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Social and Transitional Experiences of Non-White Third Culture Kids at a Predominantly White Institution

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SOCIAL AND TRANSITIONAL EXPERIENCES OF NON-WHITE THIRD CULTURE KIDS

AT A PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTION

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTERS THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to look at the social and transitional experiences of non-white Third Culture Kids at a predominately white institution. Six non-white TCKs were interviewed using phenomenological qualitative methodology. Responses were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to discover the central themes. A variety of factors emerged as determinants to how these students experience college in a country outside of their home country. The findings present implications for individuals in higher education that interact with non-white TCKs. Recommendations for future research are also included.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We live in a society where there is a high interest in and longing for world travel. In particular, the American society has become globally diverse. Storti (1999) explains that few Americans live in a monocultural world. He adds, "We [Americans] work with people from other cultures, live next door to them, study in class with them, or teach with them. They may be our customers, our competition, or our in-laws" (p. 1). The increase in transportation and technology in the past fifty years has led to global interaction (Hill, 2006). International travel and moving overseas is a growing trend, and each year many make the life-changing decision of moving abroad to work or retire.

As individuals choose to live abroad to work, they make the choice of having and raising their children in a country other than their own. In agreement Cockburn (2002) explains that "along with globalization, the number of expatriates raising their children overseas has grown dramatically" (p. 477). These children end up living a mosaic life, and as they grow up and continue to develop, they begin to realize that they are either different or similar to those around them. They begin to wonder if or where they "fit in," and the older they get the more they start to recognize the dominance of more than one culture in their lives. It is at this point when they start to question who they really are.

"Who am I?" "What is my identity?" "Where do I belong?" These questions begin to consume the mind of a college student regardless of their ethnic differences, family, and economic background. Living in a new environment, having a roommate for the first time, and adjusting to the college culture are common experiences shared among

all students. As new students navigate their way through their first year at college, they

are often faced with challenges. Many students feel lonely because of being in an

unfamiliar environment (Paul & Sigal, 2001). For Third Culture Kids, these difficult

college experiences take a different route. As is the case with international students,

TCKs are coming from life abroad. In doing so, new societal values, roles, rights and

responsibilities are introduced to them (Weigel, 2010). Gaw (1995) explains that these

students go through repatriation, a process that involves readjusting, reaculturating, and

reassimilating into their home county.

In order to have a successful and memorable college experience, TCKs need to be

willing to put in the time and effort not only in their studies but also to activities that lead

to the experience and outcomes that constitute student success. The institutions they

attend should be willing to do their share of engaging these students. Astin (1984) defines

student involvement as the physical and psychological energy that is applied by a student

to better their academic experience. Because TCKs have a different upbringing, their

experiences prior to college may or may not reflect their involvement at college.

Who is a "TCK"?

According to Bowers (1998) the term *Third Culture Kid* is not a new one, yet

there still is the misunderstanding that Third Culture Kids (TCKs) are individuals raised

or from "third world countries." In agreement, Smith (1996) argues that third culture is

not synonymous with third world. The term originated from Dr. Ruth Useem (1960), a

sociologist at Michigan State University who worked with the US business and

government families on overseas assignments. As she worked with these families, she

had the opportunity to observe their children and noticed that there was something

different about them (Bowers, 1998). Smith (1996) adds that Dr. Useem used the term *third culture* as a general term to cover the lifestyles created, shared, and learned by people who are in the process of relating their societies to each other.

In an attempt to define TCK, the terms (a) home culture, (b) host culture and (c) third culture are used. To best define the third culture, the first culture is the home culture, also known as the passport culture. The parents of the student were born and raised in this country and culture. The second culture, known as the host culture, is the culture into which the student's parents moved. This is the culture in which the student was raised. Missionaries are good examples of people who can identify with the home (first) and host (second) cultures. TCKs, therefore, are individuals who have spent most of their development years outside of their parents' home culture (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). In order to get the third culture, this individual takes different aspects of the two cultures introduced to them and pieces theses aspects together creating a culture of their own – the third culture. Dr. Useem (1993) calls this shared lifestyle an interstitial culture or a "culture between cultures." In addition, Pollock & Van Reken (2001) write:

> Third Culture Kids build relationships to all of the cultures while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the Third Culture Kid's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background. (p. 29-33)

College students classified as TCKs include students whose parents work in different countries as missionaries, in the military, in the corporate industry, as Foreign Service workers, or in the media.

Purpose of the Study

Many studies have been conducted on Missionary Kids (MKs), a sub-group of TCKs (Bounds 2008; Gaw, 1995; Hervey, 2009; Klemens, 2008; Wiegel, 2010). These studies have targeted individuals whose home culture is the United States, many of which are Caucasian. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the college life experiences of non-white TCKs who are at a predominantly white institution. This study will look at their characteristics as cultural chameleons, hidden immigrants, and global nomads and how these characteristics impact their transition into college. This study desires to extend research on TCKs as the numbers of this group of students continues to increase.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What are the college experiences of non-White Third Culture Kids while adjusting to college?

2. How does student involvement impact non-White Third Culture Kids' transition to college?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature will provide a general outlook on transition into college. It will then look at the characteristics of Third Culture Kids and integrate theories of transition and student involvement.

Transition

As defined by Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995), transition is any event or non-event that results in changed relationship, routines, assumptions, and roles. Similarly, Bridges (1995) explains transition to be a psychological process an individual undergoes when he or she is in contact with a new situation. Transitions can be expected or unexpected. Regardless, something in our lives will change due to a particular transition. Schlossberg (in Evans, 1998) stresses that a transition exists only if the individual experiencing it defines it. For a new student, going to college introduces a major shift in home and college relationships, daily activities, and personal roles.

