concluded there are two challenges facing MKs transitioning to college in the U.S. The first is saying goodbye to the life structure, culture, and interpersonal relationships in the MKs host country and the second is adapting to the new life structure, culture, and new relationships in the U.S. college setting (p. 730).

TCK postsecondary education transition challenges. Fail (1996) suggested that students transitioning to postsecondary education experience emotional distress from missing friends and family along with the feelings of being misunderstood, loneliness, and not fitting. This concurs with Fail, Thompson, and Walker (2004) who found that establishing an identity and a sense of belonging could be a challenge. For some, it's the awareness of marginality, which incurs feelings of not feeling a part of the home culture or not fitting in with peers even though they appear similar to other students. This can result in loneliness and a difficulties in college adjustment (Bonebright, 2010).

Downie (1976) promoted that when TCKs return to their home country as university students, they often become socially marginalized. Because their peers do not relate to their global experiences, TCKs may exclude that part of their identity in order to adapt to their new social situations. As a result they incur feelings of isolation and lack of connections to social groups which, in turn, caused confusion about home and roots. Uehara (1986) found that among

students who returned to the U.S. for college, that the more they were unhappy with their relationships with family, friends, and professors, the more they experienced reentry difficulties.

Purnell and Hoban (2014) conducted a study with 12 participants (seven female and five male) who were Australian citizens between the ages 18-27 years old after finding limited qualitative research in the area of TCK transition experiences. To add to the body of research, they conducted a study to explore the practical, social, and emotional experiences of college-age TCKs. They focused on the first two years of the transition, specifically looking at the practical and emotional experiences TCKs encounter. They sought to describe TCK experiences of social engagement and assess TCK access and barriers to social support networks. Each of the participants returned to Australia to attend a university after spending a significant part of their formative years overseas and came from varying TCK backgrounds including: missionary, humanitarian aid, education and business. The researchers used a phenomenological approach through semi-structured interviews.

Purnell and Hoban's (2014) interview results depicted four stages of transition: preparation for transition, initial transition (entering the passport country), adaptation, and stabilization. Four out of six missionary TCKs attended transitions programs, suggesting that missionary international schools are aware of transition difficulties. Conversely, four participants who attended American and British internationals schools did not receive information about reentry training programs. All TCKs who attended reentry programs suggested they felt unaware of what the future would hold. Results show that family and friends of the family provided practical support such as housing and transportation, which relieved stress. However, five out of twelve participants reported stress and anxiety during the initial transition phase due to the struggles of applying to an Australian university. Interestingly, the

findings did not support Lysgaard's (1955) U-Curve model or Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) W-Curve model, both of which suggest transition begins with euphoria. Three of the twelve participations revealed they had experienced depression or anxiety throughout the transition process. They experienced grief over being separated from family and friends, felt socially isolated, and encountered stress due to the practicalities associated with transition. This corresponds with research (Cockburn, 2002; Hervey, 2009) that suggested the main source of distress for transitioning TCKs was missing friends and family and developing relationships in a new environment.

Gaw (2000) conducted a study of 66 undergraduate college students, between the ages of 18 and 25 who had lived overseas an average of 10 years. Gaw utilized measures to identify reverse culture shock and assess university student concerns. Results indicated that students who experienced higher reentry difficulties were more likely to report personal adjustment problems than those who experienced lower reverse culture shock (Gaw, 2000). Nearly a third of the participants identified loneliness/isolation as either a significant or severe problem. Almost 25% rated college adjustment, depression, career choice, feeling alienated, and trouble studying as either significant or severe problems (Gaw, 2000, p. 95). He found that those with higher levels of reverse culture shock incurred more adjustment issues, but were less likely to seek help. This may be due to their level of distress, which may impede their ability to seek help. Additionally, they may not believe professionals will understand their experiences (Gaw, 2000).

Over two-thirds used the student health center; a little over half used the university career and counseling center; nearly half connected with academic advisors, and just over 25% used financial aid services (Gaw, 2000, p. 98). The author concluded it would be beneficial to seek

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support through the transition process and understand their expectations may not be the same as their actual experience.

College and career issues. Useem and Downie (1976) concluded TCKs choose professions that will allow them to continue a global lifestyle. Downie's (1976) exploratory study found that when TCKs return to the U.S. to begin postsecondary education after being abroad for a number of years, they become socially marginalized. Because their experiences are not relatable to their home country peers, they feel the need to set aside their TCK identity. As a result, they feel a sense of alienation and social separation which creates difficulties in forming friendships.

Useem and Cottrell (1993) discovered adult TCKs took unconventional higher education journeys. Thirty-eight percent of the of those surveyed did not receive a degree from the first university they attended. Nearly 50% transitioned to three or more colleges and many dropped out to travel or engage in other opportunities. Of those who earned a bachelor's degree, nearly 50% completed their schooling after the age of 22. Additionally, Cottrell (2002) found that ATCKs often chose career paths that included attributes of leadership and independence, with the most common professional career being in a human service field.

Bikos, Haney, Edwards, North, Quint, McLellan, and Ecker (2014) conducted an often-quoted qualitative research project concerning MKs education and career development. The study included 11 MKs who ranged in age from 18 to 25 years old. Of those, 58% were female and 67% were Caucasian. The U.S. citizens had returned to the States between the ages of 14 and 19 and spent between four and 19 years abroad.   They were currently transitioning to the U.S. and had spent at least one year of high school in overseas missions.

Bikos et al. (2014) submitted MKs college and career choices were influenced by parents, role models as well as the lack of role models. The authors suggested because MKs may have been exposed to "irregular education" (p. 169) and had narrow exposure to career options, they may need atypical career services. The authors recommended those working with MKs should address their obstacles to transition, provide career services specific to their unique experiences and provide space for conversations concerning faith and calling (Bikos et al., 2014).

Useem and Downie (1976) and Stultz (2003) encouraged teachers and universities to support and challenge TCKs academically and help them use their experiences to encourage diversity and international knowledge on campus. Bonebright (2010) suggested universities include TCKs to be a part of international student orientation and organizations specific for students from other countries. Additionally, she advised creating TCK support groups and equipping admissions counselors, advisors, and faculty to navigate the challenges TCKs may encounter throughout the postsecondary education experience.

Pollock and Van Reken (1999) suggested international schools stay in contact with TCKs through alumni newsletters. They encouraged sending organizations to seek input from TCKs about future ideas and projects and consider funding a return trip to the host country in early adulthood. Lastly, they encourage families and support personnel to be available, willing to encouraging of TCKs to maintain the worldview they have developed through their international experiences.

As TCKs transition to postsecondary education, maintaining ties with those they know as well as building new ties occurs. Students access a variety of networks to develop social capital. One form of building ties, of particular interest, is through the use of social media. In the following sections, social media and building bridging and bonding social capital is discussed.

Social Media and Social Capital

With increased availability and use of the Internet, technological communications and social media, people are able to remain connected to family, friends, peers, and others in ways not known before. The current literature available concerning TCKs and transition does not include how technology and social media impacts their transition in postsecondary education. To support understanding the potential role social media and technology has on the process, it is necessary to review the postsecondary student and postsecondary international student transition experience.

Today, international students are increasingly able to remain connected to family and friends in their home countries (Ye, 2006) as online groups allow them nearly instant communication with family and friends. Additionally, the Internet allows for new and unique connections that provide alternative ways to engage with others (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Gomes et al. (2014) offered that students' social networks are not necessarily connected to the home nation, but to their individual identities such as culture, language, religion, and interests.

Though students may encounter *friendsickness*, or the feelings of lost connections with high school friends (Paul & Brier, 2001), Internet technologies may help students remain close to their old friends and others when they leave for college. The social networking site, Facebook, is often discussed in the research. Facebook launched in 2004 and by March 2016, had 1.65 billion monthly active users, of which, interestingly, 84.2% live outside of the U.S. and Canada (Facebook, 2016).

The following sections explore the relevant literature available concerning the connection between social capital and social media among university students. Though many of the studies

pertained to international students, much can be gleaned for TCKs as attributes of the transition process are relatable between both groups.

Social capital. Social capital refers to the resources available to people through their social interactions (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000). The social relationships in which people are involved include a system of norms, trust, and reciprocity, which provides positive outcomes for those in the social groups. Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as the resources made possible through the use of formal and informal networks and relationship. The resources gained from these relationships differ based on the type of level and type of relationships.

According to social network theory, an individual's social networks include strong ties and weak ties (Marsden & Campbell, 1984). Strong ties include more intimate links with others who share similarities in attitudes, backgrounds, and experiences. These ties often provide emotional support and validation. Conversely, weak ties, involve fewer intimate exchanges, but have advantages as they offer anonymity, objectively, and may be helpful in the gaining of new information. Weak ties also help people to diversify their networks or connections, which allow for new ways of social support (Granovetter, 1982; Walther & Boyd, 2002).

As people process through cross-cultural adaptation, they employ a variety of coping mechanisms to deal with the psychological stress and other difficulties. Key coping resources are social support (Adelman, 1988) and social networks to create a positive cross-cultural adjustment experience (Ward et al., 2001; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Recent research indicates that the Internet has a positive influence on social adjustment and psychological well being for international students, who often face tremendous acculturation challenges (Kim, Yun, & Yoon, 2009; Ye, 2006). The Internet also provides support to existing offline social networks by allowing connection across time and space (Ye, 2006).

In a study conducted by Cemalcilara, Falbo, and Stapleton (2005), 280 international students completed an online survey during their second half of the first semester of postsecondary education. They were asked about their use of the Internet to access the World Wide Web, e-mail, and chat rooms to connect with parents, friends, and others who remained in their home country. The researchers found the international students used at least one form of communications technology each day. Almost half the students accessed sites, such as newspapers or radio stations from their home countries on a daily basis. Seventy-two percent reported using an online capability to communicate with parents at least one a week and almost all reported using Internet options to communicate with friends on a daily basis. Those who had family connections in the U.S. or who had lived in the country for longer periods of time were less likely to rely on the Internet to contact people in the home country than those who had no family in the U.S. or who had just arrived to the U.S. The results of the study also suggested that having continuous contact with those from the home country had a positive role in the international student's preservation of home culture identity and perception of accessible social support, both of which affect adaption to the new culture. The results further determined that perceived social support from communicating online directly influenced psychological adaptation and indirectly influenced academic success.

During the transition to life in a new culture, sojourners may feel a sense of disorder and confusion. Having opportunities to connect with people they know, who can help them understand the host cultural environment while reaffirming home culture values helps to reduce homesickness. Communications technologies may be used as a supplement to provide support in this process, particularly in the beginning of a cross-cultural transition. Additionally, Cemalcilar, Falbo, and Stapleton's (2005) study found that those who participated in the customs and

traditions of the host culture and had formed relationships with others in the host society were better socially and psychologically adjusted.

In a study of 135 Chinese students, ranging in age from 20 to 41, who were attending postsecondary education in the U.S., Ye (2006) discovered that age and amount of time in the U.S. positively impacted sociocultural adjustment. The participants who were older and had lived in the U.S. longer tended to encounter a lower social difficulty. Younger students were more likely partake in online social groups that provided social support. Ye's study indicated that, while most who are involved in online groups are only associated informally, the members may be able to provide each other with access to resources that will help international students adapt to everyday life in a new country.

Ye (2006) observed that those who encountered less acculturative stress reported building bridging capital through online resources from the home country. She offered that online social groups may have a similar role as face-to-face social interactions in reducing stress. However, of importance, the study did not measure for support that participants may have received from their families or friends in their home country.

Bridging and bonding capital. Bridging social capital refers to casual acquaintances who may be able to provide new ideas or information and links to new networks. Bridging social capital is also denoted as weak ties. Bonding social capital signifies intimate relationships such as family members and close friends who provide emotional support. Bonding social capital also refers to strong ties (Putnam, 2000). Norris (2004) promoted online communities offer opportunities for building bridging and bonding capital.

As previous studies have found, intensive use of social networking sites is significantly associated with bridging and bonding social capital. Social networking site usage helps college

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students achieve higher levels of satisfaction with life in college, high self-esteem, and greater engagement with their college community. In their empirical study of Facebook use by American university students, Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) found that intensive social networking site use helped students maintain connections with existing close friends and family and also allowed them to maintain ties with high school friends and build a large network of new acquaintances. In the study, 286 college students participated to determine the use of Facebook to maintain or create social capital ties. The authors hypothesized that the relationship between Facebook use and bridging social capital would depend on the level of self-esteem and gratification with university life. The participants overwhelmingly used Facebook to maintain or build relationships with those they had met offline. Those who reported low contentment with college life or low self-esteem were able to develop bridging social capital with more intense use of Facebook. As a result, the authors proposed the use of social networking sites may be of benefit to these students.

General Internet use played a significant role in maintaining social capital and self-esteem; however, it was not a significant predictor of bridging social capital. This suggested that only some forms of Internet use support the building and maintenance of bridging social capital. While demographics did not play a significant role in the results, class year and age was an exception.

The study found a link between bridging social capital and subjective well-being measures. Those who used Facebook less experienced more discontentment with the university experience and identified having lower bridging social capital than those who accessed the site more often. The same was true for self-esteem.

Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) also noted Facebook appears to be much less beneficial for developing bonding social capital. However, Facebook is an important venue for maintaining strong relationships with those with whom bonding social capital has already been established. The authors also discovered that staying in contact with friends and networks help alleviate friendsickness. Facebook also provided a link between offline communities. Lastly, interacting online did not necessarily remove people from face-to-face communications but may be used to support existing relationships even if they are not living in close proximity.

In a study conducted by Lin, et al. (2012), 195 international students were surveyed to determine how social media affected change in social adjustment and culture. They were particularly interested in understanding how social media affected online and offline bridging capital and bonding capital. They found there was a relationship between the use of Facebook and international students online bridging capital. The results suggested that social networking sites provided a pivotal role in helping international students expand and manage their online bridging capital. The more international students networked with others from their home country, the more online bridging capital they gained. The more they interacted with American friends using Facebook, the more positive experiences they had adjusting socially.

Contrary to Ye's (2006) findings that students who had more perceived support from the networks in their home countries exhibited better emotional adjustment, Lin et al. (2012) found that the amount of Facebook use interacting with friends in the home culture was only related to better social adjustment and college attachment, but not to emotional support. They proposed that students use of social networking sites was used for maintaining or building online bridging social capital, but not bonding social capital, where emotional support usually occurs. The researchers encouraged international students to utilize social networking sites such as Facebook

to develop and maintain their social network as it could help building their bridging capital online. Additionally, they encourage colleges and universities to set up groups on social networking sites to assist international students and provide opportunities to meet home country students.

In a study conducted by Phua and Jin (2011), the researchers hypothesized that social identification with the home country would influence the relationship between the level of social networks interaction and perceived bridging and bonding social capital in the home country environment. Social identification with the U.S. college community was hypothesized to influence the relationship between intensity of social network use and perceived bridging and bonding social capital in the U.S. college environment.

The researchers concurred the intensity of social network use and identity with the U.S. college and home country was highly linked the four types of social capital tests: bridging and bonding social capital in the U.S. college and bridging and bonding social capital in the home country. The more the international students studying in the U.S. used social networking sites, the more they increased their strong and weak social ties in both the U.S. college environment and in their home country. The authors concluded that the use of social networking sites was more beneficial for creating and maintaining bridging social capital than bonding social capital and had a stronger impact on increasing their bridging and bonding social capital levels in their home country over the U.S. college environment.

