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**Different on the Inside...Third Culture Kids' Transition Experiences**

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## **Abstract**

Third Culture Kids (TCKs) are children who have spent a significant part of their upbringing in a country or countries different from their passport country. This thesis explored the experiences of TCKs growing up abroad, and how this may have impacted their transition to their passport country, following high school. In particular, this thesis considered: the benefits of the TCK lifestyle; TCKs' unique strengths; their cultural identity development; meaning of home and belonging; acculturation and the TCKs' challenges during transition. It is envisioned that through increasing knowledge and understanding of TCKs, social workers, counselors, tertiary institutions and parents will be better able to address the specific needs of the TCKs during transition to their passport country.

By means of a narrative approach to the research, the participants provided insights into their TCK lifestyle and the specific challenges they experienced during their transition back to their passport country. Consideration was given to the theoretical social work perspectives that can benefit social work practice when supporting TCKs. Subsequently, the implications for social work practice provision were established.

The research findings identified the many benefits but also challenges to the TCK lifestyle. Much of the challenges TCKs experienced during transition to their passport country resulted from their sociocultural adjustment, highlighting the need for both social and cultural support during their transition. In addition to support, the findings revealed that the TCK lifestyle, cultural identity, family relationships, friendships have a significant perceived influence on the TCK's successful transition to their passport country.

## **Preface**

To my most loved, my everything, John, Isaac, Grace and Ruby, who make me a better person and this world a better place. Thank you for all you have taught me and continue to teach me. Special thanks to the participants and to all TCKs, who have the potential to make a difference by showing tolerance, and acceptance of difference. Sincere thanks to both my supervisor's Dr. Kathryn Hay and Dr. Tracie O'Mafileo for your enduring support, patience and encouragement. I would not be here without you all.

From New Zealand to Pakistan to Laos to Sri Lanka to Cambodia to Uganda and Palestine...I finally made it!

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Globalisation has changed the world in which we live, resulting in increased numbers of people moving in search of better economic or social prospects, from one country to another (Moore & Barker, 2012). Subsequently, increased numbers of children are accompanying their parents to several different cultural environments. These children can spend some or all of their developing years in countries that are outside their parents' passport country, with the prospect of returning to the passport country at some point in the future (Cottrell, 1999; Moore & Barker, 2012). The children or young adults that follow or have followed their parents to other countries are commonly referred to by the term Third Culture Kid (TCK) (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Over a decade ago, there were estimated to be four million TCKs worldwide (Eakin, 1998). The number of TCKs has risen significantly since then, as Melles and Schwartz (2013) have observed, "with the burgeoning globalisation over the last century, TCKs and ATCKs (Adult Third Culture Kids) are becoming more common" (p. 261). According to the Department of Economics and Social Affairs, in 2017 there were estimated to be over two million people living in a country other than their birth country (United Nations, 2017). Although this number does not specify exact numbers of TCKs, it does highlight the increasing migrant demographic of which children are part.

TCKs' parents' employment abroad differs, and can include military, business, diplomatic, education, missionary, and humanitarian, and the length of time they spend abroad also varies (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). TCKs also represent distinct cultures and varying facets of society, and because of these things, the TCKs' experience will vary. Given that they share the same third culture and share many commonalities as a result of their experiences they are referred to as a specific cohort.



## **TCKs**

The term TCK was first devised in the early 1960s by American sociologist Ruth Hill Useem. She had been living and working in India with her three children in the 1950s, and invented the term to describe the experiences of children who have grown up in foreign countries, which are not their own, which she defined as follows: “TCKs” is a term that “describes young people raised in a country other than that of their parents. They blend the culture of their passport country with their country of residence and become truly multicultural, often finding it easier to relate to others who have lived abroad than to those who have stayed close to their roots” (Useem & Downie, 1976, p. 103). Moreover, Pollock and Van Reken (2009) provided an alternative definition of TCKs to be: “a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all other cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background” (p.13). Additionally, Moore (2011) has articulated the TCKs’ third culture as, “the intersection between the parents’ culture, the child’s passport culture if not the same as the parent, and the intercultural environment in which he or she develops” (p. 27). Espinetti (2011) on the other hand, perhaps most clearly and concisely described the TCKs’ third culture as a fusion of their birth culture with all the cultures they have lived and experienced. Alternatively, McCaig, (1992) used the term Global Nomad to describe this population. She defined a Global Nomad to be: “anyone who had ever lived abroad before adulthood because of a parent’s occupational choice or whose parents were/are overseas independently for career purposes” (p. 2). While TCKs may not be kids at all, as the name suggests, it is used to describe a group of people who, as children, grew up in a different culture than their parents. TCKs are sometimes referred to as Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) (Byntter, 2012), however, for this particular study the term TCK will be used (Useem & Downie 1973; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). The TCK term is preferred as, not only is it the most widely used and globally recognised, this term best describes and incorporates the essential aspects of this population.

TCKs differ from other immigrant populations, as they are not immigrating permanently and do not become lasting members of their host countries. The host country is the country that a TCK has lived in, as a result of their parent/s' employment. There may be one or multiple host countries depending on many factors, for example, contract time and the TCKs' parents' personal decisions. Host countries do not allow the permanent right to live there and eventually TCKs move back to their passport country or another country to live. The passport country is the country both the TCKs and their parents originate from and the country where they have citizenship (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Some TCKs will spend more time during their developmental years living in their host country, than they will in their passport country. Invariably this may mean that the TCK develops more connection to their host country/countries than they do to their passport country. Because TCKs' are not lasting members of their host country/countries, and they may not feel connection to their passport country, TCKs' can remain transient members of both their host and passport countries, often feel that they do not belong to any specific country. This may explain the TCKs need to develop their unique relationship to all cultures, which is described as the third culture (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Useem, 1999). The TCKs' third culture is not a tangible geographical place, but rather a changing, transient, globally cross-cultural relationship to their experiences and relationships (Cottrell, 2007).

Very often these individuals and their families represent more than one cultural and/or ethnic group, due to their parents' different ethnicities and nationalities. The cultural environments TCKs grow up in are also different from their parents. As a result, TCKs are exposed to multiple cultures, which all contributes to influencing and shaping their cultural identity. Moore & Barker (2012) have claimed TCKs are multicultural individuals as they are able to acquire at least two cultural identities, making them adaptive and open to change. Literature suggests cultural diversity is what depicts the TCK and their environments (Berry, 2005; Cottrell, 2007; Quick, 2010).

As a consequence of TCKs spending many of their developmental years outside of their parents' passport culture, and of the impact of their cultural experiences and

mobile lifestyle, TCKs may face challenges with identity formation, sense of belonging, self-esteem and psychological and emotional issues (Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; Quick, 2010). Conversely, there are benefits for TCKs who grow up in another culture, which can contribute to the development of their self-confidence, independence and cultural sensitivity (Cottrell, 2007). The TCKs' mobile lifestyle, as a result of their parents' work, requires them to move and adapt to live in new countries, referred to as a transition. Transition requires the TCK to not just physically move and change countries but in addition to adapt emotionally, socially and culturally to their new environments. However, at some stage these individuals will transition to their passport country, and for many TCKs transition occurs following their completion of high school, usually for the purpose of pursuing tertiary study. The TCKs' transition at this time requires them to adapt socially, culturally and psychologically as it has before, however this time can be more challenging than previous transitions (Cottrell, 2007).

### **Research Significance**

While the TCK phenomenon is not new, literature, specifically regarding the TCK's transition to their passport country, remains limited (Quick, 2010). For the most part, literature has focused on specific issues that result from a mobile lifestyle, for example, TCKs' emotional and social development, cultural identity formation and sense of belonging (Cottrell & Useem, 1996; Fail et al., 2004; Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Walters, 2006). This literature highlights how the TCK lifestyle can create issues and challenges for TCKs, but also acknowledges there can be added benefits for them. Furthermore, the literature has suggested that it is essential to understand the TCKs' experience in connection with these factors, as this is crucial to further comprehending what happens during their transition (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010). Research on the TCKs' transition following high school abroad exists, but remains limited (Quick, 2010).

### **Theoretical Perspectives for Social Workers**

Although previous studies conducted on transition have established some of the positive factors assisting TCKs' transition process, there has not been any research that

has inquired into the theoretical implications for social work practice. While it is essential to understand and know about the experiences and challenges of the TCK lifestyle and transition, social workers also have ethical and professional responsibilities, which are aligned with social work values and based on theoretical understandings (Teater, 2014). Theoretical understandings will further help to guide social workers' development of a suitable practice framework when assisting the individual's social, cultural and emotional needs (Payne, 2014). Because TCKs are a specific population, it is therefore important not to equate or confuse TCKs with immigrant children (Schaetti, 2000). Although TCKs may share some similarities to children of immigrants, there are many differences which are essential to recognise so as to ensure the right support during transition.

Theoretical models can assist to identify the contexts in which TCKs' challenges occur, and assist practitioners to develop comprehensive constructs aimed at understanding the cause of transition challenges, and effective interventions. This enables the practitioner to conceptualise the TCK's psycho-social development and provides understanding and insights into the TCK's experiences and the impact of their life events (Teater, 2014). Theory can assist practitioners to develop frameworks that can be used to guide practitioners' practice, and assist them to manage TCKs' circumstances and address the TCKs' specific needs. While theoretical perspectives vary so does their applicability and appropriateness, therefore consideration needs to be given to what is most suited to the client (Teater, 2014). Payne (2009) stated, "reflecting critically entails reviewing different perspectives and options before deciding on best practice" (p. 3).

Payne (2014) suggested the psychosocial theory offers a perspective in which other theories and methods can be understood by social workers. The psychosocial theory focuses on the ways that individuals are shaped by and react to their social environment, by considering individuals and their social environments simultaneously, viewing the individual as interrelated and interdependent with their environment. This theory emphasises the individual's interaction with their family, the effects of significant relationships, the impact of life experiences, and their social and cultural

involvement. The theory views the individual's development and social situation to be an outcome of their environment, and views individuals as able to influence and change their environment (Payne, 2005). Payne (2005) claims the psychosocial theory, which has proved useful to social work, can provide the foundation for other social work theories, such as the ecological theory.

The ecological theory combines ideas from a number of human behavior and social work practice theories, and offers a rich, wide-ranging social work knowledge and practice base (Payne, 2005). The ecological model clarifies the different environmental systems in which a person lives, which are divided into five ecological systems, categorised from the most personal level to the broadest. The five systems include the micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1988). The microsystem is the individual's immediate environment such as family, peer group, classroom and his or her interactions. The individual is actively involved and facilitates construction of the social settings, an example of the TCKs microsystem may be the TCKs international school. Mesosystem refers to the interaction of two microsystems environments, such as the connection between a child's home and school. Ecosystem is the environment that the individual is not directly involved with, for example, the parent's workplace. While this system is external to the individual's environment, this affects him/her. Macrosystem is the larger cultural context, including issues of cultural values and expectations, and influences the individual directly. The macrosystem also describes the culture in which individuals live, including socioeconomic status, poverty, and ethnicity, which the individual has less influence in determining. For TCKs this may be a developing country, or country experiencing civil war. Finally, is the chronosystem, which incorporate the events that occur in an individual's life, such as the person's change of circumstances. An individual's transition to their passport country would be one example of this.

The ecological theory is a way to conceptualise how the individual's environment interacts and influences the development of individuals (Pardeck, 1988). In view of the social, cultural and emotional challenges that TCKs have identified as experienced during their transition to their passport country, an ecological theoretical

approach would give consideration to these factors, as this theory considers individuals and their environments as separate systems that are interconnected and interdependent. Each continuously influences the other, with changes in one of these systems affecting another. When assessing and addressing TCKs' needs during transition, applying an ecological approach will give attention to the individual's physical and social environments and culture, and to their reciprocal relationships with people and their environment. Although the ecological model has been criticised as being too subjective and abstract to be helpful to practitioners, and additionally, it has been suggested that it is lacking rigor and clarity, it remains a popular and widely used framework in social work (Wakefield, 1996).

Additional theories such as Bowlby's (1988) theory of attachment can also assist social workers in understanding and making sense of individuals' behaviour and abilities or inabilities to develop relationships, both within the social work context and within the interpersonal and environmental systems (Teater, 2014). Attachment refers to an emotional bond experienced by a relatively more vulnerable person in relation to a relatively stronger one (Page, 2011). The foundation to Bowlby's attachment theory is that past experiences with relationships and interactions affect psychological, emotional and social development and functioning, which further impacts new relationships and interactions. The social worker–client relationship can also be influenced by the relationships and quality of attachments of the individual's past (Teater, 2014, p.9).

Applying multiple theories to critique existing types of practice from particular theoretical perspectives can also be beneficial for social workers and their clients (Payne, 2014). Multiple theories are essential due to globalisation's profound effect on social work practice, creating new social problems for practitioners to address, such as cultural diversity issues, environmental issues and many more (Dominelli, 2010). As a result of globalisation, social workers are required to change practice provision so to respond more effectively to the demands made of them in a constantly changing contexts (Dominelli, 2010). TCKs', are a growing population, due to globalisation, and are one example of individuals that may require social work assistance, particularly at

the time of their transition to their passport country, as they are likely to experience cultural, social and emotional challenges (Hervey, 2009; Quick, 2010).

The International Federation of Social Workers considers social workers to be social change agents, working holistically to promote and improve the social environments of individuals (IFSW, 2004). Social change refers to the alteration in the social order of a society. Social order is the systems of interrelated social structures, which maintain and insist on certain ways of interacting and behaving, such as, social institutions, social behaviours and social relationships (Form & Wilterdink, 2017). Social change is inevitable, occurring as a result of globalisation, population growth, technological advances, and interaction with other societies that brings new ways of thinking and acting (Dominelli, 2010).

Social workers applying social change theory in conjunction with alternative social work theory when assisting TCKs' will address the necessary modifications of the social order in the community, and help to make adjustments to social institutions, behaviour, and relationships (Payne, 2014). Dominelli (2010) and Payne (2014) propose the social change perspective as a way for social workers recognise the impact of privilege, oppression and social justice on the change process. While some TCKs have been acknowledged for being privileged, social workers can therefore apply social change perspectives when working with TCKs to address the impact of privilege. However, in order to accomplish social change, social workers are required to work in an anti-oppressive way which penetrates all facets of social work practice, including the individual, family, groups, community, society and the social worker–client relationship (Dominelli, 2002; Teater, 2014). Anti-oppressive practice focuses on the use and abuse of power on and by various systems within society and is a perspective that needs to be integrated in social work practice alongside other theories and methods (Dominelli, 2002). According to Dominelli (2002):

... it is essential for social workers to consider three key levels when implementing anti-oppressive practice: (1) intellectual – understanding the principles and methods of working in an anti-oppressive way; (2) emotional – ability to deal with oppression and discrimination in a confident way, and the

ability to learn from one's mistakes; (3) practical – ability to implement the principles of anti-oppressive practice (p. 15).

### **Purpose of the Research**

This thesis focuses on the lived experiences of TCKs and their transition to their passport country following high school. The purpose of giving voice to the TCKs' experiences is to facilitate insights into the acculturation process that these TCKs encounter when they transition to their passport country. When the participants share the stories of their transition, further ideas about what supported these individuals when transitioning to their passport country will be gained. Support through challenging times has been identified as being fundamental to TCKs, especially during their relocation to unfamiliar environments, assisting in facilitating positive outcomes for TCKs' psychosocial well-being (Bredeman, 2015; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

Additionally, others can also benefit from the results of this study, such as TCKs being better prepared for the emotional and cultural stresses they may experience at transition. Parents of TCKs could benefit by becoming more aware of what their child will encounter, helping to prepare them, by better knowing how they can support their children's successful transition. Increased awareness of TCKs' needs at this time will also assist social workers, counsellors and other professionals in the TCK's passport country, to establish the specific support these individuals may require during the transition. Additionally, providing a more pluralistic approach to support, will assist in addressing all facets of the TCK's needs, and help to facilitate support that is relevant and appropriate.

### **Research Approach**

The research adopted a qualitative approach and utilised semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight TCKs using Skype. The interview schedule was determined following a thorough review of the relevant literature. Interviews were then transcribed, coded and thematically analysed. Data were analysed in conjunction with the available literature.



## **Background of the Researcher**

My interest in TCKs stems from my experiences living in countries outside my passport country for over 20 years, and as a mother and midwife. My husband, a TCK, first introduced me to the world of TCKs, and I have been fortunate to have met and have had the opportunity to develop friendships with some of the most incredibly tolerant, open-minded, internationally and culturally conscious people. While my husband is thankful for his experience living in Pakistan, which he perceives as overall positive and beneficial, the impact of this lifestyle has also created some challenges. Equally, it is evident his experiences living abroad have inherently shaped him and influenced his values and assumptions in a meaningful way.

I remember his niggling discontent, his sadness, and emptiness which created a longing that he continued to feel since his transition to his passport country following living in Pakistan. He talked about feeling ‘different,’ misunderstood, more like a Pakistani – but he was not that either. He longed for a sense of contentment and peace, but he did not know how to find it. It seemed like he was living in the memory of what was familiar and comfortable and it was this that he identified with, however life had changed, and while grieving for his past life, he was not able to move to his present life. Feelings of unresolved grief worsened by his abrupt farewell, interrupted by a mistake in ticketing that meant that he was not able to finish the farewell parties with classmates who were more like brothers and sisters to him. He talked about the feeling of being ripped away, thinking he would never see these people again. Pollock & Van Reken (2009) suggest the TCK’s feeling of grief is a result of the loss that occurs when moving countries, further emphasising the necessity to say goodbye, to friends, and significant places as part of the grief process.

So, grieving, disillusioned and confused he returned to Pakistan, five years after leaving, to say ‘goodbye.’ Going back to Pakistan however, evoked much feeling; deep wounds surfaced but happy memories too. It was a healing time, and he was able to make sense of his experiences and work through his grief. Over time old friendships have been rekindled, aided by the use of social media which was not present in his

earlier years during the transition. Though like many TCKs, he has chosen a mobile lifestyle as an adult, he has, at the same time, found it hard to settle. As Pollock & Van Reken (2001) have highlighted, while a mobile lifestyle can teach flexibility, open-mindedness, and much cultural understanding, it can also have long-term implications for TCKs, such as difficulty settling down in one location, and the possibility of not feeling as though they belong anywhere.

Subsequently, our three children, also TCKs with New Zealand nationality, lived most or all of their developing years outside of their passport country, due to our employment. They too have shared their perspective on the TCK experience. Firstly, our son, who was born in Pakistan and then spent a few years in New Zealand before moving to Laos at five years old, where he lived for ten years. Following this, he moved to live in Sri Lanka, where he graduated from high school, before returning to New Zealand to pursue university at 17 years old. At this time, he spoke about how even though he looked like a New Zealander, he did not feel like one. Feeling more Lao than Kiwi was challenging to explain to others, as everyone assumed that the way he thought about and understood things was the same way all his peers did. The question, where are you from, was confronting because for him home had been where he had lived when growing up.

Likewise, our daughter was who was born in New Zealand, left to live in Laos when she was one, and returned to her passport country New Zealand when she had completed her high schooling. During this time, she lived in three different countries. Transition back to New Zealand as a young adult at 18 years old was a confusing time for her and she often spoke of feeling misunderstood, judged and confined. She once said, "If I looked different and I did not speak English maybe people would understand that I was different". As McCaig (1994) points out, TCKs transitioning to their passport country may look like their peers, but their values, thoughts, and worldview differ as a result of growing up abroad. Being expected, by peers, to know the nuances of New Zealand culture was stressful for her, after all her parents were from New Zealand. TCKs who are transitioning to their passport country may feel like society is attempting

to fit them into their mono-cultural norms as there may be an unspoken expectation that when returning 'home' adjusting is not required.

Several TCKs have written about their own experiences during the transition. Harrist (2015) for example articulated how he felt when returning to his passport country: "when Dad took us back to America, I felt different. Coming again, I was subdued and pensive, taking in the world the way one sips a slow drink. The world seemed grey and drab, somehow lacking; I found I had less to say to anyone, and the things people wanted to talk about were colourless and dull" (para 19). Emily Hervey, also a TCK and researcher, shared her experiences of the loneliness of being an outsider, highlighting her struggle to express her experience to uncomprehending friends and family, throughout her entire transition experience (Bell-Villada, Sichel, Eidse, & Orr, 2011). Additionally, Eakin (1998) echoed another TCK's thought that, "my life overseas was exciting but people did not want to hear that" (p. 23). Again, this highlights the TCK's perception of others when transitioning to their passport country.

Listening to stories of my husband's and children's experiences as TCKs and their transition experiences following high school has enabled me to gain more in-depth understandings and insight into the characteristics of these individuals and how their experiences have shaped them. It has also helped me to acknowledge some of the realities of such a lifestyle and the impact it can have on individuals regarding their transition and future decisions, throughout their lives, both positively and negatively.

Their stories have been the inspiration and motivation for this thesis. Just as their stories have helped them to make sense of their lived experiences and provide meaning and understanding, they have informed me, prompting me to want to learn more, and better support these unique individuals. Increasing my understanding and knowledge of this extraordinary population, has also helped guide me as a parent of three exceptional TCKs. Knowledge and understanding have further assisted me in supporting them to become well-adjusted, confident, happy and secure individuals, hopefully prepared to cope and efficiently manage their experiences, opportunities and relationships and the challenges that they may encounter throughout their lives.

Additionally, their insights have shown me that TCKs can experience significant challenges when repatriating to their passport country for university, despite their lifestyle, full of global cultural experience and individual benefits such as cross-cultural skills, self-confidence, which they have been able to establish as a result of their globally mobile lifestyles. Mostly these challenges are due to the cross-cultural adaptation that takes place when transitioning to their passport country. This has highlighted to me that TCKs require emotional, social and practical support, and some TCKs may benefit from additional counselling or social work service provision. Moreover, to be effective when supporting individuals in their passport country, while it is necessary to understand the local country context, understanding the broader global perspectives will assist in addressing the multicultural aspects of TCKs and the implications this can have on their transition to their passport country.

### **Thesis Structure**

The following chapter will review the literature about the TCK phenomenon and the impact of the TCK's lifestyle on their transition. The focus of the writing will be on understanding who TCKs are, TCK benefits and characteristics, identity development and its challenges, cultural adaptation and acculturation process, and the impact the TCK lifestyle and their cross-cultural experiences have on their transition to their passport country, concluding with what assists the TCK's transition. Chapter Three will provide the methodology and theoretical overview, including a description of qualitative research, and a narrative inquiry, which will provide a research framework to approach the study. The theoretical perspective used to guide the analysis is based on a social constructivist viewpoint. An overview of the design of the study further examines the interpretive approach with particular emphasis on the inductive procedure of the research. The study design also discusses methods of data analysis, ethical considerations, an outline of reliability and credibility provision and limitations of the study. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study and explores and discovers the key themes. Chapter Five includes the discussion of the significant results from the research. Finally, Chapter Six conveys the recommendations for further study and final reflections, along with the overall research conclusions.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This review of the literature will focus on exploring the TCKs and their transition to their passport country, firstly by defining TCKs, and highlighting their experience and what it means to be a TCK. Following this, the TCK identity and cultural adaptation will be explored. The remaining part of this chapter will examine the impact cross-cultural experience has on TCKs, identify the issues and challenges for TCKs, explore what assists TCKs during the transition and conclude with a critique of TCK literature.

### **A Profile of TCKs**

TCKs are made up of individuals from different countries, representing all facets of society. As children, TCKs move with their parents to live in other countries outside their passport country due to their parent's employment (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). TCKs' parents are employed by varying organisations, such as, military, educators, humanitarian, business, and missionary.

TCKs have diverse global experiences, and variations in lengths of time living outside their passport country. For some TCKs this may be a few years, while others may spend their entire childhood abroad. The length of time a TCK has overseas and the number of countries TCKs live in, will affect their acculturation to the host culture (Quick, 2010). Mostly, this is determined by the parent's sending organisation, length of the contract, and to a large extent, both the personal decisions and choices parents make. Although there are variations regarding the TCK subgroup, lifestyle, number of countries lived and years abroad, Pollock and Van Reken (2009) have claimed that being raised in a genuinely cross-cultural and highly mobile world is a shared characteristic, and all TCKs, despite their differences, share underlying similarities as a result of their shared mutual experiences (p.17). Van Reken and Bethel (2005) claimed, as a result of their environments and experiences, TCKs become cross-cultural individuals, which they defined as: "a person who has lived in/or meaningfully

interacted with two or more cultural environments for a significant period of time during developmental years” (p.20).

The cultural environment TCKs grow up in, and the events that occur, impact, influence and shape their development (Cottrell, 2007). TCKs are exposed to multiple people with varying cultures, traditions, values, and religious beliefs, as a result of their lifestyle. This provides opportunities for TCKs to develop the necessary intercultural personal skills, which enable them to relate to the variations in cultural/social norms which they are confronted with when living overseas (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Additionally, as a result of their lifestyle, these individuals may have been exposed to diverse opportunities and experiences which have shaped their identity and sense of belonging (Cottrell, 2007; Quick, 2010).

TCKs commonly feel attached to people from their host country, and they often become attached to, and feel part of, the culture they are living in (Quick, 2010). Spending more time in their host cultures means these individuals usually become more familiar with and connected to people in their host country (Hervey, 2009). However, while the host culture has allowed expatriate families to live temporarily in their country, they do not permit full ownership, and TCKs and their families will eventually return to their passport country (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Subsequently, TCKs will not always connect to individuals and the culture in their passport culture. This is due to the attachments they have formed to their host culture and the lack of familiarity with their passport culture, as a result of living for extended periods outside of their passport country. Schaetti’s (2002) study of North American adults who grew up in itinerant third culture, concluded that TCKs are subjected to difficult conditions established within attachment theory, such as loss of host national caregivers as attachment figures, and attachment to places, and possessions. As a consequence, TCKs may experience a range of emotions when they transition to their passport countries, such as grief, cultural imbalance, identity shifts, and culture shock (McCaig, 2012; Cottrell, 2012; Gilbert & Gilbert, 2012). Eventually, most TCKs gain a degree of comfort, however they never truly feel a part of their native culture (Cottrell, 2012).

