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# Career Choices and the Influence of Third Culture Kids on International Relations

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# **Career Choices and the Influence of Third Culture Kids on International Relations**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for Honors Studies in  
International Relations

By

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## **Defining the Third Culture Kid**

Where are you from?

The seemingly innocuous question usually elicits a feeling of dread, a groan, or a knowing smirk from every third culture kid (TCK) who has ever been asked the question. The answers are varied and often depend on any number of conditions: the person's mood, the length of time allowed for a response, the perceived interest of the individual asking the question. Yet, no matter how simple the response may seem, you can be sure there is a story to be told behind it.

Third culture kids are a unique group of individuals, and, contrary to the name, TCKs may not be kids at all. Third culture kid or TCK is a name given to a group of people who grew up overseas or abroad in a culture different from their own or from their parents' culture. A TCK can be an American living in China, or a Russian living in Australia. A clear and concise definition of a TCK comes from "The TCK Profile":

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

In other words, TCKs move around a lot and tend to live in many different countries. It is important to point out that "third culture" does not refer to the "third world," but instead is a term that came about in the 1950's, coined by American sociologist and anthropologist Ruth Hill

Useem after her stays in India with her children. The term refers to the third culture that children living abroad acquire for themselves by combining aspects of their first culture, their parents' "home" culture, with their second, the culture of the host country.

There is certainly no lack of literature and research done on the mental and psychological effects that living such a lifestyle can have on TCKs. However, there is little that has been done to investigate the effects that TCKs themselves have on the world of International Relations. Often from a young age, TCKs are unofficial ambassadors to other nations, representing one country while living in another. TCKs know from life experience that there is nothing more important than the relationships that are formed between people and, because of this, TCKs are often able to look past things such as differences in nationality, religion, and culture in the interest of forging new friendships. Moreover, TCKs also have multiple identities, often able to easily adopt the culture of their host country, and eventually creating their own hybrid culture. As the definition states, TCKs build "relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any." After all, when home is everywhere, home is nowhere.

### **The Third Culture Kid in International Relations:**

Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of being a TCK that has great potential to influence International Relations is the ability to find common ground with many different people. As Brice Roger, founder of [www.TCKID.com](http://www.TCKID.com) says, "When you're stuck in a monocultural environment, you believe that your sense of belonging is within that group. But when you have a mobile childhood you quickly realize that you can have a sense of belonging with different groups regardless of where you are when you find a sense of commonality with these people." TCKs are often able to see things from differing points of view and have open

minds. It is this open-mindedness and ability to find commonality with people of many different cultures that make TCKs perfectly natural diplomats and ambassadors—positive assets to International Relations even if they are not directly involved in that field at all during their careers.

Although the term TCK is widely used to describe people who grew up with this transient cross-cultural lifestyle, other terms such as global nomad and expat brat prove just as effective and all encompassing. However, there are additional terms that are more specific to types of TCKs; these terms include missionary kid, army brat, and diplobrat amongst others. As you can tell, the word “brat” is quite frequent in these labels and it is not just a coincidence. It is not uncommon for TCKs to lead a lifestyle that is not only exotic to their counterparts back home, but one that is often exotic from the view of the locals in the host country. Americans living abroad may live in a “Western” or “upscale” neighborhood compared to the living conditions of the locals. For this reason, TCKs and their families may be looked upon with resentment by some of the community, especially if they flaunt their comparably wealthy conditions. This, coupled with the fact that many living abroad (depending on the country) will have locally hired maids, drivers, cooks, and gardeners means that there is always the risk of tension. Moreover, if a TCK is in the host country as an extension of a specific religion as a missionary kid or country as a diplo- or army brat, their presence has the potential to cause ill feelings. In any of these instances, it is evident that while TCKs can help to improve relations between nations, they can also serve to weaken them. The question that lies at the heart of this thesis is how TCKs influence International Relations through area of study and career choice.

Throughout this thesis I will look into the history of TCKs and into special characteristics of TCKs such as identity and cross-cultural relationships. I will also examine how TCKs are

affected by re-entry into their own country or culture, an event that is common for third culture kids when it is time to attend college or university. School systems in the host country also play a significant role in influencing TCKs, especially if the curriculum is heavily geared towards a specific country, usually either the United States or Great Britain. All of these different factors have immense impact on the TCK during their childhood, and, indeed, later in life as they begin to determine their own futures.

Perhaps the most important part of my study comes with the analysis of information that I have gathered from approximately 258 TCKs throughout the world relating to both their choice of major in college and their career choices. The most telling evidence comes from the third culture kids themselves as they are the ones who will ultimately determine the influence that TCKs have on the field of International Relations and relations between countries in general as they make decisions on what kind of careers they have. Some may find themselves directly influencing International Relations as they begin careers as diplomats or linguists, and still others will influence the field indirectly through careers in business or medicine. As Ruth Hill Useem and Ann Baker Cottrell, pioneers in the research of TCKs, state in their article “Adult Third Culture Kids,” most TCKs “Regardless of their career choice...have incorporated an international dimension in their work lives.” (Useem & Cottrell, 30).

As a third culture kid myself, I know that my childhood has had a great impact on my area of study in college and in my decisions for my future career and lifestyle. I hope to once again move back overseas and to be involved in diplomacy and international aid or assistance. Throughout this thesis, I hope to communicate the different effects that TCKs have on International Relations and the ways in which we can learn from their lifestyle.

### **“...prototype citizens of the future,”**

Although the term third culture kid did not come into existence until the fifties, you can bet that as long as there have been diplomats, military personnel, and international businessmen there have been kids that have traveled abroad with them. After all, Thomas Jefferson took his young daughter Polly to live with him in France in 1785 while he served as minister to the country. My father and his brother and sisters are third culture kids themselves, living in Japan and Germany in the sixties and seventies. Traditionally, if you grew up abroad most people either assumed you had a family member serving in the army or that you belonged to a missionary family. This is still a common question today; most people assume that if you lead a globally transient lifestyle then you must be a military family. However, today there are many different categories of TCKs. The most common types of TCKs are the military or army brats, government kids (affectionately referred to as diplobrats), missionary kids, and business kids (often simply referred to as expat brats). Although all of these labels refer to different types of TCKs, they all have their own characteristics that set them apart.

Military and army brats are often the most mobile TCKs though they tend to live abroad for a significantly shorter period of time. About 41 percent of military kids spend less than five years in foreign countries (Pearce). However, because of their highly mobile lifestyle, military brats may also have the disadvantage of not feeling at home even in their own country and can feel separated from civilians of their own nationality in this way. Moreover, army brats tend to be less immersed in the local culture of the host country as they often live on bases or have access to American goods and commodities.

Diplobrats or non-military government TCKs often live abroad for prolonged periods of time. Forty-four percent have lived in at least four countries and the same percentage will have

spent at least ten years outside of their passport country (Cottrell). Children from non-military government families depend on their parents' careers and involvement in the local culture to determine their own local involvement. Some parents may be diplomats and may work closely with locals, and others may live and work closely with a military base.

Missionary kids (MKs) are the most likely to spend a large amount of time overseas, but in relatively few countries. Most missionary families are stationed for several years in one country—72 percent of MKs have lived in only one foreign country and 85 percent spend more than ten years abroad (Cottrell). Compared to other TCKs, Missionary Kids are the most likely to integrate themselves within the local culture. This is due to the nature of their parents' work, where interacting with the community is essential. It is also due to the fact that many MKs are stationed in areas with little or no foreign or American presence in the first place, so they may be one of the few American or Western families in the area. However, despite the fact that most MKs do integrate into the host culture, they are aware—as are most TCKs—of never truly belonging to it. As former MK Jonathan Addleton puts it in his memoir, *Some Far and Distant Place, Muslim-Christian Encounters Through the Eyes of a Child*, “There were other moments, too, that forcefully reminded us of our continuing strangeness in a foreign land... On occasion, rocks or clods of dirt were thrown.” (Addleton, 99).

Business kids or Expat Brats also live abroad for long periods of time, but when compared to MKs they tend to live in more countries. Sixty-three percent of business kids have lived in foreign countries for at least ten years (Cottrell). Business TCKs interact with both the local community and with other people from their passport country. Although the world of third culture kids can be split up into smaller subsections, TCKs do share much in common despite the difference of the type, duration, or number of countries lived in. As sociologist Ted Ward stated

in 1984, TCKs are the “prototype citizens of the future,”—a statement that deserves a second look.

### **A Different Perspective**

Throughout American history there have been several notable examples of third culture kids. In addition to Thomas Jefferson’s young daughter, John Quincy Adams also lived in France, and as Ruth E. Van Reken points out in a recent article, “young Franklin Delano Roosevelt visited Europe often enough to master French and German,” (Reken). Perhaps the most modern notable TCK is our 44<sup>th</sup> President himself, President Barak Obama. Obama spent some of his formative years in Jakarta, Indonesia and has a Kenyan father. In addition to Obama being a TCK, so are many appointees in his administration: Senior White House advisor and Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Relations Valerie Jarrett lived in Tehran and London as a child, Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner grew up in east Africa, India, Thailand, China and Japan, and former National Security Advisor James L. Jones was raised in Paris (Reken). It appears that the future that Ward envisioned in the eighties has begun to come to fruition. But what impact, if any, does this have on world affairs and international relations? For starters, Obama’s overseas experience as a child has prepared him to work with people from different countries. Foreign affairs should be one of the areas that Obama and his administration excel at; however, this area in American policy has generally taken a backseat during Obama’s presidency due to the domestic financial and political issues in our own country.