Phua and Jin (2011) also found self-esteem played a role in bridging and bonding social capital. Those who reported higher self-esteem scored significantly higher bonding social capital. Additionally, those who were more connected to their American university environment or their passport country had better success in building and maintaining greater levels of bridging

and bonding social capital through building stronger relationships with people from that particular community. The authors suggested that students who may feel disenfranchised and alone in their new college environment may be able to overcome the feelings through more intensive use of social networking sites, which may help them build new friendships and maintain strong ties to the U.S. college environment and to their home country.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the current literature of Third Culture Kids, reverse culture shock and reacculturation, the postsecondary transition process, and what role social media has in building social capital. A detailed overview of the research concerning a sense of belonging, identity, grief and loss, and mobility was also included. Empirical definitions of culture shock and reverse culture shock were provided, as well as the W-Curve theory, which is often cited in the research. The next chapter of this dissertation includes the methodology used for this study. The philosophy and justification for a qualitative study is presented, as well as the research questions, theoretical framework, research method and design, sampling process, data collection and analysis, limitations of the study, and ethical considerations.

Chapter III: Methods

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to discover and describe the lived experiences of Third Culture Kids transitioning to postsecondary education in the United States and what role, if any, social media played in building bridging and bonding social capital. This chapter provides a comprehensive explanation of the approach and rationale for this study, including the research design and approach, participant selection and study setting, limitations of the study and ethical considerations.

Philosophy and Justification

Having lived a portion of their adolescent life outside their home culture, the Third Culture Kid "builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any" (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999, p. 13). Given their unique relational experiences interacting with others, they are adept to a culture that is not easily defined by a "fixed, single agreed upon, or measureable phenomenon" (Merriam, 2002, p.3). This study sought to describe the lived experiences of TCKs as they transition through postsecondary education and what role social media played in building bridging and bonding social capital. A qualitative study allowed the researcher the flexibility to explore the topic and voice of students in this phenomenon while also adding to the current body of research.

Past qualitative and quantitative studies have set the precedent for studying TCKs. Research has focused on reentry and the stress associated with reentry (Adler, 1981; Berry, 2008; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Kano Podolsky, 2004; Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960; Sussman, 2000), sense of belonging (Bikos et al., 2009; Cockburn, 2002; Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; McLachlan, 2005), the grief and loss associated with reentry (Barringer, 2000; Davis et al., 2013; Gilbert, 2008; Schaetti, 2002; Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999; Storti, 2001), and the success or

failure of programs to assist with transition (Davis et al., 2013; Bikos et al., 2009). Other studies have been conducted concerning the TCK transition (Dixon & Hayden, 2008; Stelling, 1991), transition issues (Bikos, et al., 2014; Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004), and the TCK transition to postsecondary education (Eakin, 1998; Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Gaw, 2000; Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001; Klemens & Bikos, 2009).

Studies have also been conducted on the role of social media in building of bridging and bonding social capital on college campuses (Cemalcilar, Falbo, & Stapleton, 2005; Ellison, Steinfield, Lampe, 2007; Kim, Yun, & Yoon, 2009; Lin, et al., 2012; Phua & Jin, 2011; Ye, 2006). Rarely, though, have these topics been merged though it has been offered as a recommendation from past researchers (Choi, Bernard, & Luke, 2013; Choi & Luke, 2011). Previous findings have included both rich data and descriptive narratives and statistical data of the experiences of the individuals studied. As social media has become a prevalent form of communication among young people, consideration for how social media is used in maintaining ties, as well as building new ones, adds a missing element in the current body of research. This lends well to building more resources for TCKs and those who work with them.

Research Questions

Interviews were conducted with TCKs currently enrolled or who recently attended postsecondary education to identify common themes in response to the following questions:

1a. What are the lived experiences of Third Culture Kids transitioning through postsecondary education in the United States?

1b. What expectations and challenges did Third Culture Kids experience during their reentry into the U.S. and throughout their transition during postsecondary education?

2a. How does the use of social media foster a sense of belonging through the transition process of postsecondary education?

2b. How did social media impact the transition process?

2c. What role did social media play in building bridging and bonding social capital during the postsecondary education experience?

Theoretical Framework

The current study explored the lived experiences of Third Culture Kids transitioning through postsecondary education and what role, if any, social media played in the building bridging and bonding social capital. Data was analyzed using Pollock's (1990) five-stage model of transition with an emphasis on steps three through five, as this transition model was created specifically for the TCK transition. The five stages: involvement, leaving, transition, entering, and re-involvement, provided a framework for understanding how TCKs journey through the postsecondary transition.

Data was also analyzed through the lens of Putnam's (2000) definition of bridging and bonding social capital, which seeks to understand the value of creating and/or strengthening bridging social capital and bonding social capital. Bridging social capital includes interactions with weak ties such acquaintances, friends of friends, or support systems to answer logistical questions. Bonding social capital, or strong ties, involves close relationships with family, friends, or other support networks, which can be related to social support.

Research Method and Design

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research method. The rationale for choosing this design was to allow for flexibility in exploring the lived experiences of TCKs transitioning from other cultural environments to U.S. postsecondary schools and gaining an

understanding of what role social media has in building social capital. The primary purpose for using a qualitative phenomenological design was to capture and share the thick and rich narratives of this unique group. Current TCK research includes both quantitative (Choi, Bernard, & Luke, 2013; Gaw, 2000; Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001) and qualitative studies (Bikos et al., 2009; Choi & Luke, 2011; Fail, Thompson & Walker, 2004; Gilbert, 2008; Purnell & Hoban, 2014).

Choi and Luke (2011), who conducted a phenomenological study concerning early adult friendships of TCK's, found participants used social media as a way to build friendships. They suggested further need for research in the area of TCK use of social media and how the use of social media contributes to the development of meaningful relationships. Hervey (2009) conducted a quantitative study to explore how TCK cultural transitions during child impacted adjustment to college. The results indicated a pattern of rootlessness, which contributed to a lack of strong ties or bonding capital. Hervey suggested further research is needed concerning MKs and their transitions, including identifying effective ways to support the transition process.

In a study conducted by Phua and Jin (2011) of Asian students studying as international students in the U.S., the use of social media was found to be significantly associated with the bridging and bonding social capital in the U.S. college environment as well as a help in building social capital with those in their home countries. The authors asserted a limitation of the study was the sample was specifically from Pacific Asia. They suggest the results may be different with different populations.

Ellison, Steinfield, Lampe (2007) conducted an empirical study of social media use in correlation to the building and maintaining of social capital. Using a quantitative questionnaire, they surveyed American students at a Midwest university and found high use of social media led to building and maintaining both bridging and bonding social capital. They offered a limitation

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of the study was only surveying one community. The authors suggest researching and exploring

other universities as well as use of different methodologies to gather further data.

Considering these suggested missing pieces in the current literature, the purpose of this

study is to understand, interpret, and describe the meaning of individual lived experiences of the

TCK transition to postsecondary education. To understand the essence of the experience, the

phenomenological approach to qualitative design was used (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2002;

Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) explained qualitative research is utilized to

understand, rather than predict, the nature/context of a setting. It allows research participants to

communicate their meanings and how they view experiences within a particular setting or the

essence of the experience. Likewise, Merriam (2009) noted, qualitative research is conducted to

seek understanding of the meaning people have constructed and how they make sense of the

experiences they have in their setting. Thus, this methodology was appropriate for this study as

the researcher sought to understand the whole of the TCK transition experience and not a

specific variable. A significant transition experience is personal to each individual and,

therefore, difficult to quantitate.

A primary method qualitative researchers use to uncover the perceptions, feelings, and

knowledge of people is through intensive and in-depth interviewing. Interviews are a common

strategy used to collect data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002; Rubin &

Rubin, 2012). Utilizing open-ended questions allowed for opportunities to generate empirical

data concerning the impact social media has on the transition of TCKs through postsecondary

education. The interview provides space for the research participant to share experiences that

may not be captured through statistical data.

The interview has advantages over other types of data collection as the interview allows the opportunity to give voice to the personal experience. The use of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews created space for TCKs to share their perspectives and experiences on a deeper level than what a survey would allow (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Rubin and Rubin (2012) promoted a semi-structured interview is used when the researcher has identified a specific topic to learn about. The interview process allows space for the research participant to give voice to his or her personal experience, while allowing the researcher to observe non-verbal cues. Creswell (2009) suggested a primary disadvantages being the amount of time it involves. Time is needed to conduct the interviews, transcribe the recordings and code the responses of the participants.

This study closely followed a previous study conducted by Purnell and Hoban (2014), which focused on the lived experiences of university students in Australia. The authors utilized Pollock's (1990) transition model to identify where students were in the transition process and to identify how universities could support the process. After corresponding with the original researcher, the research questions utilized by Purnell and Hoban (2014) were slightly modified for the purpose of this current study by adding a social media component.

Through the pilot and field tests, it was determined two additional questions were needed to gather data to answer the overarching questions. Additionally, some questions needed minor rewording to help research participants better understand the meaning of the questions. Additionally, utilizing a semi-structured interview encouraged some flexibility with additional probing questions to gather richer responses. The researcher was diligent in only asking questions that pertained to the research study.

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For this study, all interviews were conducted via the videoconferencing application, Skype. As technology becomes a more common form for communication, people "feel more deeply present with others online" which in turn "strengthens the connections they make online" (Salmons, 2015, p. 77). Conducting interviews via Skype allowed for flexibility and accessibility in timing and location of the research participants; it also allowed participant control of where they wanted to be interviewed. They chose a location that would be most comfortable to them. Though not in-person, Skype provided opportunity to observe non-verbal behaviors in many of the same ways. However, a drawback in using Skype for interviewing is that the participant may choose a place such as a coffee shop or other public place to be interviewed, which may not be as private, and as a result, may not garner the same level of truthfulness as a more private space may.

Sample Design

In phenomenological studies, it is recommended that the number of participants be limited in order to provide an opportunity for a more detailed description of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2009). The participants for this study included Third Culture Kids who completed a portion of their secondary school in another culture or cultures and returned to the U.S. for postsecondary education. This sample population included students who are in process of completing or have completed postsecondary education in the U.S. In studies concerning TCKs, college-age participants are often researched, as the arrival to university is usually the first major transition back into the home culture. It's also a more permanent transition than a year of itineration or a furlough (Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001).

Since the population studied and the research conducted was specific, a criterion purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was utilized to select the research participants. This method

allowed for intentionally selecting participants, with specific parameters, who were experienced

and knowledgeable in the topic being studied. For this study, participants were recruited through

Facebook pages open and accessible to the public, specific to Third Culture Kids. They included

the site "Third Culture Kids (TCKs)". Currently, there are just over 11,700 people who follow

this page. Additionally, messages were posted on the site "Cross Cultural Kids" with 28,000

group members, and "TCKid: A Home for Third Culture Kids" with 2000 group members. A

general post was created for Twitter and Instagram with the hashtags #TCK and

#ThirdCultureKid to draw attention to potential participants. Given Facebook, Twitter, and

Instagram's international presence, not all those who follow the pages are from the U.S. or attend

postsecondary education in the U.S. On each of the pages, a description of the study with an

outside link to a research qualifying survey was posted.

Unforeseen challenges arose with this sample process. Multiple graduate students posted

requests for research participants at the same time, which potentially diluted interest. And while

the posts were placed on the group pages specific to TCKs, the posts did not go through each

group member's newsfeed. This greatly reduced awareness of the study. Therefore, after four

weeks, it was determined it would be more effective to connect with other gatekeepers to lead

potential research participants to the study. Multiple gatekeepers posted a link in their newsfeeds

to the posting for the study.

Because of the public nature of the Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages, all who were

interested were invited to fill out a preliminary survey created using Qualtrics to determine if

they meet the requirements for participation in the study. The sample size was dependent on the

willingness of volunteer participants, with a goal of seven participants. All qualifying students

were given a fair opportunity to join the study. The criteria for participation included:

- U.S. passport holder

- Currently or recently attended a postsecondary institution in the U.S.

- A minimum of three years abroad between the ages of 7-18

- Aged 18-27

The potential research participants were asked to fill out a demographic survey to determine eligibility. In the demographic survey, students were asked questions concerning:

- Length of time in college and/or graduation date

- Age

- U.S. Passport

- Length of stay in countries lived in outside of the United States

- Parent(s) roles overseas to determine TCK subgroup

- Date TCKs returned to the U.S.

- Specific use of social media

- Willingness to participate in an interview via the videoconferencing application, Skype

Data Collection

Data collection began after approval was granted from the dissertation committee and the Bethel University Internal Review Board (IRB). Participants were contacted to schedule Skype interview times to best meet their needs and comfort level. Before the interviews were conducted, participants received a research packet via e-mail that included an informational/welcome letter, a copy of the interview protocol, and a copy of the informed consent document. Potential participants were asked to review and sign an informed consent document for research, as previously approved by the IRB, and return via mail, or scan and send as an e-mail attachment prior to the interview. Participants were given an explanation of the

research procedures and possible contributions to the current body of research. It was emphasized that the study was completely voluntary and that participants had the option to withdraw at any time.

This study utilized Skype's video capabilities to conduct semi-structured interviews to collect data. Each participant was asked questions regarding their transition and educational experiences in postsecondary education and were encouraged toward open-ended sharing. As needed, the questions were explained. Respect for the participants' experiences and viewpoints were taken into consideration as the interviews were conducted. Each participant was offered the opportunity to reflect and elaborate on his or her responses. Through the data collection process, TCKs experiences of transitions, obstacles, and successes of their experiences in postsecondary education were discussed. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes.

Shortly after each interview, the audio file was transcribed and analyzed (Merriam, 2009) utilizing the computer program, MAXQDA. Though the interviews were recorded, taking notes during the interview to observe nonverbal gestures and behaviors provided additional context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) as well as space for participants to think through the questions before responding. The memo option of MAXQDA was used to record field notes to capture the overall feelings and reactions of the interview, non-verbal cues, and potential limitations or hindrances that may have affected the data collection process.

Each research participant and names participants mentioned, were given a pseudo name to protect their privacy and locations, including university or universities attended, were not identified. All participants were given the opportunity to receive a copy of their typed interview transcripts to review for accuracy and to ensure their meanings had not been misconstrued. After the research project was completed, paper transcripts, notes, and all other paper documents

concerning the study were stored in a secure lock box at the researcher's residence. Audio recordings, data analysis files from MAXQDA, and other computer files were stored on the researcher's password protected computer. All related files and documents were stored for three years as required by the IRB.

Pilot Test

After gaining approval from the IRB, a pilot test with one participant was conducted. The interview protocol was tested to identify potential flaws and discrepancies in the questions. Through the process, an appropriate time span for each interview and the flow of the interview was established. Testing the interview protocol indicated the interview questions were appropriate in answering the research questions. It was determined additional probing questions concerning the use of social media were needed to gain more specific answers to the research questions pertaining to social media in relation to social capital. Additionally, some questions needed minor rewording for better participant understanding.

Field Test

After conducting the pilot test, the interview questionnaire was field tested with two TCKs at different points in their postsecondary education experience. One participant had recently graduated from university, and the other was in her second year. Each interview was conducted via Skype at a time and place of the participants' choice. Afterwards, the interviews were transcribed near verbatim. After conducting the field tests, it was determined filler words took away from the overall richness of the text, so care was taken to remove them when appropriate.