## **TCK Subgroups**

TCKs are typically divided into categories as a result of their parents' employment abroad (Useem, 1999). TCKs are children of educators, humanitarian and other nonprofit entities. Media representatives have also been represented as TCKs (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Differences in parents' employment influence the type of lifestyle, and the integration TCKs have with their communities. Lifestyle differences are primarily due to variations in financial support, schooling, lifestyle, and location, which often determine the different engagement and connection the TCK has with their dominant culture and their expatriate communities where they are living (Hervey, 2009; McCaig, 1996; Tanu, 2008). This research however, does not explore lifestyle and transition experiences of one particular subgroup of TCKs, instead the participants in this study represent TCKs in general.

## **Perceptions of TCKs**

Third culture communities have been referred to as elitist communities (Cottrell, 2007). This perception of elitism may arise as a result of the multiple opportunities and experiences TCKs may have. Their lifestyle may have afforded them the opportunity to travel and the chance to have diverse experiences (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Travelling to different countries with families or schools becomes a regular occurrence for many TCKs. Often, socialising events such as concerts, eating out and shopping have been more available and accessible. This is because it may be more affordable in the host countries than it can be in their passport countries. Schaetti and Ramsey (1999) highlighted how the TCK may be perceived as arrogant as they speak of their experiences abroad to others in their passport country. Out of context, this may appear exotic and privileged, but to the TCK this seems reasonable. TCKs may also give the impression their experiences are of more interest to them than the experiences their peers have had in their passport country, which may contribute to the assumptions of elitism.

While the common perception is that TCKs lead privileged lifestyles, this is not always true, particularly of missionary children (Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999). Missionary kids (MKs) are more likely to attend mission schools that are day or boarding schools, or are otherwise homeschooled, unlike other TCKs who attend international schools located in major cities. These international schools offer international curricula, other extracurricular activities and opportunities for the TCKs attending. Furthermore, depending on the sponsoring organisation, financial support differs for missionary families and financial aid can be lesser than for other TCK families, which influences lifestyle choices and opportunities. However, MKs will still be considered wealthy by local standards (Cottrell, 2014). MK families often work and live close to local communities, away from major centres, which may also explain significant lifestyle differences. They are more likely to stay in one country for long periods of time, which as a result may lead to individuals becoming more established in their host culture and less so in their passport country (Cottrell, 1999). Fuller integration into the host culture is often required because of the nature of their parents' work (Hervey, 2009). Consequently, MKs may relate more easily to their host country and could have more challenges to overcome during their transition to their passport country. However, as the MKs' parents' work focus is spiritual rather than financial, this has assisted some MKs to reconcile and accept the lifestyle without holding resentments (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Their environments have also provided the opportunity for MKs to develop spiritually, which is recognised as being helpful when transitioning to their passport countries (Hervey, 2009).

Although TCKs fall into different groups as a result of their parents' work, it is important to remember they also come from a variety of cultural, social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, which will also influence their family lifestyle choices (Quick, 2010). TCKs mostly come from developed countries and therefore have a certain amount of privilege as a result of both the political and economic power of their passport countries (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Cottrell (2014) highlighted that American, Western TCK families are privileged in several ways, such as education and opportunity, and this includes MKs. In addition, TCKs usually attend expensive international schools (Tanu, 2008). Emenike (2015) emphasised that international schools may be more inclined towards neo-colonialism rather than their stated missions



of accomplishing true internationalism. Also, some of the TCKs' parents are highly educated, and work in high level positions, for instance as diplomats, which hold power and status (Cottrell, 2014).

Social workers employing ecological systems theory take into consideration a person in the environment, and enable understanding of how the interaction between person and environment can influence individual psychosocial development. Ecological theory can facilitate practitioners' understanding of how events of the macrosystems may influence and impact not only the cultural environment of the TCK but also the perceptions of TCKs within their host country. The cultural environment TCKs grow up in can have lasting effects on the development and adjustment of these individuals. Additionally, inside their environments, the perceived culture and behaviour of these individuals can have a simultaneous mutual influence on host individuals and may have lasting effects on host people. Bronfenbrenner (1988) asserted that individual development is influenced by the environment in which each child lives. Environment influences children on multiple levels or systems that then become the context by which the individual negotiates their social development. This may be particularly important when understanding how privilege and power, but also neo-colonialism, will not only influence the TCK development but also the host cultural responses to these individuals.

### **High Mobility**

Due to the transient nature of a mobile lifestyle, TCKs often move countries. Some TCKs may experience transition up to five times during their developing years, and as a result, many TCKs have developed the ability to adapt more easily to their new surroundings (Moore & Barker, 2012). Simultaneously, due to the transient nature of their lifestyle the TCK's relationships are constantly changing as is their cultural environment. Frequent mobility has meant that TCKs have had to learn how to cope efficiently with recurring change, assisting them to broaden their self-confidence and self-assurance within their new environments (Hervey, 2009; Quick, 2010).

High levels of mobility throughout the TCK's developing years means that loss is inevitable, as the TCKs will experience friendships that come and go and

environments that change. Life may also appear to lack stability, making it a challenge to develop any lasting or permanent roots, which potentially may cause complicated emotional feelings and reactions for TCKs (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). Additionally, “this change may occur for many TCKs before they have completed the critical developmental task of forming a sense of their own personal or cultural identity” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, p. 39). Viewing these events within ecological systems theory can help to explain how this may impact and influence a TCK’s development at each environmental level or system.

### **Connection to Passport Country**

The TCK’s cultural attachment may be stronger to the host culture than to the passport country. Deep attachments to the host country result from long periods of time, increased familiarity, and involvement with their host country. As a result of the TCK’s strong connection to their host country, they may find adapting to the social and cultural difference in the passport country more difficult. Difficulty adapting may also make it emotionally challenging for some TCKs during transition (Schaetti, 1995).

Additionally, the TCK’s experiences could also dominate and may come at the expense of individuals knowing little about their own passport country and their parents’ culture (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). The TCK’s limited knowledge of their passport country has been identified as affecting the TCK’s connection and ability to feel part of their culture (Hervey, 2009). However, the TCK’s connection to their passport country may lessen or diminish the longer TCKs spend in the host country (Quick, 2010).

### **Benefits of the TCK Lifestyle**

#### *TCK characteristics*

As a result of living a globally mobile lifestyle, the TCK’s varied opportunities and multiple experiences have enabled TCKs to develop distinctive characteristics which are shaped by vibrant experiences within the third culture (Bell, 1997; Cottrell 2007; Gilbert & Gilbert, 2012; McCaig, 2012). Cottrell and Useem’s (1996) study of 700 North American TCKs reported adult TCKs to be individuals who are,

“internationally minded; adaptable; have an ability to relate to people from a diverse group of cultures, are helpers and problem solvers and often feel different but do not feel isolated” (pp. 31-33). Furthermore, Schaetti and Ramsey (1999) pointed out the TCKs’ shared characteristics to include: change; relationships; broader worldview; and cultural orientation.

Moore and Barker’s (2012) qualitative study, utilising in-depth interviews with nineteen participants from six different countries, explored their perceptions of identity, sense of belonging, multiculturalism, intercultural communication competence, as well as positive and negative factors attributed to their experiences of a life on the move. Results suggested that while TCKs lack a clear sense of belonging, they are competent intercultural communicators and perceive their experiences as mainly beneficial. The study identified the benefits of being a TCK to be their ability to adapt quickly; fluency in multiple languages; excellent communication skills; greater cultural awareness; broader worldview and open-mindedness. In this study, the participants perceived their intercultural experiences to be positive overall and to have enhanced and enriched their lives.

Additionally, Pollock and Van Reken (2009) considered the TCK’s characteristics to include a comprehensive worldview; language proficiency; ability to be cultural bridges; rootless; restless; and having a sense of belonging to relationships. However, regardless of the variations and diversity within the TCK community, these individuals share similar characteristics as an outcome of their mobile experience and distinctive identity development (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999). Regardless of the similarity TCKs share in characteristics, it is essential to acknowledge that TCKs are not all the same. TCKs differ significantly, due to many reasons such as their specific TCK subgroup, experiences, and personalities. Overall, the identified characteristics that TCKs exhibit are perceived to be mostly positive, they are also acknowledged as being the benefits of the TCKs lifestyle (Moore & Barker, 2012). However, some attributes are not always seen as being positive, for example, the rootlessness and restlessness some TCKs experience may have a more negative impact on the TCK’s long-term life outcomes, and some TCKs may never feel like they belong

anywhere, or may have difficulty settling in one location (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). The TCK characteristics which are a result of the TCK's lifestyle are outlined in more detail below. These include cultural competence, broader worldview, and language and academic abilities, as these appear to consistently be identified by literature to have the most impact on TCKs during their transition.

### *Cultural competence*

Intercultural competence refers to, "an ability to encounter diversity in a respectful and positive way" (Jokikokko, 2010, p. 24). TCKs' experiences abroad have enabled them to develop personal skills and characteristics that support awareness of cultural diversity (Gilbert & Gilbert, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010). Opportunity to travel has afforded them the chance to interact with multiple cultures, imparting a greater awareness of and empathy for unseen cultural differences (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). TCKs have learned to be more understanding and perceptive of culture difference, and of the subtleties of stressful situations, because the TCK's lifestyle has required them to respond to unexpected situations and become involved with people from different social and cultural backgrounds (Quick, 2010). Lyttle, Barker, and Cornwell's (2011) study on levels of interpersonal sensitivity compared TCKs and mono-cultured individuals. As hypothesised, TCKs scored higher on social sensitivity scales than did their mono-cultured counterparts. This confirmed that TCKs, having experienced intercultural exposure, achieve intercultural competence.

This competence originates from a heightened perceptual ability as a result of adaptation to diverse cultures. It is therefore understandable that TCKs exhibit greater social sensitivity in their social communication and their interpretation of non-verbal signs from others. Zilber (2004) believed, "the fact that TCKs are able to see and understand the relationships and connections between cultures has resulted in their being declared cultural 'bridges'" (p. 18). However, Tanu (2008) argued that TCKs may have limited contact with host nationals and may be confined to interactions mostly or entirely with expatriates. This results in TCKs living in what is referred to as the 'expat bubble.' Tanu (2008) further highlighted how the majority of TCKs attend expensive international schools, and so could be easily perceived as or considered a privileged group, also questioning whether this intercultural understanding can extend to those less

privileged. Alternatively, Cottrell (1999) argued this intercultural competence that TCKs exhibit will be influenced by the integration TCKs have with their host countries.

#### *Broader worldview*

A broader worldview is recognised as a shared quality of TCKs and has several advantages, such as being more open-minded, understanding and tolerant of differences (Schaetti, 2000). The TCK's broader worldview may, however, lead to challenges and frustrations with other individuals who have experienced only a single culture. A TCK's perception of these individuals in their passport countries, at times, is that they are ignorant and uninterested in the knowing global issues. This lack of interest may be because they have limited international knowledge or understanding (Barringer, 2000; Cottrell, 1999; Jurtan, 2011; Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Schaetti, 2000). This may be an unfair assumption of the TCKs peers in their passport country, possibly making it difficult for the TCK to make connections and find something in common with others in their passport country during transition.

#### *Language abilities and academic interest*

TCKs are often recognised for their linguistic ability, maturity, intercultural proficiency and higher education (Cottrell, 2007; Jurtan, 2011; Stori, 2001). Speaking multiple languages provides TCKs with an ability to communicate with more people and increases understanding (Moore & Barker, 2012). Similarly, TCKs are more likely to pursue and be successful in higher education (Cottrell, 2007; Jurtan, 2011). Cottrell (2007) claimed this has been influenced by the TCK's international education, their parents' own academic abilities and expectations, along with exposure to other well-qualified TCKs, who act as role-models. An outcome of their language and academic skill set has been the TCK's increased career opportunities (Byttner, 2012; Lambiri, 2005; Quick, 2010). Examples of some of these individuals who have lived mobile lifestyles and gone on to have successful careers include US President Obama, Christiane Amanpour, and John Kerry, US Secretary of State (Lambiri, 2005).

#### *Adaptable, confident, and mature*

TCKs are known to be adaptable, confident and more mature than their peers of the same age (Quick, 2010). These characteristics might suggest that as a result of the TCK's lifestyle they have developed the necessary skills which enable them to adapt to

their transient lifestyle. However, TCKs transitioning can find adapting to the passport culture challenging (McCaig, 1996; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). This may seem paradoxical, when TCKs have been characterised as being adaptable.

### **TCK Identity Development**

This section of the literature review will discuss TCK identity development, and explain the challenges of identity development for TCKs due to their lifestyle. The discussion highlights how their identity affects their transition and the importance of this for their transition to their passport country.

Developing a strong sense of self-identity is congruent with a sense of feeling valued and belonging (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Identity development, Erikson (1968) has acknowledged, is an integral part of an individual's psychosocial development. A sense of one's own personal and cultural identity is essential to all individuals, not just TCKs. Furthermore, Moore and Barker (2012) claimed that enabling TCKs to develop healthy self-esteem better supported their all-round development, sense of belonging, psychological health and well-being, assisting TCKs in their future relationships. According to Adler (1977) cultural identity cannot be separated from a person's existence, and cultural identity, "is the symbol of one's essential experience of oneself as it incorporates the worldview, value system, attitudes, and beliefs of a group with which such elements are shared" (p. 230). During adolescence, people develop a sense of self and self-worth in addition to their individual roles as members of society, and much of this development occurs within school environments where adolescents regularly interact with their peers (Fail et al., 2004). The school fits into the microsystem within the ecological systems model and is perceived to have a direct influence on the development of the individual. Walters (2006) believes that the TCK's sense of personal and cultural identity is formed from learning from their environment and the cues around them.

Identity development is a complicated process and has been described as ongoing and non-linear (Walters, 2006). The TCK identity is also influenced by many factors, for example, multiple moves, changing cultural environments, experiences,

parental relationship, parental participation and conveyed values, which may be conflicting with the host culture and the TCK's sense of belonging and home (Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001). One challenge for TCKs is the risk of developing a confused identity as the TCK's perception of self and their cultural belonging is incongruent with the different cultures they have experienced (Eakin, 1998). A confused cultural identity is the lack of direction and definition of self (Erikson, 1968). This may explain why TCKs who move to their passport country often perceive themselves as culturally marginal and have difficulty fitting in to what is considered their own culture (Cottrell, 2007; Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999).

TCK children often do not have the same opportunities to be socialised in their passport culture and to form a cultural identity and sense of belonging to their passport country, like their parents may have had. Contrary to this, it has been suggested TCKs are more likely to possess multicultural identities, rather than a blurred or confused identity. Moore and Barker's (2012) study on TCKs' cultural identity indicated that TCKs are more apt to possess multiple cultural identities or a multicultural identity than a confused cultural identity. This is because they are able to assimilate all of their cultural experiences into their identity. Pollock and Van Reken (2009) supported this idea, suggesting TCKs develop an identity constructed of multiple cultures, while Schaetti and Ramsey (1999) recognised that TCKs' cross-cultural experiences are what can lead them to assume a multicultural identity. Although TCKs are likely to possess multicultural identities, frequently it is a national identity based on the nationality of their parents which may be challenged when they move back to their passport country (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

Taking an ecological view of human development will enable practitioners to understand how the TCK's identity development has been influenced by the interaction of the different types of environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1988). For example, at the macro level, TCKs whose parents are missionaries will experience different interactions, cultural environments and challenges than TCKs whose parents are diplomats, and vice versa. Each system contains roles, norms and rules which influence and shape the TCK's development. However, all levels of the ecological system impact

and shape the TCK's identity, such as, mobility; culture environment; parental relationship; and sense of belonging and home. These are discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

### *Mobility*

Mobility causes change within the macro level of the ecological systems model, affecting other systems and impacting the development process of the individual. Walters (2006) suggested mobility may interrupt developmental stages for TCKs and affect the identity construction process, as TCKs have had to focus on adapting to different cultures instead of the stages of identity development. Therefore, mobility may delay the process of progressing through the developmental stages of identity, which Walters (2006) believed is necessary for all individuals to be able to achieve a successful outcome. Erikson's theory of human development theorised that the social development of human beings involves eight stages through which a healthy developing human is required to pass through from infancy to late adulthood. Human development theory suggests that an individual's biological development in relation to their sociocultural settings is done in stages of psychosocial development, where progress through each stage is in part determined by our success, or lack of success, in all the previous stages (Erikson, 1982).

Erikson's (1982) theory of development can guide social workers in their work with TCKs. An example would be if the TCK struggles with relationships, this may be a result of not having successfully resolved the developmental stage of identity verses role confusion. This stage occurs during adolescence between the ages of approximately twelve and eighteen. During this stage, adolescents explore their independence and develop a sense of self (Erickson, 1982). However, Mortimer (2010) claimed that Erikson's theory is based on an individualistic orientation to development and may not be appropriate for TCKs who have grown up in collective cultural environments. Therefore, when applying attachment theory, it is important for practitioners to keep in mind the individualistic focus of attachment theory. Given this, the interpretation may be inappropriate for many TCKs.



The geographical disruption that can occur in the TCK's life may mean that they address these developmental stages later in life, which is commonly referred to as delayed adolescence (Downey, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Walters (2006) suggested the timing of transition can also affect the TCK's identity development as transition usually coincides with emerging adulthood. TCKs transitioning to their passport country at the end of high school are beginning adulthood, which is when identity formation occurs and is being negotiated. Walters (2006) asserted that this timing can create unique challenges for TCKs in their identity development, as TCKs have to focus on surviving and adjusting rather than gaining a sense of who they are. As a consequence, the TCK's sense of identity during the transition may be difficult to maintain, and they may question their identity against that of their country peers, which may lead to difficulty fitting into their passport culture.

Another theme identified in the literature, related to mobility, is loss and grief. TCKs must cope with loss and grief each time a friend leaves or other losses occur. Gilbert's (2008) study of forty-three TCKs used a qualitative design, incorporating interview and email data collection. Her study demonstrated losses for TCKs include people, places, opportunities, pets, possessions, and a safe and trustworthy world. These things have provided TCKs with a sense of belonging and identity. Gilbert (2008) further claimed these losses can lead to disfranchised grief as some of the losses are not "openly mourned or socially acceptable" (p. 96).

Hoersting and Jenkins' (2011) study included an online survey of over four hundred participants and examined the relationship between a cross-cultural, geographically mobile childhood and adulthood cultural homelessness. They concluded that both self-esteem and emotional security, for children growing up in a country different than their intended home country, were affected when moving countries. They further claimed this can challenge the TCK's sense of identity and belonging, as losses occur with each move. Losses such as friendship and culture which have been the TCK's connection to the country they were living in, are influential in assisting them in developing their identity and sense of belonging. When TCKs encounter losses they are required to re-establish, or alter, their identity and sense of belonging to fit the new

environment (Moore, 2011). Transient lifestyles with frequent losses and instability may be an obstacle to developing a strong sense of self. An individual's sense of belonging and sense of identity are developed (Eakin, 1998). Both these concepts are closely related and Fail et al. (2004) have claimed that these are issues that TCKs will likely face at some stage. It is therefore understandable why moving is particularly tricky at the end of adolescence for TCKs, as this is the time for identity formation and also the time when most TCKs are transitioning to their passport country (Firmin, Warner, & Lowe, 2006).

### *Culture*

Culture has a fundamental role in the development of identity formation (Quick, 2010; Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999; Walters, 2006). The TCK's multiple experiences and their contact with diverse groups when growing up abroad, contribute to and impact upon their personal and cultural identity (Walters, 2006). Pollock and Van Reken (2009) have suggested the TCK's cross-cultural experiences dictates the development of an identity built of multiple cultures, and as a result, TCKs will possess a multicultural identity. However, Sellers (2011) has asserted that the challenge for TCKs is in knowing their own culture so to provide a solid foundation on which to build and simultaneously incorporate multiple cultures. Walters and Auton-Cuff (2009, p. 756) claimed that cultural socialisation is important because "TCKs are expected to change and adapt their cultural rules as they navigate unfamiliar cultural terrain". They suggest TCKs socialised in their passport country culture will understand their culture and therefore effectively be able to assimilate all their cultural experiences. This will enable them to develop a healthy integrated identity.

### *Parental relationship*

Undoubtedly, developing one's own cultural and personal identity can be challenging for adolescents in general (Hervey, 2009). Growing up in mobile cross-cultural environments different than the TCK's own can make working out both their own personal and cultural identity, and sense of belonging, more challenging, mostly because of the differences between their parent's host country and peer group cultural values and norms which they may find confusing and conflicting (Gilbert, 2008; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Moore (2011) believed TCKs have a greater need to develop an identity within their families and relationships as a result of a different

lifestyle and experience due to growing up in another culture than their parents'. Moore claimed that, "it is through interpersonal relationships and affirmation from within one's culture that one forms his or her self-perception" (p.24). This supports Fail et al.'s (2004) case study which concluded there is a link between a sense of belonging and a sense of identity.

However, TCKs may continue to encounter variations in cultural values and norms during their transition, also coinciding with the continued development of their personal and cultural identity (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Szkudlarek (2009) argued the personal transformation one experiences during transition influences individuals' cultural identity and sense of belonging.

#### *Sense of belonging and home*

Pollock and Van Reken (2009) believed that to enable the healthy development of TCKs' identity, parents of TCKs need to ensure their children are heard, listened to, valued and consulted. Further suggesting that belonging contributes to the TCKs ability to develop a sense of identity. Providing a home by physically unpacking, no matter how long you intend to stay, enables the family also to unpack, mentally and emotionally, assisting their sense of belonging. Providing a familiar base with personal belongings and customs includes consistency, connection, traditions, and memories, which will assist individuals to feel more secure and connected to 'home,' wherever it may be in the world (Pollock, personal communication, May 2003).

#### **TCK Transition to the Passport Country**

Reentry is the beginning stage of the process called transition (Sussman, 2000). The transition has been defined as: "a movement, development, or evolution from one form, stage, or style to another" ([www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transition](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transition)). Transition following high school is acknowledged as one of the most challenging and relevant times of a TCK's life (Quick, 2010). Because of this, TCKs' transition needs to be given vital attention to enable successful adjustment into adulthood (Davis et al., 2010; Davis, Suarez, Crawford, & Reh fuss, 2013; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Schaetti, 1996; Useem, 1999). Transition is inevitable at some point in the TCK's life as

they are not lasting members of the countries they have lived in. TCKs, following high school abroad, either move to their passport country or another country, commonly to pursue tertiary study. The initial excitement that a TCK may feel when moving will eventually make way for the realities of life and the fundamental challenges it brings.

The TCK's transition to their passport country can become uncomfortable as it confronts and challenges individuals emotionally, socially and culturally (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). It is typical for individuals to go through a cross-cultural adjustment period when moving to their passport country, questioning their cultural identity (Walters, 2006). Sussman (2000) acknowledged that it is not unusual for TCKs moving back to their passport country to experience high levels of stress when transitioning. Stress can be caused by the challenges TCKs face during the transition, such as grief, cultural discomfort, and finding a new sense of belonging in the new environment (Schaetti, 1996). Schaetti (1996) claimed, "the psychosocial process one goes through when moving from one country to another is similar to that one goes through when changing jobs, or losing a loved one" (p.2). Timmon's (2004) study on TCK transition experiences concluded that, "a sense of belonging; preparation for reentry; marginalisation issues; identity issues and what it means to be a TCK are repatriation challenges for transitioning individuals" (p. 213). Similarly, Pollock and Van Reken (2009) determined the primary issues and challenges that TCKs face during the transition to be, belonging and loneliness, loss and grief, identity confusion, mobility, cultural adjustment, rootlessness, and restlessness. Cottrell and Useem's (1996) study revealed TCKs experience similar issues that included prolonged adolescence, feelings of rootlessness, alienation, and inability to make commitments. Some of these challenges that TCKs may experience during transition are addressed later in this chapter. In relation to the literature, it is crucial to further understand the psychosocial influences of the TCK's mobile lifestyle along with TCK identity development and the impact this has had on them. Payne (2014) stressed it is crucial for social workers to apply social work theory to their practice and this will support appropriate practice intervention for transitioning TCKs.

Pollock and Van Reken (2001) identified five stages necessary for a successful transition process: involvement; leaving; transition; entering; and re-involvement. Their RAFT model (reconciliation, affirmation, farewells, and thinking destination) demonstrates ways to work through these essential processes of transition when departing from one country of residence to another, to enable growth not just survival, and to achieve successful transition (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). Similarly, Storti (2001) claimed that there are five stages of reentry: leave-taking; departure; honeymoon; reverse culture-shock; and readjustment. Storti (2001) highlighted that individuals can experience a range of emotions during the reentry process, and time it takes to work through the process varies for each individual.

While the transition period has the potential to offer personal growth and development opportunities, this time may also be unsettling, and for some individuals may cause psychological and physiological stress (Davis et al., 2010; Lyttle, Barker & Cornwell, 2011; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Subsequently, Cockburn (2002) has pointed out that it is likely that TCKs, even in the same family, will respond differently to their experiences due to their age and other factors. Not all TCKs can be guaranteed a successful transition to their passport country. While some TCKs may feel overcome by the process of transition, others may experience minimal issues, so it is fair to say not all TCKs face the same concerns during the transition (Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009).

### **Transition Challenges**

Over a decade of literature has observed the difficulties of transition, emphasising the experience of transition for some TCKs has not always been a smooth journey (Cottrell, 2007; Gaw, 2007; Hervey, 2009; McCaig, 1996; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010). The transition challenges TCKs commonly experience when entering their passport country can cause difficulties in adjustment (Bredeman, 2015; Hervey, 2009; Morales, 2015; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Gaw (2007) believed the interpersonal difficulties such as depression, anxiety, and stress, result from feelings of isolation, grief and not fitting in, and these feelings may be prevalent at the time of transition.

