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Identity, Mobility, and Marginality:

Counseling Third Culture Kids in College

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**Identity, Mobility, and Marginality:
Counseling Third Culture Kids in College**

by

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**Identity, Mobility, and Marginality:
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by

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The number of Americans living abroad currently is estimated at over four million, with over 37,000 matriculating into U.S. universities each year. The trajectory of our society is increasingly global. Amidst this shift, there is a unique multicultural subpopulation emerging-- Third Culture Kids (TCK), who experience a collision of cultures and form hybrid identities in the course of their development. TCKs are more specifically when a person spends a significant part of their developmental years outside their parents' culture. The TCK takes on pieces of each culture, while never fully 'belonging' to any. They are most at home around others of a similar transient background. This report synthesizes research about globally mobile populations from across disciplines, highlighting grief and ambiguous losses, acculturation stresses, and identity development. Potential implications for the college campus— at institutional and individual levels— will be discussed. This overview of current research and resources equips college counselors with a frame of reference for engaging this third culture in a holistic and contextualized manner.

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Introduction

Over the last few decades, instant global communication, improved international transportation, and advancing technology have catalyzed a prolific global interaction (Hill, 2006). As a result, the number of expatriates raising their children overseas has increased dramatically (Cockburn, 2002). In 1990, the US Census reported 922,000 federal workers and their families living overseas. As of 2007, the estimated number of Americans living abroad either permanently or temporarily is over four million (Knowlton, 2007). In this age of international connectedness, an increasing number of young people are growing up in a multicultural setting. These young people are sometimes referred to as “global nomads” or “hidden immigrants,” (McGaig, 1992; Klemens & Bikos, 2009), but are most commonly called Third Culture Kids.

Pollock and Van Reken (2009) present the most widely accepted definition of this term:

“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 a similar background.”

The *third culture* emerges as the parents’ culture(s) collides with the culture(s) in which the child developed. The term stems from Kramsch’s (1993) notion of ‘third place

identities,' which suggests that children may choose to forge an alternate, hybrid identity when their values and behaviors do not mesh with those of their first or second culture. Further reflective of the "third spaces" concept discussed in Bhabbah (1994) and Jameson's (1991) theorizations of postmodern society, the concept of *third culture* proposes a dynamic state of "in betweenness." From here, TCKs are able to "overcome the politics of polarity," not living fully within the confines of either culture (Gaw, 2007; Grimshaw and Sears, 2008).

The TCK is not alone in this "interstitial cultural milieu" (p.64, Gaw, 2007). Children of immigrants, refugees, multiracial families, and international adoptees all face similar acculturation stresses, losses, and questions of identity. The relevant research therefore spans a variety of fields and theoretical models. This report will focus specifically on the 'traditional TCK,' which refers to the TCK who is expected to repatriate to their passport country (Polluck & Van Reken, 2009).

Recent studies have sought to profile the TCK population. A growing body of empirical research has evaluated the educational and career orientation (Cottrell, 2002; Gerner & Perry, 2000), personality (Dewaele, 2009; Peterson & Plamondon, 2009), and adjustment process (Ebbeck & Reus, 2005; Gaw, 2000) of the TCK. In depth interviews and qualitative studies have provided insight and descriptive understanding of TCK attachments (Schaetti, 2002), their grieving process (Gilbert, 2008), and identity negotiation (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008; Cockburn, 2002; Fail, Thompson & Walker, 2004).

This is reinforced by a substantial mass of anecdotal research, compiled through social networking sites, adult TCK biographies, and advocacy organizations.

The TCK's life experience is characterized by a cross cultural upbringing and high mobility (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Their parents may be missionaries, relief agency workers, educators, recipients of Fullbright fellowships, corporate and entrepreneurial business professionals, and government personnel (civilian, military, and diplomatic corps) (Gaw, 2007). These internationally mobile adolescents seem to have greater interest in travel and learning languages (Gerner, Perry, Moselle & Archbold, 1992; Pollock and Van Reken, 2009). They tend to be culturally accepting and more oriented to an international lifestyle in the future than their monocultural US peers (Gerner, Perry, Moselle & Archbold, 1992; Pollock and Van Reken, 2009). One sociologist even predicted the global paradigm of the TCK would be the prototype for the 21st century citizen (Ward, 1984).

The strengths of this novel and pioneering group are imperceptible upon first acquaintance and under the radar of demographic surveys, but inconspicuously embedded into our cultural fabric. Our current president, Barack Obama is the quintessential example of a TCK who has been able to employ his international background to bridge cultural barriers. Several appointees of his new administration, including the White House advisor, Treasury Secretary, and National Security Advisor, share his TCK upbringing (Polluck and Van Reken, 2009). In recent years, TCKs are being sought after by global business initiatives as international business expatriates for their

intercultural and international skill set (Lam and Selmer, 2004). Some colleges recruit TCKs as valuable contributors to campus diversity (Gaw, 2007). But not all TCK accounts are success stories. It is of course, the bright and shining narratives that gain traction and press. Yet there appear to be considerable challenges for TCKs, particularly in their adjustment to new academic settings like the college campus.