Within the past few years the world as a whole has made strides toward intercultural connectedness—air transportation has made it possible for people to visit almost any country and state borders are being traversed for the simple pleasure of being a tourist. This has led to more

mobility between nations and with this comes the fact that more children will find themselves as citizens of the world, as TCKs growing up in the countries where their parents' work takes them. This is even evident on popular television shows such as HGTV's "House Hunters International" where American families search for real-estate overseas either as a permanent new home or for a vacation house. As the number of children who grow up in a globally nomadic lifestyle increases, it is important to look into the effects on world politics. To do this, one must understand the traits and characteristics that are common to TCKs.

As previously stated, TCKs grow up with a different view of the world from their peers back home; they develop something of a three dimensional world view. They can easily see things from different points of view because they have grown up in at least two, if not more, different cultures, having to understand differing lifestyles. At the same time, because of this ability many TCKs report feeling isolated or misunderstood upon returning home for college or during repatriation. Many feel a sense of superiority to their peers as well because they may find people in their own country lacking adequate global or geographic education. Moreover, the lack of interest in these subjects may prove to be even more astonishing to the TCK. However, this sense of superiority is not completely unfounded. Global nomads do tend to be more mature than their counterparts back home. They tend to grow up fast, but hold off on major decisions later in adulthood such as marriages or big career choices. Many adult TCKs report the need to move every few years, while others settle down as soon as they are able to.

The family connection is an important one for third culture kids as family is the one constant in their lives. Family vacations and trips are common for those living abroad and is something else that sets teen TCKs apart from their peers, the lack of independence that it may appear to others that they have. In reality, TCKs do not lack independence; they just have a

different kind of it. It is ironic that many TCKs live sheltered experiences even though they are constantly immersed in other cultures. Many TCKs return to the United States with little to no work experience, which may make them appear as spoiled compared to their peers who have routinely held summer or part-time jobs. It is also not uncommon for global nomads to lack a driver's license or even the knowledge of how to drive a car, which their friends back home have known for years. As Craig Sorti puts it in his book *The Art of Coming Home*, "They may know how to change planes at Heathrow or how to bargain with merchants in Cairo, but they may never have used an ATM machine..." (Sorti, 118).

### **A Different Education**

Why discuss the personality of the TCK? Because it is important to understand third culture kids themselves before looking at their impact on International Relations. Personality, not just lifestyle, affects people's decisions later in life, including career choice. Education is another characteristic of the TCK that affects their choices regarding career.

Many Americans who live abroad will attend an American, British, or International School, almost all of which are accredited by the United States. Children who grow up abroad and attend one of these schools will be getting their education from a private school and will either be learning through a British or an American curriculum. This is not an educational hurdle for British or American students, but it can cause problems or disconnects for others who will miss out on learning about their own countries and cultures. This is a challenge to both the child and to the family of the TCK. Many third culture kids are ignorant of the national and local history of their home country. One English mother was shocked to hear her daughter ask, "Mom, who is this Guy Fawkes everybody's talking about?" (Reken, 87) when she began

attending school in England for the first time after previously attending an American school in Africa. The TCKs' knowledge of global events and history often masks the lack of knowledge of their home country's history. My mother almost had a heart attack when my sister, while at age eight or so and attending a British international school in Saudi Arabia, proudly proclaimed the name of the 16<sup>th</sup> President of the United States: Ibrahim Lincoln. In all honesty, it is surprising she came even that close.

In addition to missing out on learning about the history of one's own country, the language of the curriculum in most of these schools is English. This means that many TCKs from other countries where English is not the main language may find it difficult to return home for career opportunities or for higher education. For this reason, many TCKs have to pursue their higher education in the United States or in England simply because they are unable to speak the language of their home country. Despite these challenges to education, third culture kids are four times as likely as non-TCKs to earn a bachelor's degree; in other words, 81 percent of TCKs obtain one compared to the 21 percent of non-TCKs that do (Useem & Cottrell). In addition to this, 40 percent earn an advanced degree compared with a much smaller 5 percent of non-TCKs (Useem & Cottrell). According to these numbers it appears that TCKs are a group who find education and the pursuit of knowledge important to their futures.

Third culture kids have the added benefit of gaining a unique education through experience. There is no substitute for learning a language by using it in the shops or on the street, by being immersed in it. Many things that TCKs learn are things that are not easily simulated or taught in a class room. Moreover, TCKs may be unaware that they are gaining an education simply by living their lives. Yet they are. They pick up on basic rules and ideals of

the country or culture and learn something of equality too. As TCK Rachel Miller Schaetti is quoted as saying in *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds*,

“We have lived in Tulsa for five years...I am struck again and again by the fact that so much of the sociology, feeling for history, geography, questions [about] others that our friends’ children try to understand through textbooks, my sisters and I acquired just by living.” (Reken, 77)

Children who routinely travel between their home country and the country they live in also learn to be mini-representatives of both their home nation and the nation in which they reside. In fact, it is not uncommon for TCKs to jump in and defend whomever is being attacked or criticized. While in the host country TCKs are often patriotic about their own countries, even if they do not remember much about it. At the same time, upon returning home for college or during a visit, many TCKs report feeling the need to defend the rest of the world or the countries they have lived in. This reaction is partly because they always feel the need to defend the other half of themselves and partly because they want to defend the people who are not there to do it on their own. Attempting to find a middle ground or playing the role of mediator suits TCKs best because they have often found themselves forced into that role before.

### **To Move or Not to Move? That is the Question.**

It may seem elitist to separate third culture kids from everyone else, but, in truth, the psychology of a TCK is a difficult one. As previously mentioned, several studies have been done on the effects that such a highly mobile lifestyle has on people who spend their childhoods

continually moving around. Some TCKs would call this continually being uprooted, which essentially it is. Many TCKs lack some sort of home base and even if they have a country that they can call home, they still may feel a lack of ownership to it. The countries they have lived in certainly hold significance to them but there is always the unspoken knowledge that one can never really go back. One Foreign Service child, Teresa Lauderdale, who grew up in South America and Europe in the sixties and seventies, articulates this best when she says, “Once in a while...parents let kids go back to posts, but you can’t really go back because you can’t go back in time.” (Kittredge, 18). Things change and the life that the TCK once knew no longer exists. Moving countries is almost like having to reinvent yourself.

Jonathan Addleton echoes a similar feeling in his memoir of his life as an MK in Pakistan when he recalls his last night in the country before leaving for college in America, “It seemed so astonishing, that all of this should ever have happened, that all this was about to end, that I was finally leaving Murree and Shikarpur and Ratodero behind, that it was unlikely that I would ever have an opportunity to return.” (Addleton, 206). Even though many do not want to accept it, most TCKs know that they will not have an opportunity to return to certain countries or places of their childhood, especially the more remote areas. This is another factor that will ultimately influence the lifestyle choice of the TCK, and is really something that could go in one of two directions. The third culture kid may desire to return to the lifestyle they once had, one that is highly mobile. Indeed, many TCKs are restless even during the four years they are in college. According to one study, 45 percent of TCKs attended three universities before graduating, and some may even attend more (Useem & Cottrell). Forty-five percent is obviously a significant chunk of the TCK population—it is almost half. The significance of this finding indicates that the desire to move is common in many third culture kids. Yet, there is also another dominant

reaction that TCKs have in relation to their mobile childhoods. Some prefer to settle down once they have the chance. For these TCKs the stability of a stateside job holds many benefits and comforts, one of which is the knowledge that they will not have to move abroad again. Once more we can see how the later life choices of TCKs are heavily influenced by their childhoods.

### **The Process of Repatriation**

When TCKs return to their passport countries for repatriation, usually for the purpose of attending college, they go through four main stages of reentry: leave-taking and departure, the honeymoon, reverse culture shock, and readjustment (Sorti).

Leave-taking and departure begins before the family even leaves the country for the new one. This is the stage when you are planning your move and your departure. Everyone deals with this stage differently. Some TCKs plan out their goodbyes in advance while others may mentally check out weeks before they are due to leave. Most TCKs are so used to people coming and going in their lives that they immediately begin to look forward to the move and to their new post without really taking the time to say goodbye to their old country. Some do this intentionally, knowing that they may not have the opportunity to return. One Canadian adult third culture kid (ATCK) recounted his move from Papua New Guinea back to the United States,

“When I left to return home for university, I could only think about how much I’d enjoy having Big Macs, TV, and electricity. I looked forward to new friends. When my PNG friends came to say good-bye, they started to cry, but I just walked away.” (Reken, 64)

For many this period is bittersweet because they are leaving behind one place to begin a new life in another.