The transcripts were analyzed manually for big picture concepts and then with the use of MAXQDA for closed coding. Pollock's (1989) transition model and Putnam's (2000) definition of social capital were used throughout the data analysis process. Results were used to validate

the interview protocol and clarify whether the initial interview questions would garner the data needed to answer the research questions. After completing the data analysis process, it was found the interview protocol questions were appropriate to answer the research questions. Furthermore, it was determined that two additional questions may prove useful in answering the research questions. The first question related to the use of social media in building community and the second question referred to advice the research participants would give to those who are just starting the postsecondary education process. Adding these questions afforded participants an opportunity to think about and discuss experiences in a different way. Lastly, it was determined that each interview should last about 60 minutes, instead of the previously planned 60-90 minutes. Through the field tests, it was found hour-long interviews provided enough time for the participants to fully answer the questions without encountering interview exhaustion.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of making sense of the information collected. Merriam (2009) summarized the process as "consolidating, reducing, and interpreting " (p. 176) what has been read and observed by the researcher, in order to understand the meaning. Going through the process of coding of data, identifying themes, and looking for relationships between the themes is helpful in understanding how to balance description and interpretation. Throughout the research phase of this study, big picture concepts were acknowledged, use of both inductive and deductive coding was utilized, and through the use of this combination, themes of TCK's postsecondary transition were identified. Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously.

Utilizing content analysis, data was analyzed after each interview with appropriate notes and comments written with the use of the memo function in MAXQDA. Each interview was transcribed nearly verbatim, so as to keep the authenticity of the text. The initial plan to

transcribe the interviews verbatim was changed after conducting the field test, as it was determined some filler words (i.e. um, like, you know, etc.) were distracting to the overall meaning of the text. Great caution was taken to leave in the filler words that held meaning by observing and identifying non-verbal reactions. The notes from each interview built a foundation for the subsequent interviews and provided insight in how to better word questions and reflect on what was learned (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). After transcribing and proofreading each interview, the corresponding participant received a copy to review for accuracy. Five of the seven participants responded to the request with four confirming accuracy and one offering additional information.

Each transcript was read more than once to provide space for researcher reflection. The first read through was done quickly with notations made of first impressions and big picture ideas. A second read through was done line-by-line, utilizing a deductive coding process (Gibbs, 2011; Schulz, 2012), to seek and identify relevant and keywords, phrases, and sections as they pertain to Pollock's transition model (1990) and Putnam's (2000) definition of bridging and bonding social capital.

Utilizing Pollock's (1990) five-stage transition model with particular focus on stages three through five, keywords for the deductive coding process include, but were not limited to the following, Involvement, Leaving, Transition, Entering, and Re-Involvement. Putnam's (2000) theory of social capital included definitions of bridging and bonding capital, which are also identified as weak ties and strong ties, respectively.

While reading through the transcripts, specific words, phrases, and paragraphs that indicated experiences in these areas were identified. Bridging social capital was often identified in experiences in accessing logistics. Bonding social capital is often identified through

experiences in emotional relationships with family and friends. After the read through of each

transcript, new and relevant codes emerged.

The code list was read through to identify and delete redundant or unnecessary codes in

order to build a consistent set of codes. These codes were then used to identify major themes.

The computer program, MAXQDA, was utilized to assist in the entire coding process. Though

MAXQDA was useful in providing organization of transcripts, data, and codes, manual reading

of the transcripts was also conducted to view the data from a potentially different perspective.

The essential themes and subthemes are reported in Chapter IV and discussed in Chapter V.

Limitations and Delimitations

Before embarking on this research study, the researcher had some prior experience with

TCKs while working at an international school for MKs. Though not intentional, these

experiences may unintentionally skew research questions and perceptions of participant

responses. However, the researcher's perspectives of the experiences shared by the participants

were seen through a different lens than those of the participants themselves. The researcher is

not a TCK, but has experienced multiple transitions. Having these experiences helped build

rapport with the TCKs. Additionally, having experiences with multi-cultural backgrounds on a

professional and personal level helped engage in understanding cross-cultural experiences.

Having not been a TCK, the researcher could relate to yet be able to disconnect from the

thoughts, feelings, and emotions of the experiences.

Because these experiences could produce some bias on the part of the researcher,

bracketing assumptions and potential biases was necessary in order to remain open-minded about

the data results. Several authors also suggested the process of reflexivity when going through the

research process (Maxwell, 2013; Salmons, 2015; Tracy, 2010; Yin, 2011). Tracy suggested

starting with ones-self and reflecting on potential biases and motivations before the interview process begins. This was done through the memo function in MAXQDA. Yin (2011) promoted that the researchers' presence has an influence on research participants, which may unknowingly influence the way the researcher goes through data collection. Salmons (2015) promoted an attitude of Epoché, or the act of refraining from judgment. Epoché takes place when the researcher is self-aware and is respectful of each participant's contribution. Care is taken to approach each interview with a fresh perspective. Rubin and Rubin (2012) surmise researchers should evaluate their own understandings and reactions on an ongoing basis.

Since the researcher is part of the research process, Merriam (2009) promoted the necessity of identifying potential shortcomings and biases of the researcher that may impact the study. Rather than attempt to remove these biases, the author suggested identifying and monitoring them to determine how they may shape the collection and interpretation of the data.

Another limitation of this project was the pool from which to sample. Because the population is specific, there was not a large sample size from which to draw general conclusions. However, to go outside this population would potentially skew the study. Limitations also came through the natural constraints of memory as people remember experiences from their personal perspective, which may not always be the actual occurrence. Lastly, social media use may be limited by geographical location; therefore, some TCKs may not have had access in their host countries or may not be able to communicate via social media with friends and family remaining in the host country.

It was expected that the findings from this study will provide a snapshot of the transition experiences of TCKs to postsecondary education, but not a longitudinal outlook, as observations were not collected over a long period of time. Additionally, participants have different

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experiences in different parts of the world, a varied amount of time spent in other cultures, and range of access to the members of the host country. Lastly, because participants chose the sites where they participated in the interview, some may not have been as forthright with their answers depending on how public the space was they were occupying during the interview. While these variables cannot be controlled by the researcher, care was taken to maintain consistency whenever possible.

Trustworthiness of the Research

In qualitative research, validity and reliability are often known as trustworthiness. Ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research involves conducting the investigation in an ethical manner (Merriam, 2009). Maxwell (2013) promoted a common strategy for verifying internal validity or reliability is through research participant checks. Through the data collection process, the researcher went back some of the research participants and asked for feedback on their written transcripts and on the emerging findings. Maxwell (2013) offered this is best way of ruling out possible misinterpretation of what the research participants say and do, as well as identifying researcher biases and misunderstanding.

Patton (2002) noted that researcher credibility involves "intellectual rigor, professional integrity, and methodological competence" (p. 570). These characteristics are necessary to ensure the study is carried out with integrity. To increase trustworthiness or validity and reliability of the data in this study, the following strategies were utilized (Creswell, 2009):

1. Completion of a reflexive journal, through the use of MAXQDA memos, to document personal bias and presumptions. This was completed throughout the research process.

2. Bracketing of personal and professional information that may affect data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

3. Member checks to establish credibility and validity of the account (Patton, 2002).

4. Audio recordings and transcripts stored in a safe location for three years per the IRB.

Ethical Considerations

Respect for participants well-being and choice were held in high esteem throughout this study. Confidentiality procedures were put in place to ensure identities were protected and documents held in safekeeping. Before each interview, the potential research participant received a welcome file via e-mail that included an introduction letter, a copy of the interview protocol, and the consent form. Each participant was asked to review and sign the consent form before the interview. At the beginning of each interview, the purpose of the study was explained and the consent form was reviewed with each participant to clarify the voluntary nature of participation in the study. Each participant was given assurance that his or her identity, the identities of others he or she disclosed, as well as any other potentially identifying information would remain anonymous through the use of pseudonyms and generalizations in the findings (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each potential participant received a copy of the research questions, in advance, to reduce the notion of coercion and allow for time to think through possible responses. Participants were informed that interviews would be audio recorded for transcription to be completed after the interview. The researcher took care follow the principles for ethical practice in research as defined by the standards set forth by the IRB. They were reminded of their option to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were encouraged to share freely and contribute their own thoughts, opinions, and add questions to the researcher's list.

A minimal threat of potential harm to the participants included possible loss of confidentiality and discomfort with some interview questions. In the case of unforeseen emotional distress, participants were reminded of their right to opt out of the study. They were

given repeated assurance and encouragement as to the relevance and contributions of their participation. When needed, they were also encouraged to seek out personal and university community support systems or a professional counseling center specific to serving TCKs. Safeguards were employed to minimize potential risks to the participants through the protection from harm and deception, reminders of voluntary participation, honesty, privacy safeguards, and confidentiality of collected data.

All paper transcripts, other printed documents, recorded interviews, and USB drives were stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's residence. Computer files were stored on the researcher's password-protected computer. No video recording took place. All data, including audio recordings and verbatim transcripts, were kept for three years.

Summary

Chapter III began with an introduction to the methodology of this research study. The philosophy and justification of the project was explained, the research questions introduced, and the theoretical framework introduced. The chapter continued with an explanation of the research method and design, a description of the sample population and the sample design, along with the criteria for participation. The process for data collection and analysis was discussed, as well as the limitations and delimitations, trustworthiness of the research, and concluded with ethical considerations. Chapter IV provides and overview of the study, demographics of the research participants, and the results of the analyzed data.

Chapter IV: Results

Chapter IV presents the results of the qualitative phenomenological study designed to describe the lived experiences of Third Culture Kids transitioning to postsecondary education in the United States and what role, if any, social media played in the transition process. This study was designed to answer two primary questions a.) What are the lived experiences of Third Culture Kids transitioning through postsecondary education in the United States? And b.) How does the use of social media foster a sense of belonging through the transition process of postsecondary education?

The chapter begins a description of the demographics of the participants and the interview process. Next, the data analysis process is explained, followed by a review of the research questions that guided this study. The data is then presented by emerging essential themes, with overall findings presented at the conclusion of the chapter.

Participant Demographics

The seven Third Culture Kids who participated in this study spent a portion of their adolescence in different regions of the world, including: Africa, Central America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Five participants are female and two are male. All participants hold U.S. passports and had or have also lived in the U.S. for portions of their life. Five lived abroad for the majority of their developmental years, but returned to the U.S. periodically for furlough. One moved overseas during high school and another returned to the U.S. permanently during middle school. The mean age of the TCKs at the time of the interviews was 23.1 years old. All participants grew up in two parent households and lived abroad due to their parents work as missionaries, one of the subsets of the TCK population. Figure 4.1 provides a general overview of the participants' demographics, including

gender, age, host world region and year at university. Pseudonyms were assigned to all

participants and any other identifying information such as university name or family and friend

names were either generalized or given pseudo names. It should be noted that a field study was

conducted to determine the flow of the interview protocol, data analysis, and effectiveness of

answering the research questions. However, the conclusions of the field study were not included

in the following results.

Figure 4.1
Participant Demographics

Pseudo Name	Gender	Age	Host Region	University Education Level
Emmy	Female	27	Africa	Graduated
Sophie	Female	20	Eastern Europe	2nd Year
Jamie	Male	21	Southeast Asia	2nd Year
Eli	Male	20	Central America, Western Europe	2nd Year
Izzie	Female	22	Western Europe	Graduated
Kelly	Female	25	Middle East	Graduated, Grad School
Natalie	Female	27	Africa	Graduated, Grad School

All participants had a blend of elementary, middle school, and high school educational

experiences while abroad. These experiences included homeschooling, boarding school, private

Christian regional schooling, and international schooling. During furloughs or after returning to

the States permanently, participants were homeschooled or attended public and private American

schooling. Many had experienced at least two different education options while living overseas.

All participants chose small, private, Christian universities in the South and Southeast

regions of the U.S. for their first year of postsecondary education. One participant transferred to

a public university in the South after completing his first year at a private school. The others have either graduated or remained at their first university. Two participants are currently in graduate school at small private Christian universities.

The Interview

Seven Third Culture Kids were interviewed for this study. Potential participants were recruited through public social media, primarily Facebook, postings that included a link to a voluntary Qualtrics survey. Through this recruitment process, the survey received 73 unique responses, with 51 completing the survey. Of these, 23 individuals met the research criteria and expressed interest in being interviewed. In phenomenological studies, it is recommended that the number of participants be limited in order to provide an opportunity for a more detailed description of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, a small sample size was sought to allow for rich and thick descriptions of the participants experiences. Participants were randomly selected from the interested candidate pool through the use of an online random name sorter. Three people either declined to continue participation or did not return multiple requests for interviews.

Six of the seven participants were residing in the U.S. at the time of the interview. One was living and teaching abroad. All interviews occurred using the online videoconferencing application, Skype. While Skype is fairly similar to a face-to-face interview, it was determined that it would be best to keep the interview format consistent for all participants. Using Skype for interviews allowed for flexibility of the location of the participants.

The TCKs were interviewed regarding their lived experiences of preparing to transition to university and their experiences of university life as a TCK, including perceptions of social and logistical supports. Additionally, they were asked about their use of social media to access

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means of support.   The emerging themes from the interviews are presented in this chapter with a discussion of the results to follow in Chapter V.

Analysis of Findings

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with seven Third Culture Kids who currently or had recently attended postsecondary education in the U.S. Interviews occurred through the videoconferencing tool, Skype. Shortly after each interview was conducted, transcription took place. Each audio-recorded interview was transcribed nearly verbatim using Microsoft Word, only deleting filler words that took away from the richness of the responses. The document was then sent to each participant to review for accuracy. Five of the seven participants either confirmed accuracy of the transcript or edited and added more detail and explanation for responses.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, the use of Epoché (Moustakas, 1994) was utilized to identify preconceived ideas, emotions, and potential bias on the part of the researcher. Before each interview, the researcher set aside time to reflect on potential bias and possible misunderstandings. Additionally, throughout the interviews, participant responses occasionally prompted unanticipated emotions or concerns by the researcher. Bracketing these thoughts and emotions were necessary so as to not influence the research outcomes. These notions were processed through the memo-writing feature in MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis computer program.

Data analysis occurred through a series of steps with the purpose of answering the research questions. After transcription and participant reviews, the transcribed interviews were reviewed manually for first impressions and then uploaded to MAXQDA, where coding took place. Pollock's (1990) transition model, which includes five stages: Involvement, Leaving,

Transitioning, Entering, and Re-Involvement and Putnam's (2000) view of bridging and bonding social capital were utilized through the data analysis process to identify units, categories, and themes.

Coding was conducted by identifying words and phrases that may apply to answering the research questions. After the transcripts were reviewed and coded, coded data was organized into categories. These categories were then evaluated and sorted into potential themes. The prospective themes were either renamed or moved to subcategories as each potential theme was compared to the data. MAXQDA was used throughout this process to manage, code, sort, and store the data in addition to manual categorization.

Horizontalization, the process of reviewing and regarding the data with equal consideration (Merriam, 2009), was utilized during the initial data analysis phase. From this perspective, words and phrases were coded and organized into many categories. These categories became tentative themes. As the data analysis process progressed, numerous potential themes emerged. Not all the prospective themes applied to the lived experiences of the participants postsecondary education transition. Each of these tentative themes was reviewed and went through a process of reduction (Merriam, 2009) through carefully identifying shared experiences of all the participants in this study. Those themes that did not emerge in multiple transcripts or contribute to the essence of the lived experience, were set aside and evaluated as possible subthemes.

Answers to Research Questions

This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Third Culture Kids transitioning through postsecondary education in the United States?

a. What expectations and challenges did Third Culture Kids experience during their reentry into the U.S. and throughout their transition during postsecondary education?

2. How does the use of social media foster a sense of belonging through the transition process of postsecondary education?

    a. How did social media impact the transition process?

    b. What role did social media play in building bridging and bonding social capital during the postsecondary education experience?

The shared lived experiences of the seven participants in this study included the need for a preparation process, from both a practical and emotional standpoint, to transition. Family and faith community support was essential in providing practical and emotional support throughout the process. There was also a deep sense of the need to connect with other members of the TCK population, whether it was with other missionary kids, or within another subgroup of the TCK population. The transition process is a rollercoaster, and though the first year seemed to be the most difficult, time was not a factor in how well-adjusted the participants felt.