There are many possible reasons for the challenges some TCKs experience at transition. Szkudlarek (2008) claimed that these repatriation challenges are associated with the issue of the unexpectedness of the difficulties individuals encounter, lack of preparedness for reentry, and grief due to loss of the expatriate lifestyle. Transition challenges in the passport country may be further intensified for TCKs without the security of family, and new expectations that they now have to be an independent and fully functioning individual in their new society. TCKs are no longer a minority accepted for being different and exempt from not understanding. Instead, there is an expectation that, as citizens, they understand the cultural nuances and know how to function and be part of their societies (Hervey, 2009).

Leaving a TCK's host culture has often meant saying goodbye to friends and family. Gilbert (2008), Pollock and Van Reken (2009), and Hervey (2009) have all acknowledged the loss which TCKs experience when returning to their passport country. Some may experience the loss of possessions, but all TCKs will suffer the loss of lifestyle, cultural ways of doing things, specific foods, and possibly the ability to converse in the host culture's language. It makes sense that losses such as these can lead to feelings of vulnerability (Davis et al., 2010). The transition can be a stressful time for individuals and challenges the TCK's original sense of comfort and well-being, with the loss of familiar people, places, and things (Storti, 2001).

Most individuals function in social ecosystems that are adaptive and are congruent with the social norms of their environments (Norman, 2000). The TCK's ecosystem can become incongruent and adaptive fits may no longer exist, which may lead to challenges for these individuals during transition (Norman, 2000). This is when the requirement for social work intervention may come about. Social workers applying the ecological systems theory to assessment and intervention will be able to comprehend how the individual's environment interacts with and influences the development of individuals, further strengthening their understanding of the TCK's transitioning challenges, and assisting appropriate practice intervention and support. The ecological perspective, which is an expression of the psychosocial orientation in social work, focuses on the importance of interrelationships between people and the

elements in their social systems, institutions, and cultural contexts (Gitterman & Germain, 1981). Social workers applying the ecological systems theory emphasise the importance of implementing a holistic and comprehensive view to social problems, and the shared relationship between people's living system and their environment (Payne, 2014).

### *Fitting in*

TCKs may feel disconnected from their peers in their passport country, a feeling usually evoked when TCKs enter their passport country following high school (Quick, 2010). When TCKs transition to their passport country after growing up abroad, they may have difficulty identifying with the passport culture and fitting in (Quick, 2010). Feeling different contributes to some TCKs feeling disconnected and having difficulty fitting in during the transition to their passport country (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). During the transition, TCKs are known to share common sentiments of not being heard and understood, and “TCKs returning to their passport culture commonly perceive themselves as culturally marginal and terminally unique” (Moore & Barker, 2012, p. 555). Hervey (2009) believed these feelings are primarily a consequence of the variations in cultural experiences and understandings, due to growing up abroad and lack of familiarity with their passport country.

It is inevitable that, living outside of one's passport country, individuals will at times experience the feeling of marginality, and each individual response will differ (Schaetti, 1995). Bennett (1993) proposed two ways of responding to the experience of growing up overseas as ‘encapsulated marginality’ and ‘constructive marginality.’ Individuals will either choose to remain marginal and isolated (encapsulated marginality) or develop a sense of self and relate to different types of people (constructive marginality).

Growing up internationally, TCKs have been surrounded by other TCKs and they have shared a sense of connection and identity with each other. When TCKs transition to their passport country they often set aside their third culture identities in order to adapt to their new environments (Fail et al., 2004). However, because they not familiar with their environments and are surrounded with peers who have not shared the

same lifestyle as them, this can lead to TCKs feeling a sense of cultural marginalisation during transition (Moore & Barker, 2012). Because of this, TCKs are commonly referred to as “hidden immigrants” (Gaw, 2007; Peterson & Plamondon, 2009; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999; Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009).

Externally, TCKs may appear like others in their passport country, while internally they feel like foreigners, as a result of having assimilated cultural characteristics and values of their host cultures into their personal identity (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). The Cultural Identity Model (see Table 1) provides four possible ways a TCK can interact with their dominant culture, which applies to both host culture and passport culture.

Table 1: Cultural Identity Model.

Foreigner Looks different Thinks different	Hidden Immigrant Looks alike Thinks different
Adopted Looks different Thinks alike	Mirror Looks alike Thinks alike

Author: Pollock & Van Reken (2001, p. 53).

This model highlights how difficult it is for TCKs to identify themselves after having acquired cultural values that differ from their passport country (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001). TCKs’ high mobility means that they may move between these relational patterns, therefore with each move TCKs have to negotiate their identity in relation to the dominant culture they are living in. This model however, does not take into account other specifics such as ethnicity and gender.

TCKs need to validate their experiences with individuals in their passport country, to be able to begin to feel part of their communities (Hervey, 2009). However, it can be challenging to communicate and describe how life was in another culture. For that reason, TCKs may not be able to adequately express their unique experiences and feel part of their passport country (Hervey, 2009). Additionally, TCKs may feel like their peers and/or families in the passport country disregard aspects of their background



and life experiences by appearing uninterested. The same sentiment could be shared by the TCK's peers and family in their passport country. The concern is that this perception of lack of interest may lead to misunderstandings and assumptions about individuals, that may not be truly representative of who they are. As a consequence, this may create further marginalisation for transitioning TCKs. This does seem paradoxical when some TCKs transitioning to their passport country struggle to acculturate, particularly because the literature has identified TCKs to be more accepting of other cultures and opinions, and as possessing the ability to assimilate into new cultures (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Useem, 1999).

### *Relationships*

Peterson and Plamondon (2009) argued that not only are strong familial relationships essential for successful TCK transition and repatriation during college, but also important is the ability to make new strong relationships in college. Correspondingly, Ittel and Sisler (2012) claimed that a close relationship can be constructive for TCKs, by helping the TCKs' sociocultural adaptation and ultimately their transition outcomes. Building deep, meaningful relationships can provide individuals with a sense of stability amidst the itinerant lifestyle, helping to assist their transition (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010). The TCKs' constant mobility could make it difficult for them to establish lasting, long-term friendships (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). While many TCKs have the ability to form bonds quickly, meaningful relationships can be complicated to establish due to their consciousness of the transient nature of the relationship. For this reason, TCKs may maintain a certain distance from others as a type of survival skill (Lijadi & Van Schalkwyk, 2014; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999).

Bowlby's theory of attachment (1988) emphasised the importance of previous relationships in determining how individuals will develop emotionally and socially, and form relationships with others in the future. How the individual develops future relationships is dependent on whether a child was made to feel secure and safe as a child. A child's ability to develop emotionally and socially, depends on the emotional bonds that develop from a significant other, such as a parent or caregiver. The ability or inability of a child to attach to the parent, caregiver or significant other, their degree of

consistency in meeting the emotional needs of a child, whether the child feels safe and secure, all determined how the child would develop emotionally and socially and form future relationships. A child that felt safe and secure and was given consistent attention and affection, would develop future positive relationships and develop a more positive psychological and emotional base. Alternatively, a child who did not receive attention, affection or feel safe and secure, was more likely to develop emotional and/or social problems and find future relationships and interactions more challenging.

### *Identity*

When TCKs transition to their passport country, life may be very different from the multicultural environments that they have become accustomed to. Living in multicultural environments has provided TCKs with the freedom to convey all aspects of their identity, while at the same time having it validated (Hervey, 2009). Lack of understanding and different shared experiences from those in their passport country, may make it difficult for the multicultural identity of a TCK to be explained and supported by the dominant culture they are living in. As a result, this may make it harder for TCKs to be understood, making it difficult to relate to others in their passport countries and vice versa. Consequently, this may well explain why many TCKs connect and find their sense of belonging with others who share the third culture experience (Bowman, 2001; Gilbert, 2008; McLachlan, 2007; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Peterson & Plamondon, 2009). Sussman's (2000) study looked at cultural identity, focusing on North American sojourners which also includes TCKs. Sussman emphasised how transition can be a time when TCKs are questioning their own cultural identity against their passport culture, causing identity alternation. She suggests this is a consequence of both the behavioural and social adaptations that the TCK has made while in the host country, and this becomes more noticeable when they return to their passport country. The ecological systems theory can be applied to understand how TCKs make meaning of their lives and how these multiple systems influence and affect their identity.

### *Grief*

Previous research has acknowledged feelings of grief as a result of loss caused by transient, cross-cultural lifestyles (Gilbert, 2008; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Each time individuals change geographical locations, it involves considerable loss, such as

language, friends, places, cultural values and norms, which inevitably leads to grief (Gaw, 2007). Eakin (1998) explained, “most TCKs go through more grief experiences by the time they are twenty-one than monoculture individuals do in a lifetime” (p. 17). Difficult goodbyes and unresolved grief for TCKs can have a negative impact on an individual’s emotional transition (Hervey, 2009). Social work theory can help explain how events that occur within the individual’s chronosystem of the ecological model, can help practitioners to be able to conceptualise how the individual’s environment interacts with and influences the development of individuals. Some of the challenges for TCKs during the transition could be the result of the consecutive losses that may have caused the grief they have experienced, and this can be difficult to distinguish (Gilbert, 2008; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Due to the inherent nature of some of the losses, it can be challenging to ascertain reasons for their feelings (Gilbert, 2008; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Grief may also be a contributing factor for some of the challenges experienced during the transition. Davis et al. (2010), for example, have claimed that both grief and loss have also been associated with some of the TCKs’ psychological distress. Unfortunately, some of these recurring losses that the TCK has experienced growing up may not be acknowledged, and TCKs’ may not have been given, or have taken, the attention and time they need to grieve (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Hoersting and Jenkins (2011, p.19) asserted that, “for some individuals when returning to their passport country, they may grieve over relationships and environments that belong to their host country”. Their response to unresolved grief can lead to feelings of anxiety and depression during transition (Gaw, 2007).

Research on the reentry experiences of East-Asian international students returning to their countries of origin after studying in New Zealand, concluded that reentry is a grieving process (Butcher, 2002). Butcher (2002) referred to this grief as “disenfranchised grief,” a longing for belonging, further adding that grief may be confined in its expression and will never disappear (p. 353). Applying ecological theory can provide a foundation from which to understand TCKs’ grief, as this theory acknowledges the significance of events that occur in an individual’s life and the influence and effect these can have on an individual.

The grieving process for TCKs takes time, and Quick (2010) has claimed that TCKs should be given enough time to grieve their losses and accept the losses. She further believed parents play an essential role in assisting TCKs during this process. Moore's (2011) study of TCKs' cultural identity indicated that TCK participants did not identify feelings of grief as a result of loss through life experience, a finding which differs from other literature concerning TCKs experiencing grief. Consequently, the study highlighted that not all TCKs would respond differently to their experiences, unlike what previous research has suggested.

### *Culture shock*

Many TCKs experience culture shock when returning to their passport country, otherwise known as reverse culture shock (Hervey, 2009). Gaw (2007) defined reverse culture shock as, "the process of readjusting, re-aculturating and re-assimilating into one's own home culture after living in a different culture for a significant period" (p. 2). Gaw (2007) acknowledged the TCK's experience of reverse culture shock during the transition to be associated with feelings of alienation, cultural identity conflict, interpersonal difficulties, depression, social withdrawal, and anxiety, all of which are contributing factors.

The TCK's experience of reverse culture shock during the transition is, however, not usually anticipated by them, due to the assumption that the TCK's passport country is a familiar place (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). This unconscious assumption may lead to more significant reentry stress due to the false expectations of both TCK and people in their passport culture (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Storti, 2001; Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009). Eakin (2001) believed the TCK's feelings of reverse culture shock results from recognition of their feelings of alienation. Similarly, Pollock and Van Reken (2009) suggested the feeling of reverse culture shock as related to being alienated by elements of the passport culture (p. 227). Hervey (2009) confirmed that the culture shocks some TCKs experience during the transition may be a result of feeling different and marginalised, further proposing this is because some TCKs may not have had the opportunity to learn and understand the behaviours, language and social skills of their passport country.

## **A Sense of Belonging and Home**

The concept of belonging differs between TCKs, and some individuals feel they belong only to the shared third culture and do not develop a sense of belonging to any of their old cultures (Ittel and Sisler, 2012). Alternatively, the TCK's sense of belonging may be found in a significant relationship. Fail's (1995) study concluded that people's sense of belonging was three times stronger to relationships than to a particular country. It may be this relationship which enables TCKs to find their sense of belonging and identity (Storti, 2001; Walker, 2000). While a sense of belonging is also fundamental to feeling at home, a home may not necessarily be attached to one physical location or a tangible place. Instead, some TCKs may have an emotional connection to people of significance (Storti, 2001). Sellers (2011) articulated how "a sense of home is a place to feel accepted and comfortable, which may not be the passport country," (p.15) and because the TCK's meaning of 'home' may differ from their parents, she highlighted that this can be challenging for TCKs.

The TCK's sense of 'home' can also be challenged when transitioning to their passport country, and the TCK may experience feelings of homelessness during this time (Gilbert, 2008). Also, Gilbert (2008) claimed, "the absence of a home in their life becomes most apparent when participants move to their passport country" (p. 105). The feeling may be heightened for TCKs transitioning to their passport country as they often move alone, leaving family behind in the host country. Pollock and Van Reken (2009), however, believed most TCKs do have an ability to feel at home anywhere and nowhere and have the capability to make successful adjustments.

## **Acculturation**

Periods of transition require a level of sociocultural and psychological adaption due to the change that occurs as a result of moving between cultures. This is referred to as acculturation, which involves individuals interacting with their new or different culture and having to adapt to and accommodate the differences, so as to become part of their new societies. Kim (2002) described cross-cultural adaption as the process by which "individuals upon relocating into an unfamiliar cultural environment, establish

(or reestablish) and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment” (p. 260). Cultural adaptation is a complicated process that encompasses different aspects of an individual’s emotion, cognition, and behaviour (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). It requires individuals to adapt and function successfully to become competent participants in a culture in which they have not been socialised (Haslberger, 2005). The process of adjusting cross-culturally takes time. Individuals going through the acculturation process when transitioning will experience variations regarding the time it takes, and stress, which Berry (2005) referred to as acculturation stress, also known as ‘culture shock.’

Pollock and Van Reken (2009) believed TCKs have had to learn skills of cultural adaptation as a result of changing cultural environments. They argued the TCKs’ cross-cultural adaptation is helped by their ability to blend in, a skill they have learned while growing up abroad. This ability is described as being a cultural chameleon, as their chameleon-like qualities are a common response to changing environments, enabling them to fit in (Pollack & Van Reken, 2009). Similarly, Moore’s (2011) research study confirmed the TCKs’ ability to shift identities and blend in depending on the cultural setting. Furthermore, Barringer (2000) claimed TCKs are adept at blending in because they are never fully part of one culture or another. Additionally, Eakin (1998) suggested that TCKs cope rather than adjust, becoming both a part of and apart from whatever situation they are in (p. 18). Although the TCKs have developed skills of cultural adaptability which can have advantages for TCKs when changing environments and cultures, Pollock and Van Reken (2009) have asserted that the disadvantage for TCKs is that they may not develop accurate cultural balance anywhere. While most TCKs find adaptation challenging, they work hard to adapt to their peers and their new environment (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Finally, Ittel and Sisler’s (2012) study on TCKs’ adaptation, which included international students from 24 nationalities, confirmed female TCK participants were less likely to report difficulties in sociocultural adaptation than male participants. This was consistent with previous literature which has demonstrated that females adjust more easily than males (Adler, 1987; Peterson & Plamondon, 2009; Sussman, 2000). However, there are no published studies distinguishing the differences between, and reasons for, female and male transition

adaption success (Sussman, 2000).

### **Cultural Frameworks**

Many varying theoretical models of cultural adaption have been developed to help better understand and interpret the cognitive, behavioural and affective aspects and complexities of transition (Szkudlarek, 2009). Sussman (2000) identified the influence of cultural identity on the readjustment process and proposed the “Alternation Model,” a broad and integrated theory of transition adaption using a social psychological framework (Szkudlarek, 2009). This framework conceptualises the different types of cultural assimilation and explains the different responses individuals may experience on reentry to their passport country. These four types of identity alteration include: subtractive (less connected to home culture’s values and norm); addictive (closely connected to their host culture); affirmative (strengthened links with the passport country culture); and intercultural (strengthened intercultural worldview). Sussman (2009) highlighted how individuals who experience addictive identity alteration are likely to become more integrated into the host culture, and as a result may have difficulty repatriating, with longer-lasting distress. On the other hand, transitioning individuals who experience affirmative identity alteration are more likely to experience less reentry distress and have fewer problems readjusting. Moreover, Hoersting and Jenkins (2011) referred to the individual’s broad sense of connection to their host country as assimilated integration, and suggested that the individual’s relationship to the host culture is at the expense of the relationship with their own culture, which can make adjusting to a new culture more difficult.

Moore (2011) claimed that while there are multiple models of acculturation, the ‘Alternation Model’ best fits the TCK, as it assumes that individuals can have a sense of belonging in two cultures without compromising their sense of cultural identity. Moore (2011) further argued it is possible for these individuals to become acculturated to both their passport culture and the host culture they have grown up in, retaining a positive relationship with both cultures. Alternatively, Lysgaard’s (1955) U-Curve Model describes the four stages of cultural adjustment: euphoria, culture shock, and acculturation, experienced on return to ‘home.’ These stages are not predictably linear

stages, and individuals may experience any stage of them during their repatriation. An extension of Lysgaard's U-Curve Model is Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) reverse culture shock model (called the W-Curve Model). This model expands on the U-Curve Model, linking initial transition culture shock with reverse culture shock, so as to incorporate individuals' additional experience when moving to their passport country (Sussman, 2000; Szkudlarek, 2009).

### **Assisting Transition**

The literature has identified several factors that contribute to the TCK's positive transition outcomes. These include sociocultural skills, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, family relationship and support, friendships, internet, and transition programs (Bredeman, 2015; Davis et al., 2010; Hervey, 2009; Ittel & Sisler, 2012; Lambiri, 2005; Quick, 2010).

#### *Sociocultural skills*

Sociocultural skills refer to the TCK's ability to relate to different people from different social and cultural backgrounds. Cultural skills are fundamental, especially in an increasingly diverse world, and social skills remain essential to the individual's outcomes (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010). The TCK's sociocultural skills are particularly crucial during transition as they can assist with adaption to social and cultural change. A study looking at the relationship between TCKs' cultural adaption/understanding and psychological well-being found that the sociocultural skill set of TCKs affects their emotional well-being (Klemens & Bikos, 2009), suggesting that the more developed the TCK's sociocultural skills are, the better their emotional well-being will be. Schaetti (1996) stated that ultimately the individual transition outcome depends on the how the TCK makes use of the skills that they obtain as children, along with the relationships and support that are provided to them.

#### *Self-Efficacy*

Confident individuals with a strong sense of self-value and identity have been acknowledged as managing challenging situations more efficiently, and adapting more easily culturally (Ittel & Sisler, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Plamondon's (2008) study found that individuals who had lived abroad had a clear sense of self and



appropriate attitudes towards acculturation experience and were more likely to have positive outcomes transitioning. Ittel and Sisler's (2012) study also found that TCKs with a greater self-efficacy found sociocultural adaptation less challenging and are less likely to have problems with the process of sociocultural adaptation. Confident individuals, therefore, are more resilient and more likely to have the capacity to negotiate their way through challenging times. Furthermore, the study established that TCKs with deep family bonds have considerably higher levels of self-confidence as compared to those without deep bonds. The responsibility to support individuals to develop a strong sense of self primarily lies with parents. Regardless of this, the study did not confirm that the family relationship affected sociocultural adaptation. Instead, they suggested these strong bonds may ultimately support TCKs' sociocultural adjustment, as a strong sense of self-confidence, nurtured by the family, can assist in the process of adjusting to a new culture (Ittel & Sisler, 2012). Despite the findings, further research is necessary to extend these themes and, specifically, the impact which family, friends, gender, and means of communication have on sociocultural adaptation (Ittel & Sisler, 2012).

### *Emotional intelligence*

Emotional intelligence was first defined by psychologists Peter Salovey and John Mayer (1990) as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 89). Individuals' decisions and behaviours are often determined predominantly by feelings, which act to guide their responses. Therefore, individuals do not rely exclusively on intellect but also will employ their feelings and emotions to direct and guide them, particularly when facing challenging times (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Consequently, individuals with well-developed emotional skills are more likely to be content and effective in their lives (Goleman, 2005). Goleman argued this is primarily because emotional intelligence assists people to deal with life's challenges, and those who are emotionally competent are therefore at an advantage during difficult times in any aspect of their life. TCKs' emotional competence can assist their transition. Those with developed emotional intelligence are more likely to have positive transition outcomes, and many of these TCKs often go on to become active participants in their communities (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010).

### *Parental relationship*

TCKs commonly share close relationships with their family members due to the family unit being the only constant relationship that TCKs have amongst their constant change (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Changing countries and environments while growing up has meant many TCKs remain dependent on their family for support, emotional security, encouragement and role modelling (McCaig, 1994). For many TCKs, the family can provide a “home,” amidst the uncertainty of mobility, helping to provide security (Gilbert & Gilbert, 2012). It is therefore understandable why TCKs are attached to the family relationship and why the family relationship becomes significant (Gilbert & Gilbert, 2012; Lijadi & Van Schalkwyk, 2014; McCaig, 1994). Maintaining strong familial relationships, and the ability to make new relationships, are pivotal to TCKs’ successful transition (Hervey, 2009; Peterson & Plamondon, 2009; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). A family relationship built on a firm foundation can assist in supporting and sustaining individuals during the transition, contributing to positive outcomes (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

The parental support may have provided consistency in family traditions and enabled TCKs to feel they belonged, and were valued, considered and secure. This relationship may have also offered the opportunity for their children to discuss their feelings, and seek answers to any questions, all of which may support their transition (Hervey, 2009). Bowlby’s theory of attachment (1988) emphasised that individuals who form secure attachments with their parents as children and are made to feel safe and secure, with the appropriate attention and affection, develop a more positive psychological and emotional foundation. Goleman (2005) highlighted that ensuring a secure emotional connection to family, and parents, decreases the likelihood of future emotional stress. This is particularly important when TCKs are transitioning to their passport countries, as this is considered one of the most stressful times for TCKs (Quick, 2010). Parent involvement and awareness of their child’s needs at the time of transition is essential to positive outcomes (Collier, 2008; Hervey, 2009).

The results of Huff’s (2001) study on MKs’ repatriation showed, “parental attachment was found to have a direct effect on perceived social support and college

adjustment” (p. 246). Lijadi and Van Schalkwyk’s (2014) study expanded on this, recognising the success of transition was reliant on how parents managed the challenges of transition, specifically regarding the TCK’s social relationships. As Pollock and Van Reken (2009) have asserted, “TCKs usually place a high value on their relationships” (p.136) and so parents need to be aware of the significance of relationships when caring for their TCK’s needs during the transition. Pollock and Van Reken further proposed that “parents must ensure that the right planning, support, and guidance are provided for their TCKs in their new environments” (p. 15).

### *Friendships*

Relationships with other individuals who had a similar experience growing up outside their passport country can have a positive impact on transition (Collier, 2008; Davis et al., 2010; Hervey, 2009; Martin, 1984; Tetzl & Mortenson, 1984). The social constructivist perspective would argue that individuals’ relationships are developed through their thoughts, feelings and interactions with others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Consequently, TCKs are more likely to develop friendships and find security with other TCKs or international students, who are characterised by the same experiences (Downie, Koestner, Elgeledi, & Cree, 2004; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). However, while TCKs may have shared similar cross-cultural experiences to international students, they are different, as international students are not permanent citizens of the country, therefore they will have varying needs (Quick, 2010). Pardeck (1988) proposed that adopting an ecological viewpoint leads to the shifting of focus from individual personality and behavioural characteristics to relationships between individuals, their families, and their communities within their eco systems. An ecological viewpoint would provide perspective on and understanding of the TCK’s behavior and the impact of the TCK’s relationships.

### *Time*

Length of time is another contributing factor in TCKs’ successful transitions. TCKs’ transition experiences have been identified to improve the longer individuals spent in their new environments (Bredman, 2015). The improvement over time was likely a result of individuals eventually being able to understand the culture and establish their identity within the new setting (Bredeman, 2015). Hervey (2009) pointed

out that TCKs transitions to their passport countries and cultures differed in terms of the time required to feel adjusted. Family and friends, therefore, need to be aware of assuming adjustment is completed within a specific period. Hervey further added that providing ongoing support and understanding remained crucial to transitioning individuals.

### *Internet*

Technology allows TCKs who are living abroad to stay in touch and up-to-date with the changes in their passport country. Lambiri (2005) suggested this may play a significant role in TCKs' reentry and positive transition. The internet, at the same time, readily assists in providing information for TCKs, parents, and educators. TCKs use technology to maintain communication with their TCK peers throughout the world. There is a momentous change from previous generations of TCKs, when technology was not available or as accessible as it is today. Furthermore, an increasing number of internet sites and blogs specific to the growing population of TCKs have also helped to support TCKs transitioning (Lambiri, 2005). Hervey (2009) claimed the internet enables communication with others of similar experiences, which can help to support TCKs, making the readjustment process less difficult when TCKs are transitioning to their passport country.

A study, based on Chinese TCKs, suggested that there is a connection between the effect of microblogging and reduction of reverse culture shock (Zheng, 2013). The study highlighted the positive effect social media has on building mutual understanding, shared language and maintaining relationships with people, which can help reduce sojourners' reverse culture shock (Zheng, 2013, p. 39). Similarly, Ittel and Sisler's (2012) study found communication through the internet was beneficial for TCKs, suggesting that frequent use of the internet to connect and maintain contact with friends and communities with similar backgrounds means TCKs have fewer difficulties with sociocultural adaption when transitioning to their new environments. Furthermore, Timmons's (2004) phenomenological study on TCKs' personal transition experiences affirmed that online communication is essential in supporting TCKs' cross-cultural adaption during the transition, as this enables TCKs' understanding of self and how the third culture evolves, through the insights of other TCKs.