Each year, some 37,000 TCKs return to the United States for college (Gaw, 2000). Re-entry is often more challenging and unsettling than initial culture shock, affecting academic, social, and psychological functioning (Gaw, 2007). Generally TCKs exhibit ambition and high levels of achievement academically. In a survey of over 600 adult TCKs, Cottrell (2002) found that TCKs were four times more likely to pursue a Bachelors degree than their domestic peers, and a substantial proportion continue on for more advanced degrees. The adjustment to college, however, may prove difficult as a function of acculturation stresses, and TCKs may struggle to make career choices, lacking awareness of options (Cottrell, 2002; Hervey, 2009). As with many other non-majority groups, TCKs are less likely to seek support services on the campus (Gaw, 2007).

Compounding the already difficult transition to college life, the TCK experience often results in a sense of rootlessness and restlessness, both geographically and culturally (Cottrell, 2002; Pollock and Van Reken, 2009). What was considered humorous or appropriate in one culture may not have the same connotation in America. TCKs must adopt new interpretative frameworks in order to thrive socially in their new context (Dewaele & Oudenhoven, 2009). This overwhelming task, combined with feeling

dislocated and isolated, may amplify difficulties in developing intimate relationships, questions of identity, and securing a sense of belonging (Fail, Thompson & Walker, 2004; Cockburn, 2002).

One of the most profound challenges TCKs face is grieving the losses of lifestyle and status, friends and relationships, foods and music-- all that is known and familiar (Gaw, 2000; Jordan, 2002; Pollock and Van Reken, 2009). Many of these losses, along with their intensity, are hidden and thus ambiguous to the outside observer. Ambiguous losses refer to those that lack clarity and can lead to sharply different interpretations of what is lost (Gilbert, 2008; Boss, 2004). Grief may be disenfranchised when the relationship, loss, or griever go unrecognized (Doka, 1989). Transition in so many ways, is a grieving process, and may be problematic if left unresolved (Wyse, 2000). Repeated cycles of loss and grief may present risks to a TCKs attachment style (Bowlby, 1980; Schaetti, 2002).

As the TCK population continues to grow and matriculate into American universities, it will be necessary for college student personnel to be familiar with the TCK's potential assets and unique developmental needs. An integrated and comprehensive review of current literature will enable college counselors to approach TCKs holistically and with greater contextual understanding. This paper will explore the identity development of Third Culture Kids, the ambiguous losses they face, and the acculturation stresses they encounter as a unique multicultural subpopulation. The

benefits and advantages of their background will be highlighted. Implications for college counselors, future research, and current resources will be discussed.

Chapter 1: Grief and Loss

When a loved one dies in many western societies, there is a socially validated process of grieving (Doka, 2002). There is often a memorial service, a burial ceremony, and a communal outpouring of support. But when a young person leaves behind the language, customs, and places to move to another place, there is no such ceremony. As one TCK recalls, “We pulled out of driveway to go to the airport, everybody I knew stood there waving goodbye to us. I suddenly realized I wasn’t ever coming back. It was like leaving everything I knew and loved, all at once. I felt like we should have had a funeral or something, but there was no funeral.” (H. Anderson, personal communication, March 20, 2010).

Grief is a commonly reported concern among adult TCKs (Barringer, 2000; Cockburn, 2002; Polluck & Van Reken, 2009; Schaetti, 2002; Gaw, 2007). They may seek counseling for conditions including prolonged adolescence, feelings of alienation, and an inability to make commitments (Barringer, 2000), which can be connected to unresolved grief (Schaetti, 2002). Polluck and Van Reken (2009) suggest that TCK grief may remain unresolved in adulthood because: losses are hidden and unacknowledged; lack of permission to grieve and lack of time to process the loss; a lack of comfort offered as they attempt to cope with their loss (Polluck & Van Reken, 2009).

Since many TCKs experience significant losses as children, it is important to note the unique features of children’s grief that are difficult for the adult to detect. Grief involves making sense of a loss, and this is done correlating with the child’s respective

stage of development (Oltjenbruns, 2007; Silverman, 2000). There may be cycles of re-grieving a loss as a children move through different developmental stages and form new understandings of what exactly was lost (Oltjenbruns, 2001).