All the participants used social media platforms, particularly Facebook, as a way to maintain bonding social capital with friends and family who lived around the world. Facebook was the most prevalent as the platform allowed for photo and video sharing and messaging. Only one participant noted using social media on a regular basis for bridging capital.

The following analysis is presented as an overview to answer the questions in this study. Through the data analysis process, the following four essential themes emerged with subthemes for each (See Figure 4.2), including the following:

1) Preparation Is Key: Past Experiences Influence Future Choices, Goodbye Brothers and Bus Stops, Celebrations, Finding Closure

2) Relationship Central: Family and Faith Community Support, TCK Support, Social Media as Social Capital, Social Support, University Support

3) Transition Is A Rollercoaster: Anticipation and Expectation, The First Year, I Don't Understand you, America, If You're Going to Live in America, You're Going to Need a Car, Isolation

4) I Am Complex Now: Don't Take Me At Face Value, Identity

These essential themes and subthemes are discussed below.

Figure 4. 2
Essential Themes Identified of TCKs Transitioning to Postsecondary Education

Essential Themes	Frequency Reported	Percentage
1. Preparation Is Key	7	100%
2. Relationship Central	7	100%
3. Transition is a Rollercoaster	6	86%
4. I Am Complex Now	5	71%

Essential Theme 1: Preparation Is Key

Each participant discussed different aspects of leaving their host country to return to the U.S. Key areas of closure that participants commonly cited included, saying goodbye to physical places, final celebrations, quick departures, gaining closure, and the need to end well. Though each person had different viewpoints, essential theme was that preparing for transition is necessary (See Figure 4.3).

Figure 4. 3
Essential Theme 1: Preparation Is Key

Subthemes	Frequency Reported	Percentage
Past Experiences Influence Future Choices	7	100%
Goodbye Brothers and Bus Stops	5	71%
Celebrations	4	57%
Find Closure	4	57%

Subtheme: Past experiences influence future choices. When asked about choosing a postsecondary institution in the U.S., the respondents were unanimous in knowing that they would attend schooling in America. The reasons varied from an American education being the logical choice, to affordability, to the availability of known community and social resources. All seven participants chose to attend small private Christian schools in the southern and southeastern parts of the U.S. One participant transferred to a public school after the first year. At the time of the interviews, three of the participants had graduated and two of those three were attending graduate school at small private Christian schools. The others were still working towards degree completion.

Emmy's family made a permanent return to the U.S. and because of past transition issues of her older siblings, the family chose a community to settle in based on social connections including church relations and family close by. Emmy, therefore, chose a university based on the location of the family's resettlement. Though the other participants did not resettle with their families, five of the participants either had family, friends, or church or missions organization connections in the cities of the universities they chose. Izzie explained:

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Well, I always I knew I wanted to go to a Bible school. Since I wanted to go into ministry and that kind of thing. My dad finished his undergraduate studies here. I had several MK friends that went here. People that I already knew even from my home church in the South where my parents are from were here.

As did Jamie:

Mostly because this was just was the affordable option. Honestly I can't really think of any other place I would have wanted to go. It just made sense. My sisters were in the States. I have a lot of American friends I kept up with over the years. Mostly relationships probably is the reason why I chose to come to the States.

Four of the seven participants noted a tuition discount due to the nature of the parents work as missionaries abroad. Natalie summed it up nicely, "I stayed in the U.S. for school because I had a full stipend and scholarship for my whole private U.S. university education." For others, additional factors assisted in their decision. Eli noted, "I just felt like there were more opportunities that could be provided through an American school." Sophie stated, "I didn't want to study overseas. I wanted to have an American education. I could have gotten a good education overseas . . . but, I wanted to come back to America to get that education. It was important to me."

One participant, Kelly, wondered about her choice:

Honestly, when I was in high school I didn't even think about going to any other country. I think I felt stuck like there wasn't anything else that you could do. I wasn't going to stay abroad in the Middle East. Now that I'm back in America and I interact with people transferring work from other countries, I realize I could have gone to so many other English-speaking countries. But I just didn't even think about those as possibilities.

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Each participant was asked about their area of studies and how they chose majors. Interestingly, five of the seven participants chose an undergraduate area of study that will either prepare them for a life abroad or as a result of their experiences abroad.

Two participants, Emmy and Jamie chose intercultural studies. Emmy also has an emphasis in psychology and Biblical studies. Natalie chose human relations with an emphasis in psychology. She now attends graduate school for a graduate degree in psychology. Eli chose film studies and broadcasting and Izzie chose English, both knowing the majors would be useful to serve as missionaries abroad. Sophie chose early childhood education because of her love of working with children. Kelly chose commercial music with a concentration in songwriting. She recalled choosing it because she felt it was her calling. Once into it, she realized it was not for her, but decided to complete the degree. She is now a graduate student in marriage and family therapy, as she would like to help other missionaries and missionary kids transition.

Subtheme: Goodbye brothers and bus stops. Six of the seven participants expressed the deep relationships they developed while living abroad. For some, these deep relationships impacted their ability to gain closure. Jamie, who resided in the same community in SE Asia for eight years recalled:

> I feel like I had a bond with people in SE Asia that was so deep. Cause the friends I hung
>
> out with . . . I would see them every day. They were brothers. We would do our
>
> homework together. Ride around our neighborhood on our long boards. Go to
>
> waterfalls. We did everything together. We were in the same bands in high school."

He recalled how he felt his home was only a part of home and other homes where his friends lived he also considered family.

Emmy detailed close relationships with other girls in her boarding school as "my family." She continued, "I was used to having these friendships where I could walk into the room and my roommate would know in an instant what I was feeling just because we knew each other at a deeper level."

Three participants spoke about saying goodbye to physical places. Both Sophie and Eli recalled being introduced to the RAFT process (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). Sophie discussed RAFT, which her school introduced to the seniors at the beginning of the year. "They wanted to teach us RAFT and drill it into us." Though she's not sure that it "worked perfectly" it was helpful to her in making sure to say goodbye to people and places.

Sophie recounted that it was important to her to say goodbye to the countries she lived in and literal favorite locations. She declared, ". . . . say goodbye to your favorite places . . . even if it's some random bus stop. Say goodbye to it. And literally say goodbye. Do that. Take pictures with it." She also mentioned writing down memories as they come to mind. Even though she has transitioned to the States, each time a good memory returns, no matter how small, she writes it down so she will always remember.

Though Eli has been able to go back to visit the city where he lived, he recalled his last days before coming to the U.S. He and his friends loved going downtown in their city. "Going to the same Starbucks. Going to the same Mexican restaurant and just doing that a ton. Before I left, that was one of things I did." He believed it gave "one solid memory so that when you're thinking of when you're transitioning that there was this great time. This is how much fun I had the whole time I was here."

Emmy remembered the feeling of leaving her physical location in Africa equated to losing her home. As she reflected on her thoughts prior to departing, she said, "I'm going to

leave Africa, and if I ever come back, it's not going to be the same." As a memento, she filled a film case with dirt from her home in Africa. Though she has not lived there for nine years, every once in a while, she cracks open the container and smells it. "I know it sounds weird, but it was a connection. I could smell Africa."

Subtheme: Celebrations. Four MKs attended an international school their final year of high school before returning to the U.S. for college. They described different ways their international schools prepared them for the transition. These ranged from practical coursework, to bonding experiences, to final celebrations.

Sophie stated that her school did many things at the end of the year for seniors. They had a goodbye chapel, where each senior was given an opportunity to say goodbye and to thank those who had an impact on them. Jamie also had a goodbye chapel along with other senior chapels where guest speakers would come to talk about transition. Additionally, he remembers school alumni coming back to speak about their experiences.

Three students, Emmy, Jamie, and Eli had senior retreats, though make up of these retreats were different for each of them. Eli and Jamie attended retreats at the beginning and end of the year, respectfully. The times were meant for seniors to be together and have bonding experiences. Jamie felt it was a time for strengthening relationships.

Emmy described a senior reentry retreat her boarding school organized as part of their final goodbye. She recounted the time as being very emotional as she realized, along with her friends, that they were actually leaving. She stated: "They're throwing all this stuff at us. And we're all sitting there going . . .wait a minute, you're telling us that we're going to be leaving. Which we all knew but the reality of it hadn't hit." Though she does not remember much of what was talked about that weekend, one concept that stood out was: "(laughs) So you're telling

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us everything that we've been doing for the past four years is now inappropriate" as the speaker talked about American customs compared to what she and her classmates may not be used to. Emmy went on, "There was a group of four of us . . . that were really close. . . . I remember the four of us going into the woods and just hanging out and just trying to ignore the fact that we were going to be leaving."

Knowing she would be leaving in the early morning hours, Sophie's friends and classmates came to her home late in the evening before her early morning departure to give her goodbye hugs and pray for her. She recalled that it was "really wonderful" and a "good way to leave."

Eli was the only one to refer to practical preparations. He spoke of a senior seminar class that he noted was "more focused on adulting", which is a term used to describe doing grown up activities such as renting an apartment or buying a home. He went on to say that they talked about taxes, writing resumes, and job interviews. He also had a personal finance class that helped prepare him for stewardship. Though he appreciated the idea and thought it was good, as a senior he was ready to leave. In retrospect, he realizes it was a resource that he should have tapped into.

Three research participants did not have an international school from which they were transitioning. Rather, their parents and missionary organizations were the ones to help prepare them for transition. Natalie spoke of her parents being very determined that she and her sister would not be "mentally destroyed" by all the transitions they had experienced. As they had moved multiple times during their adolescent years she noted: "Adjustment wise . . .the kind of moves that we did . . .could have reeked havoc on our lives. I mean our identities, our social networks, our support, our feelings of stability and security were threatened on so many

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occasions." Her entire family sought counseling services to process the transitions they had made.

Kelly was provided encouragement from her parents and the missionary organization they worked with. She recalled: "There wasn't an in-depth understanding on anybody's part on what the TCK experience is. I don't think that . . . my family knew what that term was until we noticed it on a university's website." She went on to say they knew there would be reverse culture shock and her parents did what they could to help her prepare for it, but that much of her time was spent in academic preparation.

Izzie was nervous as she had been homeschooled and had no frame of reference for what would be expected of her at university. Izzie noted there was not a lot of intentional prepared for the social side of the transition. However, because her parents are American and she had lived in the U.S. periodically, she felt like she had some cultural understanding.

Subtheme: Finding closure. The families of five of the seven participants in this study have either returned or are preparing to the U.S. permanently, with two families still living abroad. For the participants, this prompts a variety of emotions and the need for finding closure. Jamie did not find closure with his home in SE Asia until he went back at Christmas during his first year of college. Though his parents had moved to the U.S. by then, he felt the need to find closure with a personal relationship he had ended at graduation. As he recounts, "I think I went to find closure . . . I tell people I went to find closure. I told my parents I went to find closure. But I think inside I actually wanted it to work out and it wasn't." Though that discussion did not go well, he was reminded of the relationships he had built with local families and of "just how much I love this place. I forgot how much I loved it." Though that experience was difficult, it also helped him to move on.

Sophie was quick to disclose that ending well can be really hard and a lot of TCKs, herself included, tend to cut off relationships early before leaving to avoid getting hurt in the end. However, she says, "you're still gonna get hurt." She encourages others to end well by being mindful of friendships and cherish the moments leading to closure.

Natalie's departure from her home in Africa was abrupt as her mom was ill and the entire family needed to return to the U.S. for her medical care. Looking back, she recalls the sadness of not saying goodbye to her friends or her home and other places, as the family believed they would return. She disclosed that because there was not a sense of closure, it took her a number of years to trust in the longevity of friendship.

Essential Theme 2: Relationship Central

All seven MKs disclosed the benefits of having social support during their transition process. For many, parental support played a role in their transition. Additionally, many relied on support from their sending organizations and other faith communities. All revealed the need for relationships with others in the TCK community to process transition and embrace the value of shared experiences and understandings, whether they had these relationships through the transition process or as a result of the transition. Subthemes included Family and Faith Community Support, TCK Support, Social Media as Social Capital, Social Support, and University Support (See Table 4.4).

Subtheme: Family and faith community support. All seven of the participants declared they received practical or emotional support from their families and faith communities. "I feel like we give less credit to parents than they deserve. I didn't really talk through my experiences with my parents as I was transitioning", expressed Eli, he continued,

Looking back on how much I've talked with them and how much I consult with them on a bunch of different things, it's made a world of difference. It would be awful and miserable without their wisdom. I think talking with your parents makes a huge difference through that transition.

He reflected that his parents are also going through a transition as he was the last to graduate from high school and leave home. He was reminded that his parents were facing a transition, too. "I think it's important to be a little bit humble too and realize that you're not the most important thing. That you're not the only person going through transition. That your parents and essentially everybody else you're close with they're going through transition too. It's a big step. To just to take on that humility and realize that it's not all about me."

All seven participants mentioned receiving practical and emotional support from either their sending organization or through a local church. Upon transitioning to the U.S. four MKs had summer jobs waiting for them with their missionary organization or with a church. Eli, Sophie, and Izzie worked with the children of missionaries who were either returning to the States for furlough or being prepared to depart for a missions assignment. Through that experience all started to built new friendships and maintain existing friendships with other MKs. For some, the friendships they developed during that summer continued when they started college. Jamie spent his first summer in the U.S. was spent working at that church in the global outreach office.

Izzie recalled having preparation support through the MK division of her missionary organization. She declared, "Yeah, they're amazing" when reflecting on the organization's intentionality of checking in with her as she was preparing for her first semester at university. She remembered staff members talking with her about where she would be attending school and

how it was helpful that they understood the magnitude of the transition. Izzie also credited the campus ministry, Chi Alpha, with helping her become connected into the local university community during her first days of school. As a student organization, Chi Alpha provides large group gatherings and small group Bible studies to help students connect with each other and learn about the Christian faith. "I know Chi Alpha. I love Chi Alpha." she exclaimed. Though not on her university campus, they provided transportation to another campus and encouraged her to build relationships.

Eli discussed the opportunities to meet with the MK director of his missionary organization during his final year of high school. He recalled having a group Skype session to talk through their thoughts and feelings about the upcoming transition. He felt his missionary organization "did a tremendous job" of assisting MKs in the transition process from one culture to another. As he transitioned to his first year of university, he relied heavily on the same group for transition support.

While many of the participants found connections within their missionary organizations programs for MKs, it did not necessarily mean they found support within the church. For some this had to do with logistical issues of not having transportation. For others it was a matter of trying to blend their beliefs with the different American church experiences.

Sophie recalled trying to get involved in a church her first year. She did not feel a connection to the church, but stayed because it felt safe and what she knew. Once she built new friendships during her second year at college, she found a new church and became involved as a volunteer in different ministry areas. Izzie had a similar experience. It took nearly three years for her to be plugged into a church. For her, logistics played a role. Because she did not have access to transportation, she often needed to go to church with those who did have transportation.

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She also compared the church experience in America with her experiences in Western Europe. She was not used to large size churches with "concert style lighting and loud music."

Eli also did not find social support through a local church. Kelly also noted not finding connections in a local church, but did find support through attending a Bible study in campus dorm. Alternatively, Jamie, Emmy, and Natalie found support through a local church. All had local, family ties that provide a sense of belonging in the churches they attended.

Figure 4. 4
Essential Theme 2: Relationship Central

Subthemes	Frequency Reported	Percentage
Family and Faith Community Support	7	100%
TCK Support	7	100%
Social Media As Social Capital	7	100%
Social Support	5	71%
University Support	3	43%

Subtheme: TCK support. Kelly revealed that while she did not fully identify as a TCK in the early part of her university career, when she did it was helpful to get connected with other TCKs. She found it "relieving" to realize how similar her experiences were to other TCKs, including one of her roommates after college who had grown up in the Air Force and lived abroad. She stated, "And it was really freeing to break this feeling of isolation or I'm just so different." Though she found these connections later in her schooling, she ponders if it could have been beneficial to have those connections earlier on.