The honeymoon period occurs during the first few weeks upon returning home. For many expat kids, returning to the States is highly anticipated. This is the time when you finally have the opportunity to eat all of the favorite foods that you could not get while overseas, to catch up on American television programs and music. Trips to Wal-Mart and big American grocery stores are suddenly considered fun family outings. During the honeymoon stage, most returnees are happy to be back in their home country and are not particularly objective about it. Most TCKs are so thrilled by the simple joy of having access to American junk food that they do not really pay attention to the other aspects of the country that they may not like. For many TCKs the first few weeks are like being on a vacation.

We all hear stories of culture shock from people who visit foreign countries; their surprise at how different things can be. TCKs often experience something called reverse culture shock when they return to their passport country. After the honeymoon stage, reverse culture shock sets in. Everything suddenly shifts from being seen as idyllic to being seen as annoying. People begin to become hypercritical of every little thing. Everything the TCK does not like about the country begins to stand out over everything else. Suddenly, life abroad stands out as perfect and flawless, as Craig Sorti mentions, “Everything about your experience abroad is remembered as being perfect—and whatever wasn’t perfect isn’t remembered.” (Sorti, 52). It is ironic that TCKs are praised for being so tolerant, yet when they return home they are often very harsh and judgmental about their own countries, and show very little signs of tolerance at all.

There are several reasons for this trend in behavior. One reason could be frustration at having to return home to attend school and be separated from family and friends. Most TCKs

have to live in the country by themselves while their parents and siblings return abroad. Anger and frustration may also arise from the fact that TCKs feel isolated and different from their peers, people with whom they should be able to identify. It might be a comfort for the TCK to think they are returning to a place where people will be like them, and it can be a letdown when this is not the case. In addition to feeling out of place or misunderstood, TCKs do not have the benefit of looking like a foreigner to cover their social faux pas or cultural quirks. Third culture kids who return to their passport country after years of growing up abroad fall into the category of hidden immigrant. They may look like everyone else, but they are actually very different. If a child has grown up entirely in Pakistan and then returns to the United States for college, he or she is, in effect, no different from any other foreign exchange student, except that because they look American and are American they are assumed to be just like their peers. This is another reason why TCKs may feel disdain for their home country. During the reverse culture shock period, many TCKs desire to return overseas as soon as possible, and some may even apply for study abroad within their first year.

Readjustment will come to the TCK in time, and at first it might not even be noticeable. Eventually the TCK will begin to adjust and feel comfortable in his or her new home and realize it does not have to be his or her life's mission to return abroad. During this period TCKs are able to reconcile the two areas of their life, the one of their childhood and the one they are living in the present. They begin to see the benefits to life in their home country and begin to admit that there were some not-so-great parts to living overseas. The most important things that TCKs pick up on during their readjustment is the fact that they have to focus on living in the here and now and not in the past. Memories are important, but so is the present.

The whole process of returning home is immensely important in shaping TCKs as they reach adulthood. They develop the ability to reach a middle ground on many issues because it is something they have had to do for themselves. They learn to be not as judgmental about their peers and not as protective of the countries they used to live in. The reason for this is primarily because, as they become more comfortable upon their return home, they are able to take things at face value, for what they are. This ability to mediate and come to a consensus is an obvious skill that is needed in diplomacy and International Relations. For this reason, the process of repatriation for a TCK is an important one to understand because it is so central to the third culture kid's life. It may seem like a simple act of coming home, but as we have seen, it is something that goes much deeper. Something that in the end makes the TCK even more open minded than he or she was before. The act of repatriation is something that nearly all TCKs must go through and something that is heavily influential to their futures.

From first-hand experience I can validate the stages of repatriation, as can several of my friends. Of course, the process is not going to be the same for everyone and it is unfair to make blanket statements that are intended to encompass an entire group of people. Some people may fare better during the process than others, and some may fare worse. Some people may stay in one stage much longer than another; it all depends. The point is that throughout this thesis, third culture kids and adult third culture kids are examined as a whole, as a community. Indeed, many TCKs find that they feel most at home with others who have shared their lifestyle, with other TCKs. Identifying more with shared experiences rather than shared locations.

## **The TCK Community**

The community of TCKs and global nomads is a large one. According to the State Department, there are an estimated 300,000 U.S. students living abroad every year and about 100,000 of them return to the United States and attend American schools. They are immigrants, but they are hidden. Third culture kids may feel like they are the only one at their new university, but in reality there are others like them; they are just hard to find. In recent years websites have been created for the purpose of bringing TCKs of all ages together. One of the most popular of these online communities was created by Brice Roger and is called tckid.com. The site has over 21,000 members and continues to grow. Twenty-one thousand may not seem like many people, but to TCKs it is a comfort to find a community of people who share their same experiences. The third culture kid community is one that is largely hidden and unknown. TCKs themselves may not even know that they have a community or that they are TCKs.

Growing up, I did not know there was a name for us. I knew about Army Brats and had heard the term before, but I knew that we were not a military family so it could not apply to us. I finally discovered the world of TCKs when I was a freshman in college. I first heard the term “third culture kid” when I saw David Pollock’s and Ruth E. Van Reken’s book *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up Among Worlds* on my mother’s bedside table. Curious, I had flipped through the book before on numerous occasions, but it was not until I was going through the process of repatriation myself that I decided to do some research. I found the tckid website and was surprised to find that there was such a large community of us who were all equally surprised that there was indeed a community of us. I began to read articles and essays about TCKs and every time it was like I was reading about myself. The point is that most

people—TCKs included—do not know what a third culture kid is let alone how they could impact or influence global relationships.

### **The Growing Gap**

As international relations scholar and theorist Joseph S. Nye, Jr. has pointed out in his article, “International Relations: The Relevance of Theory to Practice,” there has been a growing gap between policymakers and theorists in the world of International Relations—a gap which can be seen as a hindrance to effective relations between nations. If policymakers do consult with an expert on a certain country they usually do so with academics and theorists. TCKs have the potential to be an even more informative source of information and influence on policymakers because of their experiences abroad. Children who grow up in different countries absorb parts of their host culture that they probably do not even realize they are absorbing. They learn simply by living and doing. A child growing up in a multi-cultural environment is different from an adult being placed in one later in life. Children have not been exposed to a certain way of thinking or to a certain way of doing things for as long as adults have, and for this reason they are able to move between cultures with relative ease and great flexibility. Adults who move overseas may bring with them an air of superiority or condescension. Of course, this can be true of children as well, but the difference is that children’s ideas are not as set in stone as their adult counterparts’ are.

The purpose of this thesis is neither to prove or disprove the claim that TCKs are the “prototype citizens of the world” but rather to examine their effects on global relationships. Some would argue that they enhance relationships through their multicultural upbringing but others would argue that their presence in foreign countries hinder them. There are many other

factors at play here as well, ones that will constitute the bulk of this work. Before understanding how third culture kids influence International Relations, it is essential to understand what a TCK is and what are some of the common characteristics they share. I have tried to explain this as best as I could in this first part of this thesis. Understanding the different processes that TCKs go through during repatriation is also paramount to discovering why TCKs choose the professions they do or whether they decide to move back overseas. These choices, in turn determine what kind of effect global nomads will have on global relations, positive or negative.

When examining TCKs and their effects on International Relations I will be looking at several different factors. As mentioned previously, there are several different types of TCK, including missionary kids and military brats. Each group exhibits its own characteristics, one of which involves the number of countries lived in. While this is not the only contributing factor to the effects that TCKs have on global relationships, it will be interesting to see if there is a link between the number or type of countries lived in and what the third culture kid chooses as his or her career path. In addition to the number of countries lived in, I will also be looking at language proficiency and language goals among TCKs. A significantly higher number of TCKs do speak more than one language than non-TCKs and this does influence not only their career choices but also the types of jobs available to them.

To obtain this information about third culture kids, I created two separate surveys. The first one is to collect demographic data concerning age and background information of the TCK. The second survey asks more detailed questions about future career preferences and decisions. The answers to these questions will be informative in indicating what types of careers TCKs largely aspire to or take interest in. It will also indicate whether TCKs chose to move back

overseas or to continue living in a highly mobile lifestyle—not only a mobile lifestyle, but a globally nomadic lifestyle.

An important question to address is: why look exclusively at TCKs? The reason for focusing specifically on third culture kids is because I was curious to see if their lifestyle made them more likely to take a career path that would lead them into the field of International Relations. Are TCKs more or less likely to enter into governmental positions, global non-profits, or other careers that would either lead them to interact with people of different countries or deal with policy creation and implementation? Obviously, there is any number of reasons as to why someone chooses the specific career that they do, and I want to see if third culture kids look to their experiences growing up as one of these reasons. As previously stated, there have been many books and articles published about the effects that a global and highly mobile lifestyle have on third culture kids. These works deal with the psychological side of growing up among worlds, the good and the bad. They discuss the open-mindedness that TCKs seem to exhibit, and the issues they share when returning “home” to their passport country. However, that is where most of the research seems to stop—at returning home. It is almost as if what comes next is of little or no consequence, when in reality it is just as, if not more, important than all of the things that come before. All of the moves and changes, the issue of feeling out of place in your own country; all of these things work together to influence third culture kids in deciding what they want to do with the rest of their lives. It is important to examine what kind of careers TCKs are pursuing and how they have impacted the way our world works. After all, the number of third culture kids is not decreasing, especially if many TCKs want their children to grow up with the same lifestyle they did.