College is a time of constant transition for both TCKs and non-TCKs. Going to college can be an intimidating and scary experience for all new college students. The new environment, being away from family, and making new friends are college experiences that are an overwhelming and intimidating process for many students, while for others the experience presents a refreshing and rejuvenating feeling. College is a time when one grows not just academically but also psychologically, interpersonally, emotionally, and spiritually. Campbell (2002) writes:

Residential learning recognizes that postsecondary studies are not only

intellectual, but also bear potential for emotional, psychological and interpersonal

growth, in addition to providing an opportunity to learn how to live with those

who are like us and with those who are different, distant and unfamiliar. (p. 11).

For TCKs, these new college experiences take different forms. Like international

students, TCKs are coming from a different country and thus may face challenges similar

to these students.

It is at college where much of students' identity issues start to surface. Many

students start to blend in while others realize that they are different and tend to isolate

themselves turning college into either a pleasant or difficult experience. Edise and Sichel

(2004) compared TCKs and their development to that of pressing a musical record where

one lays down a note (or track) upon another to produce a multi-toned chord.

The questions "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" increasingly become

difficult to answer. Though many embrace it, others decide not to deal with this issue and

tend to identify with either the home or host country. College is a place where TCKs

begin to realize that they are different. Other students come to this recognition as well. As

TCKs make their transition into college, their identity is challenged. It is through

interaction with others and their involvement on campus where many are able to

distinguish who they are.

TCKs, Transition, and Involvement

Third Culture Kids are individuals who have spent much of their developmental

years outside their parents' home culture. Living in more than one culture can be

beneficial yet challenging. TCKs are described as "cultural chameleons" and "hidden

immigrants" (McCaig 1996; Pollock & Van Reken 2001). They are also known as "global nomads" (McCaig 1992; Smith, 1996).

As cultural chameleons, hidden immigrants, and global nomads, the transition into college can be a devastating or exciting time. TCKs' unique characteristics can affect their college experience.

TCKs as cultural chameleons.

As "cultural chameleons," TCKs develop a high degree of cultural adaptability (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). After TCKs spend time observing what is around them, they quickly and easily change their style of living, relating, appearance, cultural practices, and even language to match those around them. For them, seeing, hearing, tasting, and smelling new things is their style of living (Bowers, 1998). Adapting to the culture and lifestyle around them is a survival tool, as they have had to move from one area to another. As part of being flexible, they have learned to think quickly on their feet, and they can often roll with the punches even in unusual circumstances (Pollock & Van Reken).

Because of being able to adapt to what is around them, TCKs have the tendency to belong everywhere and nowhere (Bowers, 1998). Where they call "home" becomes hard for them to describe. Home can refer to the school dormitory or to the house where they stayed over the summer, the family's home where their parents worked or the country of citizenship or the host country (Smith, 1996). In addition to belonging everywhere and nowhere, Bowers discusses that the idea of TCKs not knowing where home is introduces a sense of rootlessness. Not knowing where to belong yet having the feeling that you belong anywhere creates identity confusion among this group of

students. In addition, TCKs have a hard time differentiating what their value systems are from the value systems of the cultures to which they have been exposed. "It is hard to decide if there are absolutes in life that they can hold on to and live by no matter which culture they are in" (Bounds, 2008. p. 31).

As a result of being able to adapt to that which is around them, Chickering's (1969) fifth vector of establishing identity becomes difficult for TCKs. Knowing one's self and the attitudes towards one's self is important in establishing identity (De Larrosa, 2000). As for the cultural chameleons, their identity meshes with those around them causing confusion of what beliefs and values they hold. As they continue to relate with others, they may adopt so many personas that they may not be able to know who they really are without the help of those around them. Feelings of rootlessness and a lack of sense of belonging begin to surface. Like awkward outsiders, they always feel out of place (Eidse & Sichel, 2004).

As they continue to navigate their way in college, Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory becomes relevant to the cultural chameleons' college experience. The basic systematic process of mastering change consists of the 4S's: (a) situation, (b) self, (c) support, and (d) strategy (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). Situation refers to the perception given by the student to the transition. One can give positive, negative, expected, unexpected, desired, voluntary, or imposed perceptions to a particular transition. In the case of a TCK, this transition could be moving from a different country and culture they loved or disliked to a new college environment. Self defines the individual's personal and demographic characteristics (Evans, 1998). It takes a look at their strengths, weaknesses,

optimism and values. It also looks at their personal demographics like gender, age, socioeconomic background, health and ethnicity (Evans; Powers, 2010).

Support describes the sources of help available for the student. Cultural chameleons can experience this support from their family members, new and old friends, and the institution. Support can hinder these individuals as their family and old friends are spread across the country or world and they are still in the process of "changing their color" to suit their surroundings. In a study conducted by Weigel (2010), she found that 12 out of 26 participants found that their experiences at college was enhanced by their faculty, staff, family, other third-culture students, and international students. Strategies are the ways in which the student deals with the situation presented. They involve looking at the student's flexibility and the approaches used to cope with their transition.

TCKs as hidden immigrants.