Eli noted many of his friendships came from the MKs he met during his summer work with the missionary organization. He stated, "I feel like we all have pretty cool stores and so it's really exciting hearing those other stories so it's kind of like a motivating feeling." He went on to say those friendships developed through bonding over experiences of life on the mission field as well as learning and talking about navigating through the transition.

Sophie relied heavily on TCK relationships as she transitioned to university. She discussed choosing a mutual friend, another MK, as her roommate her first year of college. She and roommate then connected with other MKs, including her first year boyfriend. Looking back on the first year, she felt that she was in a "TCK Bubble", but then seeking out mentors with similar experiences helped her. Jamie also recalled being roommates with another MK during his first year of college. Izzie also noted the helpfulness of being connected to a TCK community upon arriving at her university as they would plan activities together and provide transportation for each other.

Though she did not have a support community of TCKs/MKs when she returned, Natalie recommended others transitioning to the U.S. should

> very quickly find a community that has individuals in it who have experienced what you're about to experience. Because there's so many obstacles that you're going to face. Just being able to be mentored by others who have gone through it or are also going through it will be a very valuable resource.

Emmy also recommended connecting with other TCKs or those with transition experience to provide a "listening ear" and in addition to seeking person-to-person resources consider joining a TCK Facebook group to share experiences.

Some were convinced that creating relationships outside, what one participant dubbed, the "TCK Bubble," was instrumental in building capital with different social communities. Izzie found friendships in other faith community events and mentioned being involved in prayer and ministry groups. She discussed the intentionality of looking for and developing friendships. She found it difficult to move to deeper levels of friendship, so being intentional with those who she really wanted to be friends with was necessary. Realizing that just because she met someone and connected did not mean they were going to be friends forever. She stated, "I had to really work on pursing the people I wanted to maintain relationship with. So I felt like it's gotten gradually better and better each semester. This semester (her last) I really feel like I've been able to pursue relationships and that kind of thing."

Subtheme: Social media as social capital. All the participants were asked specific questions concerning their use of social media to assist in overcoming practical and emotional stressors. All seven participants offered that they used social media and other Internet technologies to stay connected to family, friends, and, to an extent, sending organizations.

Jamie felt access to Facebook helped him overcome the emotional stress of the transition by using the application to message his friends. He also liked using Instagram to keep up with friends he would not message or talk with, but yet wanted to see how they were doing.

Izzie concurred. She recalled using social media off and on during her early days on campus to connect with friends and family in Western Europe. The longer that she's been in the States, the more she has started using it to stay connected to others on campus as well as to her friends and family. To stay connected to family she prefers Skype.

Sophie also agreed. She still uses Facebook to connect with her friends and family around the world. She also pointed out the messenger feature of Facebook, which allows her to

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talk to her family still residing in Eastern Europe. She also uses Instagram, which allows her to see photos of her friends and family. She stated, "I see their picture and I know that they are enjoying life and having fun." She exclaimed, "I love Facebook because it's like everything!", meaning it provides her with access to be able to see photos and videos of friends and family and to communicate with others through it's messaging feature.

Eli used Facebook to have a group chat with his two best friends from high school. Natalie discussed the use of chat rooms and social media sites to talk with other MKs as she went through the transition process. She stated, "I really found comfort in instant messaging or chatting with other MKs because we could relate."

Emmy spoke extensively of her social media use as a connector to her friends around of the world. She is able to stay in touch with former classmates and friends around the globe. It was especially helpful for her when she was going through times of depression and isolation. To be able to connect with her friends from high school provided comfort and the emotional support that she needed through her transition process. She summarized, "Yeah, It's incredible. I'm so thankful for social media. I can't even imagine how people survived. I guess they just learned to suck it up and move on."

While social media provided the respondents with opportunities to stay connected to their friends and family worldwide, no one credited social media with helping them to build new friendships. Sophie recalled having a Facebook group page for her incoming class at her university, which was intended to introduce the new class to each other. However, that did not prove to be useful to her.

Kelly was the one participant who questioned the use of social media in connecting with others. While she did have an account and remembered becoming friends with others, she

recalled, "In retrospect, I can't remember how much happened in Facebook that wasn't happening in real life. So I don't know that Facebook was a driver of social interaction as much."

For logistical support, such as directions to a grocery store or recommendations of a coffee place, the overwhelming response was to ask others or through word of mouth rather than use social media as a resource. One person, Izzie, was an expectation responding that she used social media for logistical support, such as coordinating car pools and staying in touch about events that pertained to her TCK group. They created a Facebook group page for the TCKs at her university to plan and announce activities, outings, and to coordinate transportation.

Subtheme: Social support. All the participants talked about the value of having social support as they made the transition. This support came in different forms, but all led to the idea that it is important to not do the transition journey alone. Each person sought the support at different point in their transition journey and from different resources, but all found it helpful.

As Sophie realized she was looking for support in unhealthy ways during her first year, she sought out mentors for support. As she discovered this, she sought out the advice of adults such as her mom and friends of her family including a family pastor and older adults who had life experience transitioning. Though she also sought advice from peers, she was quick to say it was not her best avenue for support.

Likewise, Jamie sought support from the pastors at his church. Though they did not have as much time to connect, he realized they tried to help him process, but he did not think "they really got it", so he processed quite a bit on his own. Eli sought out social support from the MK department of his missionary organization his parents worked. Since the headquarters were in the city where he attended school, he would often go to their office to connect with other MKs.

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Four participants sought out counseling services either on campus or through another avenue. Izzie, who accessed counseling on campus, found it helpful to process her experiences with someone. Though that person was not a TCK, sharing her experiences out loud proved to be helpful. Emmy also accessed counseling services on campus. She later went on to access counseling through other avenues and also used an online support network on occasion to talk through her feelings.

Natalie recalled the support of her youth group when she returned to the U.S. She posited, "If it was not for that youth group, I don't know . . . I have no idea where I'd be." She went on to talk about the accountability of being in a group, particularly when she had a role in leadership. She also found support within her family. She recalled her mom and dad doing everything they could to help her and her sister process through the numerous transitions they had made. She also sought counseling support at various points in her transition process.

Natalie also sought out support from her faith and the church. She reflects on the church being the one thing that remained constant throughout her transitions. Her faith in God also factored in her support process.

Kelly did not seek out support networks during her undergraduate degree. She offered that she communicated with a missionary on a few occasions and processed some with her best friends and sister. However, after completing her undergraduate schooling she did seek out counseling services from a place outside the university.

Subtheme: University support. When asked about university involvement to help with the transition process the answers varied. Four of the seven participants in this study noted a substantial tuition discount or 100% tuition coverage because of their MK status. Five students, however, reflected on not receiving transition support from their universities.

Sophie, who did receive financial support from her university, did not receive transition support, though the school knew she was an MK returning from a host culture. She has since brought it to the attention of university personnel that they should do something as her TCK friends at other schools had something done for them, whether it was arriving on campus a few days earlier than other students or some other support. Now in her second year of schooling, she notes that they still do not offer something.

Kelly's response was similar to Sophie's. Kelly's school also knew she was a TCK, and that they were excited to recruit her because of her high ACT score; yet, when she arrived on campus she was not provided support for her reentry into the U.S. or for her transition into university life. However, as a graduate student at the same school, she has observed the school's increased intent to reach out and provide care to students arriving from outside the U.S.

Jamie mentioned his first university knew he was a MK and that they had an MK community. However, once on campus, he found out it the MK community was his roommate and himself. He exclaimed, "So I was like, oh well, no there's not really an MK Community. You need more than two people to have an MK community!"

Emmy, Kelly and Sophie described opportunities at their universities for international students and while they were grateful for this resource, they felt it did not relate to their type of experiences.

Natalie recalled having access to Mu Kappa, a fraternal organization for MKs and she thought it was helpful in her transition. Additionally, she had a sponsor who would send her cards, gift baskets, and treats throughout her entire college experience. Izzie reflected on a similar experience. She felt one of the greatest supports she received was being given care packages throughout her schooling, including during her first week on campus.

During her first year on campus, Emmy did not have a TCK or MK group on campus. They did have an international student organization, but was told she did not fit in with that group. Her second year on campus, a TCK group formed and she participated with them.

Eli disclosed he was an MK, but other than a tuition discount, he did not receive support as an MK. However, he felt it was better that he school did not provide support to him. He felt that to be pointed out as an MK would cause anxiety and would incur constant pressure from too many different places to adjust. He found more support and comfort from the missionary organization's MK group.

Essential Theme 3: Transition is a Rollercoaster

The respondents of this study discussed various areas of their transition to university life in the U.S., which led to Essential Theme 3: Transition is a Rollercoaster. They experienced excitement and nervousness as they considered the university experience. The subthemes include: Anticipation and Expectations, I Don't Understand you, America, If You're Going to Live in the States, You're Going to Need a Car, The First Year, and Isolation (See Table 4.5).

Subtheme: Anticipation and expectation. All the participants in this study encountered a wide variety of emotions in the days ahead of the actual transition. They talked of mixed emotions of excitement, nervousness, and anticipation for what might be ahead.

Sophie explicitly stated, "Even though I wanted to come back to school in America, I wasn't motivated to come back to school in America." She described her emotions of the school year and summer leading up to the transition as stressful period. She recounted not acting like or making choices that resembled who she was. She often fought with her parents and siblings and would shut down and cry when they attempted to help her prepare for the transition. She was self-aware and knew that her reactions were due to that fact that she was leaving her known

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home and transitioning to the U.S. without her family. She perceived the transition to a new

place as one without having family support.

Izzie had similar feelings,

> Honestly I was not very happy about it most of the time when I thought about it. I
>
> consider Western Europe home and so I was leaving home in a lot of ways. I was coming
>
> back to my home culture kind of but not really. I knew that that majority of my time here
>
> my family would still be in Western Europe - my immediate family. Any other family
>
> would be at least eight hours away. So, there's that kind of isolated feeling.

Figure 4. 5
Essential Theme 3: Transition is a Rollercoaster

Subthemes	Frequency Reported	Percentage
Anticipation and Expectation	7	100%
The First Year	7	100%
I Don't Understand You, America	6	86%
If You're Going to Live in the States, You're Going to Need a Car	6	86%
Isolation	5	71%

Eli described it as daunting because his family would be "a couple 1000 miles away",

which made it somewhat scary. Yet, he was also excited as he heard stories about their

American college experiences from others, including alumni of his school, who had returned and

talked about their experiences. He went on to say, "I never really had a true, authentic American

experience. So this would be my first real time without my parents. It would be like an untainted

experience of America. I was excited for it."

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There were expectations of how they thought the American experience would be. Jamie stated,

All my time in SE Asia I was always hoping to go the States where people -- all my friends have cars and we can go hang out at other places. And there are concerts and a lot of things to do. So I was just really excited for that.

Jamie went on to say that while he was excited, he also felt "a sense of pain and loss" because he knew SE Asia as home. He had built deep relationships while there. But to overcome those feelings, he intentionally chose three friends with whom he would stay connected, realizing that it would be impossible to stay connected to all his friends and classmates.

"Hmmm . . . I think I thought a little bit fatalistic about it. And not especially optimistic either", noted Kelly, as she thought about the transition to university life. As she had witnessed her sister go through a difficult transition process before her, she lowered her expectations of a successful transition period. She went on to say, "I think I had both of a real pessimism about that and a little bit of optimism of this could be good but this is kind of the next thing."

Emmy felt doubt and confusion about her upcoming transition. Even though she had been to the U.S. before, she was nervous that she would not be understood. At the same time, she was excited because it was a new beginning. She was going to be attending university and preparing for her future life.

Subtheme: The first year. It was evident that the first year seemed to be the most difficult for everyone transitioning. All seven participants discussed various aspects of their first year. While some noted the transition as a gradual process, as they started to build friends, whether within the TCK community or outside of it, they were aware of the discomfort of some

of their experiences. The topics of relationship issues, isolation, loneliness, and feeling misunderstood emerged.

Sophie summarized the feelings of her first year as "desperate for comfort." She recalled, "It was hard. You don't know what to do. You just want to cry and get through it all. And just the whole loneliness. Loneliness was a big issue. I was missing home which was also there." She did not connect with others outside what she termed a "TCK Bubble." She found safely and comfort within that group because they knew and understood her. And even though she would describe herself as outgoing with those she knows, she remained very introverted during much of the first year. She also recalled being in a relationship with another MK because he provided something that was "safe and comfortable and he understood." During this time she felt guilt as she kept the relationship hidden from her family who were still living overseas.

Jamie recalled returning to the States with the expectation that he would build connections with the friends he had met over his periods of furlough, however, he was not able to connect in the ways that he anticipated because, just as he was transitioning, so were his American friends. He recalls, "I'm finally not separated by a big ocean. Finally able to spend time with my American friends and . . .they were all leaving, too." He went on, "I definitely felt a sense of loss and I definitely don't think I expected it. I just don't really think I had that . . .everyone else was experiencing change as well. I thought maybe I was the only one."

As Jamie arrived at his first university he recalled, "When I went there I expected like any other place that I'd been . . I'm pretty good at adjusting. . . adjusting to new experiences and new places. And I really look forward to that. But when I went there, as soon I was there a week I instantly knew I didn't want to spend four years of my life in this dinky little town. There's nothing to do. Nobody here has had my experiences. And I'm just not going to be

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interested in people here. That was one of the biggest things .. . .I just didn't really want to make friends. And I didn't want to (silence) I just didn't want to put myself out there." He went on, "I went through this pretty rough stage. So yeah it was a really depressing time for me. And I think it was just traumatic, depression, or I don't know. . . . After a while of living here . . .it was difficult. It's kind of like losing hope and that excitement of the future. Still holding on to this . . . this is going to get better."

Izzie, looking back on her first year,

I think a lot of it was my expectation that was kind of coloring my experience but the people that I met were all very nice and very friendly but it was very hard to . . .for the most part in most cases it was hard to move past that kind of just very friendly and very nice exterior to a deeper level of friendship. Which you know being an MK . . I just kind of have this tendency to want that deep connection with people and so that was very frustrating.

Kelly remembered being surprised at how bad her teachers were during her first year at university. She recalled a story of being put on the spot by her professor during a physical education class and not knowing how to process through it. She exclaimed, "I know! I remember crying quite a bit about that class and thinking do I need to drop this class . . . This sounds so sad, but I would cry by myself and then kind of move on with it and just gristle through it." Eli noted, "But I guess a little bit deeper to feel that fear of now I have to make friends. I have to break out of my shell a bit more to make those friends."

Subtheme: I don't understand you, America. All the participants recounted customs or cultural norms that they encountered throughout their transition process. These varied from the lack of transportation, to the use of money, to different cultural norms.

Sophie, who grew up in Eastern Europe noted,

"I didn't know anything about American culture. We would try to stay up to it. It was

hard . . . you can't always keep up with what's going on in America. . . . I would describe

myself as naive to pop culture, slang, even the way they dress. I don't know a lot of

movies and actors. We did watch TV. We watched it a lot. But it's not like something I

cared about.

She went on to say that a local couple in her college town purchased new clothes for her,

so that she would appear more up-to-date. Kelly, having spent her high school years in the

Middle East, also mentioned needing to buy new clothes as her fashions were a decade or two

behind. As did Natalie, who explained, " . . . my clothes . . .my clothes were just all sorts of

wrong according to the culture."