Gilbert (2008) investigated the loss of people, place, things, as well as existential losses associated with the TCK experience. Using qualitative inquiry, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) her work illuminated the depth and breadth of TCK losses, forging a descriptive model. The broad research question was, “What is the nature of loss and grief among third culture kids? (p.97) ” Her subquestion followed, “What do adult TCK’s identify as memorable losses they had experienced as children? (p.97)” In person interviews, email correspondence, and telephone interviews were organized around a narrative structure and transcription was verbatim. The goal was not to gather the same information from each participant for comparison, but to examine emergent patterns.

The grief described by participants evidenced elements of disenfranchisement, particularly as related to the symbolic or existential aspects of the loss. Self-disenfranchisement was also observed, when grief is not discouraged by any outside person, but actually by the griever (Crenshaw, 2002). For example, children of missionaries described occasions when they restrained their grief because defying their parents’ decision meant defying God, which was deemed unacceptable.

Participants consistently discussed not focusing on the loss and keeping their feelings to themselves, though ‘talking about it,’ is found to be a helpful part of the grieving process (Gilbert, 1996). Peers on the college campuses often lacked the

awareness and sensitivity to be helpful. Even when family members and peers were helpful, TCKs reported feelings of exhaustion simply attempting to explain the grief and loss, which often resulted in feelings of misunderstanding and alienation.

Gilbert (2008) noted that TCKs experienced losses of people: deaths of family and friends, wars and executions-- traumatic experiences foreign to the typical American youth. Other relationships with people were severed as a result of the mobile TCK lifestyle. Many experienced their peer network in a constant state of change. They expressed comfortability with the loss of relationships and a lack of emotion about it over time. Additionally, TCKs reported the loss of places and things-- each location made up of unique smells, tastes, rituals, geographical features, and weather.

These observations reflect hidden or ambiguous losses, as previously mentioned. There are two basic kinds of ambiguous losses: (1) what is lost may either be physically absent but psychologically present or (2) physically present but psychologically absent (Boss, 1999). Consider the grief that weaves its way into caring for a parent with Alzheimer's or a traumatic brain injury- something intangible has been irreparably lost.

People and places may be physically gone but still consume a generous amount of reflective time and emotional energy. When an individual's losses are disenfranchised or disregarded, not only are losses hidden, so is the grief.

The meanings associated with the losses, referred to as existential losses, were the most frequently addressed type of loss. Following a loss, the TCK begins a process of reconstructing the assumptions they've made about how the world should operate

(Parkes, 1972). Meaning must be attributed to the loss in order to regain a sense of order, control, and purpose (Gilbert, 1996). Existential losses revolved around the questions, “Who am I? What am I? Where am I from? Who can I trust? (p.102, Gilbert, 2008)” TCKs reported a loss of security, loss of trust, and loss of a place to call home, among others. These losses correspond to the second type of ambiguous loss, an individual may have a house, people to eat with, and locks on their doors, but without a sense of security or trust. Existential losses are closely linked to identity development, which will be addressed in the next section.

The “difficult work of mourning (p.9)” is a process meant to end eventually (Boss, 1999). Ambiguous losses, in many ways, are normal reactions to complicated situations. In contrast to a death, these losses are not clear cut and it may be unclear whether or not the situation is permanent. There may be substantial confusion about what is even lost. This “frozen grief” (p.11) inhibits people from starting to mourn because they don’t know what to mourn (Boss, 1999). Inability to resolve the situation may be due to a lack of clarity about the outside situation and not to internal mental dysfunctions (Boss, 1999). It may be helpful for counselors to help TCKs clarify what exactly has been irretrievably lost, and to initiate a grieving process.

Chapter 2: Acculturation Stresses

For TCKs, casual questions such as “Where are you from?” and “Where is home” may create significant stress (Pollock and Van Reken, 2009). As one TCK reports, “That question is always frustrating for me. I never know what people are really asking. Should I say where I was born? Or where I grew up? Or where my grandparents live? Or list off the countries I’ve lived in? Usually I just say Africa, because no one knows where Malawi is, and then San Antonio, because people can connect with that.” (M. Walker, personal communication, March 17, 2010)

At the broadest level, TCK’s are a cross cultural subpopulation, tapping into the vein of multicultural identity development and acculturation. As they interact with multiple cultural groups, they undergo a process of accommodating and adapting to the sociocultural and psychological changes between the groups, this is called acculturation (Bennett, 2005). Each individual experiences varying levels of internal conflict in the acculturation process, which is termed acculturation stresses or culture shock (Berry, 1997; Berry, 2005; Gullahorn, 1963; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Berry (2005) advocates for the term acculturation stresses, citing that ‘culture shock’ carries negative connotations and infers that stress is always a harmful experience. He also notes that ‘culture shock’ implies there is only one culture involved, thus denying the reality that TCKs are truly intercultural, living at the intersection of cultures (Berry, 2005). For the purposes of this paper, the terms will be used interchangeably, as the relevant research incorporates them both.