## **The Research**

To conduct my research for this thesis, I knew that I wanted to collect responses from TCKs. To do this, I created two surveys, one to collect demographic information of the participants and one to collect information on area of study and career choice (Document 1). I created my surveys on a web-based survey creation and analysis site, and had them distributed through tckresearch.com, a website that conducts and collects research and information on TCKs. My surveys were distributed in a newsletter to members of the site and within hours I had collected nearly 100 responses. Although my surveys were distributed to TCKs and ATCKs from all over the world, the majority of respondents are U.S.-based third culture kids, meaning that they identify the United States as their “home” culture. This is also true of most of the information in this thesis.

## **Demographic Information**

Of the 256 respondents to the “TCK Background Information” survey, 108 were born in the United States of America. Although not quite half, this is significant because from that information it is possible to infer that many of the respondents attended college or will attend college in the United States. Just under 89 percent of the U.S.-born TCKs had at least one parent who was also born in the United States. This is quite a bit more when compared to the total number of third culture kids polled, where approximately 65 percent were born in the same country as one or both of their parents, which could be an indicator of frequent trips back “home.”

One of the most surprising results came from the age range of participants. The selections available to survey takers were 18-22, 22-25, 26-30, or “Other (please specify).” To my surprise, most respondents (37.1 percent) were thirty years or older. The second most popular age group was 18-22 with 27 percent of the participants falling into that category. I had (for the most part inexplicably) assumed that most of the respondents would be in college or at least under thirty. I had geared my survey to those still in college and recent graduates because I thought that those were the age groups most likely to be most connected to their TCK roots. The TCK hype emerged in the eighties and nineties and most of the books published on third culture kids were published during this time. For this reason I had assumed that it would be the younger generation most likely to be involved in current TCK research and most aware of their identity as a third culture kid. However, the opposite of this seems to have been true. It is the thirty, forty, and fifty year olds who are the ones who primarily responded to my surveys. This further demonstrates that fact that TCKs and ATCKs are far from being a “new” type of person. Perhaps more importantly, it shows that the childhood and lifestyle that adult third culture kids had growing up still has a strong connection to them—that it is obviously not something that they have been able to forget but still impacts them. The oldest of my respondents was 64. This person would have been born even before the term third culture kid came into existence in the fifties, yet he or she still recognizes him or herself as one and is willing to participate in research of them.

When asked how many countries the participants had lived in, about a fifth had lived in three different countries. The majority of participants, 18.9 percent, lived in three to six different countries. However, one participant had lived in 14 different countries! Yet, even those who lived in fewer countries seemed to reply in a manner consistent with other respondents when

answering the question of, “What do people tell you when they ask where you are from?” Most people replied with some variation of “it depends on the person.” One respondent who lived in two different countries, the United States and Kenya, replied with, “I’m not really sure. Born in Florida, grew up in Kenya, Alabama for college, [North Carolina] and [Maryland] since then.” Others respond by citing their nationality. The TCK who lived in fourteen different countries replies with “I’m a Global Nomad,” or “I have an American passport,” when asked the Where Are You From Question. It is evident from these responses that being “from” somewhere is a subjective term for most TCKs. It does not necessarily match where you were born or what your heritage is, but instead where you have lived the longest or perhaps where you have felt most at home. It may even be in a country you have never lived in before if that is where your family is.

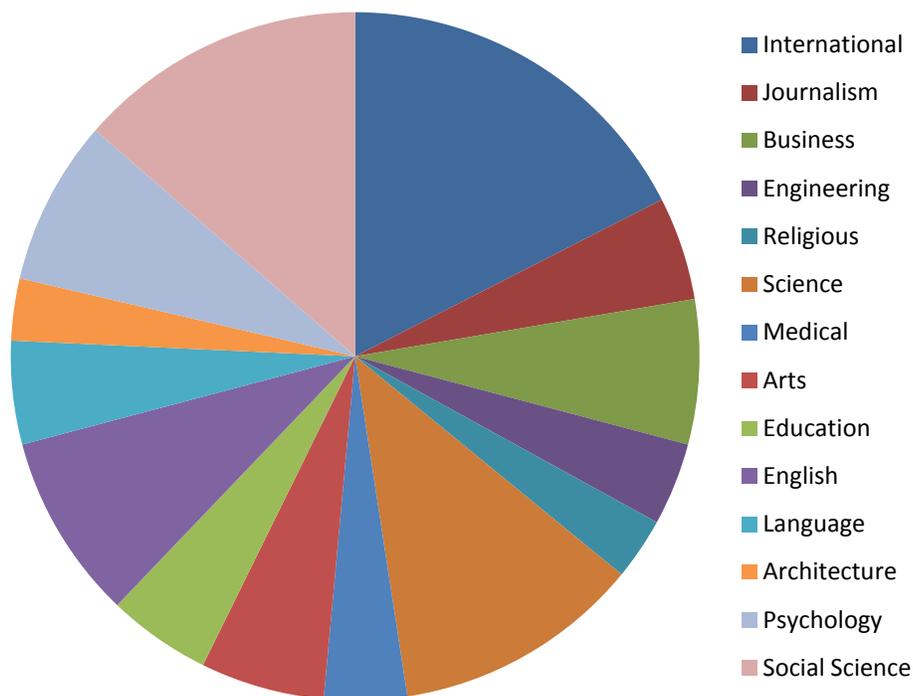
From the survey results it is obvious that the TCK lifestyle has lasting impacts on the individual even well into adulthood. It is still something they think about, as evidenced by the large population of adult third culture kids who participated in the surveys and by the fact that it is still difficult for most of them to answer the simple question of where they are from. How then does this identity play into the academic and career choices of TCKs?

### **Career Choice**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, of the 1,601,000 bachelor’s degrees conferred in 2008–2009 in the United States, the greatest numbers of degrees were earned in the fields of business (348,000); social sciences and history (169,000); health sciences (120,000); and education (102,000). Psychology is ranked number five in popularity in 2008–2009. According to my survey, Psychology ranked number one among participants accounting for over 8 percent of all majors. Anthropology was second at 5 percent and International

Relations third at 4.7 percent. Respondents majored in a variety of disciplines. However, in some cases there was some overlap and if we break it down by the overarching discipline (for example Finance and Marketing both fall under the Business umbrella), the trend is more visible. In this case International Studies and its related fields (area and cultural studies) account for 18 percent of the majors, Social Sciences with 14 percent, Science with 11.5 percent, and English Language and Literature with 9 percent (Figure 1). Although the disciplines are varied and are not all geared toward International Relations or Affairs, it does not mean that TCKs are not influenced by their childhoods. One reason for the variance has to do with the demographics of the respondents. As previously mentioned the ages of participants vary from 18 to 64, with most survey takers older than 30. Hence, majors in cultural studies that are offered today did not exist in the same way they do now. Moreover, International Relations itself is quite a young major in most colleges and universities.