Kelly expressed a new understanding that did not occur to her until well into her

transition. She noted,

Living abroad (in the Middle East) women and men can't make eye contact. That would

be really shameful . . . So I didn't even notice this but I came back to America and

realized all white men look the same, too.   I can't tell white men apart very easily. I

would get certain white men mixed up when they looked fairly similar to each other.

Emmy detailed receiving her first ATM card. She recalled her mom handing her a card

and telling her it was connected to her bank account. Emmy knew how to access her bank

statement, but no one had explained to her the difference between a checking and a savings

account. She recalled having her card denied while trying to purchase a smoothie. She

responded to the cashier, "But I just looked at my card. My ATM. I don't understand! . . . Try it

again!" She continued to explain that she had just looked at her account and there was money in

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it and exclaimed, "Unless the ATM is broken, I saw." Kelly also recalled making the transition from her cash only society in the Middle East to using an ATM card. As she processed through the transition, she continued to pay for everything in cash, only using her ATM card for withdrawals.

Looking back, Eli recalled, "I guess it's easy to try to compare things to where you used to be. Where you used to live. What things are like. It's an unrealistic thing to do I think. . . . It's important to have an open mind that you're going to a different place. You're going to a place that you may have never have experienced beforehand. It's good to . . . just realize that things aren't the same."

Natalie did not like America when she made her permanent return, "I didn't like America. . . . we had this gorgeous home and this really green area (in Africa). . . The memories were just so sweet. . . . We just really had a great community there." Emmy also experienced feelings of longing for Africa. "I got to the point where I was, that I hate America. I want to be in Africa. I mean, I didn't hate American in the sense of the politics or anything like that. I just hated being there. I just hated that I just didn't feel home. So it wasn't America itself. I just hated the fact that I wasn't home."

Sophie encouraged others who will make the transition in the future,

I would first of all say . . . don't have a negative attitude towards America and Americans. Because I had a negative attitude towards American and the Americans. And I couldn't see the positive in it and all I wanted to do was get back overseas as soon as I graduate because America is a terrible place. And now I am here and I'm like okay it's not that terrible of a place. I'll stay here. I'll teach here and live here. . . . Bit if you could just go into that it would be so much better.

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Kelly discerned,

(Silence) I think that it's important . . . it can be really helpful to conceptualize coming

back to America as coming back to a new country so that you can retain that sense of

eagerness and curiosity about the culture. And the willingness to transition into it. So

instead of seeing it as I'm coming home and everyone should just accept me as I am. To

be able to have that curiosity and wonder and so you can get excited about the same

things that are generally exciting here without feeling angry that people are happy about

the wrong things. Or that people behave in different ways.

Subtheme: If you're going to live in the States, you're going to need a car. When

asked if they encountered practical stressors when transitioning to the U.S., many brought up the

use of transportation. As the participants shared their logistical obstacles, the notion of "freedom

versus constraint" emerged. Not having a car, meant not readily having transportation, which in

turn meant reliance on other people and a remembrance of when, not long ago, they had

opportunities to explore independently.

Until his second year of college, Jamie did not have his own car. He relied on others for

rides including his friends, boss, and family members. He noted, "I had to mooch rides all the

time!" and that was rough at times to not have the freedom and independence to go when and

where he wanted. On the need for a car, he stated, "It is if you're going to live in the States.

You're going to need a car!" Jamie continued, "In SE Asia I didn't have a car . . . but I had my

long board and there's a public transportation system. I never felt constrained. And when I

moved to the States I definitely felt constrained." Emmy concurred that it was "humbling to

learn to rely on other people to get places" as she did not have a car, either, and would need to

rely on family members and friends for rides.

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Sophie talked about having her driver's license, but lack of experience in driving. She recalled her parents giving her the keys to their car, which had been in storage, and telling her it was her car to use through college. She stated, "the first time I got in the car and had to drive was when I was 16 or 15. I cried the entire two blocks. I'm am a very emotional person if you haven't noticed that!" And now she would be responsible for getting to different locations. She recalled, "It was also a stressor in the fact that I ran over someone's foot on accident!" Eli had similar feelings. He received his license just months after being in the U.S. The idea of driving himself and going to different locations was stressful.

Though lack of transportation could be considered a practical stressor, for some it signified deeper meaning. Four MKs described the easy access to public transportation they had in their host countries. This easy access provided easy logistics, but also something greater: independence.

Emmy recalled not having to rely on transportation when she was used to walking everywhere near her boarding school in Africa. Izzie described that the Western European city she lived in public transportation was accessible and easy to use. There was not a looming need for a vehicle as she was able to use the transportation system or walk throughout the town. However, in her current college city, the need for transportation is apparent. And because she does not have a vehicle, she has to find rides to get the basics.

Subtheme: Isolation. Isolation tended to be an issue for the participants early in their transition process. Five of the participants outright recognized that they felt or were isolated. Two participants did not use the word isolated, but described feelings of being alone.

Sophie recalled, "Yeah (silence) I want to say that I dealt with a lot of the emotional stress of coming back to America by ignoring it and saying I can't deal with this right now." She

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went on, ". . . I did not contact my parents for I think the first six weeks of school. At all. And I probably only called them to let them know when I was coming back for break."

Emmy agreed and remembered how the first couple of months of school she did not want to leave her home.. She would go to school and work, but then stay at home and be alone in her room as everything was so overwhelming to her. She recounted,

I don't really fit in. I'm in this place I don't really understand. Just also the constant growth. Like buildings popping up everywhere. Right when I got used to something, something massive changed and so I wasn't used to that constant growth. That not fitting in.

Izzie noted, "especially someone with my personality, but I think in general with difficult transitions it is easier too become a hermit or become isolated just because you feel isolated. Actually, becoming and making yourself isolated is a danger. Being involved in a group that will get you out there is important."

Essential Theme 4: I Am Complex Now

All the participants recalled periods of time where they felt out of place or were not sure how they fit in. But when asked about advice they would give to those preparing to transition to university, many reflected on the complexity of who they are as TCKs. And while sometimes the differences are hard to navigate, it is good to embrace those differences. The two subthemes that emerged are: Identity and Don't Take Me At Face Value (see Figure 4.6).

Figure 4. 6
Essential Theme 4: I Am Complex Now

Subthemes	Frequency Reported	Percentage
Don't Take Me At Face Value	7	100%
Identity	6	86%

Subtheme: Don't take me at face value. Many of the participants felt misunderstood

by those they encountered in America: "In America I look the same as everybody else, my

passport tells me that I'm American, but my heart and mind tell me I'm not," Emmy stated. "So

that was really hard for me. . . .people didn't understand that you just literally got a big part of

your life, in one sense, ripped away form you."

Izzie concurred:

It was odd because there were times when I felt I did belong and should belong here

because it is part of my culture. So then those times when I felt like I was not fitting and

not belonging were even harder because to look at me and to hear me talk, you would

think I would belong. But I just didn't feel that. So that was tough. And you know

raising questions like is this just because they're American and I'm kind of Western

European and kind of not American or is it just me? Am I just way to deep and I need to

lighten up. And that kind of thing. Or are these people all really superficial really there's

nothing deeper that's there?

Kelly reflected, "I think that on the outside most things probably looked fine. I tend to be

a little bit more of an internal processor and more observant when I get into situations." She

went on to discuss that she had observed her older sister's transition. Natalie discussed feeling

that others did not care. She recalls that it was not taken well that she grew up in Africa and so

she would hide that truth. Once on campus she did her best to not identify as an MK, however, was grateful for the resources provided as an MK.   Kelly recalls doing the same. Because her family also moved back to the U.S. shortly after she graduated from high school, she was able to tell others she was from the south. She said, "When I came in I kind of just pretended that the Middle East had never happened. . . . I voluntarily mentioned it a few times but on the outside I think I blended in okay." However, after the death of a missionary, she realized the need to share her story with others.

Eli also recalled sitting in class with a mix of MK's and others and thinking that some people just do not care. He noted,

I've had a few classes with other MKs. . . . A lot of times they'll point out the fact that they're MKs or that they lived overseas. And just watch other people . . .sometimes they just don't care. I guess taking that step again that not everything is about you. And some people just really don't care at all. It's important to realize . . .you're going through transition but not everybody has to know. You don't have to make it super obvious that you're going through that transition.

Emmy reflected, "But I had to come to the realization that people where going to say really stupid things to me and that a lot of them were going to be hurtful but I had to choose not be offended by them. And that was hard just because people said hurtful and harmful things." She also felt that people did not care. She continued, ". . . growing up in Africa, it's really cool for about 10 seconds and then it gets old for everybody else." She went on to describe the process of learning what to share and what not share. As she thought back to her days in boarding school, she remembered being able to share on deeper levels because that's what

everyone did. However, in the U.S. she had to learn that ". . . it's okay not to share my whole self at one time and not share my whole story."

Subtheme: Identity. Many of the participants discussed the need to establish identity outside of their parents. For some, this is more difficult. Emmy disclosed it was difficult to establish identity outside of her parents because she lived with them. It was in her second to the last year of university that she fully realized this need. She started attending another church and Bible studies.

Jamie explained, ". . . let yourself be different. Let yourself feel different. Don't just immediately become American. Or become of whatever country you're moving to. Please will think you're interesting for having lived abroad." Kelly surmised:

And I think too it's important to give yourself permission to recognize I am complex now. And that complexity is a good thing. But I get to determine hat ways that comes out. And so I don't have to always tell everyone everything about me. But I also don't have to purposely hold back. So I think the freedom to be who you actually want to be instead of just having to fit into boxes or expectations.

Kelly also revealed:

I think I didn't realize how much of an important part of being a TCK was to me. For a really long time. And in my senior year of college one of the missionaries was murdered overseas. And it was all over the news and so suddenly I couldn't exactly hide it from everyone anymore. And that brought . . .kind of made me come to terms this is actually where I'm from. This is a really big part of me.

Izzie explained:

There is a part of me that doesn't want to fit in completely. I like the fact that I am

different and so it's a balancing act I think between valuing that difference but then not

letting differences control me to the point of me not being able to relate to other people

and appreciate other people.

Sophie, who's family is now preparing to return to the U.S. permanently, expressed

emotions over losing her identify of living overseas: "I cried when she (her mom) told me cause

I'm losing my identity of being, of living overseas and having family living overseas. Even

though I know my identity is not in where I live."

Summary

Chapter IV described the lived experiences of Third Culture Kids and their transitions

through university in the U.S. Semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data

analysis was conducted through the use of closed coding to identify essential themes (Gibbs,

2011). Through this process, four essential themes were identified: 1) End Well, 2) Transition

Is A Rollercoaster, 3) Relationship Central, and 4) I Am Complex Now. Each essential theme

included subthemes.

The results indicated that ending well in the host culture was beneficial. Those who did

not effectively experience a sense of closure were more likely to have difficulties letting go and

transitioning well. Even for those who were able to end well, the transition to American culture

was rocky. Though all had great anticipation and expectation for how they thought the college

experience would be, they also felt feelings of nervousness and discomfort at the thought of

starting the college experience.

All participants in this study did not consider attending a university in a country other

than the U.S. The criteria choosing universities based on tuition discounts provided by their

missionary sending organizations or locality of family and friend social and logistical support. The majority chose major areas of study that reflected their experiences abroad. These included intercultural studies, Biblical studies, and career options that would allow them to return overseas as missionaries. Many were surprised at the lack of transitional support they received from their universities.

Access to support, both from offline and online sources, proved helpful for all the participants in this study. Particularly accessing social and practical support from family, mentors, sending organizations, and other TCKs helped with the transition process. Faith beliefs played a role for some in the transition process, but some of the participants noted that church attendance did not positively affect their transition. Church choice was impacted by the availability of transportation or connections with others.

The first year at college was the hardest to navigate for the participants. Challenges included missing family, friends and physical locations in the host country, processing culture shock and building new relationships. The participants found transitional support from family, counseling services, and mentors from faith communities. The participants expressed the complexity of identifying as a TCK. For some this meant denying that identify for a season so as to integrate within the U.S. culture and repel attitudes of indifference from others in the home culture. Many found solace in communicating and interacting with other TCKs and support organizations for TCKs as the shared experiences provided a sense of belonging.

The next chapter, Chapter V, provides interpretations of the findings, implications, and conclusions from the study.

Chapter V: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to discover and describe the lived experiences of TCKs as they transition into and through postsecondary education in the U.S. and what role social media played in building bridging and bonding social capital. This chapter provides an overview of the study and discusses the key findings and conclusions that emerged from this study. Implications and recommendations for practitioners and academics are discussed and conclude with a summary of the study.

Overview of the Study

With the increase and ease of international travel, options for living and working abroad have also increased. After children accompany their families to new countries, returning to the U.S. for postsecondary education can prove to be difficult, as it is often their first major transition without parents. It was anticipated that the descriptive data obtained from this research would provide a deeper understanding of the transition experiences of TCKs and contribute to the investigation of TCKs' transition to university experiences.

The methodology for this study included the use of a qualitative phenomenological design, so as to describe the lived experiences of TCKs transition to postsecondary education. The qualitative, semi-structured interviews allowed for continuity of data gathering among all the participants, yet allowed space for individual reflections and thoughts. The framework for data analysis was Pollock's Transition Model (1990), which includes the following stages: Involvement, Leaving, Transition, Entering and Re-Involvement as well as Putnam's (2000) viewpoint of social capital.

The participants for this study were recruited through postings on public social media group sites. Each posting included a brief description of the study and a link to a participant

qualification survey. Of those who completed the survey, 23 qualified and were interested in being interviewed. Through the use of an online random name sorter, ten potential participants were contacted, with seven participants ultimately agreeing to be interviewed. Though the goal was to recruit participants from all TCK subgroups, all seven were children of missionaries.

Key Findings

Key findings in the research indicate the participants had a desire for an American postsecondary education. Sending organization indirectly influenced participants decision where to attend and some provided tuition discounts at denominational-related postsecondary institutions. Other influencers included family and friend connections, accessibility, and cost factors.

Students who attended international schools before attending college in the U.S. received transition support to varying degrees. The most common was in the form of celebrations. This included senior retreats, end-of-the-year chapels, and workshops for ending well. Both those who did and did not attend an international school were provided support and encouragement by their parents. Those who were homeschooled were more likely to talk about academic readiness in preparation for the transition to college. Participants in this study had varying reactions to the preparations for transition.

All participants in this study had a sense of anticipation and expectancy of what university life would be like in the U.S. While some had mixed feelings of leaving the home and host culture they where familiar with, the notion of experiencing America for themselves and obtaining an American education was important to them. The need for ending well in their host cultures was evident. For many this possible, but others left with unresolved feelings.

It was evident that relationships were central in decision-making, good and bad transition experiences, and sense of belonging. Feelings of not being understood, weak relational ties, and a lack of social support greatly affected the transition process. Alternatively, having social support networks, both in person and online, provided a sense of belonging. Particularly, connecting with other TCKs to socialize and share experiences with proved beneficial. Additionally, while logistics provided obstacles, such as lack of transportation, resiliency helped to overcome the issues. For some, it meant stepping out of their comfort zone and asking for help from others.

Lastly, the complexity of identity emerged. While the participants valued their experiences as TCKs, some found it easier to hide it as part of their identity. This occurred as a result of either hearing about or experiencing adverse reactions to having overseas experiences. For others, declaring the title of TCK or MK was a statement of the uniqueness of their experiences.

Discussion

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of Third Culture Kids transitioning to postsecondary education through the use of a phenomenological methodology approach. This methodology was selected as it allowed space for participants to communicate how they viewed their experiences within a particular setting (Patton, 2002), in this study, the university setting. Studying the essence of TCKs experiences of their transition process required spending time collecting, observing, analyzing, and reflecting on the data shared and meaning associated with the TCKs experiences.