Berry's (1997) overarching model discerns four primary styles of acculturation. The style is primarily determined by an individual's degree of cultural maintenance (the extent to which the cultural identity and characteristics are considered important), contact, and participation. A TCK may pursue an assimilation style, in which contact is severed with the original culture and contact with the new culture is exclusively developed. This has the potential to manifest itself in conditions such as prolonged adolescence, and may be evidence of unresolved grief (Schaetti, 2002). A second style is marked by separation, when an individual holds on to their original culture and resists interacting with the new culture. This is consistent with TCKs reporting the sheer exhaustion of explaining their background to someone (Gilbert, 2008). TCKs face the challenging task of maintaining their unique cultural background without isolating themselves entirely. A third acculturation style is called marginalization, when the individual has no interest in maintaining the original culture concurrently with no expressed interest in interacting with others. This may be linked to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Gaw, 2000). The last stage is integration, when contact is maintained with both cultures, which will be discussed in the following section. It is significant to note that this is not a linear model, and TCKs may switch styles at any point in time.

Gullahorn's (1963) foundational model of the *W-curve hypothesis* (Gullahorn, 1963) still remains the basis for illustrating the challenges of intercultural adjustment, despite more recent descriptive models with paralleling stages. This model highlights five stages or points: arrival into new culture, initial shock, recovery, re-entry "home",

re-entry shock, and recovery. As Gaw (2007) notes, there is no time frame these stages. The process may range from a few months to a few years, or longer. The difference between initial culture shock and re-entry culture shock is the expectations of the individual (Gullahorn, 1963). TCKs are more likely to anticipate and cognitively prepare for entering a new culture, minimizing the potential effects (Searle & Ward, 1990; Weissman & Furnham, 1987). Returning to their passport country is often expected to be easier, making TCKs more susceptible to re-entry culture shock (Blake & Gaw, 2004; Gaw, 2000).

Both of these models provide a frame of reference for understanding the TCK specific research in this area. Gaw (2000) conducted a study of 66 overseas experienced college students regarding their willingness to seek assistance for the problems they encountered in acculturating. The population was drawn using the criteria of (1) United States citizenship and (2) completion of high education outside the U.S. The survey used the previously published Personal Problems Inventory (PPI) and Reverse Shock Scale (RSS) to collect quantitative descriptive data (Seitar & Waddell, 1989; Cash, Begley, McCown & Weise, 1975).

The study assessed the relationships between reverse culture shock and the personal problems/concerns experienced in the college context. Gaw (2000) found that returnees reporting high levels of reverse culture shock concurrently reported more personal adjustment problems. These findings support that cultural conflict is related to problem severity (Gim, 1990). Additionally, a reverse relationship was found between

the level of culture shock and a student's willingness to seek support services. The more affected they were, the less likely they were to seek help.

While it may be easy to imagine that transition is stressful, the stress involved can be attributed to a host of factors. In this study, the 'personal problems' accounted for personal adjustment, intimacy concerns, college adjustment, and shyness concerns. Loneliness and isolation was considered by 30% of the sample to be a moderate or severe problem. Over 22% of participants cited college adjustment, depression, career choice, feeling alienated, and trouble studying as significant and severe problems. Financial concerns, general anxiety, academic performance, and shyness were considered significant or severe by approximately 15% of the sample.

It is well documented that those experiencing a higher degree of reverse culture shock are affected interpersonally more than those experiencing low levels of culture shock (Martin, 1986; Seiter & Waddell, 1989; Uehara, 1986; Gaw, 2000). This presents counselors with questions of how to engage this hidden population of struggling students and how to assess what may make a student more prone to severe acculturation stress.

One body of research links the independent variables (such as environmental factors, individual factors, ethnic origin, social background, and psychological profile) to successful cross cultural adaptation. Kim (2001) notes that the following dispositions (defined as the internal conditions of the strangers themselves) as playing an important part in cross cultural adaptation: preparedness for change ethnic proximity between the

immigrant and the natives, and adaptive personality. The most important personality traits that facilitated the process were openness, strength, and positivity (Kim 2001, p85). In the seminal work of community psychologist Rudolph Moos, he purported that “every crisis presents both an opportunity for psychological growth and a danger for psychological deterioration” (Moos and Tsu, 1976, p13). The acculturation process may, in effect, be transforming the TCK for better or for worse (Kim, 2001).