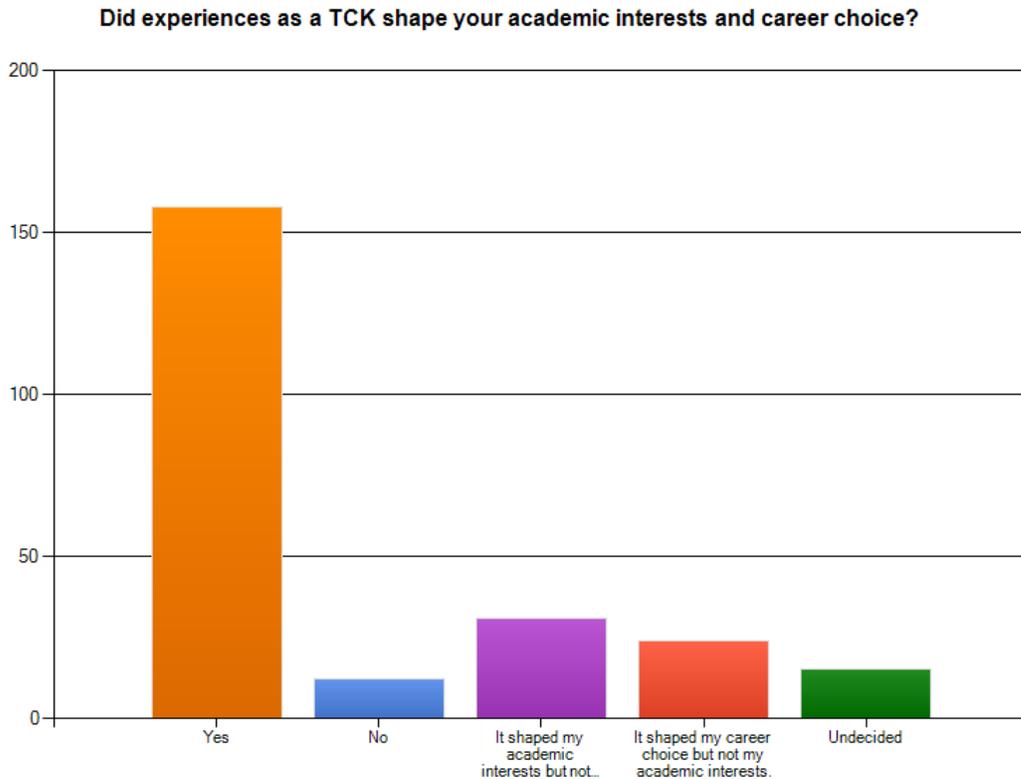
**(Figure 1) Majors:**



Almost half of all respondents also listed a second major in addition to their first one. International related fields of study dominated the second major, accounting for nearly a quarter of the responses. Foreign languages were also quite popular as a second major—accounting for 11 percent of responses. In terms of minors chosen, foreign languages and psychology accounted for most of the minors pursued, each accounting for 14.6 percent. Minors with an international component account for slightly less, 13.4 percent. When it came to a second minor—which only a few respondents listed—religious studies and languages each accounted for 15 percent. In addition to a place to write a first and second major and a first and second minor, I also included an option for “Other” for respondents to leave any additional or pertinent information about their academic discipline. Several respondents used this as an opportunity to list additional degrees that they received after their bachelors—a number had gone on to pursue master’s degrees. A few also pointed out the difficulty of the question. As one respondent put it, “Your questions demand [an] [A]merican schooling system.” I agree that it did. However, this was necessary in order to have some kind of uniformity of responses. Most of the survey takers did appear to have gone to an American college or university, but it was clear that several had not. One was unfamiliar with the term “college” itself. Although the term “major” and “minor” may not translate directly to another country’s higher education system, it does not affect the results because the point is to determine what ATCKs pursue academically regardless of the system or institution in which they are pursued.

Perhaps more important and more telling than the area of study itself is the perception third culture kids have of how their life experiences influenced their academic interests. Nearly 66 percent of participants agreed that their experiences as a third culture kid shaped their academic interests and career choice. Thirteen percent agreed to the extent that it shaped their academic interests but not their career choice and 10 percent said that it shaped their career choice but not their academic interests. Only 5 percent disagreed and said that their experience as a third culture kid shaped neither their academic interests nor their career choice (Figure 2). Therefore, even if a TCK does not choose an area of study in a multicultural field or in International Relations or aspire to work for the government or for an international company or non-profit, many of them still have interests and career choices shaped by their international and multicultural identity.

**(Figure 2) The TCK Experience:**



This is evident in the results of the survey—over a quarter of respondents chose international relations or foreign language related majors or minors. One respondent felt that his or her academic interests were shaped by his or her TCK experience but not his or her career choice. This respondent majored in World Arts and Culture with a concentration in Dance Studies. This individual now works as a freelance artist and there is no doubt that this ATCK's experiences growing up in Singapore and Indonesia influenced his or her decision to pursue a degree in World Arts and Culture as opposed to simply pursuing an art degree. In this case we can see that even if TCKs do not pursue careers in International Relations specifically, it is still something that they are aware of. A somewhat similar study is analyzed in *Strangers at Home*. This study shows that although most TCKs did not choose majors that were specifically international in content, they were still influenced by their overseas experiences. As that study states, “some who chose biology had been captivated by early exposure to African wildlife; historians and artists cited their exposure to European art and historical sites as influences,” (Useem & Cottrell, 29). Even those who go into the sciences, medical, or business fields may be doing so because of a desire to “help people they had known in less developed nations,” (Useem & Cottrell, 29). Still others may have chosen a specific major as a means to return overseas. In fact, over half of the respondents did move “back overseas” upon their graduation from college or planned to do so. In addition, 65 percent claimed that they if they had children they would want them to grow up with the same internationally mobile lifestyle that they did.

Foreign languages are an academic discipline that most third culture kids excel in simply because they tend to pick up at least some of the language of their host country. An interest in foreign language is evident in the academic disciplines responses listed in my surveys. Foreign

languages were popular choices as minors for a number of respondents (about 15 percent) and the languages ranged from French, Spanish, and German to Chinese and Japanese. A few respondents also pursued majors and minors in linguistics and translation. Following this trend, 70 percent of respondents wanted to or did work in a job, or used to work in a job that required multiple language skills. After all, a recent study conducted by Denizen Magazine shows that 85 percent of TCKs speak two or more languages (Nataria, Elaina, & Yiu).

Respondents in my survey were asked four similar questions regarding their career choice and preference. For all of the questions, the answers that respondents could choose from were the same. They could choose “Yes, I am currently employed” by the job described in the question, “Yes, I used to be employed” by the job described in the question, “No, I have never been employed” by the job described in the question, or “No, but I hope to be.” The first question asked participants if they currently are employed or have ever been employed by a news or broadcasting agency. The overwhelming answer was no—84.6 percent replied that they have never been employed by a news or broadcasting agency, and only 7.5 percent expressed the desire to be hired by one. A similar response was elicited from the question of whether respondents were currently employed or had ever been employed by a governmental organization. Sixty-eight percent replied that they had never been employed by a governmental organization but 31 percent either had been employed by one, was currently employed by one, or wanted to be employed by one. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were more popular than careers in journalism or government—58 percent had been involved with or wanted to be involved with an NGO.

From this information it is clear that most ATCKs prefer to pursue careers that require multiple language skills and are not tied to the government. One main reason for this is likely

because most TCKs may not feel a strong connection to the land they were born in and may not feel a desire to work for a government that they feel they are not connected to. Third culture kids are also very aware of international events and global affairs and many may not agree with the foreign diplomacy of their home country or may simply feel that they lack adequate knowledge of the home country to participate in government.

There is a specific reason for choosing to include the career choices that I included in my surveys. I thought that these would be especially telling of how involved the average TCK is in terms of pursuing professional involvement with other countries. Of course, almost any career can be one that results in a move overseas. Doctors, teachers, businessmen, and engineers are some careers that are more mobile than others. However, the careers I chose specifically related to a stronger attachment and involvement in International Relations and World Affairs.

Journalists, employees of governmental organizations, and people working for NGOs are all jobs that focus more on the interaction between nations than other highly mobile positions would.

For example, journalists may cover international news stories or write articles on current global events. Those employed by a governmental organization could work for the State Department or for the National Security Administration. People employed by nongovernmental organizations could be working for the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, or similar organizations. These careers have a strong emphasis on either foreign aid or on diplomacy.

As evidenced by both my study and the one published in *Strangers at Home*, it can be determined that most adult third culture kids do not choose to become involved with governmental organizations. There is no doubt that most TCKs and global nomads would be beneficial to not only policy makers, but also to diplomatic relations in general. Their ability to relate to other cultures and their understanding of different countries is what makes many TCKs

choose to not get involved with politics or diplomacy. It is perhaps ironic in the sense that most third culture kids have a lifestyle that is a direct result of their parents' involvement as missionaries, army personnel, or diplomats; and yet it is this same reason that influences them to not pursue these types of careers. As Useem and Cottrell write, "Although they may have been influenced by their parents' work overseas, they generally have not followed in their parents' footsteps," (Useem & Cottrell, 30). According to this same study, over 80 percent of third culture kids become professionals, executives, or managers.

"One won't find many ATCKs in large corporations or government. The small number in this sample who have government jobs are in the Foreign Service or AID, or in branches such as the Bureau of Wildlife and Fisheries or the national parks... Only a small percentage of these respondents, for example, have chosen careers in the military or as missionaries." (Useem & Cottrell, 30)

For the most part, ATCKs deliberately choose not to pursue careers related to those of their parents. However, most do desire to return overseas and to remain in a mobile lifestyle. Indirectly ATCKs do influence international relations. Many pursue jobs that will take them back overseas and most want their children to have the same lifestyle that they did when they were growing up. When asked if they would or if they did move "back overseas" after college only 18 percent said that they would not or did not—the majority (52.1 percent) of respondents expressed a desire to continue their international moves. One respondent joined the Peace Corps to serve overseas for two years and also "considered teaching at International Schools." Another participant claimed that he or she planned on moving abroad again as soon as possible. Even

those who had jobs that did not allow them to move overseas expressed a desire to return abroad. As one ATCK said, “My field of study [and] my career is mainly found here in the [United States], but I would love to move back overseas.” Another ATCK also wanted to return overseas but was unable to do so. Nonetheless, they acknowledged that their childhood has impacted them to this day. One particular ATCK used their “overseas experience to build a successful [U.S.] based business.”

Although third culture kids have the qualities that would make them perfect diplomats and ambassadors, most do not pursue careers in these areas. Yet, this does not mean that they do not contribute to the fields of International Relations because in their own ways they do. Those that become teachers may teach at schools abroad. Others may do volunteer or aid work. For TCKs and ATCKs the emphasis is in helping and not in professional mediating. Many do not feel strong ties to any one specific country, or, if they do, it is most likely to a country where they are considered a foreigner and could not participate in the government even if they wanted to. Third culture kids see the world as their home and feel an obligation to work for a better “it” and not for a specific country. Almost 80 percent of respondents said that they either wanted to work in a job that requires extensive travel or they did work in one. This indicates that even when a TCK becomes an ATCK, most will still have the desire to go to new places. Most third culture kids maintain their desire to learn and experience new and different things. Yet sometimes it is this desire to travel and ability to adapt to different cultures than can actually be seen as a detriment in the field of International Relations.