The sample for this study included seven individuals who were at varying points in their postsecondary education career. Criteria for inclusion in the study included U.S. passport

holders who had spent at least three of their developmental years between the ages of 7-18 in a country other than the U.S. due to their parents work. Additionally, they attended or currently attend a postsecondary institution in the U.S. and were between the ages of 18-27 at the time of the interview. Participants were selected from a pool of qualifying potential participants, using an online random selection tool. As a result, five females and two males agreed to participate in the study. Though this study sought to include TCKs of different subgroups, all seven who agreed to be interviewed were children of missionaries.

The findings of this study are important as they represent the essence of the TCK postsecondary transition experience and confirm previous research findings as well as add new insights. The themes that emerged based on the overlapping shared experiences of the seven TCKs interviewed may assist universities who welcome TCKs to their campuses as well as sending organizations who prepare and equip people for entry into new countries and reentry into the U.S. Additionally, the findings may also help TCKs, their parents, and international schools in providing insight of how to be better equipped for the transition to postsecondary education.

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1a. What are the lived experiences of Third Culture Kids transitioning through postsecondary education in the United States?

1b. What expectations and challenges did Third Culture Kids experience during their reentry into the U.S. and throughout their transition during postsecondary education?

2a. How does the use of social media foster a sense of belonging through the transition process of postsecondary education?

2b. How did social media impact the transition process?

2c. What role did social media play in building bridging and bonding social capital during the postsecondary education experience?

Preparation is Key

The participants in this study prepared for the transition from their host cultures to the U.S. in different ways. Those who attended an international school were more likely to be exposed to or participate in activities to help equip them for the transition. These included opportunities to bond and celebrate with their classmates, workshops and seminars to equip them with the practical skills they would need as young adults, and experiences to help process the emotions of saying farewell to the host culture. Those who were homeschooled were more apt to be concerned about the academic preparation for university than the actual transition itself.

Previous studies have also concluded the preparation to transition is important as the transition process itself can be stressful (Martin, 1986; Sussman, 2000) and be a bittersweet time (Storti (2001). The feelings of anticipation and excitement of going to the home culture are mixed with the sadness of leaving the host culture. As Sophie, one of the participants in this study noted, "I wanted to go to college, I just wasn't ready to leave life overseas." This proved true for the majority of the participants of this study. All described anticipation about experiencing American culture, though some were unsure about the values and cultural norms, but had mixed feelings of separating from friends and their lives abroad. There was a sense of excitement in starting over and developing a perspective of America from an untainted viewpoint.

Two students recalled the use of RAFT as promoted by Pollock and Van Reken (2001) to assist them with the goodbye process. This process includes reconciliation, affirmation,

farewells, and think destination. Though other participants may not have knowingly gone through RAFT process, many discussed the process of saying their goodbyes. Because of the quick departures for some, not having opportunities for a good goodbye resulted in feelings of non-closure. Three participants found that closure in going back to the host country to visit.

For others, there is still a longing to find peace. In a previous study conducted by Hervey (2009), the more difficult goodbyes were, the more distress was found in the adjustment process and led to greater issues readjusting to the culture. For those in this study who were not able to adequately say goodbye, this also proved to be true. Natalie recalled the abrupt nature of her departure and, believing her family would eventually return to Africa, did not say goodbye to her friends or community members. As a result it took her a number of years to grow comfortable in establishing friendships.

The TCKs who attended international schools were more likely to take part in closure celebrations. Celebrations included a getaway retreat for the graduating class to have time together and, in some instances, prepare for the transition. For others it included farewell chapels where the outgoing class could say thank you and share memories. These celebrations align with the Pollock's (1990) second stage of transition; Leaving.

The majority of the participants in this study reported choosing careers that would either allow them to extend their experiences from being abroad or to support others who work abroad. This concurs with Useem and Downie (1976) who found that most TCKs pursue professions that will continue their international lifestyle. Alternatively, it is common for TCKs to transition to multiple universities to complete their undergraduate education. Useem and Cottrell (1993), in a study of nearly 700 adult TCKs noted nearly forty percent of those surveyed did not receive a degree from the first college they attended. However, in this study, six of the seven participants

either graduated or are still at the first college they selected. This is likely due to the tuition discount offered to some of the participants in this study.

Relationship Central

The participants in this study found support in various places and at different times during their repatriation process. Many in this study reported receiving practical and emotional support from family and friends and found the most security in friendships with other TCKs. Some found support through their sending organizations and counseling services. Those who found support earlier on were more apt to transition more quickly than those who prolonged building relationships. This concurs with the results of a previous study conducted by Bikos et al. (2009) that revealed that having a support system was vital in navigating the journey of repatriation.

Because parents are often the one constant in the highly mobile lives of TCKs, strong parental relationships are common (Peterson & Plamondon, 2009) as parents are often the only people with whom TCKs have a continuing relationship. Throughout this study, participants were quick to support their parents decisions, even when they may have felt emotional duress from the experiences. Some challenged the experiences and wondered if their parents could be of help, but no one put blame on their parents for the experiences. As Natalie stated, "my parents were such good stewards of our feelings . . . they went above and beyond to get us the care that we needed." Additionally, TCKs often felt a sense of responsibility towards their parents and hid their feelings, which aligns with a study conducted by (Gilbert, 2008).

The majority of the participants in this study discussed the role of their faith communities as a means of support, both in the practical and emotional sense, in the days before transitioning to the U.S. and once they arrived. Some received summer employment through their local

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church or sending organization to help prepare other missionary kids to transition in addition to in-person and online resources. Interestingly, many did not find emotional support in a local church. This was attributed to a variety of reasons, including lack of transportation which meant having to go with others who were able to provide a ride. For others, the church style was different than they were accustomed to experiencing. As Izzie pointed out, "Just the differences in services. Going to really big churches. I was not used to that. . . . Worship services with all the concert style lighting and loud music."

While some of the universities the TCKs attended provided tuition discounts, the availability of transition support seemed to be non-existent for most of the participants. They found this surprising as many of the universities knew they were TCKs because of their missionary status. Some were surprised by this lack of support and felt it would have been beneficial. Four of the seven participants sought counseling services on campus or through another avenue. While they found value in being able to share their experiences and express their feelings, they felt it would have been helpful to have had a counselor who was also a TCK or had received training in the TCK perspective.

As Fail, Thompson, and Walker (2004) have previously discovered, TCKs often struggle to find a sense of belonging. However, being a part of a TCK community, whether through previously formed relationships or newly formed friendships on campus provided a sense of comfort and belonging for the participants. Some sought these connections right away, but for others, particularly those who did not want to identify as a TCK, the support came later in their university experience.

Social media as social capital. A primary research question of this study included "How does social media foster a sense of belonging through the transition process of postsecondary

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education?" All the participants in this study reported using social media as a way to connect with others. For most, the connections were the strongest with those they already knew and had built relationships or connections with. Particularly during the beginning of the transition, the use of social media brought comfort as it allowed for connections with friends and family around the world. The most commonly used social media form was Facebook. Though others were mentioned, Facebook allowed for flexibility in messaging and photo sharing. Instagram was identified as the second most popular social media tool and was used for sharing pictures and being able to visually see how others were getting along. It was interesting to note the perspective of Izzie, who disclosed she used social media on and off during her transition process, but then as she grew more comfortable in the U.S. culture, found she needed it more so to stay connected with her peers in America.

Emmy, a participant in this study, disclosed that during her first year at school, she went through a season of depression. Through Facebook conversations and encouragement from a former classmate, now residing in Australia, she sought out the help that she needed. Similarly, Natalie found comfort from communicating with other MKs through chat rooms when she was feeling down about her transition. These outcomes concur with Ye (2006) who observed that online social groups play a protective role similar to face-to-face social support and provide a reduction in stress.

The majority of participants in this study reported social media networking use helped maintain bonding social capital connections with existing close friends and family through allowing them to keep in touch with family members and high school friends who were based around the world. These results are similar to those of a study conducted by Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) of U.S. college students who reported, in a study of U.S. college students, that

social media use helped students maintain connections with existing close friends and family.

However, the use of social media did not factor in building bridging social capital, or those ties that refer to connections to help with logistical and other practical support. Only one participant, Izzie, reported using social media as a means for logistical support. And even in that, her use was to access a network she already had developed offline. As Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) previously discovered, Facebook, in particular provided a link between offline communities, however, online interactions did not necessarily remove people from their offline world but may be used to support relationships and keep people in contact.

Transition Is a Rollercoaster

High rates of mobility are often a trait of TCKs (Cockburn, 2002, Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999; Walker & Auton-Cuff, 2009), which was also found to be true of the participants in this study. They transitioned often between multiple U.S. cities and the host culture for furloughs, as well as made multiple moves to different host cultures. One participant, Kelly, recalled making ten moves before starting university. Many have transitioned numerous times, not only between home and host cultures, but also between different host cultures.

For those returning to their home country after spending much of their lives abroad, there is anticipation and expectation of what they think home should be. While living abroad allows for unique and diverse experiences, the same cross-cultural experiences can also produce negative feelings and emotions upon repatriation to the home country (Adler, 1981; Davis et al., 2013). The participants in this current study, experienced similar expectations.

As they recounted their transition experiences, they often followed Pollock's (1990) transition model. The participants in this study felt a sense of belonging in their host cultures. As they prepared to leave, which is the second stage of the model, there were many celebrations,

yet some had feelings of denial and distancing. As one of the participants, Sophie described, she was not herself the year and summer before she returned to the States for schooling. As her parents tried to talk her through some the upcoming transition, she would push them away. Emmy also recalled being in denial about the transition, even though she knew it was coming and that it was her next logical step. As Izzie looked back on her days before arriving in the U.S. she said, "Honestly, I was not very happy about it most of the time when I thought about it. . . I was leaving home in a lot of ways. I was coming back to my home culture kind of but not really."

The participants talked about the need for transportation in America. While at first glance, this would appear to be a logistical concern, feelings of being constrained surfaced. Many of the participants fondly remembered the freedom associated with the availability of public transportation in their host cultures and how this gave them a sense of freedom and independence. This concurs with a previous study conducted by Huff (2001) who found TCKs were given more independence.

It was evident that the first year at university seemed to be the most difficult for everyone. Many participants felt a sense of grief and loss for the expat life (Szkudlarek, 2010) and had concerns for building personal relationships (Martin, 1986). They related to the third stage of Pollock's (1990) model, the Transition stage, which includes feelings of being unknown and isolation, as well as anxiety. Jamie discussed how he did not want to get to know the other students at his first university. He recalled the others grew up in small towns and did not have relatable experiences to his. As a result, he transferred to a bigger school.

Not feeling understood, loneliness, and not fitting in were all areas of distress for the participants (Cockburn, 2008; Fail, 1996). Sophie recalled feeling "desperate for comfort"

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during her first year. She found safety with other TCKs who could relate to her experiences. Emmy recalled attempting to build relationships with anyone who was wiling to be her friend. She spent time considering how much to share with people, as she was accustomed to having deep relationships with those at her boarding school. As both Sophie and Emmy reflect back, they realized some of their choices were not healthy, but were a means of getting through a difficult time. Izzie also remembered the challenges of building relationships and identifying those with whom to be intentional. She longed for deep connections with others but, as what has been encountered by TCKs in a previous study, found shallowness of relationships (Bikos, et al., 2009).

Though the first year of schooling seemed to be the most difficult for the participants in this study, it should not be assumed that students are completely adjusted after the first year (Hervey, 2009). While many grew more comfortable in the surroundings, when asked, most in this study said it took three or more semesters to grow comfortable in their setting, with one noting it was closer to the end of their undergraduate studies. As Kelly, one of the participants observed, "I don't know that there was on specific moment or one specific semester where everything became better. . . at some point I started to feel like I could actually be active in my own life more . . . I would definitely say by my senior year."

I Am Complex Now

Identity is typically defined by values, belief, behavior, and what influences our interactions with others (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). Though TCKs are able to cope and adapt to a new setting, some do so by trying put aside their culture experiences. This proved true for some of the participants in this study. Many of the participants in this study struggled to formulate their identity. Previous authors (Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Pollock & Van

Reken, 2001) have promoted that this a common challenge TCKs encounter as learning to live between and among cultures can be complex and a difficult challenge. For the participants in this study, it was not always about losing the physical location or host culture identity, but about losing the known, particularly in the form of deep bonds they had developed with others while living abroad.

TCKs may feel disappointment when they discover differences between themselves and passport country peers who have not lived overseas. Because peers often do not understand the unique experiences an lifestyles TCKs have encountered, TCKs are often forced to put that part of their identity aside and attempt to adapt to the new setting (Downie, 1976). As a result, they may hide their experiences (Bates, 2013). This proved to be true for some the participants in this study. Though it was often relieving for them to be able to identify as a TCK and share their experiences with others who would understand or listen. Loneliness and isolation, along with a depression and feelings of alienation were reported among the participants in this study, which concurs with a previous study conducted by Gaw (2000).

Implications

The results of this study support the transition model as proposed by Pollock (1990). For TCKs to effectively go through each phase of their transition successfully, support from parents, sending organizations, international schools, and the universities that receive them is crucial. While many of these entities do well to support TCKs through the transition process, others have much to do to gain understanding.

Implications for international schools and homeschooling families include intentionally providing opportunities for TCKs to have farewell experiences that provide a sense of closure. Additionally, offering transition preparation training that includes both practical aspects, as well

as steps that will help in overcoming the emotional stress of the reentry and transition process. While there seems to be an understanding that transition is a process, some families did not know how to adequately prepare their children for reentry.

Implications for U.S. postsecondary schools include better preparation for those who work directly with TCKs, whether through the admissions process, community development, or counseling services. As some TCKs in this study observed, their universities were not adequately prepared to welcome them to campus or assist with the emotional stress of the transition process.

Implications for sending organizations include reviewing their current practices of how they assist TCKs with the transition process. Though some currently do this well, there were others that did not provide support. Reviewing the practices of other sending agencies may help in identifying a comprehensive portfolio of online, text, and interactive resources to prepare TCKs.

Implications for TCKs include recognizing the value of having an international experience. Though the transition process includes obstacles, appreciating that the unique experiences they have will benefit society. Acknowledging, but then overcoming the emotional obstacles that often hinder them, will be of benefit to them as they share their rich experiences.

Recommendations for TCK Stakeholders

The conclusions that emerged from this study lead to several recommendations for practice at international schools, universities that knowingly recruit TCKs, and for TCKS, their parents, and their sponsoring organizations. While this study was specific to children of missionaries, other TCK populations could also benefit from these recommendations.

Recommendations for international schools. The participants in this study who attended an international school their final year of high school before transitioning to a university, recalled senior year events including retreats and goodbye chapels. International schools would do well to continue providing these bonding experiences, but then also offer additional opportunities for intentional transition preparation. Two students remembered having events their senior year that were meant to be helpful, but because the students were either "checked out" and ready to graduate or overwhelmed by the fact that they were actually leaving. As a result, schools are encouraged to begin transition preparations with juniors and then continue preparations during the fall of senior year.

Two students recalled using the RAFT (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001) process to say goodbye. School counselors and teachers would benefit from reading the book, *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds*, which provides a detailed description of the RAFT process. The book also provides additional insights and recommendations when working with TCKs to transition.

School personnel should conduct a pre-departure seminar or workshop for students transitioning to postsecondary education in the U.S. It is encouraged to do this in a series of events rather than in a one-weekend getaway. For those in this study who experienced a getaway retreat, even when it was developed for reentry discussions, the time was used to bond with friends and classmates. Topics should include possible practical and social stressors, navigating relationships, and potential psychosocial obstacles they may encounter.