Dewaele and Oudenhoven (2009) found that TCK’s scored significantly higher than non-TCK’s on the dimensions of open-mindedness and marginally on cultural empathy, and they scored significantly lower on emotional stability. They employed the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) among 79 young teenagers from London. Females scored higher than their male counterparts on emotional stability. They noted that lower emotional stability could not be exclusively attributed to the stress of migration; language dominance also assumes significant responsibility for the anxiety. Dewaele and Oudenhoven (2009) concluded that the intensity of the loss is linked both environmental factors and individual dispositions.

Chapter 3: Identity Development

Due to the fragmented nature of their development, many TCKs experience a confused sense of identity as they enter adolescence and adulthood. Migration on any scale confronts a person's established identity, their sense of self in the world and the boundary between their inner and outer reality (Jones, 2000). The term *third culture* itself suggests a state of liminality or "in betweenness" (Schaetti & Ramsey, 2007). As they negotiate and maintain their identity, they do so in a state of cultural marginality.

Bennett (1993, 1998) further expounds on this idea with model of intercultural sensitivity development. He suggests that the collision of cultures produces this state of marginality, which may have negative implications or favorable outcomes. Consistent with Berry, Gaw emphasizes that this marginality is not necessarily negative (Gaw, 2007).

While allowing TCKs to handle transitions well may be constructive, (Barringer, 2000), an individual may become 'stuck' between cultures and experiencing conflicting loyalties. This condition is referred to as encapsulated marginality, and it may result in alienation, self absorption, loss of reference to one's group, loose boundaries and low self control, poor decision making, low tolerance for ambiguity, a general sense of unease and never feeling at home, and a feeling of being 'culturally fractured' (Bennett, 1993; Gaw, 2007).

With a history of consistently revolving social strata, TCKs are often able to engage socially with a degree of confidence in new situations (Polluck and Van Reken,

2009). Having developed a dynamically different worldview, they may feel lonely and isolated from US peers (Gaw, 2000). Students re-encountering American culture may experience a loss of friends and status, fear of rejection, and lack of identity or role definition (Hill, 2006; Westwood, Lawrence & Paul, 1986; Gaw, 2007). Their mentors, role models, and other social supports are among the people who are now physically absent but psychologically present (Boss, 1999).

By far most of the research conducted on the TCK population centers on the issue of identity development. Fail, Thompson, and Walker (2004) investigated the TCK's sense of identity, belonging, and the nature of their relationship. They conducted a multiple case study focused on 11 former international school students who attended an international school between 20 and 50 years ago. Qualitative analysis revealed themes of loneliness, but most TCKs viewed their marginality as constructive. While these participants represent a previous generation, their experience may parallel today's TCK and may prove useful in developing counseling interventions.

Much of identity research for TCKs involves small sample sizes, and it is difficult to draw succinct conclusions. Konno (2005) compared levels of ethnic identity of TCK international students of Asian descent and those of Asian students who did not have extensive experience living overseas through quantitative analysis. No significant differences in ethnic identity were found and the relationship between ethnic identity and psychological adjustment was also weak.

Cockburn (2002) qualitatively examined identity through a series of case studies, themes of ambiguity and uncertainty surfaced. Devens (2005) explored the prevalence of depression among TCKs in international schools, finding that more schools attended predicted higher rates of depression. These struggles are not unique to TCK, and typify much of the college student population. They are however exacerbated in the TCK population.

Arthur Chickering, student development theorist, proposed seven vectors of college student development in his most recent cornerstone work (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). One of these vectors involves developing identity, specifically, developing a sense of sense within a historical, social, and cultural context. This task builds on the prior tasks of developing competence and managing emotions.

Of the myriad of theoretical models for identity development, attachment theory (Schaetti, 2002), symbolic interactionist perspectives, and postmodern theory have been applied specifically to the TCK population (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008). Attachment theory historically limits attachment relationships to human relationships, while acknowledging that people are influenced by their attachment to places, pets, and possessions (Bowlby, 1973; Altman & Low, 1992). Objects and locations can facilitate anxiety reduction, providing a sense of stability and sameness during seasons of change. This underscores the importance of honoring important places and objects in the life of a TCK. Regarding the globally mobile upbringing, the literature suggests that frequent change in the external environment can hinder secure the process of generalizing the