### *Transition preparation and support*

More frequent visits to the passport culture while living abroad may also contribute to a more comfortable transition for many TCKs (Bredeman, 2015). Hervey (2009) claimed that the stress experienced at transition eased for MKs when they had increased interaction with peers from their parents' culture while abroad, as this enabled MKs to stay more connected and aware of current trends in their passport country. Attending transition programs both before leaving the host country, and in the passport country during the transition, can be helpful in determining better outcomes for TCKs during the transition (Bredeman, 2015). Programs can assist TCKs' transition primarily because they introduce them to the cultural values, trends, and norms of their passport culture, therefore better preparing individuals for repatriation (Davis et al., 2013; Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001).

Transition programs are also a way of connecting individuals who have shared similar experiences, and provide environments to share their personal life story with others who understand (Hervey, 2009). The individual's set of beliefs, values, knowledge and attitudes builds the foundation of their belonging to a group. This allows individuals to develop a sense of self-worth and a sense of belonging socially, as the group adheres to the same beliefs and values individuals will follow. In addition, being part of a group allows the connection of people across cultural, social, economic, ethnic and racial lines. The shared beliefs, values, norms and practices that a group of people holds in common is referred to as social order. Social order is considered a necessary component of any society and it is deeply important to a sense of belonging, connection to others, and cooperation (Payne, 2004).

Programs were also shown to reduce the amount of stress and depression that TCKs experienced when transitioning (Davis et al., 2013). Essentially, this was because individuals who attended these programs were given the opportunity to talk about their experiences, providing support and understanding to each other. Consequently, this had a positive effect on their psychological well-being (Davis et al., 2013). In addition to transition programs, international student counsellors have been recognised to be a valuable resource in terms of support for TCKs (Barringer, 2000; Butcher, 2002; Gaw, 2007). Social workers could provide additional support, for example, providing an

advisory role; facilitating support groups, social and community support; counselling on social problems; and advocacy. This support is a vital factor in assisting individuals to manage and identify issues that they are likely to face on returning to their passport country, helping to ease difficulties in their cross-cultural transitions (Butcher, 2002). Even though this support has been recognised to be essential for TCKs during the transition, the support needs to be specific and appropriate to individuals (Davis et al., 2010).

Employing an ecological perspective can provide practitioners with an integrated approach that allows for different ways of assessing and addressing problems (Teater, 2014). This theory assists practitioners to conceptualise the challenges that TCKs may confront during transition and involves not only working with the TCK, but within the systems that facilitate social and emotional functioning. These include the TCK's family and community, in conjunction with other essential social systems.

### **Critique of TCK Research**

Peterson and Plamondon (2009) have acknowledged that psychological research on TCKs is limited. Szkudlarek (2009) also suggested that there is a growing need to understand the psychological, social and practical complications related to transition, due to the movement of people as a result of globalisation. While Szkudlarek recognised that literature on repatriation is abundant, she believed research on cross-cultural reentry remains essentially overlooked, and stressed that it remains undervalued and ignored. Despite the fact that there have been extensive publications on the impact of cross-cultural transitions, Szkudlarek (2009) also argued research concerning TCKs' reentry transitions remain limited and that much of the reentry research is disjointed and does not always link to TCKs' reentry, or rather TCKs' repatriation which she believes more adequately describes reentry. Similarly, Lambiri (2005) has previously highlighted TCK research limitations, referring to the disconnection that often exists in intercultural research, between data and investigations resulting from academia, and that resulting from work in the field.

Research on the transition experiences of TCKs is also increasing and largely compiled through social networking sites, TCKs' biographies, and advocacy organisations (Downey, 2012). Families in Global Transition (FIGT) are one example of a research network, which includes researchers from a variety of backgrounds, and was formed to provide support and research significant to families transitioning (<http://www.figt.org>). However, much of this TCK literature is anecdotal and not necessarily published in peer-reviewed journals. Lambiri (2005) drew attention to the fact that, while the authenticity of the TCK's actual experiences helps to clarify and explain their experiences, it is also important to recognise the role of meticulous research in advancing current knowledge further, and integrating the research on TCKs. (Bredeman, 2015; Espinetti, 2011; Hervey, 2009; Hisano, 2015).

Furthermore, existing literature regarding the TCK phenomenon mostly focuses on American TCKs, and targets specific groups, predominantly Missionary and Military Kids, strongly reflecting their experiences (Bredeman, 2015; Espinetti, 2011; Hervey, 2009; Hisano, 2015; Lambiri, 2005). The majority of significant studies contributing to TCK research have been American studies. Some of the studies include

- Cottrell's (2002) study which used a questionnaire to determine the educational and occupational choices of over six hundred American ATCKs;
- Ender's (2002) study involving the use of a questionnaire to establish the experience of children of military parents, from over six hundred ATCKs;
- Gerner, Perry, Moselle and Archbold's (1992) qualitative study which identified the characteristics of internationally mobile adolescents and included over one thousand TCKs;
- Gerner's (2002) qualitative study of over one thousand TCKs and non-TCKs, which looked at the gender differences in cultural acceptance and career orientation among internationally mobile and non-internationally mobile adolescents;
- Huff's (2001) study which explored how parental attachment and social support impacted the transition to college for MKs, by comparing forty-five MKs with

sixty-five non-MKs, using the Home Comer Culture Shock Scale as well as measures evaluating attachment, support, and college adaptation; and

- Walters' (2006) qualitative study conducted with eight American female TCKs, exploring how women growing up in multiple cultures navigate their way through emerging adulthood and develop a sense of identity.

Tanu (2008) claimed that much of the existing TCK research focuses primarily on Western culture. The westernisation of intercultural study can, therefore, make it difficult to apply it to all repatriating groups (Szkudlarek, 2009). However, significant non-Western research contributions to understanding the TCK's reentry process, and the re-acculturation of Japanese children, are the studies of Yoshida et al. (2002); Podolsky (2004); Kanno (2000); Shimomura (2014); and Tamura and Furnham (1993). Shimomura's (2014) study focused on the social and psychological outcomes of Japanese returnees (*kikokushijo*) and their struggles as they reentered Japanese society after their international experiences. The study highlighted the expectation by Japanese culture to have shared cultural values and norms, with the lack of acceptance of any kinds of difference. Consequently, this can lead to unease and confusion that Japanese returnees may experience due to developing different cultural norms and practices growing up abroad. Other international studies include,

- Lam and Selmer (2003) looking at the perceptions of over two hundred different TCK in Hong Kong and concluding that TCKs have different perceptions of being international;
- McLachlan's (2007) qualitative study of forty-five mobile British families, highlighting the challenges and positive aspects of transition, faced by the entire family;
- Kim (2001) who interviewed thirty Korean MKs who attended Faith Academy in the Philippines, regarding their experiences living in a different cultural setting; and
- Schnelle (2008) exploring fifty-one German TCKs' return to their country after living abroad, and finding that they exhibited great cultural skill and flexibility.



Lambiri (2005) recommended that future research should consider how to develop new approaches to intercultural research through comparing and contrasting different groups, although comparative studies to investigate the similarities and difference between TCKs from different countries may encounter obstacles and challenges when accessing such a widespread sample. Lambiri (2005) also proposed that further research to test the theories that make up the TCK profile would necessarily allow for a more in-depth understanding of current developments. For example, the impact of technology on TCKs' communication; identity development; how TCKs apply their overseas experience to their future lives; what happens to TCKs during cultural adjustment; and the strategies that work best to help individuals cope with the challenges of transition.

Overall, the current literature advocates the importance of TCK research and the necessity for further study. It also highlights that gaps exist in current TCK research and that a more international focus is necessary, as not all nationalities and cultures are being adequately represented. Further large scale international and intercultural research studies of all TCK groups is necessary to address the existing gaps in literature, so as to provide comprehensive knowledge and understanding of all TCKs. Finally, both Lambiri (2005) and Szkudlarek (2009) have claimed there is a need to integrate the research, and they propose that, by developing connections between data and field research, the integration of TCK research will be ensured.

## **Summary**

TCKs are unique individuals who share common experiences and themes as a result of living globally mobile lifestyles. As with all children, it is reasonable to assume that a TCK's childhood will impact her/him throughout the rest of their life. For some TCKs, a mobile lifestyle will have lasting adverse effects (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Useem, 1999). However, for others it can be an extremely positive experience, providing individuals with more significant opportunities to develop competencies necessary to successfully advance throughout their lives (Moore & Barker, 2012). Like other individuals, TCKs share fundamental needs that assist their emotional/psychosocial development, enabling them to become healthy, well-rounded and confident individuals. Just as the cultural and geographical experiences during a

child's developing years have a significant influence on an individual's identity development and well-being, so do their interpersonal relationships, psychosocial support, self-confidence and emotional intelligence. While the literature acknowledges the advantages of a highly-mobile, multicultural upbringing, much is written on the difficulties such a lifestyle can present for individuals emotionally, socially and culturally (Gaw, 2007; Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001; Peterson & Plamondon, 2009). For some TCKs, transition to their passport country is not a smooth journey. Even though the transition has been identified to be challenging for some TCKs, many have been shown to have positive acculturation experiences (Plamondon, 2008). Nevertheless, fitting into their new environments can be difficult for any individual, and it is likely they will experience challenges in response to the variation in cultures and lifestyle.

With the right support, transitions can be positive for TCKs (Bredeman, 2015). Support from interpersonal relationships with family and friends has a positive impact on individuals and is fundamental to the outcome of individuals' future well-being (Barringer, 2000; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999). Additionally, support through transition preparation and transitional programs is also believed to be a critical aspect to a successful transition for TCKs (Bikos et al., 2009; Hervey, 2009; Huff, 2001; Peterson & Plamondon, 2009; Schaetti, 2002). Such support enables TCKs to understand better and make sense of their diverse cross-cultural experiences (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

Developing greater awareness through communication of TCKs' varying views of self and how the third culture develops will also be beneficial for understanding and managing cross-cultural adaptation (Ittel & Sisler, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). This, together with knowledge and understanding of the positive multicultural and personal benefits from the experiences of growing up abroad, and the impact of the TCK's life experiences, will provide insights into the challenges that TCKs may face during the transition to their passport country (Timmons, 2004). TCKs have been fortunate to develop multicultural skills and a broader worldview as a result of their global cross-cultural experiences. This can only help to assist them as they work through the challenges that transition to their passport country may bring (Moore &

Barker, 2012). However, Bytner (2012) claimed that the TCK's full potential can only be realised once they efficiently work through the challenges that interrupt their transitions following high school.

Finally, by applying social work theories, social workers are able to understand and conceptualise the TCK's psychosocial and cultural development in relation to their environment and experiences growing up abroad. Theories can provide the foundation for the development of appropriate support interventions for TCKs facing challenges during transition. The following chapter provides the theoretical and methodological outline informing this qualitative research.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

This chapter provides the rationale for the design of this qualitative research study. Firstly, the theoretical perspective, methodological approach, and research design are described. This is followed by an explanation of participant selection, and description of methods used to collect, interpret and analyse the data. Consideration is then given to the ethical aspects of the research process. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the use of the alternative indicators of reliability and validity, more suited to social research. It is these indicators which will assist to demonstrate and communicate the rigor of the research process and the trustworthiness of research findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

### **Research Aim and Question**

The aim of this research was to gain further insights into and increased understanding of the TCK's life abroad and their transition to their passport country following high school. The findings of the research will provide additional knowledge and understanding to assist future TCKs, their family, educators, social workers and counsellors who may be required to provide support during TCK transition.

The participants' narrative focused on addressing the following aims:

- Identify the benefits of growing up abroad;
- Acknowledge the impact TCKs cross-cultural experiences have on their transition;
- Identify the challenges for TCKs during a transition to their passport country;
- Deepen understandings of TCKs acculturation experiences, and the support needed during the transition;
- Identify the positive aspects of the transition to their passport country; and
- Advance current knowledge and understanding about TCKs transitioning to their passport country.

To facilitate the qualitative research process, the fundamental question: *What was the TCK's experience when transitioning to their passport country?* was explored. Additional questions guided the researcher to further explore how the TCK's cross-cultural experiences impacted their transition to their passport country, the benefits of such a lifestyle, and the positive aspects of their transition. These included:

1. In what ways has being a TCK benefited you?
2. How has being a TCK influenced your cultural identity and sense of belonging?
3. Please tell me about your transition to your passport country after living abroad.
4. What were some of the feelings you experienced during the transition?
5. What was positive about your transition?
6. What were some of the challenges you encountered during the transition?
7. What could have helped make the transition better for you?
8. How have your experiences of a cross-cultural lifestyle impacted your transition?

### **Research Method**

Qualitative approaches to research are well suited to the social sciences as they enable the representation of participants' voices, perceptions, and understandings, enabling an 'insider' view (Bryman, 2001; Gilbert, 2008; O'Leary, 2004; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Qualitative research is concerned with obtaining in-depth understandings of how people interpret their social world (Bryman, 2001). These understandings in the social sciences are based on multiple realities and subjective truths, unlike those of the natural sciences, which are primarily based on predictions, fact and objective truths. A qualitative research approach was deemed suitable primarily because the study aimed to elicit in-depth meaning and understandings of a specific phenomenon of the participants' experience (Bryman, 2001; O'Leary, 2004). This approach was therefore consistent with the research objectives (Bryman, 2001; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Etherington, 2007; Gilbert, 2008; O'Leary, 2004; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

### **Theoretical Perspective**

While research is concerned with generating knowledge, there are nevertheless multiple theories as to how people construct their knowledge and understanding

(Creswell, 2003). Social constructionism is a philosophy of learning based on the belief that people create their understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences (Etherington, 2007; O’Leary, 2004; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Social constructionists believe sociocultural and historical contexts shape individuals and their conception of knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). They view knowledge and knowing as being embedded within history, context, culture, language, experience, and understandings, all being equally reliant upon and connected to each other (Etherington, 2007).

The theoretical perspective that the researcher chose to guide this research was derived from a constructivist paradigm. By viewing this research within the framework of social constructivism, the researcher acknowledged that the participants’ realities and knowledge are shaped through experience and interaction with others, in conjunction with their cultural, historical, and social context (Etherington, 2007). Subsequently, when exploring the participants’ meaning and understanding of the process of transition for TCKs, this framework enabled the researcher to recognise and understand that the participants’ subjective meanings and knowledge were negotiated culturally, socially and historically. Therefore, it was within this context that the researcher was able to consider the participants’ experience. Furthermore, this perspective acknowledged that the researcher’s own background shaped her interpretation of the data, by recognising that the researcher’s values and own lived experiences cannot be separated from the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Gilbert, 2008; O’Leary, 2004; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). In effect, the researcher and participants’ relationships work together to shape the research, as each bring their own experiences, histories, and worldviews to the research process (Bryman, 2001; Patton, 2001). Because of this, the researcher’s values and perspectives will inevitably influence the research findings. Therefore, it is impossible to ensure that the research is free of bias. To limit this bias and to ensure the ‘true essence’ of the participant experience was understood, self-reflection in the form of bracketing throughout the entire research process was used (O’Leary, 2004; Patton, 2001). Bracketing is the term used to reflect on one’s biases and preconceptions, to set aside the researcher’s assumptions (Bryman, 2001; Patton, 2001). This entailed keeping a reflexive journal on the researcher’s practices, knowledge, and experiences at

all stages of the research journey. The reflexive process enabled biases to be identified and ensured the participants' beliefs and understandings were not manipulated (Creswell, 2003).

As the research focus was primarily on exploring the lived experiences of the participants, a narrative approach was undertaken so the researcher could enable the TCKs to voice their understandings and meanings of a specific experience. Narrative approaches are considered a research method which explore narrative ways of knowing (Creswell, 2003). Similar to other methodologies used by social researchers, narrative investigations look more in-depth into the understanding of particular aspects of life experience. This approach has been identified as a successful way of understanding and inquiring into an experience, generating detailed descriptions and interpretations of individuals' experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Josselson, 2006).

Narrative research is an interpretive approach, which views social reality as a subjective paradigm relying on interpretation from which an understanding is obtained (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Furthermore, narrative research is an inductive form of research, so it allowed for themes and concepts to emerge from the data itself, rather than through testing a hypothesis as in deductive types of research (Bryman, 2001). When the participants in the study shared their stories, they were not independent of the content, but rather very much linked to their social, cultural and historical backgrounds (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This is consistent with a social constructivism viewpoint which views understanding as being shaped by and connected to an individual's experience. A narrative approach meant the participants were able to take responsibility for their meaning and knowledge, while at the same time being able to reveal what was important to them (Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, this allowed for the participants' narratives to shape the research findings, and for the research question to be answered.

### **Participant Recruitment**

The research explored the experiences of eight adult TCKs in transitioning to their passport countries. This number of participants has been shown to be a sufficient number for qualitative inquiries involving the understanding of the experiences and

perceptions of participants (O’Leary, 2004; Patton, 2001). The criteria for participation included potential participants being between the ages of eighteen to twenty-six years, and having returned to their passport country after living outside their parents’ country of origin for three or more years as an adolescent. The World Health Organization stipulates the adolescent years to be between the ages of 10-19 years (WHO, 2014). Participants were not limited to TCKs from a specific sub-group or country, and their parents’ employment represented the missionary, diplomatic, humanitarian and business sectors. The passport countries of the participants included Netherlands, Thailand, New Zealand, Japan, India, USA, Italy, Taiwan, Australia, Canada, and America. The reason for this was to create a more diverse sample population, as much of the current research literature strongly reflects the experiences of American TCKs and MKs (Bredeman, 2015; Espinetti, 2011; Hervey, 2009; Hisano, 2015).

Recruitment of potential participants was through snowballing methods. Snowballing is a procedure by which participants are recruited for interviews or group discussions using informal contact between them (Bryman, 2001; Patton, 2001). This technique assists the research in identifying participants that meet the research criteria (O’Leary, 2004). A connection was initially made through an email to two TCKs known to the researcher (but not included in the research). The TCKs that were initially contacted were asked to send an invitation email to acquaintances that met the research criteria. The invitation email (see Appendix A) included the information sheet, which outlined the participant involvement and research objectives (see Appendix B), together with the interview schedule (see Appendix C). To ensure enough participants were recruited, potential participants initially invited were asked to repeat this process and send the email of invitation onto TCKs known to them. Interested participants then contacted the researcher using email. There was a response by fifteen people in total who were interested in the research. Following this, the researcher used email to contact the interested people and invited only the participants that met the study criteria. Ten potential participants who met the study criteria were selected. A follow-up email was sent to arrange an interview time that accommodated the researcher’s and participant’s schedules. The participants were assured of their confidentiality throughout the research process including in the final thesis, and a written and signed consent was obtained by



email (see Appendix D). Withdrawal from the research process was possible up until data were analysed, and participants were informed of this. Two of the participants were not able to make the interviews due to unforeseen circumstances and only eight of the ten participants were interviewed.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews have been determined to be the best method to acquire an understanding of an individual's lived experience (Creswell, 2003). As an inductive approach, interviews allow for themes to be discovered instead of themes being predetermined. They enable immediate responses from participants and allow the participant to recall their experience as it was lived (O'Leary, 2004). As a method to collect data, interviews are known to assist in giving full accounts of the participant's experience and assist in the production of in-depth understanding. Additionally, due to the interactive nature of the interview, the data is generated between the researcher and participant (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Consequently, social researchers typically select one of the three different types of interviews, that is, structured, unstructured and semi-structured, as their method of data collection (Bryman, 2001). Structured interviews use pre-established questions, asked in a set order, limiting the researcher's personal communication. Unstructured interview questions are not predetermined, instead a more conversational style of interview is used to obtain the data. Finally, semi-structured interviews are neither fixed nor free. The interview starts with a question plan and continues with a more conversational style of interview. Although semi-structured interviews provide some structure, they also allow for flexibility, allowing questions to be answered in a more natural flow of conversation (Bryman, 2001; Creswell, 2003; O'Leary, 2004; Sheppard, 2004).

An advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they are well suited to a small-scale qualitative research project. Semi-structured interviews are considered to be less formal than structured interviews, but have more focus than unstructured interviews. (Sheppard, 2004). Based on the advantages outlined above, and considering that the research was to establish deep understandings and perspectives of the participants' transition experience, the data were collected through semi-structured

interviews. Additionally, this method of data collection was consistent with the methodological considerations of the research, and considered to be more suited to answering the proposed research question. With all this in mind, the interview protocol was designed to address the research question, and at the same time depict the voices of the participants, and enable broad meanings and understandings to evolve (Bryman, 2001). The semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher. The open-ended questions allowed the researcher to listen carefully to what participants were saying, and for the participants to share their views freely (Creswell, 2003). Although semi-structured interviews start with a definite plan and set of questions, they also provide flexibility, allowing for a more conversational style of interview (O'Leary, 2004). This conversational style of interview enabled the researcher the chance to explore important themes and probe more deeply into the participants' experiences where deemed necessary (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Listening has been identified as an essential aspect of the interview (Creswell, 2003). This required the researcher, when facilitating the interview, to take an active role throughout the interview process. At the same time, the researcher needed to be in tune with, and alert and attentive to what the participants shared (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). As a result, it was easier for the researcher to respond to what the participants said. Also, attentive listening was beneficial when the researcher was required to explore a participant's response more deeply, otherwise known as probing. Planning probes in advance can be difficult due to the uncertain responses of the participants. However, the researcher applied listening skills, and had a sense of the range of probes that a qualitative researcher could use before interviewing, to assist this process. Essentially, probing is a way of clarifying and gaining further meaning from and understanding of the participant's experience (Creswell, 2010). The use of probing during the interviews enabled the researcher to attain further insights into the thoughts and feelings of participants (Bryman, 2001; Creswell, 2003).

Skype as a method of data collection, especially in place of face-to-face interviews, and in real time, is increasingly being used by researchers (Sullivan, 2012). Before commencing the interviews, the researcher considered the implications of using

Skype, such as technical issues, authenticity and ethics. Technical problems associated with using any technology can include the internet connection speed and the quality, which can interrupt the flow of interviews and affect data collection. During some of the interviews, the use of Skype created some challenges, due to the poor-quality internet from Jerusalem where the interviewer was based. This caused the line to drop, causing disruptions during the interviews, which meant the researcher had to call the participants back multiple times. This was frustrating and two of the interviews were stopped and alternative times for the interviews were arranged. The interruptions affected the flow of conversation, which may have affected the participants' responses to the questions. Furthermore, Skype quality meant there was limited use of cameras, which prevented the researcher from reading the participants' body language and reading their responses, which would have further contributed to communication. Finally, a challenge that the researcher had underestimated was the participants' different geographical locations around the world, which required the researcher to accommodate individuals' time zones. This was not always straightforward. It was difficult with some time differences to establish an interview time that suited both researcher and participant, and sometimes this meant holding the interviews late at night.

Authenticity has been identified to be a concern with using Skype (Sullivan, 2012). As with all research interactions, whether face-to-face, over Skype, or in writing, there are concerns regarding authenticity. However, qualitative researchers are more concerned with discovering understandings and meanings that participants find and assign, rather than questioning the truth of their interactions (Bryman, 2001). To enhance the authenticity of the research findings, the researcher audio recorded the interviews, which made it possible to capture the data in its natural form (Bryman, 2001; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Ethical considerations such as confidentiality when using the internet to collect data were also something the researcher could not ensure. This was because it is possible to track conversations, locations and identities on the internet, and Skype can record conversations (Sullivan, 2012). Mostly because of this, the researcher thought it was important to clarify and fully inform participants of the possibilities of security issues and to keep in mind the potential of this happening.

Participants were reassured that the likelihood of this happening was minimal. None of the participants were concerned or refused to participate in the research because of this. Before the interviews, the selected participants agreed to be interviewed, voice-recorded, and for the recordings to be transcribed. The interview schedule was included at the time of invitation, enabling participants the time to consider important questions. Interviews lasted approximately sixty minutes, and were digitally recorded onto the researcher's password-protected laptop, and written notes taken during the interviews were stored in a locked file.

### **Data Analysis**

Following the interviews, the researcher transcribed them verbatim. This helped the researcher to not lose any data, and guided the analysis (O'Leary, 2004). The transcripts were emailed to the participants for editing and approval. All transcripts were approved by participants, and consent to use them was obtained using email. Directly following the interviews, the researcher listened to the recordings. By exploring the interviews further, the researcher became familiar with words and concepts from each interview (O'Leary, 2004; Patton, 2001). Studying is an essential start of any analysis, forming the foundation to increase the integrity of the analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Following this, the researcher used thematic analysis which involved coding, categorising, and identifying themes from the interviews' transcriptions (O'Leary, 2004; Patton, 2001). Clarke and Braun (2013) suggested that, due to its flexibility, thematic analysis allows for rich, detailed and complex description. Finally, by using index categories, the data was sorted and labelled into thematic groups, related to the original interview. This involved developing a framework to help refine the identified topics into key themes and subthemes. The themes and concepts were vigorously compared within and between interviews to enable in-depth descriptions to emerge (Gilbert, 2008). This generated seven key themes, which are explored in more detail in the next chapter.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Researchers are obligated to pursue truths in their search for knowledge, but they also have a responsibility, due to the relational attributes of social research, to their

research subjects to provide ethical behaviour (Gilbert, 2008). Ethical behaviour acknowledges the attitude of the researcher as crucial when engaged in the human aspects of qualitative research (O'Leary, 2004). The relationship between the researcher and the participants must be based on a position of equality as human beings while ensuring a respectful and empathic manner throughout the entire research process (Bryman, 2001). Narrative inquiry, furthermore, necessitates the researcher to be mindful of and sensitive to the context when exploring the thoughts and feelings of participants (O'Leary, 2004).

Consequently, the researcher acknowledged her relationship with the participants to be of vital importance and made a conscious effort to guarantee a relationship of respect and empathy throughout the research process. This necessitated the researcher informing herself regarding the personal skills required of researchers when undertaking qualitative research. Discussion with the research supervisors, and the reading of relevant literature assisted the researcher to develop an awareness of the skill required to ensure such a relationship (Bryman, 2001; Gilbert, 2008; O'Leary, 2004; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The researcher achieved a relationship of equality and respect by exercising a transparent relationship and collaborative manner with participants throughout all stages of the research process. During the interviews, the researcher maintained an empathic but neutral stance and avoided sharing personal information (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The researcher engaged in reflective listening and kept a nonjudgmental attitude and response during interviews, which enabled the researcher to respond effectively and sensitively to what the participants were saying.