International schools should also be diligent in remaining in contact with alumni. Because so many are connected to social media, often Facebook, a school group page may be the most accessible and beneficial. The majority of the participants in this study maintained ties

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with their friends through the use of social media, whether those friends were located in the U.S. or in other parts of the world. Social media may be the most flexible and logical tool depending on the location of the international school. Two students recalled the benefits of hearing from alumni about their transition experiences. This was especially important for those who the first in their family to transition.

The research participants overwhelmingly chose careers that reflected their experiences abroad or to prepare them for future careers abroad. School counselors would do well to encourage a wide range of career options while the students are still in high school. Additionally, along with discussing the unique characteristics of being a TCK, provide opportunities for how students can implement their unique experiences in their future careers. Figure 5.1 provides a summary of the recommendations for international schools.

Figure 5.1
Recommendations for International Schools

Theme	Summary of Recommendations
Preparation is Key	Offer pre-departure seminars for the practical and emotional transition during junior year or early in senior year
Relationship Central	Provide bonding experiences and other celebrations for TCKs to strengthen relationships and allow for good goodbyes
Transition is a Rollercoaster	School personnel would benefit from reading *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds* Invite alumni to present their transition experiences
I Am Complex Now	Provide space for TCKs to discuss their identity and how their unique experiences may impact their college and other life experiences

Recommendations for U.S. postsecondary institutions. Universities who actively or knowingly admit TCKs should train and equip someone within their admissions office about the unique needs of TCKs. For some TCKs, their first campus visit is during move-in week as not all have opportunities for college visits during their high school years. If the university is connected with a church denomination, linking resources would also be of benefit to students. Participants in this study shared examples of how their universities assisted them with the transition process, but others recounted their universities provided no support even when they were aware the student was a TCK. One participant remembered how her university excitedly recruited her because of her TCK status, yet when she arrived, provided no support for reentry.

Figure 5.2
Recommendations for U.S. Postsecondary Institutions

Theme	Summary of Recommendations
Preparation is Key	Offer welcome week events and campus tours specific to TCKs prior to the start of the school year
Relationship Central	Provide separate student organization for TCKs and international students to build community support
Transition is a Rollercoaster	Universities who actively or knowingly admit TCKs should train someone within the admissions office about transition challenges TCKs encounter
I Am Complex Now	As TCKs often seek counseling services, primarily on campus, train or hire a counselor with a TCK background to assist students with emotional stressors

A number of students in this study accessed counseling services. Some accessed services on campus, but were either not confident of or were unsure of the counselor's understanding of their perspective and experiences as TCKs. Ultimately, it would be of great benefit to TCKs to employ a counselor who was also had the experience of being a TCK. For many campuses that

may not be possible, so providing specific training concerning TCKs would be a doable substitute. Figure 5.2 provides a summary of recommendations for universities actively or knowingly enrolling TCKs.

Recommendations for TCKs, parents, and sending organizations. TCKs would benefit from processing their identity as TCKs. Students who have an understanding of their identity and are able to process their experiences are better adjusted and experience less isolation (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). Their parents should become aware of the unique experiences and challenges their children encounter as TCKs; and, particularly for those who homeschool their children abroad, it is recommended they become mindful of the transition process their children will encounter when moving to the U.S. for postsecondary education. They are encouraged to collect resources from a local international school or from other avenues to help their children prepare. Parents should provide opportunities to for their children to say goodbye to the host culture(s). Not only to the people they encounter, but also to the places that held meaning. Parents are encouraged to have their kids attend a reentry retreat in the U.S. as these events provide practical experiences in the U.S. such as navigating the banking system and Wal-Mart. Additionally, these retreats create space for TCKs to process their transition and interact with other TCKs who are encountering the same expectations and challenges of being in the U.S.

Some of the TCKs in this study were encouraged by the support they received from their parents sponsoring organization as they prepared for the transition process and while they were transitioning. Other TCKs in this study noted their sponsoring organizations did not provide support. It is important that these groups provide resources and support for discussion concerning TCKs and their families process the transition to postsecondary education. Figure 5.3 provides a summary of recommendations for TCKs, parents, and sponsoring organizations.

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Figure 5.3

Recommendations for TCKs, Parents, and Sponsoring Organizations

Theme	Summary of Recommendations
Preparation is Key	Provide resources, including books and seminars, concerning practical and emotional preparations for the transition. Encourage TCKs to attend a reentry retreat upon arriving in the U.S.
Relationship Central	Provide bonding experiences and other celebrations for TCKs to strengthen relationships and allow for good goodbyes
Transition is a Rollercoaster	Be mindful of the transition process TCKs will encounter when moving to the U.S. for postsecondary education
I Am Complex Now	Parents should become aware of the unique experiences and challenges their children encounter as TCKs TCKs would benefit from opportunities to process their identity and unique experiences

Recommendations for Further Research

This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of seven TCKs from missionary families who spent part of their developmental years overseas, and recently attended or are currently attending postsecondary education in the southern and southeastern part of the U.S. The initial goal was to explore the experiences of TCKs from a variety of backgrounds including missionaries, as well as children of military, business, and diplomatic personnel. However, through the participant recruitment phase, all those who met the research criteria for this study came from missionary families. Therefore, this study focused on the TCK subgroup, missionary kids.

The first recommendation would be to replicate this study with a larger sample size and broader range of TCKs from all subgroups, who attended college in various parts of the U.S. to draw potential distinctions among the various TCK populations and regions. Secondly, a mixed-method approach would be valuable in continuing to develop the rich and thick narratives of TCKs, and also provide generalized statistics of the various TCK populations in relationship to their postsecondary education transition experiences.

Another recommendation is to study the relationship between TCKs and their sending organizations in preparation for transition. As some in this current study found great benefits from being connected to their sending organizations, others either did not have a sending organization or were unaware of potential resources available to them. Also, a study comparing the effectiveness of resources for TCKs at universities knowingly or actively enrolling TCKs would be a welcome addition to the current body of research. While Lewis and Clark in Oregon is often cited in the research, it is evident there are many other postsecondary institutions actively accepting all subgroups of Third Culture Kids.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of Third Culture Kids transitioning to postsecondary education and what role, if any, social media played in the process. Patterned after a previous study conducted by Purnell and Hoban (2014), the study sought to add to the current body of Third Culture Kids research. The research approach focused on the essence of the phenomenon while seeking to understand the experience of the seven TCKs in this study, however, the experiences of these TCKs should not be generalization for the entire TCK population (Merriam, 2009)

With the ease travel abroad and as the world becomes increasingly connected, families are choosing to live and work in countries other than their passport countries. While these experiences provide opportunities for adolescents to experience different cultures, sites, and people, the process shapes them in unique ways. As noted in this study, as well as previous studies, TCKs inhabit a unique space with their broad worldview and highly value relationships. As they prepare to make a transition, particularly to postsecondary education, these factors impact how they proceed through the transition. They encounter myriad experiences, some that are exciting such as discovering new places and building new relationships. For many, the transition also proves to be challenging as they encounter emotions associated with culture shock, the journey to process identity, and finding a sense of belonging.

This study utilized Pollock's (1990) transition model of Involvement, Leaving, Transition, Entering, and Re-involvement as a data analysis structure. Throughout the data collection and analysis phases of the study, it was found the TCKs in this study identified with each of the stages through their experiences. However, for many the final stage, Re-involvement, proved to be unclear.

The study also used Putnam's theory of social capital to help determine if social media is a source for maintaining and building bridging and bonding capital. It was determined that all the participants in this study used social media sites for maintaining bonding social capital, or personal relationships, with close family and friends. However, their social media use did not effectively help with building bridging social capital. This may be due to the nature of the communities they came from and comfort of face-to-face communications.

All the participants relied on ties with family, faith community, and other TCKs for practical and emotional support, both online and off. As they continue and complete the

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transition process, this network of support, along with personal resiliency, TCKs can find

confidence in having good goodbyes and happy hellos.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

The following questions will be used as a guide during the semi-structured interviews of TCKs who are transitioning or who have recently transitioned through postsecondary education. The specific wording may be modified as needed to accommodate each research participant. Additional questions may be used to further probe for clarification or elaboration of the topic. The interview questions are a replication of a previous study conducted by Purnell and Hoban (2014). Purnell granted permission of interview protocol for use in this study.

1. How long have you been in the United States?
   a. What are you studying? Why did you choose to study this area?

2. Why did you decide to come to the U.S. to study?

3. How did you feel about coming to the U.S. to live and to attend postsecondary education?

4. What was your experience of settling into American culture and way of life?

5. How did you become socially connected in the US.?
   a. Probe: social network sites, student life at your university, church, family and existing friendship networks, etc.?
   b. Feelings about their new social situations in the U.S.?

6. If you encountered any practical (logistical) stressors when you moved to the U.S., can you tell me about them?
   a. What were some of these practical stressors?
   b. Probe: Public transportation, phones, food, banking, social etiquettes and customs?
   c. Feelings about these stressors?
   d. What role, if any, did social media (FB, Twitter, etc.) play?

7. If you encountered any emotional stressors after moving to the U.S., can you tell me about them?
   a. What were some of these emotional stressors?
   b. How did these emotional stressors make you feel?
   c. Actions taken to address these emotional stressors? Did you utilize social media during this process? If so, how?
   d. Situation now?

8. If you accessed any support networks when you moved to the U.S., can you tell me about them?
   a. If you did access support networks, what were they and what was your experience of them?
   b. How was it for you trying to access support networks?
      i. What made it easy or difficult?
      ii. What was the outcome?
      iii. How did they assist you in settling into life in the U.S.?
      iv. What role, if any, did social media play in this process?

9. Did your university provide any support to you settling into the U.S.?
   a. If they did, what kind of support? What was your experience of that support?
   b. If they did not, how did that affect your experience of settling into the U.S.?

10. Did your international school prepare you for the transition?

11. What advice, if any, would you give to this year's seniors preparing to transition to university life in the U.S.?

12. Is there anything we have not discussed that you would like to share before we end?

Appendix B: Consent Form to Participate in Research

Project Title: Good Goodbyes and Happy Hellos: The TCK Transition to Postsecondary
Education
Researcher: Sarah R. Hoverson
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Cheryl Bostrom

You are invited to participate in a study of Third Culture Kids (TCKs) transitioning through
postsecondary education. The purpose of this study is to gain insights of the lived experiences of
TCKs transitioning to postsecondary education and what role, if any, social media played in the
process. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you filled out the
qualifying survey via Qualtrics and met the research criteria.

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-minute audio-
recorded interview via Skype. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this
research beyond those experienced in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to you from
participation, but the information you provide may impact future TCKs who grow up abroad and
transition to postsecondary education, as well as those who interact with TCKs.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will
remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In any written reports or
publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only aggregate data will be presented.
At the completion of the project, all transcripts and audio recordings will be stored at the
researcher's residence in a locked cabinet. Online recordings will be stored on the researcher's
computer, which is password protected. All data will be stored for three years before being
destroyed. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but
your identity will not be revealed, as you will be provided a pseudo name. Any other potentially
identifying information will be generalized.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not
affect your future relations with Bethel University or the university you are currently attending or
have attended in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation
at any time without affecting such relationships. Following the interview, if you would like to
talk further with someone, you are encouraged to contact your university's counseling center
(whether current student or alumni), who will speak with you or provide a referral. Should this
not be possible, you will be directed to the Minnesota Renewal Center (651-486-4828) for
services if local to the Twin Cities or for possible referrals if outside the Twin Cities area.

This research project has been reviewed and approved in accordance with Bethel University's
Level of Review for Research with Humans. If you have any questions about the research and/or
research participants' rights or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact researcher,
Sarah Hoverson, at srh62753@bethel.org or 1.651.324.1239 (cell) or Faculty Sponsor, Dr.
Cheryl Bostrom, at c-bostrom@bethel.edu.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agreed to participate in this research study. You may withdraw from the study at any time without affecting your relationship with Bethel University or the university you are currently attending or have attended. You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

_____   _____

Signature of Research Participant   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Investigator   Date

Appendix C: Participant Qualification Survey

Participant Qualification Survey
Good Goodbyes and Happy Hellos:
The TCK Transition to Postsecondary Education

1. Do you hold a U.S. passport?
    a. Yes
    b. No

2. Have you lived outside the U.S. for three or more years between the ages of 7-18?
    a. Yes, if yes, how many years?
    b. No

3. If you answered yes to question 2, which country(ies) did you live in and your approximate age while living there:
    a. Form Box

4. Which of the following best describes your reason for living outside the U.S.:
    a. One or more members of your family is or was a missionary
    b. One or more members of your family is or was in the military
    c. One or more members of your family works or worked in business
    d. One or more members of your family is or was a Diplomat
    e. Other (please specify):
        i. Form for other answer

5. When did you last return to the U.S.? Please list month and year
    a. Form Box

6. Year in Postsecondary education
    a. First
    b. Second
    c. Third
    d. Fourth or more
    e. Graduated

7. What is your age?
    a. Form Box

8. Do you use social media?
    a. Yes
    b. No

9. If you answered yes to question 8, which of the following do you use:
    a. Facebook
    b. Twitter
    c. LinkedIn
    d. Other, please list
        i. Form for other

10. The questions in this survey are part of a research project about Third Culture Kids and what role social media plays in the transition process to postsecondary education. Would you be willing to talk with me further about your experiences transitioning to postsecondary education? If you are willing to talk with me via Skype, please check yes and provide your first name and the best way for me to contact you.
    a. No
    b. Yes. If yes, please provide your first name and preference for contact

Appendix D: Participant Recruitment Letter

Study Title: Good Goodbyes and Happy Hellos: The TCK Transition to Postsecondary
Education

Dear ___,

Thank you for your interest in participating in the "Good Goodbyes and Happy Hellos" study.
As a doctoral candidate in the Doctorate of Educational Leadership at Bethel University in St.
Paul, MN, I am conducting this research study as part of the requirements of my degree, and
would like to invite you participate in the study.

The study focuses on the lived experiences of Third Culture Kids transitioning to postsecondary
education and what role, if any, social media has in the process. Would you be willing to meet
with me, via Skype, for an interview? In particular, you will be asked questions about your
experiences transitioning from living overseas to college in the U.S. The meeting will take place
at a mutually agreed upon time and will last about 60 minutes. The session will be audio
recorded so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. You will have the opportunity to
review your interview transcript.

Although you probably won't benefit directly from participating in this study, it is possible that
others in the TCK community will benefit from your shared experiences. Participation is
confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at my home residence. The
results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will
not be revealed as you will be provided a pseudo name.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You may also withdraw from the study at any time or
decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at
651.324.1239 or srh62753@betheul.edu.

Thank you for your consideration. If you haven't already done so, and would like to participate,
please go to https://bethel.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV0PdBncUvT7z1gYl to complete a
qualifying survey. After completing the study, you will receive a $25.00 gift card to a business
of your choice as a thank you for your time.

With kind regards,

Sarah Hoverson
1.651.324.1239 or srh62753@bethel.edu

Good Goodbyes and Happy Hellos:
The TCK Transition to Postsecondary Education

Third Culture Kids meeting the following criteria are needed for a dissertation study:

- U.S. passport holder

- Currently or recently attended a postsecondary institution in the U.S.

- A minimum of three years abroad between the ages of 7-18

- Between the ages of 18-27

- Final year of secondary (high school) education spent overseas

- Willingness to participate in an interview via Skype

- Participants who complete the study will receive a $25.00 gift card

ARE YOU INTERESTED?
Please contact the researcher, Sarah Hoverson
at
651.324.1239 (cell)
or
e-mail srh62753@bethel.edu