dyadic attachment to the home, school, and community. This is however, significantly mediated by the quality of the attachment style at the time international transition is first experienced. Securely attached children more easily adapt to mobility and change than children with insecure or disorganized attachments (Rachel & Manire, 1994; Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986; Schaetti, 2002). Schaetti points out that early secure attachment relationships manifest in an internal working model of self-in-representation, assuming the self is worthy of love and that care is available (Schaetti, 2002). The laborious work of the caregiver in developing such an attachment is more likely to yield children that can explore, be flexible and sociable, and solve problems. The parent's experience of the global transition further informs our frame of reference from an attachment perspective. If there is a non-salaried spouse or older family member, their emotional adjustment and perspective will be critical for setting the tone. Attachment figures may find themselves in an environment where the water isn't potable; there are regular threats of violence, implicit messages of being unsafe (malaria pills, mosquito nets, bottled water). Parents necessarily pass their concerns on to their children, invoking new rules of behavior, limiting child exploration (Schaetti, 2002). A primary care giver who is overcome with anxiety or depression or simply cultural distraction will render them less emotionally available to an attaching child, particularly an infant (Bowlby, 1982; Schaetti, 2002). It is not uncommon for expatriate families to hire local caregivers to help care for the children. In some countries it is considered shameful to not take on a caregiver. Oftentimes, these local caregivers spend hours upon hours a day with the

infant or toddler, even assuming primary responsibility for well being in some cases. The benefits of this include developing fluency in the host language and culture. But this dynamic incorporates potential risk for cognitive dissonance with the passport country culture (i.e. inability to identify with practice specific to home country culture) and also the inevitable loss of the attachment relationship with the caregiver. It is not altogether unlike the situation in America during the Civil War era among wealthy families, who frequently hired caregivers to raise the children, with whom the children developed an attachment. Rachel & Manire (1994) explored attachment patterns by country and found that most countries tend to be secure in their attachments though they may emphasize and reward avoidant or ambivalent attachment behaviors. This may result in a TCK who has developed a personality style validating in their country of upbringing, but not in their passport country. Although rigorous re-entry repatriation programs exist, the intercultural implications at this foundational level of personality are largely overlooked (Schaetti, 2002). TCKs who move multiple times often have the skills to build relationships very quickly, which may put them at an advantage when attaching to sequential caregivers and endearing themselves to a new culture. However, some experience a kind of “transitional fatigue” (Schaetti, 1996b). The attachment literature regards the “fear of strangers,” which may be more broadly a resistance to starting over again, a push back to engaging in new social relationships (Bretherton, 1980).

The social interactionist perspective addresses the individual in light of their social networks. These are complex dynamics, but the basic premise is that people

respond to things not in terms of the things themselves, but in terms of the meanings they carry (Blummer, 1969; Spradley, 2005). Meanings are derived from social interaction and interpretation (Geertz, 1993; Blummer, 1969). The TCK's mobile lifestyle and dynamic social context may impact their meaning-making process, demanding that individuals reinterpret, reassign, and maintain a range of possible meanings for a given activity (Grimshaw and Sears, 2008). This exchange of information and meaning with the environment has been compared to a theatrical performance, with elements of stage management, persuasion, concealment, deceit, and discovery (Goffman, 1990). Symbolic Interactionism is notable for its sense of human agency, viewing individuals as rational and usually in control of their actions. TCKs may fluidly operate in different social and cultural roles. This theoretical approach may provide a framework for the dialectic between cultural structure and human agency in this population (Grimshaw and Sears, 2008). Grimshaw and Sears (2008) underscore the inevitable questions that surface in the discussion of social interactionist perspectives on identity development: Does each TCK consist of multiple equally influential but different selves? Or is the personality made up of a dominant self along with attached "satellite selves"? Or is there no 'core self,' but simply multifaceted and adaptable personalities?

As Jordan notes (2002), many theories of identity formation are not as helpful when dealing the TCK population because, like most developmental theories, they are based on predictable age/stage levels and assume a series of shared experiences, historic senses, and the presence of home or roots. While a sense of place is integral in

identity formation, developmental tasks involve moving toward ethnorelativism, which is characterized by a flexible and contextually responsive identity (Gaw, 2007).

Chapter 4: Implications for College Counselors

Counselors must extend support, validation, and encouragement, along with cultural competence and intercultural understanding, in order to assist TCKs experiencing re-entry culture shock. According to Gaw (2007), one of the more common interventions with TCKs experiencing re-entry difficulties is to help them cognitively reframe the home country (United States) as a new country and culture like the ones they have encountered before. This invites them to employ their skills as intercultural adept, global citizens, and emphasizes their areas of competence.

Assumptions & Assessments

Gaw cautions mental health practitioners to be aware of possible misdiagnosis or incorrect clinical procedures that may result from (a) misunderstanding this population (b) not accepting or validating this population (c) assuming the TCK experience is transitory and something to grow out of, or (d) assuming the assessment tools and constructs normed with the majority population will be applicable. (Gaw, 2007). As noted in previous literature, the limitations of assessments are vast when it comes to a multicultural population. It is important to be cognizant of this with the TCK population, as they may not appear to be culturally distinct, but they may have a dramatically different set of meanings for artifacts and actions.