Many TCKs are hidden immigrants in both the host and home cultures. While in the host culture, TCKs are not just culturally different from those around them but also physically distinct from their peers. Pollock and Van Reken (2001) explain that being a hidden immigrant gives TCKs the choice not only to be "cultural chameleons" but also "physical chameleons" (p. 95). When TCKs are recognized as foreigners (often in their host cultures), they are excused for their different behavior – a behavior that usually mismatches the local cultural norms and expectations of that culture. When these students return to their home culture, they cease to be foreigners. This presents them with a difficult challenge. They have to find ways of distinguishing who they are because in their home culture they look like everyone else. Most of these students distinguish themselves by not adapting to their surrounding home culture (Pollock & Van Reken).

Hidden immigrants physically look like those around them. The difference is that their view of life is different from that of their physical looks. This makes campus involvement difficult. Student involvement according to Astin (1984) is the "amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 518). He proposed the I-E-O model (Input, Environment, and Outcomes) which is used to shape the indirect and direct outcomes of the institutional environment. This model shows that, while at college, the students' input and environmental factors affect the student's outcomes (Astin, 1985). It offers students with diverse academic and social opportunities in which they can be involved (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Inputs, in Astin's model, are those already existing sets of characteristics and perceptions that the student brings. Gumm (2006) notes that these inputs include family background, ethnicity, race, gender, and the reasons for attending the university. In the case of a TCK, these characteristics and perceptions are unique because of their different background. The inputs have an effect on the environment, which in turn affects the students' outcomes. Astin's I-E-O model indicates that there are several environmental factors that affect the student's transition experience and their outcomes (Gumm). These factors can include the characteristics of the new institution, characteristics of peers, student involvement, previous or current experiences, and place of residence. As the hidden immigrants adjust to all these factors, their outputs are affected. Astin (1985) found that student involvement impacts the students' experiences in the university environment. In order for the hidden immigrant to have a positive transition experience, their involvement and the environment need to be positive as well.

TCKs as global nomads.

TCKs are also known as global nomads or children on the move. Many of them move from one place to another. An example is children of missionaries, who go to a boarding school that is outside of the host culture and outside of their home (passport) country. On breaks, they go home to where their parents are and when their parents are on furlough, they go back to their parent's home country. As they move from one place to another they pick up more cultural practices, language, styles of living, and in so doing, their worldview is broadened. At school, they are in contact with other students who come from different backgrounds and whose parents are serving in different countries or with different people groups.

Smith (1996) explains that part of a global nomad's heritage is the ability to become a keen observer, developing the invaluable ability to suspend judgment while examining both sides of an issue or situation. He also notes that these groups of students begin to develop the skills of social extraversion that are necessary for them to become part of a group. As cultural chameleons and global nomads, TCKs become unconscious observers of human behavior. They carefully take note of the verbal and nonverbal signals of others around them and do their best to make it suit them and the situation they are in. Bounds (2008) says, "TCKs assume enough coloration of the social surroundings to gain acceptance while maintaining some vestige of identity as an 'other'" (p. 31).

Pollock and Van Reken (2001) provide a transition model specific to TCKs. Like other students, TCKs experience a shift in their relationships, roles, assumptions, and daily activities. However, unique to their situation, they will also experience a change in culture as many of them will be coming from abroad to attend college. As global nomads,

transition of TCKs is heightened as a result of culture shock and readjustment to their surroundings. This adds to the normal stress of college transition.

The five-stage model identified by Pollock and Van Reken (2001) concentrates on describing transition within the physical mobility context. The first stage, involvement, is where the student feels a sense of belonging and commitment to where he or she is currently living (Dixon & Hayden, 2008). This stage is hardly recognized as a stage as it is a comfortable period. The student knows where he or she belongs and feels settled in it. The second or "leaving" stage is characterized by feelings of anticipation, denial, sadness, expectations, and detachment (Dixon & Hayden). The student is aware that he or she is leaving a comfortable place and starts to loosen their emotional ties and withdraw from relationships and responsibilities.

As feelings of sadness, anticipation, denial, and expectation characterize the leaving stage, feelings of anxiety and chaos describe the third stage, the transition stage. This stage is the heart of the transition process, and it begins from the time the student leaves one place and ends when the student has not only arrived at the destination but more so has decided, consciously or unconsciously, to be part of that new culture. This stage is also the crisis stage where everything has changed within a short time period. A student has come from being the minority to being the majority or vice versa. In addition, there is change in the climate, scenery, home, family, friends, and space. Schaetti (1998) puts a positive spin to this stage noting that this is the stage where one has the opportunity to reinvent oneself.

Feelings of uncertainty, doubt, and ambivalence introduce one to the fourth stage known as the entering stage. The student is unsure of their position in the new community

and thus is vulnerable (Dixon & Hyaden 2008). Unlike the transition stage, anxiety and chaos have decreased and the student has decided to be part of the new community. However, feelings of isolation and disappointment are present. The final stage is characterized by a sense of belonging and commitment. This stage is known as the re-involvement stage. It is at this stage that students know their position in the community. Security and value are feelings that describe this stage. The time it takes to get to this stage varies on the individual, and not all successfully navigate the first four stages.