Before the interviews, the researcher verbally explained to the participants the research information, including the reason for the interview, exact involvement of the participant, and how the data obtained was to be used. This gave participants the opportunity to query the meaning and implications of any statements, and the option to withdraw. With further respect to the ethical considerations of the study, the ethics procedure expected by Massey University was observed. This involved completing a full Human Ethics Application for approval to conduct research that involved human participants. Following this, the research project application was evaluated by the

Massey University Human Ethics Committee. The data collection only took place once ethics approval was given (see Appendix E). The ethics application, while assisting in guiding the researcher's ethical considerations during the formation of the research design and throughout the research process, also highlighted the ethical principles and potential issues of a qualitative study, which are discussed below. These considerations include: harm to participants; informed consent; privacy; and deception (Bryman, 2001).

#### *Harm to Participants*

The researcher was aware of the risk that, during the interviews emotions may be triggered, due to the sensitive and personal nature of the subject for the participants. To avoid underestimating this risk, the researcher ensured the participants were well informed regarding the aims and objectives of the study. Participants were sent research information before the interviews, and further clarification and dialogue were given where necessary. The participants were also aware that they were permitted to opt out at any point if they felt that was necessary. However, none of the participants chose to do so. Also, the researcher made an effort to remain sensitive to how the participants were responding to the interview, and to act appropriately in response to their needs. As the researcher was also a parent of TCKs, she was aware some participant responses and perceptions could potentially trigger her emotional reaction. To safeguard from this happening, the researcher wrote down her feelings following the interview, so at a later date if needed she could arrange to share and discuss the feelings with a professional counsellor. The researcher did not feel the need to consult a counsellor.

#### *Informed Consent*

To ensure the participants were able to make an informed and voluntary decision to participate in the study, an email was sent to potential participants from TCKs assisting the researcher in the recruitment of participants. The email included a letter of invitation that specified that the participant's participation in the research was voluntary. Attached to the invitation email was the information sheet which outlined the objectives and aims of the study, and explained the research project and the management of data. Also, the participants were informed of what the research entailed, and the researcher's and thesis supervisors' email contact details were given for further clarification if required. A consent form was sent via email, and an electronic signature

was requested and obtained before commencement of interviews. Additionally, a signed agreement was obtained from all participants for the edited transcript and extracts being used in reports and publications arising from the research (see Appendix F). The researcher, a mother of TCKs, was aware that participants might by chance be known to her or her children. Therefore, when selecting participants, the researcher was careful to ensure no one was known to her, or her children, and before interviewing guaranteed this by confirming all participants were unknown to her and her children.

### *Privacy*

Participant privacy was respected by making a conscious effort to ensure confidentiality was maintained at all times during the research process, such as by storing the participants' transcripts in a locked file on the researcher's password-protected computer. To ensure the identity of participants remained unknown, pseudonyms, instead of participants' real names, were used. Furthermore, participants were able to refuse to respond to questions that they felt delved too much into their private lives or deemed too sensitive. However, none of the participants declined to answer any of the questions. Participants were also given the right to stop the interview at any point.

### *Deception*

Care was taken to safeguard the participants against any deception that potentially could have been encountered during this research process. This was achieved by the researcher striving to maintain a genuine and transparent relationship with both participants and supervisors throughout all stages of the research process. This involved providing participants with written information regarding the research project, clearly outlining the aims of the research to ensure participants were fully informed, and explicitly understood the nature and objectives of the study. Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to keep a copy of their interview transcript, and will be provided with a written summary of the research findings.

### **Reliability and Credibility**

Due to the complex and subjective nature of social research, it has been acknowledged it can be challenging to achieve reliability and validity in qualitative

research. For research to be credible, it is dependent on consideration of the indicators which are concerned with reliability and validity, throughout the entire research process, regardless of the research paradigmatic positioning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; O’Leary, 2004; Patton, 2001). Quantitative research is approached objectively, and can be quantifiably measured as it is based on defined rules of inquiry and fact. As a result, quantitative research is knowable, making it easier to guarantee its credibility (Bryman, 2001; O’Leary, 2004; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This is in contrast to qualitative research, which is based on subjectivities and acknowledges multiple truths. Qualitative research is therefore more suited to an alternative set of indicators. Indicators that assist in demonstrating and communicating the accuracy of the research process have been developed for use in qualitative research (Bryman, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; O’Leary, 2004; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). These indicators can assist researchers by ensuring the quality of their research, and guarantee the trustworthiness of qualitative research through consideration of the management of subjectivities and inherent biases. Furthermore, these indicators assist in ensuring research methods are approached with consistency, and ensure that research findings are applicable and able to be verified.

To assess and ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of this research, the researcher has included indicators of credibility that are more suited to qualitative research. Subjectivity, dependability, authenticity, transferability, and auditability are proposed criteria for evaluating qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; O’Leary, 2004; Patton, 2001). Each indicator will be discussed in turn.

### *Subjectivity*

Subjectivity in qualitative research is primarily due to interpretations throughout the research process that are based on the researcher’s opinion, belief, and personal perspectives, making it more likely for biases to occur (O’Leary, 2004). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argued that we cannot separate who we are from what we observe or what we write. It is, however, essential that the researcher in qualitative research positions himself or herself within the context of the study, is self-aware, and acknowledges his or her own experiences while recognising the impact their values and theoretical perspectives has on the research results (Bryman, 2001).



In this study the researcher positioned herself as an insider, due to being the mother of three TCKs. The literature has shown that insider research can have many advantages (Bryman, 2001; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; O’Leary, 2004; Patton, 2001). Insider researchers have prior knowledge of their subject under study and often do not have to worry about orienting themselves with the research environment and/or participants. The familiarity of the researcher with the subject under study can make the participants more comfortable and therefore more likely to speak freely. Furthermore, insiders are accepted by participants as belonging, and can understand what it feels like in a particular setting (Patton, 2001). Conversely, insider research is frequently accused of being inherently biased, as the researcher is considered to be too close to the culture under study (Bryman, 2001; Patton, 2001). While knowledge is not necessarily biased, it can still influence how the researcher looks at their data with the potential to manipulate it to fit what previous researchers have found (Bryman, 2001). To limit the bias in the study, the researcher used bracketing. Bracketing is a method used in qualitative research to reduce the potential of biases that may negatively affect the research process. This required the researcher to engage in reflexive practice throughout the research process, considering her personal and subjective positioning to the research process. Bracketing allowed the researcher to set aside her own experiences, biases, preconceived ideas and assumptions about the research topic, so as to let the voices of the participants be as fundamentally central to the research process as possible. The method of bracketing involved journaling throughout the entire research process, which helped the researcher to identify biases and reflect on them as the research progressed. Additionally, the researcher outlined the research objectives, background, and rationale of the research study to show the participants her positioning and ensure openness and transparency (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2001).

To further limit biases in qualitative research studies, both collaboration and transparency have been recognised as helping (Bryman, 2001; Patton, 2001). The researcher worked to ensure both transparency and partnership occurred between herself, the researcher, and the participants throughout the process. This was enabled by answering questions about the nature of the project as honestly and openly as possible, and by sharing interpretations and collaborating with participants about how their data

would be represented. Additionally, interview transcripts were shared for review and editing by participants. This gave participants the opportunity to check that they had been understood and their views had been described accurately in the research.

#### *Dependability*

Ensuring reliability in qualitative research can be difficult, as qualitative approaches acknowledge the existence of multiple realities and truths so, therefore, cannot always claim to be 'reliable' in the same way expected of quantitative approaches (Bryman, 2001). Because of this, qualitative methods are more concerned with the dependability of the research to ensure the quality of research, theory, data collection and analysis (O'Leary, 2004). To assist the researcher in providing the dependability of the study, and therefore ensuring accuracy and consistency, proper research practices and procedures were followed (Bryman, 2001). This involved outlining the research design and rationale, along with methods used to collect data and the process of data analysis. Additionally, the researcher endeavoured to ensure the research was well documented throughout the entire research process (O'Leary, 2004).

#### *Authenticity*

Safeguarding the authenticity of the research procedures and collected data, the researcher provided precise accuracy in recording and transcribing. This ensured the real meaning of participant experience was depicted by the researcher, and also assisted in addressing research subjectivities (O'Leary, 2004). At the same time, throughout the research process, the researcher adopted a non-judgmental attitude towards the thoughts and words of the participants, which further helped to ensure that the correct thoughts and feelings of the participants were expressed (Bryman, 2001; Clandinin & Murphy, 2007; Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, the researcher reflected on her own personal, cultural, social, and historical background, before starting the research, by dialogue with her supervisors and also writing this down. Subsequently, through the researcher understanding the context, this assisted her to grasp the meanings and perceptions that the individual participants communicated. As Clandinin and Huber (2010) explained, "his or her understanding shapes the necessity of negotiating research texts that respectfully represent participants' lived and told stories" (p. 15).

### *Transferability*

An additional indicator of credibility is transferability which, in small-scale social research involving small numbers of participants, can be challenging to achieve. This is due to the sample size not being large enough to ensure generalisability (O'Leary, 2004). Therefore, applicability has been identified as a more useful indicator in qualitative research, as applicability is primarily concerned with whether the research lessons and findings apply to other contexts (Bryman, 2001; O'Leary, 2004). The researcher has made the research applicable by producing detailed descriptions of the experiences of the participants to provide readers with extensive understandings. These understandings will assist the reader to transfer findings and lessons learned, making them applicable to other research contexts and situations (Bryman, 2001; Cresswell, 2003; Patton, 2001).

### *Auditability*

Finally, researchers are required to be responsible for ensuring their research is accountable and demonstrable. Auditability in research is one way of ensuring this, necessitating the researcher being transparent throughout the research process and providing a full explanation of the research methods and procedures (Bryman, 2001; O'Leary, 2004; Patton, 2001). The researcher has demonstrated auditability in her research process by having an open and transparent approach and providing full explanations of how she came up with research data, findings, and conclusions reached. This is intended to enable readers to fully grasp the research process and support them in applying it to other types of research (O'Leary, 2004).

### **Limitations**

Disadvantages or limitations associated with this research relate to the relatively small scope of the study. The limited size of the study, involving eight participants, could potentially make it difficult for the research to be representative of TCKs overall. An increased sample number in the research would possibly enhance the reliability and representation of the research study (O'Leary, 2004; Patton, 2001). Although the study provides the perspectives of only eight participants, the findings may still be relevant to other TCKs. Furthermore, the study indicates how further research could build on the key themes from the research. The subjective nature of a qualitative approach can also

be seen as a limitation of the research, generating bias on behalf of the researcher. However, qualitative research is fundamentally concerned with meaning and multiple truths, rather than factual data and absolute truths (Bryman, 2001; Creswell, 2003). Finally, the use of Skype could also be a limitation of the study, as there are concerns regarding authenticity with using Skype (Sullivan, 2012). Due to the interruptions that occurred during interviewing, as a result of the poor-quality internet, the flow of conversation was affected, which may, therefore, impact the accuracy of the data findings.

### **Additional Observations/Reflections**

Participants were aware that, as the researcher, I was also the mother of three TCKs, and have lived outside my passport country in six different countries for over twenty years. Because I had some insights into the TCK experience, this provided me with some shared understanding of the TCK phenomenon under study, and afforded me some validation for the research. Although my personal experiences were an advantage, this also had the potential to influence my perceptions and understanding of the phenomenon under study. Consequently, to ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the study, I acknowledged and addressed this by being self-reflective throughout the research as outlined in the methods chapter.

Every participant interviewed appeared engaged and enthusiastic about sharing their stories. The interviews were longer than anticipated, as many of the participants continued to recall their lived experiences following the end of the interview questions. As a result of participants spontaneously sharing further about their experiences and themselves, I was able to elicit additional information on their lived experiences. At times, some participants responded emotionally, many verbalising how they had found it therapeutic to talk to someone who was interested and understood how they felt.

### **Summary**

This chapter outlined the aims of the research; the theoretical and methodological perspective; research approach and design, and methods used, including

how data were collected and analysed. This was followed by discussion of the ethical considerations and requirements of qualitative research, with an explanation of how the researcher addressed potential ethical issues. Validity and reliability, ways of ensuring the truthfulness and the rigour of the research, were demonstrated and explained by use of indicators suited to qualitative social research. The chapter ended by acknowledging the limitations of the study and recognising the study's shortcomings. The following chapter conveys the data collected from the eight semi-structured interviews.

## **Chapter Four: Research Findings**

This chapter presents the summary of data obtained from eight semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with eight TCKs who had lived abroad as children and experienced transition to their passport countries following their completion of high school. The chapter begins with an outline of the participants' backgrounds, followed by a summary of the themes that emerged from the interviews. The themes pertain to the participants' perspectives on their experiences abroad, the effect and impression these experiences have had on them, and insights into their transition to their passport country following high school. Excerpts from some of the participants' interviews have been included to provide further clarity and understanding.

### **Participant Background**

The participants' ages ranged between eighteen to twenty-six years. Five were currently completing their undergraduate degree, while two had completed their studies, and one of them was completing a Master's degree. Six of the participants had parents from different nationalities, and this resulted in these participants having two passport countries. The remaining two participants had parents who were from the same country. All of the participants except one had moved to their passport countries to study after graduating from high school. One of the participants had lived in just one country during her time abroad, whereas all the other participants had lived in six different countries. Five participants had been born outside their passport country and the other three had moved to live abroad at varying ages, and had remained abroad throughout their adolescence. One participant had no siblings, while the others had one or more siblings. All of the participants had moved to their host countries because of parents' work, which was either missionary, diplomat, humanitarian or business. Participants had attended international schools for most of their education in developing countries. The English language was the dominant language they used. However, all participants spoke two or more languages fluently. On completion of high school in countries abroad, all participants moved to attend tertiary education in one of their passport countries.

## **Establishing Themes**

While the TCK narratives strengthened previous research, the participants' narratives also offered new findings. The primary research question inquired into the participant perception of their transition experience to their passport country, and additional questions enabled the researcher to further explore the impact of their experiences growing up abroad. The interview questions and additional probes enabled participants to share their stories, and themes to transpire. In total, seven themes emerged regarding the participants' overall perception of their experiences. These themes were the impact and benefits of the TCK lifestyle; TCK identity; perception of home and belonging; transition challenges and the acculturation process; feelings at transition; factors that assisted transition; and the positive aspects of transition.

## **Impact and Benefits of the TCK lifestyle**

Participants shared their experiences of being a TCK, and how this had shaped and impacted them personally. The findings established that all of the participants perceived their experiences to be normal for them, and positive overall. In addition, the participants emphasised how moving to their passport country had exposed the differences in their experiences and opportunities from those in their passport country. Participants identified that the cultural experiences and increased opportunity their lifestyle had afforded them, had been a benefit of their lifestyle. As a result, the participants felt they had developed a broader worldview, and greater cultural and self-awareness and, therefore, participants felt they were able to be more tolerant, open-minded and adaptable to difference. Additionally, the participants perceived themselves as mature, confident and independent. Finally, because of their lifestyle, the participants had benefited in their development of language skills and gained more interest in pursuing higher education.

### *Experience as normal*

Participants did not view their TCK lifestyle as atypical, and all articulated how being a TCK and moving countries as a child seemed nothing other than usual to them. All but one participant did not know any other way of life, as they had either spent their

entire life or most of it living outside their passport country. Mike recaps on his situation:

I was born on a plane to parents of dual nationalities. They were living in Africa at the time, and because of the limited birthing options my parents had planned to travel to Dubai for my birth, but I was born on the way before arriving. I was given a passport from New Delhi as it was estimated that was the country we were flying over at the time. I have since been raised my whole life in multiple countries, and that seems normal to me...I do not know any other way of life.

Amy, who was twenty years old, and who had lived all her life outside her passport country, in three different countries (Indonesia, Cambodia, and Thailand) shared that:

Travelling was the norm for us as kids. Our family travelled somewhere most holidays, and we had school exchanges with other schools, which I participated in. These were for sport and culture, and it meant we got to travel to other countries in our region.

Other participants shared some of their personal and cultural experiences as TCKs, which they said had seemed the norm at the time. It was not until they returned to their passport country, following high school, that they had become fully aware of what being a TCK had meant. One participant, Mary, mentioned how old videos and photos had drawn attention to how different their lives had been growing up abroad, “Looking back now and watching some of the family video recordings, I realise that my life growing up was full of amazingly different experiences and full of wonderful people.”

Transition to their passport countries had highlighted how different their upbringing and experiences had been, to those of their peers in their passport country. Participants considered the differences in their experiences and opportunities from those



of peers in their passport country, to be a result of the variations in lifestyle having grown up outside their passport country.

#### *Experience as positive*

Findings revealed the participants' perception of their experience to be overall positive. All were thankful for their experience, which they perceived as positive overall. All participants felt their experiences had provided them with many diverse opportunities, which they perceived optimistically. They recalled their experience enthusiastically, implying they would not replace it with any other. All participants were appreciative of their experiences, reflecting on the opportunities that their lifestyle had granted. However, the participants felt their experiences growing up had been hard to explain to others that had not shared similar lifestyles. It was not until they shared their experiences with others in their passport country at transition that they became conscious of how advantaged they had been growing up abroad. The participants revealed this awareness had resulted from the comparisons they had made of their own experiences and opportunities with others in their passport country. Participants shared their memories of growing up, recalling how happy they had felt. They also acknowledged how fortunate they had been to have had opportunities, which had afforded them many unique experiences.

While most of the participants appeared content with their upbringing, for some, the experience had been life-changing. Two of the participants who had moved abroad at a later age were able to make lifestyle comparisons with prior experiences in their passport country. One of these participants, who had moved abroad at twelve years old to live in Uganda, and then moved to Kenya, identified his experience as life-changing. Pete explained:

When my parents first told me, we would be moving to live in Uganda, I was not pleased. However, I am so thankful we did because it has changed me in so many positive ways. All the experiences, which I would not have had if I had stayed in my passport country. This has helped me grow as a person; it has been life-changing for me.

Another participant, Sue, moved to live abroad at six years old, and went on to live in one country until she graduated from high school. Although her overall experiences growing up had been beneficial, she had not always found it easy. Her experiences at transition, however, had helped her to define who she was, once she worked through the challenges.

#### *Broader worldview*

The participants conveyed how their experiences and opportunities living abroad had highlighted a deeper awareness of global issues and, as a consequence, they had been able to develop a more comprehensive worldview. The influence of significant individuals during each participant's life had also contributed to the participant's development of a broader worldview. For many of the participants, the experience of more than one culture had been the impetus for them becoming interested in global affairs and cultures. Furthermore, the nature of their parents' work had meant that all of the participants had lived in developing countries. As a result, the participants had been exposed to poverty and the consequences for individuals and countries. Some participants shared how living in the countries they had, had made it impossible to avoid the realities of the world, such as poverty and injustice. Exposure, for example, to poverty and injustice was impossible for most of the participants to avoid. This included not just the reality of poverty, but also unfair wealth distribution, exploitation, and corruption. This had been confronting, and affected many of the participants in a personal way. As a result, they had developed a strong sense of social consciousness and social justice.

#### *Greater cultural awareness*

The participants believed their exposure to many different people and cultures had given them awareness and understanding of multiple cultures and religions. Exposure had unequivocally caused them to be competent in both their cultural and interpersonal skills. The participants' narratives demonstrated that they developed cross-cultural and interpersonal skills. Their exposure to other ways of life had also helped shaped the way they viewed different cultures, religions, and socio-economic groups. The participants' friends growing up were all from different countries and had

different religions and customs, however this had never stopped them from sharing parts of each other's cultural traditions.

The participants' experience of culture in a personal way had further enabled them to develop a greater sense of self-awareness, and to develop a greater openness to other cultures, and had taught them to have an open mind. The experience of cultural difference in a personal way had enabled the participants to understand and accept others more easily. Being a part of so many different cultural environments had made the participants more aware of individuals' race and religion, which had helped to shape their thinking.

Participants agreed their broader understanding of cultures and the world in general, had made them more open to experiences with diversity, cultures, food, and people. This meant that now the participants often looked for new and different opportunities and experiences. Factors that had further contributed to the participants' cultural awareness were the participants' ethnically mixed families. Many participants shared dual nationalities and diverse cultural traditions and family experiences, and so it was easier for them to understand and adapt to cultural differences, because they experienced and understood cultural differences.

#### *Adaptable, tolerant and open-minded*

Multiple cultural experiences had enabled the participants to be adaptable to cultural variations, and the participants spoke of their ability to be one person when around one set of people or culture, and then to be able to be someone entirely different when in another situation. Mike shared how his ease at blending in was due to his familiarity with different cultural norms, "I can quickly change between Eastern and Western culture behavior, as I am familiar with both." The participants agreed they had developed this ability growing up abroad in response to their changing environments, as a way to make it easier to fit in. However, participants did not feel this skill, which is referred to in the literature as being a 'cultural chameleon,' had prevented them from being genuine, it just made life easier.

Although the participants felt they were more comfortable with people that had shared similar experiences to them, they still tried to adapt to others in their passport country during the transition. Many of the participants shared how they tried not to stand out in their passport country, but sometimes it was impossible because they spoke with an accent and did not always know the social norms of their passport country.

Most participants perceived themselves to have an increased tolerance of individual differences and to be more open-minded than their peers in their passport country. They felt this was because of their experience of different cultural friends while growing up. All had held multiple points of view, which they had learnt to not necessarily judge as right or wrong, and had learnt to accept that others share different views. Although most of the participants attributed their skill of increased tolerance and open-mindedness to their experiences and exposure, others felt this ability was not entirely because of their experiences growing up, suggesting instead that these skills developed as a result of them feeling different, which had made it easy to accept others' differences.

### *Independence*

The participants all perceived themselves to be independent, however this had created other challenges during the transition because it could have appeared they did not need others or want to join in with other people. Some participants felt it was a different type of independence when they were transitioning, because they had to be independent in ways that were not familiar.

### *Confident and mature*

All participants thought they were mature for their age as a result of their opportunities and experiences, and agreed this seemed to be a common theme among their friends in the global/international community. The participants also acknowledged their keen sense of self-confidence which they credited to their TCK lifestyle, and to being a result of a close and supportive family. Pete expressed, "I do not want to sound arrogant but I am a confident person, and I know that it is a direct result of my experiences." Participants also acknowledged that, after the experiences they had, it was impossible to be anything other than confident. For one participant, their experience had

impacted their sense of confidence and had propelled them to believing anything was possible.

### *Language skills*

One of the significant findings, was the development of language skills as a direct result of the participant's experience and opportunities. This was evident in all participants being able to speak two or more languages. They attributed this to having bilingual parents, living in countries where different languages were spoken, and being schooled in the English language. They were appreciative of the opportunity to speak other languages. Some participants had not always seen this as a priority growing up. Participants also shared that, knowing their host country and passport country languages had enabled them to feel and remain connected to people and places. Language had contributed to the participants' ability to fit in once they returned to their passport country, as it had made it easier to communicate and understand people in their passport country. Ability to converse in other languages had provided some practical support during the transition. Also, participants' multiple language skills had also increased opportunities and been an advantage. Kate illustrated:

I speak French, Spain and English, so it is helpful when I move around as it makes it easier to communicate with others. I was schooled in English, and that's what I spoke to with my friends, but my spoke to me in their languages. I am thankful because knowing other languages increases opportunities for me.

Amy spent eight years living in Thailand. Being able to speak Thai, even though she was not from Thailand, had helped her to feel connected to the country she referred to as 'home' after she had left.

### *Education*

Participants all appeared to value education, and thought they were prepared for university. Interest in pursuing tertiary education was essential, and most participants appeared motivated academically and professionally. Several of the participants acknowledged their school diploma had been academically challenging. However, they felt it had prepared them for university, and that there was an expectation amongst TCK

students and families that TCK students would pursue further study. Participants had all attended international schools which had used the same IB (International Baccalaureate) curriculum. The same education system had provided them with consistency, making it easy to adjust academically when moving countries and schools. The participants' interest in further education had been inspired by some of the people they had met, and the experiences they had abroad. Also, most of the participants appeared appreciative of the opportunities that education could afford them. Many had local friends in their host country that did not have the same educational opportunities. This was primarily due to their country's limited facilities, or financial and geographical limitations, and this had made participants appreciate what they had.

For Mike, it was clear that his studies were his primary concern: "My focus is on my studies mainly. Friends are important, but my studies are the priority." Mike felt that he had been given an opportunity to study and wanted to make the most of it. While he had made some friends, and connected with them socially, mainly through sport, he appeared content and was not concerned with having a large social community. Mary, on the other hand, had found school challenging at times. She felt this was due to some of the individuals within her year group that had caused ongoing social problems. It did not, however, prevent her from valuing education and pursuing university study.

### **TCK Identity**

Participants shared their perceived sense of identity by sharing how their experiences and exposure to different cultures, combined with their parents' culture/s, had enabled them to develop an identity that integrated all experienced cultures and life experiences.

Kate had parents from different ethnicities and had lived her entire life outside her passport country. She explained how this had influenced her identity:

My parents are Belgium and Vietnamese. I have never lived in any of my passport countries, and while I am a combination of their cultures, my identity integrates all of my experiences and the cultures I have lived.

Ange shared a similar identity to most of the other participants, which encompassed both their experiences and their parents' cultures.

Sue's identity expanded further, incorporating friends and the universe, as she articulated: "My identity exists with several facets, blood family, but only my immediate family, not extended, it is with like-minded loved ones and friends, my sense of belonging is to the entire universe." Sue added how she had found it difficult to find a common identity within mainstream community when she first returned to her passport country. Eventually, she was able to find a sense of identity within the alternative art community. She felt this was because the individuals within the group accepted her for being different and that they been brought together by common goals and shared experience.

However, when talking about national identity, nearly all of the participants acknowledged their passport country as their national identity, which they felt was different from their own personal/cultural identity. Amy explained what this meant to her:

While I hold a Japanese passport, and it is my national identity, it does not make me feel Japanese. It is only one small aspect of who I am. I would have to say that my identity is a combination of much and it is hard to define.

For nearly all of the participants, identity could not be entirely defined or confined to just that of their national identity.