## **The American Reach**

Most third culture kids grow up with the lifestyle they do as a direct result of their parents' jobs. Some may be the children of diplomats, others of missionaries, teachers, or professionals. Many TCKs will live in "wealthy" or "western" areas of foreign cities and attend American or International Schools. This is certainly not true for all TCKs, but one cannot deny the fact that it is true for the majority. Most of these kids will grow up with "many advantages of wealth without actually having it," (Addleton, 164). In other words, many are wealthy compared to the local population and have certain travel advantages that they would not have had access to had they not been living abroad. Many TCKs are put in a unique position when living abroad—they will witness extreme poverty every day but will most of the time live above it. TCKs deal with this experience in different ways; some ignore it, others block it out entirely, some try to help, and others cannot escape the feeling of guilt. Clare Kittredge deftly describes this experience in "Growing Up Global,"

"There is nothing quite like the feeling of being whisked about in an embassy car and seeing tiny hands the size of your own trying to reach through the window at a stop light, or trying to finish everything on your plate when ten pairs of hungry eyes are watching."  
(Kittredge, 12)

Another TCK describes a similar experience, "Only because people closed one eye could I do it...It was like being a traveler between two dimensions," (Smith, 11). Obviously, most TCKs are impacted by what they experience overseas, the good and the bad; and it is important to remember that it is not all good. Living abroad is not simply like a permanent vacation.

Many TCKs learn at a young age how real war and poverty are—that they are not just some abstract concept. What some children in America may see on the news, another American may see in real life. Many TCKs are shocked when they arrive back home and see the surplus that their country has. Yet, the way many TCKs see their peers back home is the same way that TCKs are viewed when abroad. This view of the wealthy American can cause tension between the TCK and his or her family and citizens of the host country—especially if one of the few Americans citizens of a specific area are exposed to are members of the military or missionaries.

We in America are certainly no stranger to this trend. In fact we perpetuate many stereotypes that the average American may hold as true. It is all too common for the term “Muslim” to be considered synonymous with “terrorist” or “Mexican” with “illegal.” Similarly, it is just as easy abroad for Americans and other foreigners to be viewed in a stereotypical fashion because of the actions of a small minority. In addition to personal beliefs, political actions and diplomatic ties between countries place additional lenses on the TCK. There are countries where Americans are not popular and thus “Western” TCKs in these countries can cause anger or resentment—even if their parents are not diplomats, missionaries, or part of the army.

The presence of Americans or Europeans in some countries may reinstate a fear or serve as a reminder of imperialism and histories that cannot be forgotten. Often, children living abroad do not notice these connections, and some may even deny their utopian view of childhood when they are adults. My father spent several years living in Japan when he was a child. He lived there from 1967-1971, just sixteen short years after the atomic bombs were dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I asked him once how the Japanese in his town felt about him living there as not only an American but also as member of a military family. He replied, “Everyone

was fine with it, the people were very friendly. We had a Japanese maid and she loved us.” Perhaps my father was right and no one really did care. However, one has to wonder how relationships like the one between my father’s family and their maid affect politics and diplomacy. There is no doubt that the maid in question did have a good relationship with my father and his family, but one does wonder what kind of tensions, if any, lay deeper. After all, she was working as a domestic servant to people who were living in her country and who were from the very nation that dropped two devastating bombs on Japan not two decades before.

Even seemingly innocent American assistance made to countries in the form of foreign aid carry some weight. Jonathan Addleton remembers the foreign aid that he would see in Pakistan as a child of a missionary family. He recounts how his view of that same aid changed over time,

“By the early 1960s, most of the coal-fired steam engines inherited from the British Raj on the main railway lines were being replaced by new General Electric diesel engines, painted green and bearing a red, white, and blue emblem centered around two clasped hands—the familiar sign of American aid, gifts to the people of Pakistan from the people of America. When my turn came and I finally had the opportunity to ride in the engine cabin, I pulled the chain that activated the whistle with a special pride and satisfaction, as if I too had been partly responsible for the donation. Later, as an adult, I came across another, more cynical version of the familiar American aid sign in a popular Pakistani publication, a cartoon depicting a hand squeeze rather than a hand shake—an aggressive white hand grasping a limp brown hand tightly, hard enough to draw blood.” (Addleton, 62)

As is evident in this passage from Addleton's memoir, as a child he felt pride in seeing the new trains that America had donated to his friends in Pakistan. It was not until he was older that he began to understand that perhaps the donation was not as free as it seemed and, more importantly, that Pakistanis were not as thrilled with the aid as he thought they were. The American influence can be felt and seen in most parts of the world. From food choices, to clothing brands, to forms of entertainment such as music, television, and movies, America is, in a sense, everywhere. It is not that globalization *per se* is the problem or an immediate cause for discomfort; it is more the idea that the United States can and does have such a strong reach. Addleton also mentions the American films that were offered for entertainment and the reassurance that came with them that "though a minority in Pakistan, we still belonged to a larger and more powerful civilization that commanded attention and displayed its largesse in even the farthest reaches of the globe," (Addleton, 67). Therefore, it is the exertion of power, actual or perceived, that can result in misperceptions between countries. This is also one of the reasons that so few TCKs decide to pursue careers with the government or travel abroad as missionaries—they understand these feelings and wish instead to either quell them through service or aid in fields such as education and medicine, or they choose to pursue something completely unrelated.

### **Cultural Awareness**

Perhaps one of the most important points to come of the survey and this research is the fact that 93 percent of respondents claimed that they found themselves to be more open to other cultures and customs than people who have lived in a single country. As one participant noted,

he or she was “[More] open and in need of them [other cultures].” And here, arguably, is the crux of the argument and a sentiment that was echoed throughout the survey; a need of new faces and places, the desire for a different culture. Another TCK answered the question of whether he or she was more open to other cultures and customs replied with “I am more open to all cultures except my original one—Canadian culture bores me.” Many TCKs have a love-hate relationship with their birth country, especially those who are from the same country as their parents. Most of these TCKs visit their birth country because it is where their parents call home. TCKs have a habit of longing for the place they are not. When they return to their birth country they may become dissatisfied with it because it is not what they had envisioned, but when they are away they miss certain aspects of it. Amongst TCKs there is also a loss of patriotism to one specific country. The inability to identify more with one country than another is another reason why TCKs choose not to pursue a career in government or military.

It is indeed interesting that student programs and internships that are used by the government to promote cultural awareness in order to create effective diplomats and ambassadors, strive to emulate, in part, the lifestyle of a TCK. For example, State Department internships may have interns working in America, but they also have many opportunities in other countries. Hiring preference for governmental agency jobs is often given to candidates who have international experience or foreign language skills. The reason is simple and obvious: governments know that experiences with other countries and cultures is an important asset for those who are going to be involved in International Relations. Diplomats who are well informed about other countries and who are familiar with their traditions, laws, and ideals are more likely able to build a strong diplomatic relationship between that country and their own. The Fulbright Program is an example of such an opportunity. If accepted, students will participate in an

exchange program, completing part of their education in a different country. Fulbrighters then return home and are encouraged to “bring what they have learned through this cultural exchange home and teach others about the cultures they have experienced.” The majority of TCKs play similar roles during repatriation and during their subsequent moves later in life.

## **Conclusion**

Third culture kids grow up in a globally nomadic lifestyle that allow them to gain an education that most are unable to have. They learn by doing and living. Most of them will learn to speak another language. Through frequent moves and travel, TCKs learn much about the world and about other countries and cultures, although at the same time this means they may miss out on learning about their own countries, heritages, and even language. As we have seen, education for TCKs is a complex issue, especially when most TCKs will be attending a school with either an American or British curriculum. This not only presents challenges to the TCKs’ identity with a specific country, it also makes it difficult for some TCKs to return “home” to attend college or university—not only because of logistical issues but because of the course material covered, and consequently, not covered.

Many TCKs have trouble settling down while in college. Many study abroad and some even transfer schools. It is this desire for high mobility that is perhaps most influential in the career choices of TCKs. As we have seen in my study as well as others, third culture kids are not likely to follow in their parents’ footsteps in terms of career choice. They may not become diplomats, missionaries, or officers in the army but they do tend to choose careers and academic areas of study that are likely to lead them abroad once more. In addition (or perhaps because of this) TCKs tend to pursue an advanced degree. Most TCKs have academic majors that are

international in character (International Relations, Area Studies, and Political Science to name a few) and many pursue degrees in education or medical fields—both of which are careers that could take the TCK abroad relatively easily. Some wish to have a highly mobile career because it is simply a way of life they are used to. Others want to return abroad to help as teachers or doctors. Each individual's preference and motivation for returning abroad may be different, but it is evident that a move “back overseas” is one that most TCKs desire. Third culture kids are less likely to pursue careers in government or military because many of them simply do not feel a strong connection to their birth country.

Third culture kids truly are global citizens. They can feel at home anywhere and because of that, nowhere. TCKs may not be directly involved with government or in the field of International Relations as diplomats, but they certainly do have an impact on relations between nations. They are mediators and representatives of other countries and cultures even if, quite frankly, they do not want to be. Even though they may not be “from” the countries they grew up in, they still develop an identity with each individual culture, picking up habits, customs, and ideals. At the same time, they also leave their own marks on the places they live. While adults are able to appreciate a culture from a comfortable “us versus them” mentality when abroad, most children do not have to separate people in this way, especially when they are living overseas and being raised in a different culture. It is the deep immersion in other countries and cultures that sets TCKs apart from the vacationer or common traveler. For most TCKs there is no “right” or “wrong” culture.