Based on Pollock and Van Reken's (2001) model of transition, Schlossberg's 4 S's, and Asitn's I-E-O model, the role of the institution is important to the involvement and adjustment to college students. The institution influences the students' arrival, departure, and arrival at another location (Shaetti, 1998). Concurring, McKillop-Ostom (2000) proposed a strategy where the United Nations International School Hanoi would establish a transition resource team in which they will develop and coordinate programs that will help all individuals to understand and support the transition process. Various institutions recognize this need and create programs for all students, particularly TCKs, to experience.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A phenomenological research design was utilized in order to understand social involvement and the college experience of non-white TCKs. The intention of this design is not to test a hypothesis but rather to describe and understand a lived experience of an individual (Creswell, 2003; Osbourne, 1990). A phenomenological research design was chosen for this study as the researcher will be studying individuals who share a similar experience or situation. Studying a small group of individuals allows the researcher to determine how other members of the society make meaning of the world around them. In addition, this design helped the researcher capture a phenomenon. The lived experience, or phenomenon, in the present study is the college experience among non-white TCKs. The purpose of this study is to explore the social and transitional experiences of non-white TCKs at a predominately white institution and how that impacts their experience at college.

Participants

Six participants who describe themselves as TCKs were recruited for this study. Out of the 6, 2 were male. Participants came from 2 Christian liberal arts institutions located in the Midwest. These institutions have student populations of 1900 and 2700. Around 36 countries are represented at each institution. These institutions are residential and focus on whole-person education. Participants represented Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, North America, and the Middle East.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from the international student and Mu Kappa groups at both institutions. Mu Kappa is a college organization for missionary kids designed to provide a supportive community. This nationwide organization offers activities that help these students transition into college. The researcher contacted the Directors of American Ethnic Students, International Programs and Mu Kappa at both institutions to help recruit students. A request to participate was sent via email (Appendix A). The researcher used snowballing sampling to recruit participants for this study.

Upon IRB approval from both institutions, a pilot interview was conducted with an individual who identifies himself or herself as a TCK and is non-white. The pilot interview helped the researcher refine the interview questions. The participants signed a consent form (See Appendix B) before the start of an interview after which the researcher conducted approximately hour-long interviews. These interviews were audio recorded and kept safely where only the researcher had access to them. Appendix C shows the interview protocol used for the study.

Data Analysis

After all the interviews were completed and recorded, the data was transcribed from the recording. The researcher then read through the data to obtain a general sense of the information (Creswell, 2003). Coding brought out concepts from the transcribed data. "Coding entails thinking through what you take as evidence of a category or theme" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 180). This is a process where the researcher will read the transcript line by line, assigning codes to words, phrases, and concepts. The researcher analyzed each interview in order to find the underlying meaning. The participants

received the information once it was coded in order to undergo member checking. This was done in order to validate the participants' comments. Once all the information had been received, the researcher further analyzed the data. Themes were developed and interpreted and the findings presented.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

As described in chapter one, the purpose of this study is to investigate the

experiences of non-white TCKs who attend a predominately-white liberal arts institution.

While there are several studies that look at the experiences of Third Culture Students

(Bounds 2008; Gaw, 1995; Hervey, 2009; Klemens, 2008; Wiegel, 2010), these studies

have focused on white missionary kids, a subgroup of Third Culture Students. However,

with the increase to move and have children abroad, many colleges are receiving an

increase of a group of students that identify themselves as being from a country different

from that in which they, or their parents, were born. Although themes convey a number

of different experiences, the stories of non-white TCKs show a general struggle to adjust

to American and campus culture. Their stories also express their feeling of being "in

between."

This chapter outlines the results and themes that emerged from the interviews

with these students. These themes emerged throughout the interviews and were not

necessarily direct responses to specific questions. The themes that were developed from

the student narratives revolve around the transitional and social experiences of non-white

TCKs while at college.

Experience

In order to understand the lived college experiences of non-white TCKs on a

predominately white institution, data was collected that addressed the following research

question: "What are the college experiences of non-white TCKs while adjusting to

college?" This section looks at the non-white TCKs' transition to college. It also looks at factors that challenged and aided their transition to college.

Adjustment

In the interviews, the concept of adjustment was discussed more than any other theme. Participants talked about positive and negative aspects of adjusting to college. This theme looks at the interaction of the participant with his or her surroundings. Respondents spoke mainly to adjusting to the institution and the American culture, specifically the Midwest culture.

Institutional adjustment.

Four of the 6 participants talked positively about their adjustment to their institution. Out of the 4, 1 student transferred into the studied institution. She noted that her transition to her previous institution was more positive than her transition from that institution to the studied institution. She said:

Coming in to [the studied institution] was a really hard transition especially my first semester. At my previous institution, I lived in a co-ed dorm so every other floor was a guy, girl. I had 3 roommates and I did not feel pressure to hang out with them and that made our relationship and friendship enjoyable and we got really close to each other. When I came to [studied institution], I had a roommate who was sophomore and in my suite it was just me and her who were sophomores – the rest were freshmen and they were introverted freshmen that didn't want to talk and it was just hard for me to adjust to that…I need to have people around me all the time and it was just weird having girls around all the time. (TKC1)

Out of the 4, 1 participant was homeschooled, and she believes that being from a different culture did not negatively affect her adjustment to college as much as being homeschooled did.

Sibling influences and their ability to switch back and forth between languages aided the four participant's adjustment to college.

Sibling influence.

Three out of the 6 participants had siblings that had attended predominantly white institutions. Two of them attended the same institutions as their siblings. They noted that their siblings' experiences prepared them to go to college. All 3 of these participants said that they were excited to go to college so that they could experience what their siblings had experienced. TCK2 says:

> I felt like my transition to [the studied institution] was a little easier than the usual international student because I had the background of [the studied institution]. I had visited the campus before, [and] I knew some of the people at the campus.