### **Traditions and Values**

Participants shared how their parents' traditions and values had also influenced their sense of identity. Traditions and values had provided a way for the participants to understand and connect to their parents' culture. Over half the participants had two parents from different countries, so they experienced each of their parent's cultural traditions and values. One of the participants shared how, at times, this had been conflicting for her parents, as some of their values differed. Although she understood

both parents' traditions and values, and had been influenced by them, she identified more with her mother's.

The traditions and values that the participants' parents had imparted were not just instrumental in shaping who the participants were, they had also provided them with a sense of security when growing up. In the uncertainty of new environments as a child, the participants recalled how this had been one consistent and certain thing they could rely on. For many of the participants, their established traditions and values had been helpful during transition to their passport country, not just because this had provided them with a sense of who they were and with security, but also as a way of guiding them.

In addition, the participants spoke of how living in other cultures had also played a considerable role in shaping their traditions and values. Although the participants felt their experiences had contributed to shaping and forming their values, the participants considered their families to have had the most considerable influence. Kate explained this:

My values have been shaped by my experiences. When you move around, you get to see different cultures and different ways of doing things. You cannot help but pick up a little from the people that you are friends with, but ultimately my family has had the most influence. They have always had definite values and, because of that, I know what is important to me.

### **Perception of Home and Belonging**

Participants all shared similar perceptions of home and belonging, which was nowhere and everywhere. Their feeling of home did not necessarily have to belong to a physical place, and the feeling of home was intangible and transient. All of the participants shared their feeling of home. For over half of the participants this was not any one physical place, and they felt that home was wherever they were for a period of time. Most of the participants acknowledged how their sense of home had varied from



that of individuals in their passport country, which they attributed to their changing environments when growing up.

### *Home and Belonging Connected to Relationships*

Most participants described home as a feeling of connection or familiarity with positive relationships and experiences. Their sense of home had been supported by friendships with others from different backgrounds when growing up, their family relationships, and their shared traditions. Many participants shared memories of their family traditions, which for them had supported their sense of home, especially when they had changed countries. Three participants shared their view of home as being where their parents lived. The participants acknowledged that, while their parental relationship had provided them with a sense of home when growing up abroad, it had also provided them with a sense of security. Mary explained: “For me home is a place where I feel comfortable, where my traditions and relationships are. There were a lot of changes for me growing up, but Mum and Dad were always constant, which gave me security.”

It was evident that maintaining meaningful friendships the participants had developed while abroad, had helped them to remain connected to what felt comfortable and familiar, and allowed participants to feel like they belonged. Continuing these friendships during the transition was also crucial for participants, as the support this provided aided their transition. The family had further provided the participants with a strong sense of belonging. Participants reflected on their significant relationships with their families, highlighting that their sense of home and belonging were connected. Because the participants’ sense of home and belonging was more connected to relationships than one particular place, this had made it harder to establish a sense of home in their passport country.

Because my parents were not living in my passport country and I had never lived here until I moved for university, it made me feel like I did not belong here. I also feel different to others here, but people here don’t always recognise this. I hold the same passport, and I feel like I am expected to know the culture. It is getting easier now, but it has taken two years. (Mary)

Mary, like other participants, had a very close relationship with her family and the family remained significant to her ongoing sense of belonging.

Developing a sense belonging in their passport country had been, for most participants, more difficult than in other countries where they had lived.

It was easier to feel a sense of belonging and to feel like I was home when I was living and moving as a kid. When I moved to my passport country, it was different, and I had to work on developing a sense of belonging in my passport country. This was difficult and took some time before I felt like I belonged. I was living in a country I was not familiar with even though it was my passport country, it was not home for me. (Amy)

When participants were asked why they thought their sense of belonging was more challenging when transitioning, their response was, because they often felt there was an expectation in their passport country that they would know and understand the culture. Also, at times, people from their passport country did not always recognise or acknowledge them as being different, or value their experiences.

Other participants mentioned how their passport country did not feel like home because they did not always feel a sense of familiarity or comfort there, adding that this was hard to explain to others in their passport country. For one participant, this was because other personal situations were occurring, for example, her parents' divorce.

### **Transition Challenges and the Acculturation Process**

When TCKs are transitioning to their passport country, they go through the process of acculturation. This process requires individuals to adapt to the cultural differences and to feel part of their new environment. This time of acculturation can cause individuals to experience personal, emotional, social, and cultural challenges. The findings suggest that all the participants, to varying degrees, found their transition challenging. While the practical aspects of transition were not so difficult, the

emotional, social, and cultural aspects of transition were challenging. Cultural differences were highlighted during transition, primarily due to the participants' cultural differences from those in their passport country, as a result of their experiences abroad. The cultural differences some participants experienced led to the participants feeling culture shock, which also affected their ability to fit in, make personal connections, and develop friendships.

#### *Cultural differences*

The participants all mentioned that they were not familiar with the context of the passport culture. This was because they were not acquainted with aspects of their passport country such as the various systems, and cultural and social customs, or they were not acclimated to the weather. Nearly all of the participants described their sense of confusion and shock when they initially returned to their passport country following high school. This was mainly attributed to the social and cultural variations they experienced in their passport country.

#### *Culture shock*

While all of the participants experienced culture shock in some way, they felt this was exacerbated by the expectations and responsibility that came with leaving home. Most of the participants acknowledged their culture shock to be more evident when they returned to their passport country, than when they had moved to other countries as a TCK.

Each time we moved I would be always so stressed. Starting at a new school was scary, but this time it was different cos I was not seen as being different in the US, even though I felt it. I am on my own now, and I miss my family and what was familiar. At times, I long for what was/is familiar, I miss Ethiopia and my old life. It is not all bad here, though if I am honest, it has not been easy to adjust to the changes here. I realise now that I experienced a type of culture shock. When I think about it, it was not easy, but I have been so fortunate to have this opportunity to study here, and I want to make the most of it. (Ange)

### *Emotional challenges*

The participants acknowledged that there was an emotional adjustment required in response to the changes they experienced during transition. All of the participants felt that their emotions were a direct response to the changes they were experiencing during transition. The findings confirm that the participants all experienced similar emotional responses and feelings when they transitioned to their passport country. Even though they accepted this process had not always felt comfortable, it had required them to be resilient during this time. Despite the fact all of the participants had strong family support, ultimately, they said they were the ones that had to go through this process.

All the participants shared how their initial feeling of moving to their passport country was one of mixed emotions. Although they were ready to leave high school, and excited about their next stage in their life, they also felt anticipation about the unknown. Some of the participants perceived this move to be like moving to a new country. Some of the participants shared how they would have liked the opportunity, during transition, to offload their emotions and talk through their experiences, suggesting that this could have helped provide them with some clarity during their transition.

### *Social challenges*

Over half of the participants indicated that social interaction was something they struggled with during transition. The participants attributed this to having to think more about how to interact with people in their passport country, particularly within the context of how to respond to people, and what was acceptable. Much of this was brought about by not understanding the social nuances of their passport country. Also, the participants recognised that social interaction was made harder by not being familiar with the culture of their passport country. The assumption made by others in their passport country was that they knew and understood the culture. Even though all of the participants had visited their passport country during childhood, there remained much that was not familiar. When they had gone back during their time of living abroad, they were on holiday, so they had not been able to get a realistic idea or understanding of what their passport country and the people were really like.

Many of the participants shared how they had felt comfortable relating to and finding connection with others outside their passport culture when they were growing up abroad. This had not always been the case when they were transitioning to their passport country. Participants felt this was because of the expectations from those in their passport country, to know and understand the culture, which they said had placed added stress on them. Other participants acknowledged their discomfort with social interaction, choosing to find an alternative focus as a way of overcoming this difficulty. Mike was one of the participants who felt this way, “Knowing what I wanted to study had given me a goal and helped me to focus when I was finding it hard to connect to people in my passport country.” Others avoided interaction, as a way of managing awkward social interaction. However, participants all agreed that, in time, they began to feel more comfortable interacting socially in their passport countries.

*Where are you from?*

Nearly all of the participants shared the internal struggle of how to explain where they were from and how their experiences had influenced who they were and how they felt. Explaining who they were and where they were from to others in their passport country was particularly challenging. This was more difficult for the participants who had never lived in their passport countries, and those participants who were from multicultural families. Mike explained why this was difficult for him:

My mother was Indian, Italian and Greek, my father was Indian and Chilean but we had never lived in any of those countries, I was not born in any of them. I had grown up in multiple countries my whole life, so it was a challenge to explain to others where I was from. I often just said Belgium because that is where I spent most of my time.

Likewise, Mary’s parents were both Australian, and she disclosed why this was difficult for her:

I was born in India to parents from Australia. I had never lived in Australia until I moved to University. When asked where I was from I responded to people in

Australia saying I was Australian even though I did not feel Australian, it was more comfortable that way.

Answering where they were from, and explaining their life experiences, often created confusion. As a result, the participants said they had become reluctant and selective about deciding when and what to share about themselves. Some participants would try to avoid having to explain this to people. Most of the participants had found it complicated to explain their life growing up abroad. Difficulty explaining where they were from appeared to be a common theme for participants who had parents from two or more different countries, or who had spent all their years growing up outside their passport country. The participants mentioned how, in time, they had become more comfortable answering this question, compared to when they had first moved back to their passport country.

#### *Different interests*

Participants spoke about how their interests differed to those in their passport country. They preferred to discuss international affairs, and other areas of global interest, in which peers in their passport country did not appear interested. At times, this had led the participants to feel frustrated with others in their passport country when they were transitioning. Some participants expressed surprise at how others in their passport country appeared ignorant and not always interested in the same aspects of life as them.

#### *Establishing friendships*

Some of the participants mentioned it had not been easy to make friends during their transition. Most thought this was possibly because there was not anyone that they could easily relate to, as they had not shared similar experiences to others and this had made it difficult to find connections. People in my halls of residence knew each other or had connections; I did not share these connections with anyone. When they used to talk about things, like schools, education, and places, I could not contribute. I also found my peer's immature. In my first year, they were so excited to be partying and getting drunk; it was like they were free now to behave how they wanted. (Mary)

Developing friendships was made more challenging as the participants did not always share the same interests as their peers. Finding like-minded friends had been

easy in the environments the participants had grown up in, due to the shared experience of TCKs and being comfortable with diverse friendships. All of the participants were eventually able to make friends, but they felt their relationships with their passport country peers did not have the same depth or connections they had been used to. Although the participants had some things in common with their passport country peers, they were aware there was a difference which was hard to change. Forming friendships was further complicated by the expectations the participants had of their friends, based on their experience of previous relationships.

### *Self-protection*

Self-protection was a common experience shared by participants during transition. As a result of a transient lifestyle, participants said they had learned to make friends and form close relationships quickly living abroad. They agreed, however, during transition to their passport country they did keep some distance. This distance they felt was not necessarily intentional, but was a form of self-protection. Others held back from making friendships as they were concerned about encroaching on others' relationships. Feeling different, and the fact that participants were not always made welcome to join existing friendships in their passport country, had made it more difficult to make friends, unlike their previous experience when they had transitioned to new countries.

The desire to develop close, in-depth relationships, appeared to be more important to female participants than it was for male participants. During transition to their passport country, some of the female participants longed for deep emotional connection with a friend, but this had been hard for them to find. Eventually, all participants were able to form friendships during transition, although this had taken time and the participants did not always feel understood by their friends.

### *Fitting in*

All participants, at times during their transition, did not feel entirely part of their passport culture, which they believed was predominately due to feeling like they did not fit in. The participants attributed not fitting in to be the result of having had different experiences growing up, compared with others in their passport country. This had made

it harder for the participants to contribute to conversations and make connections during transition. The participants further recognised that fitting in had been more difficult during transition to their passport country, than when they had transitioned to new countries while growing up. They suggested that this was because, during this time of transition, they did not share the support in the same way they had previously, from other TCKs. Although it took longer to feel like they fitted into their passport country than places they had lived previously, eventually they were able to feel they did fit in, once they had made friends.

#### *A sense of isolation/feeling lonely*

Half the participants mentioned that initially they had felt lonely, and wished they had known at least one person when they transitioned to their passport country. The participants said that, when they had previously moved, there were always other TCKs in the same situation and, if not, their peers had understood their feelings, having experienced moving and transition before. Other participants had found other strategies to cope with their loneliness, such as focusing on sport and study. In time, all of the participants said, they had been able to make friends, and they confirmed that establishing friendships had enabled them to feel less lonely and isolated.

#### *Feeling different and misunderstood*

All participants spoke of how they felt different. Mostly this was not an issue, and they liked the fact they were different. As one participant eloquently explained, “the experience of being a TCK makes me feel ‘special’ but also irreversibly different.” (Sue). Participants acknowledged that, as a result of not only feeling but being different, it had taken them more time to feel accepted as part of the new culture. Amy explained:

When I started university in Japan, so many of the students knew of each other or had some connection, it was obvious that I was different and it took a while before I felt accepted. I would say I felt a little judged by others, and they did not understand me.

Although most participants identified themselves to be different to others in their passport country, this did not prevent them from being open to making new



friends. Feeling different was not an issue for the participants, however what they did find frustrating was how others in their passport country did not recognise this or were not able to comprehend this. Additionally, the expectation, from others in their passport country, that the participants would understand and know their passport culture was frustrating. Mary commented:

I always felt different when I moved as a kid, but in a way, it was easy because no one expected me to understand. It is different here because I feel this expectation to be like everyone else in my passport culture.

Some participants went on to suggest that people in their passport country assumed they knew what their passport culture was, because they shared the same nationality. All participants shared the repeating theme of not being understood. Mary shared why this was hard for her:

I think the hardest part about it for me is that like my skin colour is white, I am just like everyone else here, and I do not stand out being different, but feel I am different, I am not the same. I grew up in another country, but no one knows that people assume so many things about me and that is what I find hard.

Unfortunately, for many of the participants, not being understood had led to misunderstanding from others in their passport country. These misunderstandings, participants felt, were often the result of the assumptions that people made, as Amy articulated: "I speak Japanese with an accent, so people in my passport country assumed that I was not Japanese. I did not feel Japanese, but I did not want people to decide that for me." Participants also talked about how feeling misunderstood during transition had at times prevented them from sharing their experiences. The participants agreed misunderstandings also resulted from the conclusions others drew about them, and they were often misunderstood as being privileged when they spoke about their schooling and lifestyle. However, the participants felt that explaining their life to others who had not had similar experiences was impossible to do, because others had not shared this

way of life growing up. Some of the participants felt people in their passport country also showed a lack of interest in their experiences.

### **Factors That Assisted Transition**

Multiple factors influenced the participants' transition, and when the participants reflected on their experiences, they were able to identify what had assisted them during this time. Although the participants shared similar challenges, these challenges also varied as did their responses to them.

#### *Length of time*

Participants all said that, with time, they began to feel more comfortable in their new environment. The participants who had lived most or all of their life outside their passport country appeared to need more time to adapt and feel part of their passport country. All participants agreed that adapting during transition to their passport country following high school was made easier the longer they had been in their passport country, as they had become more familiar with the nuance of the culture. Participants credited the ease in their transition to increased understanding, not just of themselves but of the culture and how to work internal systems, for example banking and student services. They further added that once they had been able to establish friendships, they felt more comfortable in their passport countries.

#### *Prior visits*

The findings illustrated that prior knowledge of their passport country had been helpful for the participants during transition. The participants who had lived in their passport country before moving abroad, had moved when they were older. Therefore, they had some memory of living there and, while some things had changed, they had more of an idea of what to expect when they transitioned back. Pete was one of these participants, and he highlighted this sentiment: "I had lived in my passport country until I was 14 years old and while I felt different to others at home, I at least had some idea what to expect when I went back for university." The participants who had visited the university they were planning to attend, prior to moving, found this was somewhat helpful, as it was one aspect of their transition that was certain.

### *Relationships*

For all participants, relationships with peers enabled them to acculturate to their new culture. All female participants spoke of the need to develop a support system of genuine relationships based on support and understanding. For the male participants, while relationships were important, they were not as important for them as for the female participants, and the males' priority appeared to be their study. Additionally, male participants had found sport activities to be helpful for them to make connections and develop friendship.

The participants all mentioned how it felt natural to gravitate towards people that had shared similar experience, however they did say that they had been open to all types of individuals. Friendship with other TCKs, or someone who understood them during this time, was more significant. Being around other TCKs had helped them feel immediately more comfortable, compared to when they were with non-TCKs. Primarily, this was because they understood how one another felt, and they had more in common. Kate explained: "While I was open to making friendships with people in my passport country, I found that I had more in common with others from international communities or those that had shared similar experiences"

Being able to communicate via the internet was one way of connecting with their other TCK friends who understood and shared what they were experiencing during transition. This had also been helpful, as it was one way of alleviating the loneliness they had felt, and had enabled the participants to maintain their friendships from a distance. Some of the participants mentioned that, when they were transitioning, they would have liked having a friend from their passport country who had grown up there or was moving back too. The participants agreed that, once they had achieved friendship in their passport country, this had made their transition easier.

### *Counselling*

The female participants all mentioned that counselling services to provide an outlet to talk about feelings and experiences could have been helpful. As Sue conveyed: "Talking to someone would have been helpful, just to offload all the emotion I was feeling." Nearly all of the participants, following their interview, expressed how sharing

their stories had been constructive and how they had found it therapeutic. Some mentioned this was the first time that they had given serious thought to their experiences and feelings as a TCK.

#### *Returning to host country*

Maintaining a connection to the host culture, and returning to the host culture, was helpful. Participants who returned to their last host country, had done so within the first year of leaving. For some, of the participants their parents were still living there, and for others, their parents had moved on to another country, or had returned to live in their passport country. Returning, for some participants, enabled them to find comfort and security while they were adjusting to a new culture and establishing themselves as independent individuals. For others, it was helpful because they were able to find closure and move on with their lives, as was the case for Amy, who shared her feelings after returning to Thailand. It was so emotional for me. I was surprised at how I felt. I think it was the realisation that it was not the same and never would be. In many ways, it helped me to move to another place and make me realise that I was elsewhere now, which was not such a bad thing. Visiting Thailand was so comforting in my first few years of University, my life has moved on now, but it would always be special.

It was not until they had returned to visit their host country, that many of the participants were emotionally able to move on in their transition. This aided them to feel more settled in their passport country. Returning had enabled them to become conscious that life in their host country had not been entirely perfect, as they had imagined. The participants all mentioned how, during transition, having trips to look forward to and travelling to where their parents were living was helpful when they were adjusting to their new environments. Moreover, visiting their host country made it possible for the participants to retain some connection to the culture and relationships, which provided them with additional security and comfort they needed when transitioning.

#### *Transition programs*

Over half of the participants thought it was difficult to prepare for transition before leaving their host country, suggesting there was much about transition that was

unexpected, and ultimately transition was just something you had to experience and live. Even though some participants felt that no one could prepare them entirely for many of the uncertainties that came with transition, others agreed some preparation could be beneficial. None of the participants had attended TCK transition programs before leaving their host country, or during transition to their passport country. All participants would have liked to have had access to some form of transition program in their passport country, suggesting this could have eased some of their stress during this time. They believed that transition programs in their passport countries could have assisted them, by providing increased opportunity to establish friendship with other TCKs, and both practical and emotional support.

#### *Family relationship and support*

Findings demonstrated the significance of the family relationship. All participants reflected on how living abroad had brought their families mutually closer, because they spent much time together, shared unique experiences, and learned to rely on each other. Mary articulated her perception of her family relationship: “My family is tight, growing up we relied on each other, and we understood each other, and it has helped me to know that they are there for me especially during times of change, it helps me feel secure.” Throughout their lives and during transition to their passport country, all participants identified how family had provided them with emotional support they needed.

The family was helpful during their transition, by not passing judgment, and by listening and understanding the cultural challenges that the participants experienced during transition. As well, family helped the participants with practical and financial support. For some participants, even though their families were not in the same country, they still said their family was able to be an active support system, and was able to give advice when needed. Those who had siblings and/or parents in their passport country, found it helpful both emotionally and practically.

#### *Additional support*

Participants spoke of the need for practical and emotional support during transition, and some indicated that at times they had felt as though they could have

benefited from additional support. Family support was the primary type of support participants felt they had during transition. Participants all expressed how the universities they attended had not provided the support they needed, and that nothing was targeted explicitly for TCKs. Instead there was support for international students. While the international students were similar, some of their needs differed. Mary explained, “I was not an international student, but I was not an Australian either, even though I held an Australian passport.”

### **Positive Aspects of Transition**

Even though it was apparent that the participants had encountered some challenges and at times had struggled emotionally and culturally during their transition, it was also apparent that this time had provided them with some constructive and enjoyable possibilities. All were thankful for their experience, perceiving transition to be a new beginning and a chance to learn and understand another culture. For others, it had enabled them to have some time with siblings who had left before them, and with extended family. Most of the participants enjoyed what they were studying, and for the most part they reflected on their transition experiences positively. Recognising transition to have been a time that had provided him with new opportunities, Mike expressed: “I enjoyed walking the streets and discovering new things, meeting and talking with different people which is what I always did when we moved, it was easier to do this in my passport country.”

The transition had further provided them with an opportunity for personal growth. Participants shared that, while there were times during transition that were challenging, likewise they felt that this time had also been positive, as it had given them the opportunity to mature and develop personally. Some of the participants recognised how transition had taught them to be more resilient, while others agreed this time had been the catalyst to move them into adulthood.

## **Summary**

All of the participants recognised the definite advantages of growing up abroad, emphasising what they had gained from their experiences. Participants identified their cultural identity to be an assimilation of their lived experiences and the cultures they had been exposed to. Participants shared similar meanings of home and belonging, which were not necessarily connected to one country. However, all of the participants appeared comfortable with their non-conventional perception of home and belonging. The participants identified challenges of the acculturation process during transition, and of feeling different from others in their passport country. While the participants illustrated some of the challenges they faced during transition, they were able to acknowledge that some of these challenges had also been a precursor to growth. Participants reflected on what it was that had assisted them, and what could have further assisted them, during their transition. Assistance predominately included both practical and emotional support from family and friends who had an understanding of their life experiences and the impact this had on them. The support that they acquired from these relationships was pivotal to assisting their transition, with the participants' social relationships seen as being paramount to assisting these individuals in fitting in, and feeling accepted when transitioning. Additionally, some participants felt that they could have benefited from universities having an increased awareness of TCKs, and better provision for services and resources targeted primarily for TCKs transitioning to their passport country.

The following chapter will discuss the research findings in relation to the relevant literature.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

This research aimed to explore the transition experiences of TCKs to their passport country following high school abroad, as demonstrated through the narrative of the participants. This chapter will provide interpretation and discussion of the findings, drawing on the TCK literature, concluding with the limitations of the research. The discussion is structured according to the themes from the research findings and includes, benefits of the TCK lifestyle; identity; a sense of home and belonging; transition challenges; assisting transition; feelings at transition; and finally, the positive aspects of transition.

### **Benefits of the TCK Lifestyle**

One of the significant findings to emerge from the analysis of the research data, was that the participants concurred that they had personally benefited from being TCKs. Third culture research confirms there are benefits for individuals who grow up outside their passport country (Cottrell, 2007). All of the participants held a shared view that growing up abroad had been a significant and meaningful experience, and they all held a positive impression of their experiences. They felt their experiences had provided them with increased cross-cultural opportunities, which participants perceived as one of the benefits of growing up outside their passport country. Similarly, the literature has confirmed the TCK's general perception of their cross-cultural experience as being positive overall, life-changing, and beneficial (Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). However, in conjunction with identifying the advantages of the third culture lifestyle, Kim's (2008), and Moore and Barker's (2012) research correspondingly suggest that the third culture lifestyle may likewise create some challenges for individuals. When studying these internationally mobile children, both psychological and emotional issues have been the main concern (Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

According to social theory, the psychosocial development and adjustment of individuals is perceived to be the consequence of transactions between individuals and



their environments. Changes in any of the systems affect the others, which also impacts the individual's psychosocial development (Bronfenbrenner, 1988).

#### *TCK attributes*

Reflecting the literature, the participants believed that, because of their experience growing up abroad and their cross-cultural opportunities, they had been able to develop specific attributes, including open-mindedness, flexibility, increased global outlook, greater cross-cultural awareness, and tolerance (Cottrell & Useem, 1996; Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999). All of the participants confidently asserted that they shared these abilities, realising that these characteristics had enabled them to be more culturally intuitive, sensitive to prejudice, and therefore less judgmental of others. In addition, participants agreed being confident and mature was an additional benefit of growing up abroad. They were all of the same opinion that their confidence and maturity were a consequence of their lifestyle, which had provided them with greater opportunities, independence and increased exposure to diverse people and environments. Previous literature supports this finding, suggesting the TCKs' knowledge of global issues, their practical skills such as travelling, and their relationships with culturally different people of all ages, have contributed to their confidence, independence, and maturity (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010).

#### *Language and education skills*

Other benefits participants acknowledged to be a result of their third culture lifestyle, were their interest in gaining further education, and their developed language ability. Literature confirms the TCK's commitment to pursuing higher education, and recognises TCKs for their academic achievements (Cottrell, 2007; Jurtan, 2011; Stori, 2001). Findings of this research highlight that education was a particular priority for the participants, and that attending university was the reason the participants had moved to their passport countries and all of the participants had pursued, or were pursuing, tertiary education. They did not stipulate their specific academic skills and abilities; however, they did acknowledge their language abilities, and their interest in languages, which they believed to be consequences of growing up abroad. Language aptitude was further evidenced by their ability to speak two or more languages fluently. Earlier studies have identified TCKs as being likely to possess fluency in different languages,

due to growing up in different cultures, and have suggested that language proficiency is beneficial for cross-cultural communication, and in the TCKs' future careers (Moore & Barker, 2012; Jurtan, 2011). The TCKs' cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity could also create valuable contributions, by way of assisting and benefiting relationships, and enabling TCKs to act as possible mentors for others working cross-culturally. Findings confirmed language to play an essential role for TCKs, as a beneficial skill in communicating, fitting in, making connections, and making friends. Overall, these findings support the literature, which confirms that TCKs possess a skill set, as a result of growing up abroad, which provides for increased opportunities and has the potential to benefit them in their future careers and lives (Lambiri, 2005).