Institutional Considerations

Consider the case of TCK coming into a college counseling office. As they fill out the intake form, they note their age, address, name, citizenship, presenting concerns,

health or mental health history. The non-linear background of a TCK doesn't fit the mold of the average intake form. It is highly likely that a counselor would not know, lest the TCK client self identified, that they had a globally mobile experience. Counseling centers may consider adding questions to their surveys and intake forms: Before the age of 18, I lived in more than one country/culture. Questions of this nature may also enable the university to track graduation and retention rates of TCKs.

Stultz (2002) highlights some specific recommendations for university administrators and student personnel at the institutional level. (1) *Allow for appropriate exceptions to rules to be made (i.e. required courses or housing accommodations)* This may include exempting a foreign language requirement because they have fluency without formal instruction or substituting courses in American literature to compensate for what was not covered. (2) *Encourage TCKs to participate in programming and student organizations.* While new social dynamics are commonplace to a TCK, they may yet benefit from the diffusion of ideas and breadth of exposure that can be reaped from on campus involvement. (3) *Create a method for identifying potential global nomads before matriculation.* As noted above, tracking this population would be a great advantage for educating future services and interventions. Many people have a TCK background without realizing it, but they recognize the feelings and challenges associated with a nomadic lifestyle. (McCaig, 1991). Admissions staff may also be trained in recognizing TCKs from international school transcripts or discrepancies between citizenship status and country of residence.

(4) Determine the priority of TCK support program implementation at a university level, and take actions accordingly. This may include establishing a committee that connects the different departments of the university who may be interacting with the TCK- academic, housing and food services, career services the registrar, and international office. Delegating responsibility will diffuse information more strategically and support a uniform ‘point of contact.’ Another low-cost option could involve creating a university specific webpage or email account for TCK specific questions or concerns. While simple, it may validate incoming students and give them a starting point.

Therapeutic Considerations

The conversation about identity is likely to be woven into the counseling relationship. Symbolic Interactionist, Narrative, and dialogical models may prove helpful for establishing a theoretical framework with enough flexibility to accommodate the TCK transnational experience. Symbolic Interactionist perspectives will view the TCK as playing multiple social roles with associated cultural symbols and meanings. Their social life, a significant dynamic of any college student experience, will be affected by how they manage their multiple selves (Grimshaw & Sears, 2008). Employing symbolic interactionism may help the student reorganize meanings and roles without devaluing or disenfranchising any one experience.

Narrative perspectives may help build a sense of continuity among the fragmented TCK experience. Sears (2011) found that internationally mobile students employed narratives to find resolution for their identity concerns. Students would often

simplify their narratives in the conversation with students with a more traditional background, but admitted that their identity was fully realized only among people who had shared a similar globally mobile upbringing. This highlights (1) the potential impact of developing a cohesive narrative of the TCK experience during college and (2) the potential value of groups that gather students of an internationally mobile background. Counselors may consider life maps or other activities that build narrative cohesion, themes, and help the student chronicle and connect their diverse array of experiences. Arguably, symbolic interactionism and narrative theory have their roots in dialogical models, building on the work of Russian philosophers Bakhtin and Volosinov. The essence of the dialectic is that when participants in interactions respond to what other participants do, they respond in a way that takes into account how they think other people are going to respond to them (Wegerif, 2001). It is something of a circular process that instills change over time. Another way a counselor may incorporate the dialectic into the therapy relationship is through the mythic structure commonly associated with screenwriting. Exposed concisely by Christopher Vogler, the mythic structure employs archetypes to outline the elements of a journey. Vogler presents the structure not as an invention, but as an observation of the qualities of a story, the set of principles that govern the conduct of life in the world of storytelling (Vogler, 1998). The mythic structure has been applied in university settings previously to facilitate student return to American college life after study abroad experiences.

Broadly, developing rapport with the TCK population is critical, as in most counseling relationships. A counselor may facilitate this process for the TCK by being curious about their upbringing. TCK may be far less aware of the value of their background and may minimize it to appear more “normal.” The counselor may also emphasize their unique strengths as they relate to their background. It may be significant to provide examples, keeping in mind that the TCK may not yet have a vocabulary for talking about the strengths in their background. In a discussion about students’ career interest or lifestyle, a counselor may champion them leveraging the experience. Counselors may also share qualitative or quantitative research about this population, which may validate their uniqueness and facilitate their meaning making process. While these practices may prove helpful, it is of note that the TCK background may not be the most salient issue a client brings to the table.

A counselor wishing to facilitate the transition experience of TCK may develop his or her own approaches using the principles outlined above. However, the counselor may also tap into existing resources. This analysis concludes with a summary of available programs and resources.