TCK1 shared about her excitement of going to college because of her siblings' college experiences:

> …since I had siblings going to college, I had always waited for the day to go to college because they always talked of the experience and stuff and I was just psyched. So I went to college with really high expectations and I was really looking forward to it. So I mean I just made the best out of what I had and I guess that's why it seemed so amazing to me.

Accent / language.

This theme speaks to the number of languages the participants are fluent in and their ability to switch their accents while interacting with different groups. Five out of the 6 participants said that they are fluent in English and that this aided their transition into college. The remaining participant said that her transition was hardened because of her lack of good English speaking and writing skills:

> All the language was a little hard the first year. I speak English with my dad but [language] is my first language, so coming to [the studied institution] and attending classes really intimidated me and also the writing style is really different. (TCK 5).

A significant part of this theme is the kind of high school they attended prior to going to college. As a senior, one participant attended an American high school for her senior year:

> Being in the states my senior year of high school really helped my transition into college because I was with my family my senior year, so I was immersed into the American culture. I was in a public high school so I was exposed to the real American culture. (TCK1)

Two participants went to an international school in their host countries while the remaining 3 attended local high schools in their host countries. However, 1 out of the 2 that attended international schools was not fully prepared to attend a predominantly white institution. Only 2 of the 6 participants said their overall transition into college was difficult, but all participants mentioned something that negatively affected their transition.

Pressure.

Three out of the 6 participants described the pressure they felt to be part of a certain group. Of the 3, 1 was an athlete who described her experience as difficult:

I was stuck with my soccer people and they were all American and I thought it was okay but that was a really bad experience for me and that is why I am not playing…..my coach talked about "let's be a family and we were going to be a family on the soccer team." That was just going in one ear and going out the other. I didn't see the action taking place and so my second semester when the soccer season was over, it was even harder because I didn't know anyone. (TCK6).

TCK2 shared similar sentiments. While they were not athletes, they described the pressure to hang out with people that are like them:

I know a lot of [country] on campus, they didn't like hate me but they just kind of didn't like me because someone told me that they think that I think that I am better than them because I did not hang out with them as much. (TCK2)

TCK1 also concurred:

I just felt like I was pressured to hang out with the girls on my wing. Because we ate together, we did everything together. I didn't like that idea. (TCK1)

Midwest Culture

Two out of the 3 participants mentioned the difficulty of adjusting to the culture in which their institutions are placed. One participant transferred to the studied institution from an institution on the east coast. This participant expressed her frustration as she was

used to having variety of opportunities off-campus in which to participate. The other
participant mentioned the difficult in adjusting to the mentality of Midwest thinking.

Involvement

In this section, the following research question was addressed: "How does student
involvement impact non-white TCKs transition to college?" Participants expressed
different levels of involvement on campus. This section looks at different activities in
which these students are involved while in college. It also looks at various leadership
roles these participants have pursued at their institutions. Leadership roles that the
participants held included student body president, resident assistant, and members on
various councils like international student council and Mu Kappa cabinet. This theme
also looks at different factors that influence the involvement of non-white TCKs on
campus.

Non-white TCKs fell in three categories when it came to involvement: (a) very
involved, (b) somewhat involved, and (c) not involved. Two out of the 6 participants are
very involved while 2 are somewhat involved. The remaining participants were not
involved on campus activities nor did they hold any campus leadership roles. However,
out of the 2 remaining participants, 1 participant was involved with her local church.

Upon coming to campus, many of these participants did not think they would hold
leadership positions while on campus:

> At [previous institution] I was not involved in anything I just did classes and hang
> out with friends but then when I came to [current institution], I felt like to be
> someone you had to be in a leadership role and didn't find that out until recently.
> (TCK1)

Participants that were somewhat involved mentioned that they were asked by other student leaders to be in the leadership roles that they currently hold. There are a few factors that influenced the involvement of these students.

Identity

The concept of identity was discussed among the participants in relation to (a) their home culture and country of origin, (b) being biracial and having multiple cultures, and (c) those with whom they related on their college campuses.

"Where am I from?"

In the participant interviews, the concept of where they were from was discussed more than any other theme. Five of the 6 participants said that the country in which they grew up the most is where they consider home. TCK6 said "I say [country] because that is my home I consider that my home," and TCK5 said, "Since I lived most of my life in [country], I say I am from [country]." Only 1 participant said that the United States is her home country:

> I feel like I am more American because of my mom and because of going to high school and middle school in the states. (TCK4)

Two of the 6 participants said that they only go into more detail if the other party is interested in knowing something specific about them, for example how they are fluent in English or how they ended up at their current institution. One participant said that her answer varied depending on where she was:

> Usually here in college when someone asks me where I am from, I automatically say [country]. First of all that is where I lived most and that is where my parents live right now. If I was in [country] and someone asked me where I was from, I

would say I am Palestinian or I am from [country]. I would not say I am from [country] because I do not have [country] citizenship. I cannot have [country] citizenship because my dad is not [country]. My step-mom is and she is legally my mom….Even if my mom is [country] I am not [country] (TCK1).

The concept of being an American citizen or holding an American passport was discussed among participants as they talked about their country of origin. They discussed that being an American citizen does not make them American. However, they recognized the privileges that they have as an American citizen: TCK1 stated, "I say it's a privilege that I am an American citizen because I am able to come to the states, I am able to get education from here." Likewise, TCK3 said, "To me an American passport is just an ease or convenience of travel."

Campus identity.