### **Identity and TCKs**

In this study, the participants discussed at length their own personal and cultural identity, explaining how this characterised their unique sense of self. Participants outlined the influence their lifestyle had on their own personal and cultural identity, and shared their perception of their identity, and the challenges faced growing up and during the transition to their passport country. Also, participants shared the assumptions others in their passport country had made about them, regarding who they were, which were not entirely accurate. TCKs' identity has been a topic extensively discussed and studied in third culture literature, emphasising how the cultural experiences TCKs have growing up influence and affect their identity development (Downey, 2012; Gilbert, 2008; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Walters, 2006). Previous studies have asserted that a strong identity is essential to ensure individuals, in general, develop self-confidence, emotional security, and a healthy self-esteem, which will ultimately assist them in their future life (Moore & Barker, 2012).

Much of the literature supports the claim that the TCK's identity may be affected as a result of their lifestyle and experiences, suggesting this is the cause of some of their transition challenges (Sussman, 2000). In contrast, a confused identity or delayed identity was not the case for the participants in this research. All of the participants acknowledged themselves to have gained a strong sense of who they were

in connection to their experiences as a TCK, which had contributed to assisting their transition.

### *TCK identity challenges*

Participants shared insights into their identity, which they described as being made up of many aspects, not entirely influenced by their passport country, or host countries, or any one thing exclusively, instead being influenced by many factors. They did not believe their personal and cultural identities to be confused or blurred, contrary to what previous literature has suggested. Instead, all participants perceived their identity to be an assimilation of their lived experiences and cultures, incorporated with their family traditions and values. They acknowledged that their family relationships and traditions were significant in terms of contributing to their identity. These findings are consistent with other studies that claim the family to be a considerable influence on the TCK's identity development (Hervey, 2009; Pollock & Van Rekan, 2009; Schaetti, 2002). Furthermore, these findings are congruent with Moore and Barker's (2012) study, which examined the cultural identity of third culture individuals, and found TCKs to process multiple cultural identities or a multicultural identity, rather than a confused or blurred cultural identity.

The TCK's lifestyle is one of high mobility and, as a result, TCKs commonly experience changes of environments and culture along with relationships. Subsequently, some previous research has recognised the transient lifestyle, which incurs frequent losses, as potentially being an obstacle to the TCK developing a sense of belonging and a sense of identity (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011; Moore & Barker, 2012; Walters, 2006). Changing cultural environments when TCKs are developing their identities during childhood, may also challenge the TCK's identity due to the influence cultural environments and experiences can have on these individual., Some researchers, therefore, propose that mobility may be the cause of TCKs developing a confused or blurred identity (Downey, 2012; Eakin, 2001; Walters, 2006). Experiencing more than one cross-cultural move during childhood, it has been suggested, can lead to uncertainty in a TCK's cultural identity, because they experience significant life events (Gilbert, 2008). Additionally, literature has indicated that mobility may disrupt and delay TCKs from progressing through their normal stages of identity development. The reason

suggested for the TCK's identity development delays are that, instead of focusing on the typical stages of identity development, they are having to focus on adapting to their new environments (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Walter, 2006). Human development theory can be applied to help understand how these individuals' lifestyles may affect their identity development (Erikson, 1982). Erikson's theory proposed eight stages through which a healthily developing human is required to pass from infancy to late adulthood. In each stage, the person confronts, and hopefully masters, new challenges. Each stage builds on the successful completion of earlier stages. The challenges of stages not successfully completed may be expected to reappear as problems in the future.

#### *Challenges to identity at transition*

Although the participants in this study did not perceive their identities to be confused or altered, they did acknowledge that their identity was challenged, to some extent, when they transitioned to their passport country. Primarily, the challenges were due to them questioning their identity against that of their passport country, and to the expectations they felt from themselves, and others in their passport country, to share the same identity because they shared the same nationality. Third culture literature also supports the belief that the TCKs' identity can be challenged when TCKs transition to their passport country, because the TCK may begin to question their existing identity against that of their passport country (Hervey, 2009). The variations in values and norms that TCKs experience during the transition to their passport country can be confusing and conflicting. It has also been suggested that the time of transition coincides with the continued development of their personal and cultural identity as young people (Gilbert, 2008; Walters, 2006).

The longer the participants were in their passport country, the easier it was to reconcile their existing identity against that of their national identity. This is consistent with a previous US study on TCKs' transitions (Bredeman, 2015). Primarily, this was because they became more familiar with the cultural nuances and developed an increased understanding of the culture, which enabled the participants to feel more part of their passport country. This is supported by previous literature (Hervey, 2009).

### *Assumptions in the passport country*

Sellers' (2011) qualitative study examined how the TCK lifestyle affects TCKs' experiences and impacts their lives as adults. The study found all participants understood their passport country to be their country of citizenship and of their national identity, but they did not perceive their passport country to be all-encompassing of their personal and cultural identity. The participants' difference in cultural identity to others in their passport country had created dilemmas and additional stress at times during their transition, primarily as a result of the assumptions made by some in the participants' passport countries, that participants knew and understood their passport culture. Although the participants shared the same national identity this, unfortunately, did not mean that the participants fully understood the culture, due to growing up outside their passport country. These findings reflect Hervey's (2009) claim that frequently there is an expectation for the TCK to understand the nuances of their passport country, which can create stress for the transitioning TCK. This was further confirmed by Pollock and Van Reken (2009); Storti (2001); and Thurston-Gonzalez (2009) who believe this unconscious assumption may lead to more significant reentry stress due to the false expectations of both TCK and people in their passport country.

### **Perceptions of Home and Belonging**

All participants perceived their family relationships as providing a strong sense of home and belonging for them. Participants whose families had established consistent traditions throughout their time abroad articulated how this had provided continuity, enabling them to develop their values and a strong sense of identity and belonging. While their family relationship had provided them with a sense of identity and belonging, it had also been the most constant thing throughout their lives, providing them with the security they needed when moving countries. Given these findings, it is evident that the participants' significant family relationships and traditions were responsible for enabling them to acquire a strong sense of belonging, facilitating a solid foundation upon which to build their sense of identity, and resembles what Pollock and Van Reken (2009) suggested is necessary for TCKs' identity development. Additionally, findings of this study acknowledge that there is a link between a sense of

belonging and a strong sense of identity as has also been identified in previous research (Fail et al., 2004; Moore & Barker, 2012). Finally, the findings further reflect what has been discussed in the literature, including that the TCK's sense of belonging is more likely to be connected to a relationship rather than a physical location (Fail, 1996; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Storti, 2001; Walker, 2000).

### **Transition Challenges**

The dominant themes of this research regarding the participants' transition to their passport countries primarily involved the challenges of their cultural and personal adjustment to their new surroundings. These included culture shock, fitting in, social interaction, friendship and, finally, acculturation. The participant's transitional challenges to their passport country, explored in this research, correlate to some of the existing research, suggesting that these challenges during the transition to their passport country are mainly because of the TCK's sociocultural differences and their losses, which is result from the TCK lifestyle (Sussman, 2000; Timmons, 2004). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the individual losses experienced growing up abroad, can lead individuals to feelings of grief, isolation, and loneliness, as was highlighted by Gaw's (2007) study. Other challenges identified during the transition may be a result of the cultural differences the TCKs feel, which can make fitting in and developing relationships difficult (Hervey, 2009). These challenges can make the TCK's adjustment to their passport country complex, therefore, impacting their transition success (Hervey, 2009; Morales, 2015; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Literature has also concluded that the TCK's transition to their passport country following high school, is one of the most challenging and difficult times in a TCK's life (Davis et al., 2013; Gaw, 2007; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010; Schaetti, 1996). Furthermore, TCKs are likely to experience varying psychosocial and emotional responses as a consequence of transition (Gaw, 2007; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Szkudlarek, 2009). These possible responses are because, not only are these individuals transitioning to university, they are concurrently adapting to their passport country culture (Quick, 2010).

### *Culture shock*

Findings in this study revealed that the differences participants felt between their host and passport cultures appeared to have an immense impact on their adjustment process during the transition to their passport country. Participants in this research were found to have experienced varying degrees of culture shock, which they attributed to the cultural variations and adjustment they experienced when transitioning to their passport country. Participants acknowledged some of their feelings they experienced during transition, such as, loneliness, not fitting in and frustration, to be a response to their culture shock. All agreed the culture shock was a result of the cultural confusion they had experienced when they returned to their passport country. They did not express to have felt grief, which is not consistent, with previous research which has established grief to be a response to culture shock (Gaw, 2007). Their varying degrees of culture shock, and their reactions, appeared to be affected by their levels of familiarity with their passport countries. Participants in this study that were more familiar with their passport country experienced less culture shock. This finding supports Hervey's (2009) previous claim, that found TCKs who are more familiar with their passport culture are more likely to experience less culture shock and adapt more easily to their passport country. The culture shock that some TCKs experience may be a result of not having had the opportunity to learn and understand the behaviours, language and social skills of their passport country when living abroad. Furthermore, it was found that the participants' culture shock contributed to them feeling different, supporting Hervey's (2009) findings on MKs' transition adjustment, which identified the culture shock, or the stress of adaptation to the new culture, as being a result of feeling different.

Culture shock is mostly the result of an individual's emotional reactions to the loss of support and understanding from their own culture, and to new and diverse cultural environments and experiences that are not fully understood and hold minimal meaning (Adler, 1987). Literature has referred to the culture shock that many individuals experience when they return to their passport country, as a reverse cultural shock. Although this is the same as culture shock, it highlights better the difficulties of re-adapting and re-adjusting to one's own home culture after living in another cultural environment (Gaw, 2000). Previous research has identified the emotional responses to

culture shock as including, alienation, isolation, academic problems, cultural identity conflict, social withdrawal, depression, anxiety, and interpersonal difficulties (Gaw, 2000).

Culture is created based on the meaning that people make by relying on their social and physical contexts, and reflects the impact of predominant values, beliefs, and traditions of their social group. TCKs are influenced and affected by their cultural environments, and it is within ecological theory's macro system that policies and traditions of cultural environments play a fundamental role in cross-cultural children's development. Social workers applying an ecological perspective to individuals will provide understanding of the development of children in different cultural contexts (Pardeck, 1988). This will enable social workers to conceptualise and understand how a TCK's development affects them when transitioning to their passport country, assisting practice interventions. Subsequently, human development theory can help social workers to understand the context of clients' immediate and more remote environments (Payne, 2014).

#### *Fitting in*

A significant finding of this research was the participants' challenge to fit in during the transition. This was especially crucial in enabling them to make connections and consequently establish relationships to facilitate their transitions. The participants articulated that feeling part of their passport country was complicated by the variations in cultural experiences and understandings, resulting in the participants feeling different. These findings are consistent with previous research findings suggesting TCKs transitioning to their passport country may have difficulty fitting in because of the variations in cultural experiences and understandings (Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010).

#### *Social interaction and friendships*

Another significant finding was the participants' difficulty with social interaction, which made establishing friendships difficult. The challenge of establishing friendships with others in their passport country was sometimes due to not being able to make connections. Making connections was difficult because of the differences the



participants had felt in relation to their peers, specifically in relation to their identity, interests, and values. In the same way, Huff (2001) has highlighted how the different cultural values TCKs hold may also affect their perception of their passport country peers, affecting their ability to make connections. Moreover, not having shared similar experiences to those in their passport country, meant they did not always understand the nuances of the new culture. Also, most of the participants highlighted their need to connect with someone that understood them. Similarly, research has confirmed that TCKs commonly find a connection with others who have shared the third culture, as similar experiences and understandings enable them to be understood and find meaning in their relationships (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). However, finding like-minded friends was challenging for participants, and this is also consistent with previous research (Hervey, 2009). The theory of attachment may assist social workers in understanding and making sense of TCKs' behavior and abilities or inability to develop relationships within their interpersonal and environment systems.

#### *Acculturation challenges*

All participants found transition to their passport country to be more challenging than other transitions had been, and they identified their transition as involving social, cultural and psychological adaptation. The literature has identified transition to the passport country to be more difficult than other transitions, because TCKs are not only transitioning to their passport country, they are also adjusting to college (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010). This time of transition is unlike others, as previously the participants had the support of other TCKs who were experiencing, or had experienced, similar transitions, and they found this support had been helpful. The participants agreed that their own expectations and the expectations of others, that they would know and understand the nuances of their passport country, had made it more challenging. In addition, the participants all agreed that, because they felt they were different from those in their passport country, this had contributed to some of the challenges the participants experienced when adapting to their passport country.

Furthermore, the third culture research suggests that during the transition to their passport country, some TCKs struggle with adjusting to their new surroundings. This may be due to the cultural and social differences between host countries and passport

country (Bredeman, 2015; Hervey, 2009; Morales, 2015). The TCK's transition process requires the individual to adapt culturally, socially and psychologically, referred to as acculturation. Acculturation can be a complicated process, and individuals will have varying responses to their acculturation experience (Berry, 2005; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Sussman, 2000).

It was evident that the participants had developed strong connections to their host countries, and that their experiences of growing up abroad had shaped and influenced their cultural understandings, personal beliefs, values and worldviews. Sussman (2000) argued that the individual's responses during transition are mostly determined by the relationship and connection they have with their host cultures. Consequently, the participants differed from those in their passport country. Although the participants had shared similar experiences, the impact their experience had on them differed, and so had their responses to cultural adaptation (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011; Sussman, 2000). Although, in time, all of the participants had been able to attain a certain degree of comfort in their passport country, they still did not feel entirely part of their passport culture. This finding corresponds to previous studies, which found significant numbers of TCKs, over time, do not feel entirely part of their passport country (Cottrell, 2012; Hervey, 2009; Moore, 2011; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Overall, this study's findings support the literature's conclusions, which confirm that transitioning to one's passport country after growing up abroad can be challenging for some TCKs.

While the participants acknowledged that preparation affected their transition, for example, visiting the university prior to starting, they did not think it contributed significantly to their transition challenges. Even though these findings, regarding TCKs' transition challenges, are consistent with the literature, there are also areas in which they differ. For instance, Szkudlarek (2009) associated transition challenges with a lack of preparation, and unexpectedness of reentry. Furthermore, previous research has highlighted that the TCK's lifestyle is likely to influence the TCK's identity development, suggesting this could be the cause of some of their transition challenges (Walters, 2006). However, this was not the case for the participants in this research.

Instead, participants regarded their identity as being different to the identity of those in their passport country, while recognising it had been shaped and influenced by their experiences of being a TCK. Consequently, all of the participants agreed their identity had some effect on their transition experience, but they did not recognise this to be the cause of some of their transition challenges, as has been suggested in the literature.

### **Assisting Transition**

Consistent with previous literature studies, the participants identified factors which were, or could have been, more helpful for them during their transition. When addressing TCKs' challenges, they can benefit from an ecological approach which supports the idea that individual problems are derived from the complex interplay of psychological, social, economic, political, and physical forces. This perspective allows the practitioner to effectively treat problems and needs of various system levels, including the individual, family, the small group, and the larger community.

#### *Transition preparation*

Several previous studies have identified that transition preparation programs that occur before transition, and in the passport country at transition, can be extremely beneficial. This is primarily because they provide additional support, encouragement, and preparation for a TCK's transition to their passport country (Davis et al., 2013; Bredeman, 2010; Hervey, 2009). Davis et al.'s (2010) study that evaluated the impact of transition seminars on MKs, concluded that participating in a reentry program improved levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and psychological well-being, when compared to these levels before going through the program. Programs predominantly facilitate contact with an individual's passport country culture, offering information about universities and what students may encounter. These programs also, make available opportunities to discuss relevant topics, such as becoming independent, cross-cultural adaptation, and the stages of transition and fitting in. They discuss how to manage individuals' feelings, including their hopes and anticipation, along with the fears and concerns they may have about returning. They may also help create realistic expectations. Importantly, programs such as these give TCKs the chance to share and reflect on their experiences of growing up abroad and, at the same time, provide

opportunities for friendships with others who have had similar experiences growing up (Hervey, 2009; Quick, 2010).

This research demonstrated that prior visits to their passport country and university, before the participants moved to live in their passport country, had reduced the stress of the unknown and given them more of an idea of what to expect. Literature has confirmed that TCKs' preparation for the transition to their passport country and university is perceived to be extremely important to TCKs, highlighting that transition preparation programs can offer encouragement and support for transitioning individuals (Bredeman, 2010; Szkudlarek 2009; Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009; Quick, 2010). According to Davis, et al. (2013), TCKs who participate in reentry programs have better coping strategies and are more prepared for repatriation, and individuals are more likely to have a positive transition. Quick (2010), a cross-cultural training and transition expert, asserted that individuals who receive cross-cultural training and preparation shortly before or after moving countries will have a smoother transition. Huff (2001) attributed the helpfulness of transition preparation to the cultural norms and values taught, enabling TCKs to better understand the new culture.

Although participants in this research did agree that prior visits were beneficial, not all were in agreement that preparation before leaving was necessary, sharing the view that it was not easy to prepare someone for the experiences they encountered during the transition, as those experiences were different for each of them. That said, none of the participants in this research had attended transition programs before leaving for their passport country, because they had not been offered or available. While none of the participants in this research had attended transition programs when in their passport country, all of the participants did recognise that attending a transition program could have supported their transition to their passport country, suggesting that this could have provided them with additional information regarding culture, and enabled them to meet other individuals who had shared similar experiences to them. The participants articulated how the universities that they attended could have also provided them support in the way of transition programs for TCKs. Instead, support was aimed at international students. Additionally, some of the participants would have appreciated

environments that provided situations to offload how they were feeling and to share their experiences. Davis et al. (2013) found that opportunities to share experiences had a positive impact on psychological well-being. Considering the previous literature indicating the TCK's transition to their passport country following high school to be one of the most stressful and challenging transitions, and knowing transition programs are shown to assist TCKs' transition, it was somewhat surprising that this is not a priority for institutions of higher education, international schools, agencies that send families abroad, counsellors and social workers. Only limited number of preparation programs specific to the needs of transitioning TCKs before leaving their host country and during the transition, were available. Therefore, this finding validates what Thurston-Gonzalez (2009) indicates, that transition programs continue to not be readily available for transitioning TCKs.

#### *Parental and family relationship*

Parental and family relationships were a dominant prevailing theme of this research, and the participants all shared a close relationship with their families. All of the participants had found their family and parental relationships, particularly the social and emotional support they received from these relationships, assisted their transition to their passport country following high school abroad. This is consistent with the literature that identifies positive family and parental relationships to be associated with improved outcomes for transitioning TCKs (Goleman, 2005; McCraig, 1996; Peterson & Plamondon, 2009; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Schaetti, 2002).

Participants understood their healthy family relationship and their closeness to have resulted from their family members' mutual reliance on each other growing up, combined with their unique shared experiences. Reflecting these findings, literature confirms the third culture lifestyle increases family bonds. This is primarily a result of the reliance family members have on one another when living abroad. High mobility brings family members closer together as they are often the only ones who provide continuity in life (Gilbert & Gilbert, 2012; Hervey, 2009; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Useem & Downie, 1976).

Literature has identified that moving cross-culturally affects emotional security and self-esteem, especially for children who grow up in a country different from their passport country (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011). This is contradicted by this study's findings, in which the participants found their family relationship to have provided them with a strong sense of security and self-confidence when moving cultures. This confirms the claim that the TCK's family remains their home, further helping to ensure consistency, security and a sense of belonging when moving cultures (Gilbert & Gilbert, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010). Furthermore, the importance of the participant's family in maintaining continuity and communication was also evident, and visits to the participant's previous host country and/or to family still abroad, were also found to provide support during the participant's transition. Some of the participants expressed how this had enabled them to find closure in the process of adjustment. Consequently, the findings of this study are in agreement with previous research, as the participants perceived their family relationship to be fundamental in assisting their personal development. Also, their family relationship provided them with the emotional support they needed during their time abroad, and during their transition to their passport country, highlighting the importance of the family's role in positive outcomes of the transition process (Collier, 2008). Huff (2001) claimed, "parental attachment was found to have a direct causal effect on perceived social support and college adjustment for all subjects. Perceived social support was found to be significantly correlated with college adjustment" (p. 246). As Schaetti (1996) proposed, according to attachment theory, parental support may be especially important for helping TCKs to achieve a sense of cultural balance and worldview.

### *Self-efficacy*

Most of the participants in this study understood their strong sense of self-confidence to be an additional asset during the transition. These findings support previous research which has claimed that individuals with higher self-efficacy may find adaptation less challenging (Ittel & Sisler, 2012). The TCK literature identifies that individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy are more successful at adjustment, assisting them in transitioning to their passport country (Sussman, 2000).

A strong bond with parents can also lead to the development of higher confidence (Tetzel & Mortenson, 1984). Similarly, the participants in this study felt their experiences, and their close relationship with their family had contributed to their sense of self-confidence. Furthermore, the participants perceived themselves to have, not just a strong sense of self, but also established values, which they felt had also been influenced by their strong family relationships. The participants felt their family relationships had provided them with consistency, security and emotional support when growing up, which had enabled the development of their self-confidence and had assisted them during their transition to their passport country. As the third culture literature suggests, the global lifestyle that TCKs experience enables them to acquire skills whose contribution to TCKs' emotional well-being cannot be ignored (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010). Schaetti (1996) suggested these skills, combined with family relationships and support, will ultimately determine the individual's outcomes during the transition.

#### *Emotional intelligence*

Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to monitor feelings and guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Emotional intelligence is necessary for dealing with life's challenges, and those with well-developed emotional skills are more likely to lead content and productive lives (Goleman, 2005). It was evident that all the participants in this research could easily articulate their third culture and transition experiences while concurrently acknowledging their accompanying emotions. The participants' recognition of their important experiences, and the significant impact of those experiences, highlighted their highly-developed self-awareness and self-reflective thought processes. It is apparent then, that social and emotional intelligence played a key role in the participants' repatriating experiences.

#### *Friendships*

Participants perceived friendships as fundamental, confirming that friendship provided the participants with some of the social and emotional support they needed during the transition. Once they had established genuine friendships in their passport country, adjusting to their new environments became easier. Some participants mentioned that knowing one other person in their passport country could have made

fitting in more comfortable for them by providing social support. Research has revealed that individuals who maintain their relationships with family and friends from their passport country while abroad, are more likely to experience fewer adjustment issues and have a more positive transition (Hervey 2009; Szkudlarek, 2009). Hervey's (2009) study suggested that maintaining a connection with passport country peers enables TCKs to be aware of current trends in the passport country, and to learn how to build and maintain relationships with people in the passport country, resulting in a smoother adaption to their passport country.

All participants voiced how they would have found it helpful during the transition to have friends who were also TCKs, as they would have been able to understand each other because of similar shared experiences. Research has also found that forming relationships with others who grew up outside of their passport country has a positive impact on the transition (Collier, 2008; Davis et al., 2010; Hervey, 2009). The findings of this research correspond with previous literature, which determined that having friendships with others that have shared similar experiences makes the transition process easier (Collier, 2008; Hervey, 2009; Davis et al., 2010). The fact that most of the participants shared this view, implies the value of having access to people who share similar experiences, and that this could be an additional ongoing support system for TCKs.

#### *Internet*

The use of technology, specifically social media, has changed significantly in the past ten years or more, and TCKs are able to stay more connected to their friends globally. This has enabled them to maintain friendships online with like-minded friends abroad, who were able to provide ongoing support during the transition process. Although all of the participants were open to all types of friendships, they agreed that they tended to gravitate towards other TCKs or individuals who had shared a similar experience. This was because they understood each other and this had also helped provide meaningful connections, assisting their transition. These findings reflect Ittel and Sisler's (2012) study that found TCKs' communication with friends through the internet to be beneficial for them when transitioning, as this supported their social and cultural adaption. Conversely, Pascoe (2006) argued that technology may slow down



the transition process, through a false sense of connection with friends and family, preventing or hindering the TCK from exploring their new environment and culture.

#### *Time*

The findings from this study confirmed that the longer the participants were in their passport country, the more the transition challenges seemed to diminish. In a similar vein, previous research has determined that adjustment to the passport country improves over time. Time allows individuals to learn about the culture in the new environment, and for the TCKs to mature (Bredemen, 2015; Hervey, 2009). Participants shared the view that time had provided increased understanding and familiarity of their passport country, assisting them to adjust culturally, but also providing opportunities for friendships to develop. Also, time had enabled them to reconcile both facets of their life, by focusing on the benefits of both growing up as children and their present emerging adult life in their passport country. Primarily, participants were able to adapt and work things out in their own time, as they came to better understand the culture and establish their identity within the new setting (Bredeman, 2015).

#### *Additional support*

It was evident that the participants were enthusiastic about sharing their perspectives. Some participants expressed that it had felt therapeutic to talk and to offload how they felt to someone who understood. Narrative process is a self-reflexive process and can enable broad understandings of an individual's life experiences, helping them to make sense and find meaning (Etherington, 2007). These findings also suggest that providing opportunities to facilitate dialogue between individuals proficient in the knowledge of what it means to be a TCK, can be of considerable benefit for TCKs. While it was evident from the participants' narratives that the researcher's prior experience and knowledge of TCKs was beneficial to the participants, this was also beneficial to the research process. Both researcher and participant, bringing their own experiences, histories, and worldviews to the research process, enabled the researcher and participants to work together to shape the research (Bryman, 2001; Patton, 2001).

Not only does this dialogue offer emotional support, it enables TCKs to make meaning of their international experiences. Although the participants believed that they

eventually learned to adjust to living in their passport country, they shared how the availability of other resources when they first returned to their passport country, could have made their transition more natural. These findings indicate that more support would be beneficial to transitioning TCKs, with the emphasis on the transitioning needs of TCKs, and acknowledging these individuals' backgrounds, in connection with their cultural and diverse issues. Also, there is provision for universities to provide counselling opportunities or social workers to provide professional assistance which could also provide additional support for some TCKs. With an ecosystem approach, social work can assist to ensure a better fit between clients and their environments, aiming for improved quality of these transactions so "that growth and adaptive potential are released and environments are more responsive to people's needs and goals" (Gitterman & Germain, 1981, p. 41).