TCKs can have both positive and negative impacts while living abroad which is often either related to the careers of their parents or simply through their presence as representations of their home country. However, it is evident that third culture kids are an overall positive

influence on global relations. As Hon Lam and Jan Selmer state in their article, “Are former “third-culture kids” the ideal business expatriates?” there are many benefits that TCKs may bring to the workplace that other employees do not. Often, prior to sending a new manager to a post overseas, a company will offer cross-cultural training seminars or courses in an attempt to prepare the employee for life abroad and to ensure cultural awareness and respect. However, there is no real way to determine whether or not these ideas and lessons will be put into practice. For the third culture kid, it is not as difficult to adapt to living abroad or in other cultures simply because they have done it before. By hiring former TCKs, companies and businesses, especially ones with international branches, would benefit from the knowledge that TCKs would bring to the workplace. By assigning TCKs to overseas posts and assignments, companies would be able to cut down on cross-cultural training programs and would have the benefit of hiring a uniquely culturally aware individual. Lam and Selmer argue that “former TCKs may be close to the ideal business expatriates” (Lam & Selmer, 119) because of their exposure to other countries prior to adulthood, “Since these cross-cultural experiences may have become a permanent part of their frames of reference developed from a young age, adult, former TCKs could be able to make use of them appropriately during cultural encounters,” (Lam & Selmer, 119). The same can be argued for other careers with international components as well.

“Where are you from?” is a question that is all too common in college. It is thrown about haphazardly more out of formality than genuine interest—right after “What’s your major?” If people needle their way into my life story many cannot understand how I could stand to live my life the way I did, moving every three to five years. I just smile and shrug my shoulders all the while thinking, *How could you stand to live in the same house since you were born?* For both of us the answer is the same: we never knew anything different. The life of a TCK is best described

by TCKs themselves. I will conclude with some of the comments that my survey participants left for me about what being a third culture kid means to them.

“From the years of 11 to 19, I spent almost 7 years living in Africa. It was wonderful!”

“I love being a TCK.”

“It is one of the best things that can happen to a kid!”

“[I] would not have wanted to grow up any other way. [I] have learned more from other cultures this way than if [I had] read a book.”

“Growing up in another country has enriched my life in more ways than I can count! What a blessing!”

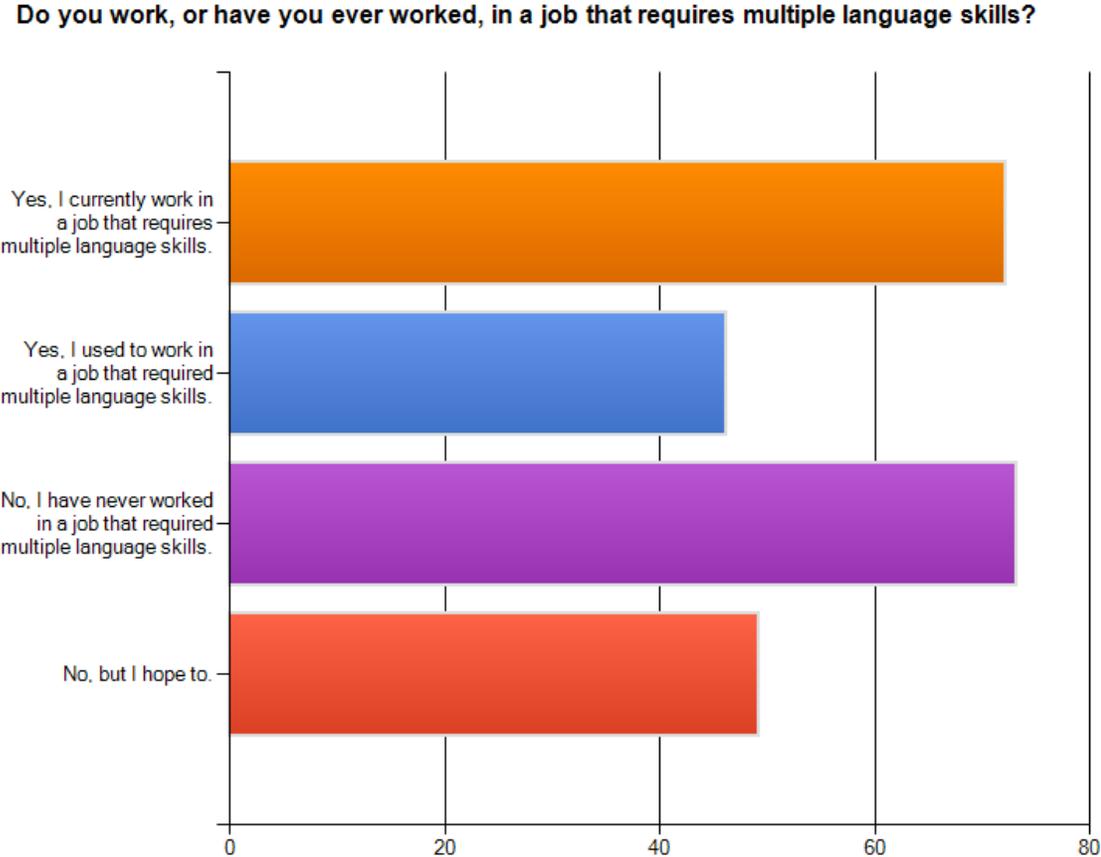
“[We] never truly feel home anywhere.”

“I have a strong global identify and a fairly strong regional identity (European) but a weak national identity with any nation. I feel at home almost anywhere.”

Third culture kids are a unique group of individuals who have definite positive impacts on relationships between countries. Diplomacy is not only for Presidents, diplomats, and ambassadors; it exists in the interaction of citizens and communities as well. Most TCKs love

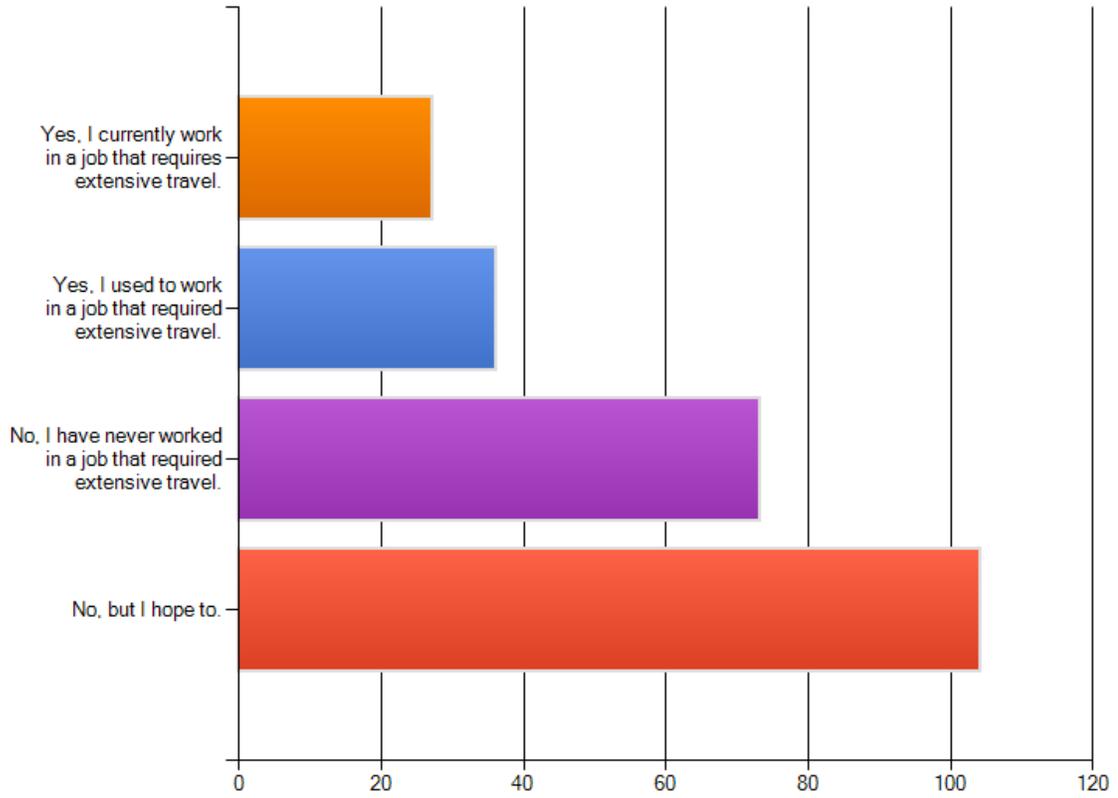
the lifestyle that they were able to have growing up and wish to continue the trend with their own children. Organizations, companies, and institutions would make a smart decision in hiring TCKs as they bring a global clarity and understanding that most people are unable to achieve even as companies implement mandatory cross-cultural training programs for overseas jobs and assignments. There is no doubt that the TCK community will continue to grow and hopefully in the future we will see more of their knowledge and experience implemented not only in policy making but also in business decisions and other areas.