Students descried their identity in terms of the group on campus in which they felt comfortable. Though having American parents and having visited the United States frequently, 5 of the 6 participants said that they felt they did not quite fit in. This was a struggle for TCK6 as she said, "Coming here was hard for me to make friends because I have always had them."

Though difficult, all 6 participants had a group on campus with whom they were most able to identify. Four of the 6 participants identified with the international student groups and the MuKappa groups on campus:

I made a good number of friends. Surprisingly they are all internationals because we have something in common and even though I am more American than some of the Koreans I still get along with them fine and I get along with them fine and I

get along with the American people fine as well but most of my friends are all

international (TCK6).

Likewise, TCK1 said

I think the closest group that I am with right now are people that are just cultured.

I have a lot of friends that are American but I only a few good American friends

that from them they have either lived abroad or they are just so well culture or just

diverse. They don't have to have lived abroad. They just know a lot about other

culture and are interested and I connect with those a lot.

Two of the 6 students could not identify with any groups on campus. One noted

that he was equally comfortable around different groups because of his outgoing

personality. The other participant was a commuter student and is heavily committed to

other activities outside of campus. The group that she could somewhat relate to was the

Mu Kappa group.

Biracial.

This theme speaks to the outward appearance of the participants. Five out of the 6

participants are biracial:

Participant	Mother	Father
TCK2	American	Caribbean
TCK3	Asian	American
TCK4	American	South East Asian
TCK5	Asian	American
TCK6	American	African

Though these participants are biracial, 2 of the 6 spoke to the fact that this did not aid or challenge their adjustment and transition to college. Because of their unique looks they found it difficult to find "their place." TCK2 and TCK6 found that when they are in the states, those around them assumed that they were African American. However, when they go to their home countries, they are considered white:

> For me, I identify as being African, I don't say I am black or white. When people call me White back home most of the time I will tell them that I am not White. I am half. And then they are surprised by my [language] and knowledge of the culture and then they are a bit more accepting. But here people automatically assume I am black. I mean I do not have a problem if they assume I am black but I do not like to be assumed that I am African American. (TCK6)

This struggle is also experienced when these students are in their home countries. TCK5 says:

> I grew up in [country] culture and I identify myself as [country]. My friends see me as a foreigner because my face is not completely Asian and I have an American name.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study was an examination of the experiences of non-white Third Culture

Kids. This study looked at the characteristics of these students, their transition into the

current institutions, and factors that affected their adjustment while at college. This

chapter discusses the major findings of the study, looks at the limitations of the study,

suggests areas for future research, and concludes with final thoughts.

"Who am I?"

This section looks at the ability of non-white TCKs to switch between accents and

languages. It also looks at how this ability affects their transition and their involvement

on campus. The results show that this group of students show characteristics of cultural

chameleons. Like a chameleon that changes color depending on its environment, non-

white TCKs change their behavior by incorporating mannerisms, nuances, and speech to

match their surrounding cultural setting.

The most evident example was their accent. As individuals who are on the move,

these groups of students speak more than one language. According to Dr. Ruth Useem

(1970), 90% of children who grew up abroad are able to speak another language. Because

of their fluency in other languages, non-white TCKs are able to switch back and forth

from one accent to another, depending on what group or their surrounding environment.

On the one hand, non-white TCKs at a predominately-white institution speak English

perfectly with an accent like those around them, yet on the other, they are able to speak

English with an unidentifiable accent. Their language and accent often sounds like it

should belong to their home country yet at the same time, it sounds like it should belong to their host country.

Their ability to switch back and forth from one accent to another enables these students to quickly adapt to their current surroundings. Non-white TCKs with this ability are able to fit in well with those around them. Pollock and Van Reken (2001) note that when individuals learn new languages, they instinctively pick up the differing nuances of how people around them think and relate to one another. Being able to move from accent to accent enables these students to adapt cross-culturally. Bounds (2008) defines cross-cultural adaptation as "the positive results of the adjustment process whereby cognitions and behavioral changes produce neutral or positive affect as well as successful social interactions" (p. 26). Language is a component of cross-cultural adaptability. Though their behavior through language is almost indistinguishable from long time members of a group, their ability to go back and forth from one accent or language to another helps them feel protected from the scorn or rejection of others that may come as a result of being different from others (Pollock & Van Reken).

The ability to switch between accents and languages results in an easier college transition. From the study, 4 participants were able to speak to the ability to switch between accents and languages. These participants were heavily involved in different areas of student leadership. Their language adaptability, though not always, aided their college transition. In addition, Quick (2010) asserts that TCKs fare better than their domestic peers in managing the university transition because they are used to coping with change. The case remains the same for non-white TCKs.

Non-white TCKs' ability to flip-flop between various accents shows characteristics of cultural chameleons. Although a strength, this ability can challenge their college transition. As they adapt from one situation to the next, they start to have trouble figuring out who they really are due to the multicultural mix exposed to them. Most non-white TCKs are able to navigate this challenge as they have always been different, moving back and forth between groups to best fit their situation. For the traditional TCKs, the idea of changing roles is new to them when they move out of their host culture. Non-white TCKs are used to this challenge as they have had to live it most of their lives. Two participants from the study talked about being different when they grew up because of coming from biracial families. They have learned to embrace being different at an early age.

"Where are you from?"