Chapter 5: Current Resources

Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon targets the TCK population, marketing themselves as an internationally minded institution (http://www.lclark.edu/offices/international/third_culture_kids/). They offer a student group with customized programming including- ethnic dinners, career workshops, biweekly discussion groups, outdoor trips. Their International Office has a staff intern who specializes in the TCK population. Their website also provides links to resources.

The *Denizen* (<http://www.denizenmag.com/>) is a magazine targeted specifically to TCKs. they conduct informal surveys and publish thoughtful articles geared at the adolescent and emerging adult. They underscore the changing face of the TCK population, as our economy is increasingly globalized, even providing input on choosing a college. The magazine is notable for their innovative culture, creating space for important conversations. Among their projects is a self-portrait photo blog, which chronicles TCK's response to the question, "Where are you from?" through photograph submissions. Other periodicals, like *Among Worlds*, are geared specifically at the adult TCK and the potential challenges they face, with articles compiled by TCKs themselves.

Additional print resources include non-fiction narratives of TCK life experiences like Ruth Van Reken's memoir, *Letters Never Sent* (1988) or psychoeducational works like Beverly Roman's *Footsteps Around the World: Relocation Tips for Teens* (2001). More recently mainstream literature and filmography may afford additional perspective. Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998) chronicles a missionary family's

experience and the popular movie *Mean Girls* (2004) narrates the re-entry experience of a TCK into a high school in Illinois.

In America, there is network of mental health professionals who specialize in the TCK experience (<http://counseling.tckid.com/>). Other advocacy groups like Interaction International offer lists of practitioners competent with nuances of this population (<http://www.interactionintl.org>). Additionally there are faith-based groups who specialize in the internationally mobile and provide counseling services (<http://gyfm.org/tck-ministry/>).

With the advent of social media, TCK populations are more able than ever to stay in contact with friends and family across the world through tools like Sykpe or Facebook or Blogger. Facebook boasts multiple social networking groups for TCKs. With a recent transition of their layout, Facebook's previous format for groups like TcKid, are phasing out into "communities" where Facebookers can post stories, You Tube videos, and comments publically about the internationally mobile experience without committing to membership in a group. The most well travelled Facebook page about the TCK experience is Denizen Magazine's TCK page, with over 1,500 likes to date. Linked In groups, on the more professional front, are also beginning to appear. This may present a challenge to professionals with an internationally mobile youth, as they may not desire to professionally identify as a third culture "kid," and risk potential misinterpretation. Blogs, another medium of instant communication, provide narratives and journalistic input about the TCK experience. Commonly visited blogs include

<http://3rdculturekids.blogspot.com/> and <http://www.libbystephens.com/third-culture-kids>, as well as a similarly formatted website, <http://tckid.com/>, which supports a community of over 21,000 TCKs. It is possible that the single most impactful benefit will be the sheer access ability social networks provide to important relationships. With over 900 million users as of April 2012, over 300 of which do not reside in America. This connectedness potential may mediate ambiguous losses as well as undergird a new paradigm for the relational aspects of transition. The online “home” of the TCK may in fact become one of their most stable situations.

The State Department of the United States Government has historically had a vested interest in providing services for the TCK experience, as they employ families to live overseas for extended periods of time. Their website (<http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c21995.htm>) provides a description of the TCK as well as links to additional resources and research. It offers some valuable tools for parents to dialogue with their internationally mobile children about their experiences, but also reflects a narrow slice of the research and information that is available. Additional, non-governmental websites include Planetexpat.com and Militarybrats.com.

While these resources represent honorable attempts to connect and inform the TCK experience, they may not encompass or capture accurately the emerging population of TCKs. These resources run the risk of being antiquated, in a time of fast paced change when the international experience is becoming more normalized. They may also fail to capture the insights available from psychological research.

Chapter 6: Future Research

The cross-cultural nature of the TCK population makes them difficult to distinguish. They may also be challenging to identify, as they must self disclose. They run the risk of remaining a hidden multicultural population, under the radar of traditional assessment tools.

Future strands of research necessitate isolating the TCK population. While this feat presents notable challenges to securing a random sample, career services offices on the college campus may serve as a strategic access point to this population. Simple, straightforward questions in a walk-in appointment survey may provide the details needed to identify a TCK. Such data collection may provide insight into a TCK's use of and satisfaction with college student services. The advent of Facebook and other social networking sites may make it easier to quantify the TCK population, which researchers previously have steered clear of doing. However, this data is limited to those who self-disclose and search out a "Facebook group."

With the TCK population there exists high potential for mediating variables such as stability of culture, age of transition, level at which second or third language is learned, isolation of living situation abroad. These variables could be explored through in depth interviews and large-scale surveys. With a small and nuanced population such as this, qualitative data may prove more helpful as a foundational body of research is still being constructed.

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