### **Emotions During Transition**

There were several times throughout the participants' narratives where they recalled their emotions and their feelings during the transition. The transition has been associated with high levels of stress which can lead to anxiety, depression, and difficulty adjusting to the new culture (Adler, 1981; Davis et al., 2010; Gaw, 2000). According to Gaw (2000), feelings such as confusion and anxiety can be experienced by TCKs when they transition to their passport country, in response to the different culture and values in the TCK's passport country. Individuals and their environments work together as interconnected systems. When alterations or changes occur in one of these systems, such as transition which occurs within the chronosystem of the ecological systems theory, this will impact other systems, impacting and invariably causing difficulty for the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). In addition, Erikson, (1982) theorised that biological development in relation to our sociocultural settings is done in stages of psychosocial development, where progress through each stage is in part determined by our success, or lack of success, in all the previous stages.

#### *Grief*

Grief, both current and unresolved, has been extensively documented as having a significant impact on the TCK's transition challenges (Eakin, 2001; Gaw, 2007;

Hervey, 2009; Hoerstring & Jenkins, 2011; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010). Research has explored TCK feelings of grief at transition, and confirmed that grief is the response to the sustained losses TCKs experience throughout their lives abroad due to the transient nature of the TCKs' lifestyle. These losses commonly include friendships, culture, and much more. Furthermore, literature has proposed that these losses may not always be recognised, resulting in unresolved grief and, leading to feelings of anger, depression, and confusion, which contribute to challenges when transitioning (Cottrell, 2012; Gilbert, 2008; Hervey, 2009; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010; Storti, 1997). Hervey (2009) asserted that it is essential to be aware of the grieving process TCKs experience at transition, suggesting that if the grief is left unresolved, this can lead to a more difficult adjustment during the transition. However, in contrast to the existing literature, the participants in this research did not perceive grief to be one of the challenges of their transition. These findings are more consistent with Moore and Barker's (2012) study on the transition experiences of TCKs, which found the participants did not experience grief as a result of their experiences, confirming that not all TCKs will experience grief during the transition.

#### *Excitement and apprehension*

Feelings of excitement and apprehension dominated participants' initial responses to transition, mainly as a result of the anticipation of their new experiences, entwined with the thought of the unknown. Participants in this study were ready to move on to the next stage in their life, and although the physical move was familiar, they were not familiar with their passport country and were not transitioning within the third culture as they had done when living abroad. These findings confirm Pollock and Van Reken's (2009) claim, that the excitement TCKs initially feel is replaced with the realities and challenges of their transition in their passport country.

#### *Feeling different*

Additionally, participants spoke of how they felt different to their peers in their passport country. When living abroad, they had enjoyed a sense of belonging with others of shared experience. Most of the participants had not felt different until they were in their passport culture during transition. Participants understood this to be the result of different experiences growing up, to their peers in their passport country.

Literature confirms that TCKs returning to their passport country after many years abroad may appear to look like their peers, but often can feel very different, due to the influence of their TCK experiences, and TCKs are commonly referred to as ‘hidden immigrants’ (Gaw, 2007; Peterson & Plamondon, 2009; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Quick (2010) believed that, once TCKs understand this, they are then able to embrace their differences and use them in positive ways throughout their transition and their lives.

#### *Misunderstood and loneliness*

Participants had, at times, felt misunderstood when transitioning to their passport country, as has been acknowledged in TCK literature (Hervey, 2009; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Quick, 2010). Misunderstandings were primarily a result of the assumptions others made about them in their passport country. Cultural and personal differences, and not fully knowing or understanding the nuances of their passport country, had further increased misunderstandings. Consequently, the participants had found it hard to explain who they were, explain their experiences, and explain where they were from when asked. Loneliness was experienced by some participants during their transition, mostly because of the difficulty they had connecting to their peers in the passport country. Davis et al. (2013) suggested that the reason TCKs can struggle making connections is because of the differences they feel to their passport country peers. Alternatively, Huff (2001) suggested that the independence gained from learning to live in different cultures may result in an inability for individuals to connect well with peers in the passport country.

#### **Positives Aspects of the Transition**

Further findings in this study revealed that there were some positive aspects of the transition experience for all participants. While the literature acknowledges there are apparent benefits to the TCK lifestyle, there exists minimal literature regarding the positive transition process for TCKs, specifically transitioning to their passport country for tertiary education (Lambiri, 2005; Szkudlarek, 2009). Although much of the literature focus on TCKs has been on the positive factors of the third culture experience, there is minimal research available on the positive aspects of transition for TCKs to

their passport country. Transition, for most of the participants, was perceived to be a time that had challenged and confronted every aspect of their being, and forced them to question who they were in relation to their new environments. Moreover, transition had required them to be able to fully establish themselves personally and academically. Many participants spoke of how this time, while not always easy, had allowed them to grow and develop personally. Additionally, being in their passport country had enabled them, in time, to reconcile their host countries against their passport country. Recognising the significance and importance of each culture, and of their experiences, made it easier for the participants to emotionally move on. Transition to their passport country had provided participants with extra opportunities to pursue higher education, make new friends, spend time with family, and have new experiences, which participants felt was an added benefit to being in their passport countries.

### **Summary**

It is evident from the findings of this research that there are many benefits and challenges to the TCK lifestyle. Even though participants primarily faced some cultural and social challenges during their transition to their passport country, they all agreed the benefits of their experiences outweighed the challenges at the time of transition to their passport country. In addition, the findings determined factors such as: TCK lifestyle; cultural identity; family relationships; friendships and support to have an impact the TCK's transition experience. Overall, the findings are consistent with previous third culture research, which has suggested that the TCK lifestyle, cultural identity, family relationships, friendships, and support have a significant perceived influence on the TCK's successful transition to their passport country. Although this research, and previous research studies, recognise the participants as sharing similar challenges during the transition, it also acknowledges that, for each, their experiences differ, as does the impact of, and their responses to, their experiences. Applying an ecosystem approach to the TCK's challenges during transition will enable social workers to understand and assess the disturbances in the relationships between the individual and their environments. This approach will further, assist social workers to establish interventions that can help to enhance these transactions, ultimately facilitating TCKs transition outcomes. The following chapter will outline the recommendations, from the

research findings, including the researcher's self-reflection, and final research conclusion.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of this research was to gain further insights into and increased understanding of the TCK's life abroad and their transition to their passport country following high school. The findings of the research will provide additional knowledge and understanding to assist future TCKs, their families, educators, social workers and counsellors who may be required to provide support during their transition. The theoretical perspective to inform this research study came from a social constructivism paradigm, and the methodology used in this qualitative research study to explore the transition experiences of eight TCKs to their passport country, was a narrative approach employing semi-structured interviews.

The participants' narrative focused on addressing the following aims:

- Identify the benefits of growing up abroad;
- Acknowledge the impact TCKs' cross-cultural experiences have on their transition;
- Identify the challenges for TCKs during a transition to their passport country;
- Deepen understandings of TCKs' acculturation experiences, and the support needed during the transition;
- Identify the positive aspects of the transition to their passport country; and
- Advance current knowledge and understanding about TCKs transitioning to their passport country.

To facilitate the qualitative research process, the fundamental question: *What was the TCK's experience when transitioning to their passport country?* was explored. Additional questions guided the researcher, to further explore how the TCK's cross-cultural experiences impacted their transition to their passport country, the benefits of such a lifestyle, and the positive aspects of their transition. These included:

1. In what ways has being a TCK benefited you?
2. How has being a TCK influenced your cultural identity and sense of belonging?
3. Please tell me about your transition to your passport country after living abroad.
4. What were some of the feelings you experienced during the transition?
5. What was positive about your transition?
6. What were some of the challenges you encountered during the transition?
7. What could have helped make the transition better for you?
8. How have your experiences of a cross-cultural lifestyle impacted your transition?

Participant selection was through the snowballing technique, and the research data were obtained through semi-structured interviews. The participants' interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematic analysis was used to establish common themes. This research has achieved its purpose of exploring the TCKs' perspective of their transition experiences to their passport country following high school, and the impact growing up abroad has had on their transition. The findings of this research provide increased understanding of the TCKs' transition experience and contribute to current literature regarding the TCKs' transition. Conclusions can be drawn from the findings regarding some of the factors that can contribute to better outcomes for TCKs during their transition to their passport country. Recommendations highlight areas in which the perspectives of the participants in this research may help to inform better practice provision for sending organisations, education institutions, social workers, families, and counsellors, to ultimately improve support for TCKs during their transition to their passport country.

## **Conclusions**

The following conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this research, regarding the transition experiences of TCKs returning to their passport country following high school abroad. The findings are predominantly congruent with the reviewed body of literature. According to the participants, they all shared a significant and meaningful experience living abroad, with specific personal benefits to the lifestyle, concurring that their experiences had offered them an increased global perspective and



deeper cultural understanding. The results of the research indicate that participants found transition to their passport country had created some challenges. This was mainly a consequence of cross-cultural adaptation and the personal and cultural differences they experienced when in their passport country, such as worldview, cultural understandings, and values. Consequently, making connections and developing friendships were not always comfortable, and so the participants had been more inclined to gravitate toward and form friendships with others who had shared similar experiences. Friendships with other TCKs was determined to be beneficial in strengthening TCKs' acculturation process during transition, as was the ongoing support that the participants had received from their family relationship.

Participants all exhibited self-confidence and a strong sense of self, sharing a cultural identity that was made up of multiple aspects of culture and experience. These skills, in conjunction with their cross-cultural skills and family support, were instrumental in assisting their transition. Finally, participants in this research concluded that while over time their challenges had lessened, additional support and resources would have been beneficial, before entering their passport country, but more importantly during their transition. However, support would need to be specifically aimed at the distinct cross-cultural needs of TCKs during the transition to their passport country.

### **Recommendations Based on the Findings**

As an outcome of the study recommendations were established, which can help to deliver more positive outcomes for TCKs transitioning to their passport country, and these are outlined below.

#### *Parental preparation*

Since the parent relationship was instrumental in providing support during the transition, parents can also work to establish good relationships with their children, even before they return to the passport country (Quick, 2010). Social workers and international school counsellors could provide parents with professional support, and information regarding the significant needs and challenges of parenting a TCK, and the

importance of the family relationship. Parents returning with their TCK children at the initial transition to their passport country can also offer emotional and practical support during the transition. Even if parents are unable to return with their children, they can still be useful in helping their children navigate the difficulties of leaving their host country and acculturating themselves into their passport country's culture.

#### *Maintaining relationships*

Maintaining relationships with peers and family in the TCK's passport country while the family is living overseas can be a helpful way to provide support for when the TCK moves to live in their passport country. Visits to their passport country when living abroad can help to facilitate relationships with extended family and peers. Also, increasing the familiarity TCKs have with their passport country can further assist the TCK's cultural adaptation to their passport country (Bredeman, 2015). Opportunity to return to their host country during the transition will enable TCKs to find closure in their past environments, and support ongoing family relationships if parents are still living there (Hervey, 2009).

#### *Transition programs*

Because of the challenges that have been identified as likely during individuals' transitions, it could be beneficial for TCKs to attend transition programs before leaving their host country, and in their passport country during the transition. Programs specifically designed to address the process of transition and the needs of the individual have been found to assist successful transition (Hervey, 2009; Thurston-Gonzalez, 2009). Transition programs run by the TCK's international schools and parents' sending organisation could prepare TCKs for their return to their passport country. Prior to leaving the host country, facilitating transition preparation programs for families and their children, aimed at the specific needs of the TCKs during the transition could relieve some of the stress of transition for these individuals, by informing them of the differences in cultural norms and preparing them for some of the challenges they may be likely to experience. Prior visits and orientation to universities could be of additional assistance when individuals are transitioning.

### *Connecting TCKs*

Linking TCKs with others who have shared similar experiences, and providing TCKs with a place and time to share their personal life stories, can be beneficial for TCKs during transition. The establishment of groups with the purpose of connecting students who are TCKs would encourage opportunities for social interaction and support within the TCK community. A TCK who has previously experienced transition could be a contact person on each campus. In conjunction, programs could also provide education for passport country peers, regarding who TCKs are, and highlighting their specific characteristics and needs, which could be beneficial by helping to limit misunderstandings of TCKs by their peers. According to the view of social order, individuals are defined by the groups they belong to and this provides individuals with a sense of belonging, which could also be beneficial to TCKs transitioning to their passport country

### *Social work support*

The social worker's role is to help facilitate change among individuals, families, groups and community groups, but also change within each of the systems' environments that is oppressing or prohibiting them from positive growth and development (Payne, 2014). Concurrently, social workers seek to challenge inequality and disadvantage, promote social justice, and advocate for resources and opportunities for individuals, families, groups and communities (Payne, 2014). Social workers could offer an advocacy role during the transition by developing and facilitating community support, such as, informing TCKs of their financial entitlements, extra organisational supports, and directing them to specific agencies they may require. Social workers could further develop their practices regarding the TCK phenomenon to include not only social support but also psychological supports to ensure the TCK population is socially and emotionally healthy.

Firstly, it is necessary to acknowledge that while TCKs face many of the same challenges as international students transitioning to university, such as social and cultural challenges, TCKs face a unique set of challenges during transition to their passport country, compared with international students or other migrants. Practitioners

therefore need to be well informed about the intricacies of growing up as a TCK, and the impact the TCK's experiences can have on their transition to their passport country. For social workers to be effective, it is necessary for them not only to have an international perspective, but to apply relevant social work theories and perspectives, such as ecological systems theory, human development theory, social change theory, and social and constructivist perspectives (Payne, 2005). Theories can assist the social worker's understanding of TCKs and their interactions with their environments. In addition, theory can guide the development of practice models that focus on ways to assist with TCKs' psychosocial and cultural challenges when transitioning. Behaviour cannot be understood outside the context in which it occurs, which includes not only the individual but their family, culture, and environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). Therefore, when supporting TCKs, practitioners are required to understand how the individual is embedded in their environment, and affected by the interactions and relationship they have with that environment. Social workers' collaboration with TCKs' families, teachers, caregivers, and community groups, acknowledges the effect and influence these people and the environment have on a child's development.

Pardeck (1988) believed implementing the ecological approach enables social work practitioners to understand the significance of the adaptive fit between the environment and organisms. This enables the development of a practice model that essentially focuses on the importance of locating ways to assist individuals in adapting to their environments, and on the formulation of strategies for changing environmental elements that are not helpful to individuals. Pardeck (1988) further claimed it is important to understand three concepts, specifically, behaviour settings, ecosystems, and definition of client problems. Essentially, understanding these concepts enables social workers to understand and appreciate the fit between organisms and their environment, and to be able to understand the different approach of the ecological perspective. Payne (2014) proposed that social workers can apply social change perspectives as a way to recognise the impact of privilege, oppression, and social justice on the change process. Dominelli (2010) argued that an anti-oppressive perspective needs to be integrated in social work practice alongside other theories and methods, to be able to accomplish social change.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research has drawn attention to the need to increase understanding of TCKs, and their needs at transition. As the research highlights, gaps in the existing research remain, suggesting future research regarding the TCK phenomenon is highly recommended. Possible areas for future research could involve gaining a better understanding of the different sub-groups of TCKs. Many variables exist amongst the TCK groups regarding such things as lifestyle, educational opportunities, location, host country involvement, and expectations and support of sending organisations. It would therefore be interesting to establish whether the TCK's needs at transition differ as a result of such variations. Similarly, exploring and researching about particular factors that may influence the TCK's lived experiences, such as ethnicity and parents' employment, could provide further insights. Furthermore, this research highlighted how cultural influences have a significant effect on TCKs, specifically on their identity. Consequently, further research on how this impacts TCKs' future life decisions could provide further insight and understanding.

With the extensive use of social media worldwide, future researchers may want to examine how social media mediates or moderates the repatriation experience. This may be relevant to parents of TCKs, organisations, counselling centres, and education institutions, enabling them to know what kind of counselling and resources the TCKs may need during the process of transition. Gender is another area of research that would be worth considering. The experience for boys and girls growing up overseas will be different as a result of the different countries' varying cultural norms. This can be conflicting and potentially could create differing attitudes and expectations of boys and girls. Research could, therefore, examine the effect this has on male and female TCKs, regarding shaping and influencing their personal development and sense of identity.

Relationships are a critical factor in TCKs' lives and this would be another relevant area to continue to investigate. All of the participants in this study acknowledged the importance of establishing friendships during the transition to ease the challenge of transition. Additional research on what assists TCKs to develop

sustainable relationships during transition could provide more information to support this process. The significance of the parental relationship in providing emotional reassurance to the participants while growing up and during the transition was considered essential. The value of this relationship in terms of the effect on the individual's emotional intelligence, self-efficacy and interpersonal skills, would be worth study, as these skills have been recognised in the literature to contribute to the TCK's ongoing success and well-being. Moreover, more studies regarding the effectiveness of transition programs before leaving the host country, and of reentry/transition programs, would provide further insights into the positive benefit these programs can have on individuals' transition outcomes. In conjunction, the relevance of social work provision for support, both psychological and practical, during the transition, and the effect this has on TCKs' outcomes would be another area worth investigating.

### **Limitations**

The research intended to provide depth of interpretation from the participants, and to develop deeper understandings of the TCKs' life abroad and their transition process to their passport country. This research was significant in addressing the unique experiences reflected on by TCKs, regarding their lifestyle abroad and their transition to their passport country. There are, however, several limitations to the research. Firstly, the extent of the research does not allow the researcher to determine the difference between the subgroups. More comparisons between the different groups of TCKs would also increase our understanding of the benefits and challenges of their mobile lifestyle. Establishing the impact of other variables, such as the type of schools attended during childhood, would generate further knowledge and identify the specific transition challenges for individual TCKs. Gender difference could also warrant further study, for instance regarding the responses of both male and female TCKs to transition, gaining further insights into the particular needs of each gender during the transition. Further research about particular factors that may influence the TCK's lived experiences, such as non-Western versus Western cultures, could also increase understanding of culture's influence on TCKs' transition outcomes, and needs during the transition.

The small number of participants in this qualitative research could possibly have resulted in more limited themes, whereas a larger number of participants may have provided a broader, more in-depth scope of themes. Bryman (2001) has confirmed that the rigour of narrative inquiry makes it more suited to a smaller population, unlike other research which is concerned with proving or disproving theories. Although this size may be considered inadequate by some research in regard to generalizability, this study intended to provide the richness of interpretation by way of participants' narratives, which therefore helped provided greater generalizability of results.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, this study has achieved the aim of exploring the transition experiences of TCKs. Through the participants' voices, more profound insights into and understandings of their life growing up abroad, the impact this has had on their transition, and the acculturation process to their passport country have been achieved. The findings of this study will advance current knowledge and understanding about TCK transitioning to their passport country, to benefit TCKs, their families, educators, sending organisations, and other professionals, to ensure the ongoing psychological, social and emotional well-being of TCKs during their transition to their passport country. The importance of raising awareness and understanding about individuals, their multicultural lives, and their unique challenges, will only contribute to providing better support when they are transitioning to their passport country, and further ensure successful outcomes for these individuals. However, it is necessary that social workers assisting TCKs during transition apply relevant social work theory to be able to understand and conceptualise TCKs and their experiences. Theory will help guide social workers' practice interventions and provide appropriate methods based on individual situations. Furthermore, theory can recognise the impact of privilege, oppression and social justice on the social change processes (Dominelli, 2010; Payne, 2014).

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## Appendix A - Email Invitation



Hi,

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project which is exploring the experience of individual Third Culture Kids (TCKs) transition, to their passport country following their experience of having lived a mobile, cross-cultural life abroad. This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my Master in Social Work degree at Massey University, New Zealand.

Participants are required to be between the ages of 19–26 years, have lived abroad for a minimum of 3 years with their parents between the ages of 10-19 years and be transitioning/transitioned to their passport countries.

If you agree to this study the intended time required of you will be approximately 1 ½ hours in total and will involve the following:

- Email correspondence to provide project information sheet, and clarification prior to the study, and confirm your acceptance of invitation
- You will complete a consent form and release of transcript form then email this back to me
- Email contact to arrange a convenient time for the interview
- Participate in an interview that will last between 45 to 60 minutes that will be recorded by a voice recorder
- Further email correspondence after the interview for clarification of the interview content

I have attached all the project information to assist you in making your decision to participate. Please note that individual's and place names will not be used and all information is confidential. If you need any further clarification regarding this project, please do not hesitate to contact me at [saplailai@gmail.com](mailto:saplailai@gmail.com)

Further I would appreciate if you could assist me by inviting others that you feel would be interested in participating and who meet the criteria. If they are interested, please ask them to contact me via email.

I have asked you as a possible participant because someone else thinks you would be suitable for this study and meet the requirements, however please do not feel any pressure to have to participant.

Thank you in advance and I look forward to hearing if you are interested in participating.

Kind regards,

Francesca Tranter

## Appendix B - Information Sheet



### INFORMATION SHEET

#### **Different on the Inside: Narratives of Third Culture Kids' (TCKs) Transitional Experiences**

Hello, my name is Francesca Tranter, I am a university student and I am conducting this research project as a requirement for my Master of Social Work degree at Massey University, New Zealand.

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project that is exploring the experiences of individual TCK's transition to their passport country following their experience of having lived a cross-cultural life abroad.

The aims of the project are to:

- a) Identify the benefits of growing up abroad;
- b) Identify what was positive about transition to passport their country;
- c) Identify the challenges for TCKs during transition to their passport country;
- d) Deepen understandings of TCKs acculturation experiences and the support needed during transition;
- e) Acknowledge the impact TCKs cross-cultural experiences have on their transition;
- f) Advance current knowledge and understanding about TCKs when transitioning to their passport country.



The project will explore the transition experiences of 10 adult TCKs returning to their passport countries who are currently between the ages of 19–26 years and who have lived abroad for 3 or more years during their adolescent years (10-19 years).

Additionally, this project will look at how cross-cultural experiences have impacted their transition, explore the benefits of such a lifestyle, identify the challenges during transition, and establish what allows these individuals to transition successfully.

It is hoped that, through the narratives of TCKs, that deeper understanding and meaning will be generated for friends, family, employing organizations, educators, social workers and counsellors. These understandings will help to assist influential individuals in a TCK's life, and to support their ongoing well-being.

Participant recruitment will be done through the use of a snowballing technique. Initially, I will make email contact with 2 TCKs known to me, who will not participate in the research. I will ask them to forward my invitation email including the information sheet, on to those TCKs they think would be interested. These TCKs would be asked to repeat this process and send the invitation email onto TCKs known to them. This is to ensure enough participants have been recruited.

It is expected that participation in the research will be one and a half hours: approximately 15 minutes for initial contact; 45–60 minutes for the semi-structured interview; approximately 15 minutes to review the interview transcript. The interview will take place via skype from my office in Jerusalem, Israel and at a location suitable for the participant. I will negotiate a convenient time to contact the participants from December 2016 - February 2017. This will be organized through email correspondence once participants have agreed to participate.

If you choose to participate, I will ensure that all information you give me, including the consent form, the recording of the interview and the transcript, will be kept in a secure location that is not accessible to anyone other than myself and my supervisors. Electronic data will be password protected on my computer and written data will be

stored in a locked file. The data from the project may be used in publications and presentations, and all efforts will be taken to ensure that you are not able to be identified, unless you have given permission for this. However, while very effort will be made, confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed.

You will receive a copy of the summary of the findings and also of any publications that relate to this project. You will also be able to have a copy of your audio recording and your interview transcript if you wish. After a five-year period, all the data for this stage of the project will be destroyed.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any stage up until the commencement of data analysis;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used, instead a pseudonym;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;
- ask to stop being recorded at any time during the interview.

Please contact my supervisors or me if you have any questions about this project. Please contact me if you would like to participate in the interviews:

Francesca Tranter

Email: []

Phone: []

Supervisors:

Dr Kathryn Hay

E: [K.S.Hay@massey.ac.nz](mailto:K.S.Hay@massey.ac.nz)

T: 6 3569 099 ext. 83518

Dr Tracie Mafileo

E: [T.A.Mafileo@massey.ac.nz](mailto:T.A.Mafileo@massey.ac.nz)

T: +646 3569099 ext. 85027

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 16/40. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83657, email [humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz)

Thank you for your consideration of my request. I look forward to hearing from you if you are interested in participating.

Yours sincerely,

Francesca Tranter MSW student

## Appendix C - Interview Schedule



### **Different on the Inside: Narratives of Third Culture Kids' (TCKS) Transitional Experiences**

#### **Interview Schedule**

The interview will be approximately 45-60 minutes via skype at a time most convenient to the participants. The interview time will be negotiated between the participants and researcher at a time convenient to the participants and time zones will be taken into account. Prior to starting the interview, I will introduce myself to participants.

#### **Interview Questions**

Before we start I wonder if you could tell me a little about yourself, your passport country and where you grew up?

1. In what ways has being a TCK benefited you?
2. How has being a TCK influenced your cultural identity and sense of belonging?
3. Please tell me about your transition to your passport after living abroad?
4. What were some of the feelings you experienced during transition?
5. What was positive about your transition?
6. What were some of the challenges you encountered during transition?
7. What could have helped make the transition better for you?
8. How have your experiences of a cross cultural lifestyle impacted your transition?
9. Do you have any other comments you would like to make about the transition process for TCKs?

## Appendix D - Participant Consent Form



MASSEY UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF HEALTH  
TE KURA HAUORA TANGATA

### **Different on the Inside: Narratives of Third Culture Kids' (TCKs) Transition Experiences**

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded

I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

## Appendix E - Massey University Human Ethics Approval



Date: 17 January 2017

Dear Francesca Tranter

Re: Ethics Notification - **SOB 16/40 - Different on the inside: Narratives of Third Culture Kids' (TCKS) transition experiences.**

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: **Human Ethics Southern B Committee** at their meeting held on **Thursday, 8 December,**

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Dr Brian Finch  
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

## Appendix F - Release of Transcripts



### Different on the Inside-Narratives of TCKs Transition Experiences

#### AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview(s) conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....