This theme investigates the identity of non-white TCKs, looking at how they describe their country of origin and with whom they place their identity while at college. Literature notes that TCKs are "children on the move" (Gillies, 1998) because they live in a highly mobile world. All participants moved in and out of their host and home countries visiting their immediate families. Though they have the characteristic of cultural chameleons, this group of students was able to put a finger to where they are from. Though they are legal citizens of the United States, 5 out of the 6 participants consider themselves non-American, stating that they introduce themselves as people from other countries. All the participants said that they do not consider themselves as United States citizens because the significant part of their life was spent outside the US. This

aligns with Pollock and Van Reken's (1999) definition of a TCK who is a person who has spent a significant part of their developmental years outside their parent's culture.

Quick (2010) notes that global nomads struggle with cultural imbalance and identity issues because of their vast knowledge of other places, peoples, cultures, and languages than they do their own passport country. However, the studied group did not struggle with these issues. Though they were all American citizens, none of them identified themselves as being from the United States. However, they all recognized that holding an American passport was a privilege as it aided their transportation from one country to another. Though they may dress like an American, enjoy American music, and talk like Americans, non-white TCKs exemplified pride in their home country. Through this, we are able to see the appreciation they have for diverse cultures. From the interviews, these students mentioned that while on campus they like to identify with groups that appreciate culture. So they tend to be around those students who are from different countries. One participant mentioned that they do not have to be from a different country to appreciate different culture. She has found individuals from her host culture who may be white American and have never travelled but still appreciate culture more than a student who is from a different culture.

Globally nomadic families are characterized as having a high degree of interdependence among family members (McCaig, 2010). They heavily rely on one another for emotional support and validation. Although family members were far away, the studied group mentioned the importance of their extended and immediate family members as they transitioned into college. Because these students are used to their tight bond with their immediate family, they tend to try and tighten the bond with their

relatives that live close to them. However, because of the physical distance from their parents, non-white TCKs tend to have a hard time adjusting to college life. As they try to create that tight bond between them and their relatives, some of them feel that they are building new relationships and quickly give up because they feel that their relatives do not fully understand them going against what they believed.

Race vs. Culture

Pollock & Van Reken (2009) describe TCKs as hidden immigrants as they physically look like those around them yet they have differing views, beliefs, and norms. This theme looks at the physical appearance of these students and how it affects their college transition and identity. It also addresses the push or pull non-white TCKs face between being biracial and their cultural background.

Five out of the 6 participants come from families where both their parents are not just from different cultures but are from different races. Outward appearance is a factor that affects one's identity. "Appearances present our identities to others and allow us to infer the identities of others" (Brunsma & Rockquemore, 2005, p. 30). Physical appearances assist in describing a situation. They also provide perspective for all those involved. For non-white TCKs, no matter what culture or country they are in, they always look different from those around them. This could either aid or challenge their adjustment to college.

Due to their unique outward appearance, people around them either consider them as bi-racial, African American, foreigners, or international students. Unlike white missionary kids, these students looked different from the moment they were born. When they are in their home country, they are viewed as foreigners and the same is true while

they attend a predominately-white institution. However, because they look different, they are excused for their different behavior in both the home and host cultures – a behavior that usually mismatches the local cultural norms and expectations of that culture. Hidden immigrants are considered not just cultural chameleons but physical chameleons as well. "Once they adapt culturally, people around them have no idea they are actually foreigners" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

Because they have been different all their lives, these students are used to being different from those around them. From the study, it was obvious that these students are not heavily concerned with their looks but with their culture. One participant describes it best as he says:

I identify as being African, I don't say I am black or white. At home when people say I am white, I tell them that I am not white but that I am half white…but here [United States] people automatically assume I am black…because in America if you are mixed you are automatically black so that doesn't bother me. (TCK3)

In agreement with existing research, non-white TCKs are hidden immigrants in the sense that they are assumed to be of different minority groups. However, what describes them best is the term "hidden diversity." Van Reken and Bethel (2003) used this term to describe the basic concept contained in the idea of hidden immigrants. They define this term as a diversity of experiences that shapes a person's life and worldview but is not readily apparent on the outside, unlike the usual diversity markers such as race, ethnicity, nationality, and so on.

Non-white TCKs are easily categorized as minority students, African American, international students, or biracial, and as a result they face similar challenges that these

groups of students face at a predominately white institution. TCK2 says that as a result of looking different, he faces certain stigmas:

> If you are in a science class and you have to work with the lab partner, I notice that people often do not want to partner with a black student because they feel like they [the black student] may not know as much or that they may not going to work as much. (TCK2)

Such challenges may come as a shock to non-white TCKs challenging their adjustment to college. For non-white TCKs, culture matters more to them than race. However, as they continue to navigate the university setting and the culture they are in, they begin to realize that race matters just as much as culture.

Implications for Future Research

This qualitative study adds to the needed research that seeks to understand the lived experiences of non-white TCKs. This study adds to the growing research on TCKs in general and their experiences at a predominately-white institution.

This study revealed factors that affect the transition of non-white TCKs to college. While athletics was not one of the significant themes derived from the research, it did emerge as an issue. With the rise of inter-collegiate athletics, many TCKs are coming into a predominately-white institution as athletes. Therefore, a study exploring the experiences of TCK athletes will be beneficial to existing literature on TCKs.

Seeking participation by male individuals for this study was difficult. From this experience, there is need to understand the engagement patterns of male TCK undergraduates and their influence in their adjustment to college life. Because of the rise

in qualitative study, a quantitative or mixed method approach should be taken in order to better understand their experiences.

Because of the increase in global travel, universities are receiving an increase in students from more than one race, country, and culture. Though they all consider themselves as being from countries outside the United States, 5 out of the 6 participants from this study are biracial. A study dedicated to understanding the biracial identity of non-white TCKs would be beneficial to not just the different individuals at the institutions that they attend but to their friends and families abroad.

Although biracial, many of the participants identified with many of the experiences of international students. Some international students have grown up in countries that are different from where their parents are, but because they are not American citizens this study did not seek to understand their experiences despite the fact that they are non-white. A study to explore the relationship between characteristics of TCKs and international students is needed to add to research that seeks to understand the experiences of TCKs and international students.

Many students attend colleges and universities as student athletes. This was true to 1 of the 6 participants of this study. In order to meet the needs of such students, further research is needed to better understand their experiences coming to a predominately-white institution from various cultures and countries.

Finally, though this study was conducted at Christian institutions, none of the participants mentioned how their spirituality affected their transition to college. In this light, a study examining the spirituality and its role in the lives of non-white TCKs at a predominately-white institution is necessary.

Limitations

Like every study, this study has its own set of limitations. First, the personal bias of the researcher is a limitation to this study. Although there were attempts to eliminate personal biases, it is not possible to completely remove the researcher's held beliefs. These biases can surface through the protocol questions used during the interviews. However, to guard against this, the researcher sent the transcriptions and themes that were pulled out in order to make sure that the pulled themes captures what they had said during the interview. In addition, the researcher made a conscious effort to limit commentary during the interviews.

Second, the sample size of the study was a limitation to this study. Many factors limited the students who could take part in this study. In order to participate in the study, students had to be non-white and had to have grown up in a country outside of the United States. They also had to hold an American passport showing that they are American citizens. Due to these requirements, the researcher found it somewhat difficult to recruit participants. In addition, the study had more females than males and though this was not explicitly explored in the study it is a clear limitation and issue for further research. A final limitation to this study is that every participant is not perceptive and articulate (Creswell, 2003). These students are of different backgrounds and personalities and are on different levels of development. Because of these differences, information will vary depending on their experiences, characteristics, and personalities.

Summary

The TCK experience is not a disorder. However, living such a multicultural lifestyle can result in traumatic experiences when a new environment is presented to

these students. It is important to acknowledge the unique background of TCKs and support them as they adapt to the university setting (Jang, 2010). Sanghera (2005) reminds higher education practitioners that diversity is not just difference in the visible layers of culture. In agreement, Reken and Bethel (2009) note that if the definition of diversity does not expand, student affair practitioners are more likely to categorize falsely their students which may lead to an increase of negative effects of stereotyping.

As non-white TCKs face unique transitional and social experiences, these experiences can help educate their peers and student affairs professionals to learn from and grow within different cultures. An increase in awareness of non-white TCKs' college experience will help higher education professionals to identify these students who will also benefit from understanding their own unique background. Their diverse and different upbringing should not be viewed as a problem because of their unique transitional issues. Rather their upbringing should be viewed as a strength. Institutions with these groups of students will also benefit by the increased diversity, deeper cultural understanding, international knowledge, and linguistic skills that this unique group of students bring to campus (Jang, 2010).

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APPENDIX A

Request to participate

Name,

Hello, my name is Debby Langat and I am a graduate student at Taylor University pursuing a Masters Degree in Higher Education and Student Development. I also serve as a graduate assistant for the program.

I am writing to ask you to consider taking part in a study I am conducting on Third Culture Kids. This study will explore the experiences of non-white TCKs and their experience at a predominantly white institution.

Hour long interviews will be conducted giving you enough time to share your college experience. Your input will be highly appreciated. I value your time and will conduct these interviews at your convenience. Please respond to this email letting me know of your willingness to participate and what times would work best for you.

Your input in this study will be confidential. If you have any questions regarding the study please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for your consideration.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

This study is being conducted to better understand the college experiences of Third Culture Kids. Face to face interviews, lasting an hour each, will be conducted with among 8-12 individuals who identify themselves as Third Culture Kids. The interviews will involve a series of questions which will be asked one at a time allowing time for the participant to answer each question.

The questions asked will relate to your experience as a TCK. All answers given will be kept confidential. Interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes and only the principle investigator will have access to them. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to discontinue your participation at any point.

Once the information has been transcribed, a copy will be given to you, the participant to confirm what has been said. The recording will then be destroyed and the transcribed data will be stored in a safe location.

There are minimal risks to this study. However, should you have feelings of anxiety counseling services will be provided.

****

I, _____, give my consent to participate in this

study. The study has been explained to me and I understand that I may choose to

withdraw from the study at any point. The potential risks have been explained to me and I

know that my answers will be kept confidential. My questions have also been

_____

_____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____

Principle Investigator's Signature

Debby Langat Graduate Student   Dr. Scott Moeschberger

Principle Investigator   Faculty Supervisor

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Upland, IN 46989   Education & Student Development

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APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

General questions: name, major, why did you choose to attend this university.

- Tell me about yourself and your upbringing

    o What country were you born in?

    o What countries have you lived in?

    o Did you go to a boarding school? If so where was it located?

    o Where do your parents live now?

    o Where do you go home for the holidays?

- What box do you check when asked to identify your race? Why?

- When asked, "Where are you from?" what do you normally answer? Why?

- Have you been asked to choose between the different cultures?

- How has the college experience been coming in from a different culture?

- What have been some challenges you have experienced while at college as a result of being raised in different cultures?

- What are some things that have benefited you in your transition to college because of your unique upbringing?

- Are you involved in any campus activities? If so, what activities are you involved in? If not, why not?

- What would you want others to know about TCKs?