**(Figure 3) Career Choices**



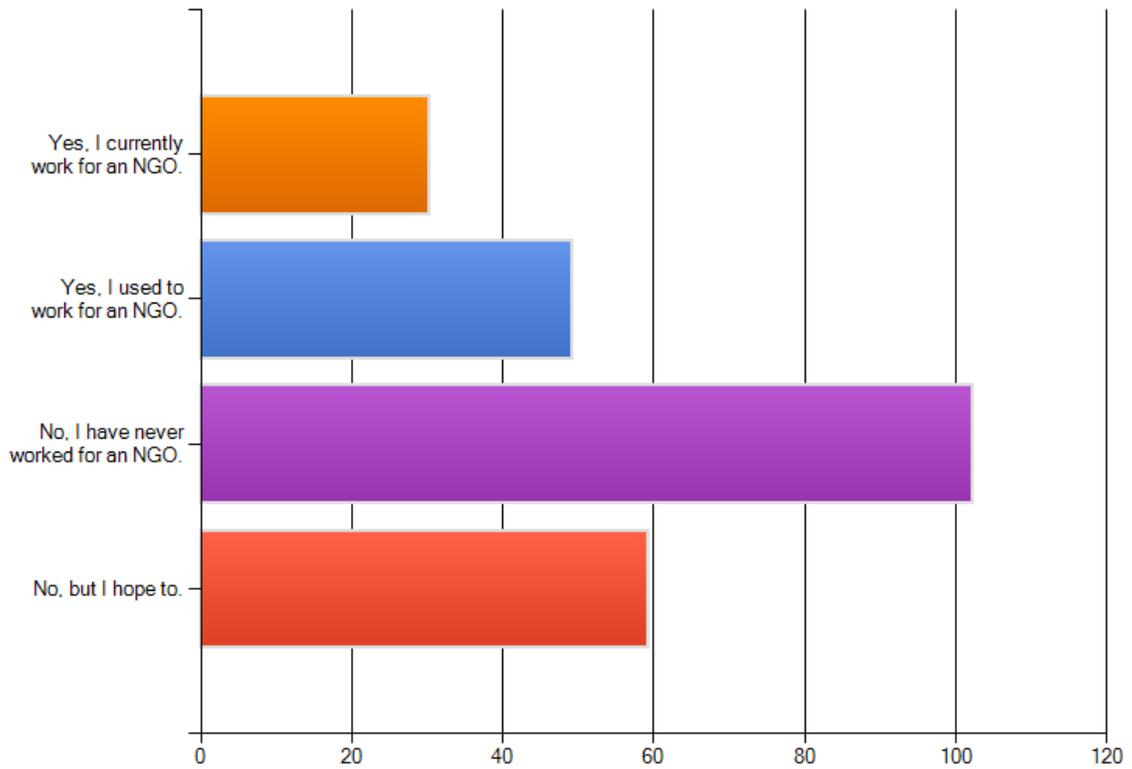
*The majority (69.6 percent) of participants indicated interest or prior experience in a job that requires multiple language skills.*

**Do you work, or have you ever worked, in a job that requires extensive travel?**



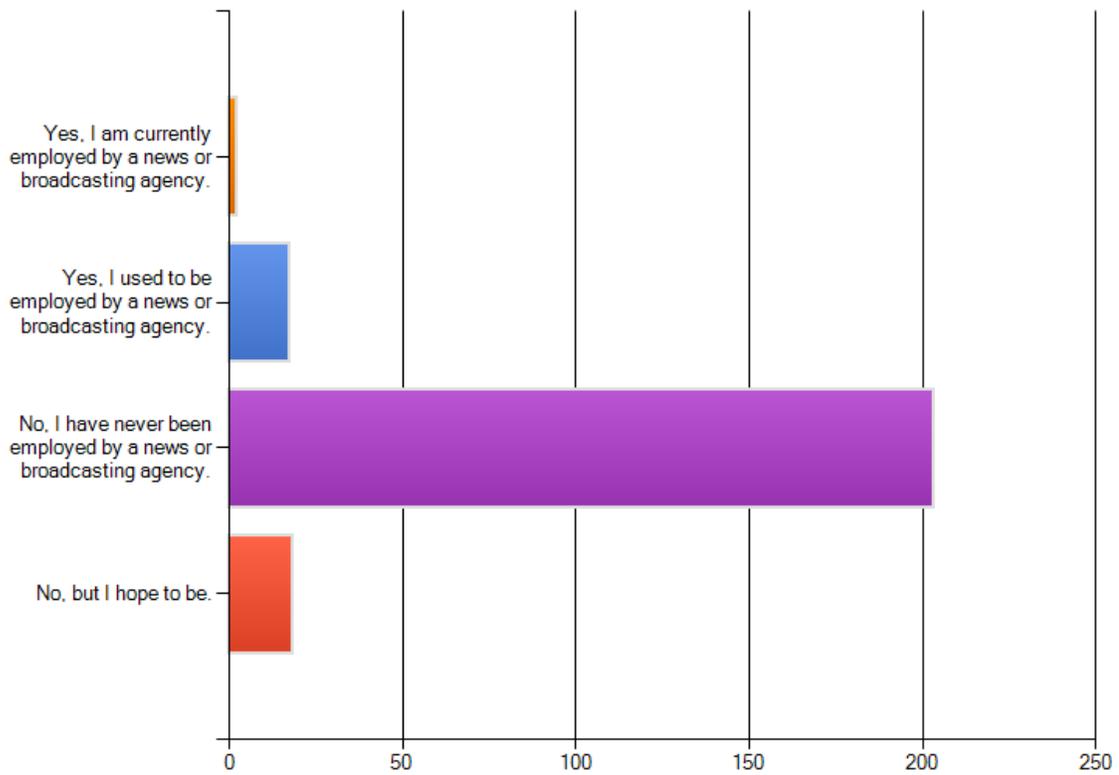
*Although only 26.3 percent of respondents have worked or currently work in a job that requires extensive travel, 43.3 percent expressed desire to do so in the future.*

**Do you currently work, or have you ever worked, for a non-governmental organization (NGO)?**



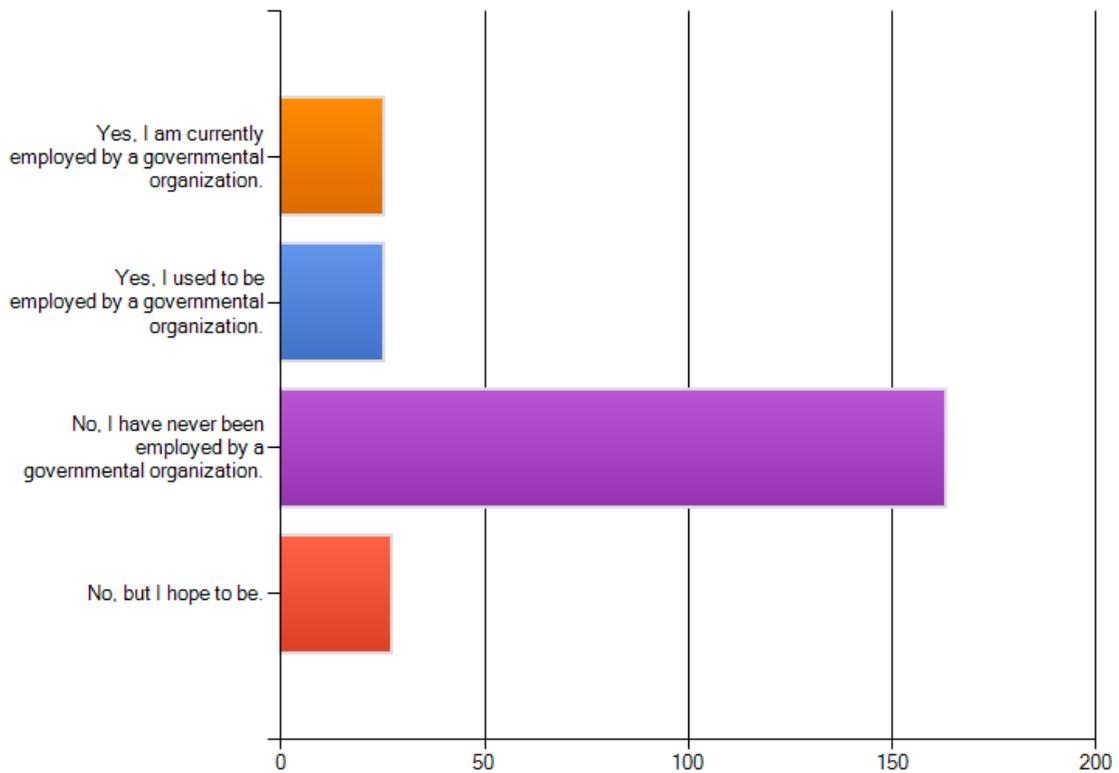
*Non-governmental organizations were more popular career choices than governmental agencies or news and broadcasting corporations. Over half (57.5 percent) of the TCKs polled expressed desire in working for an NGO.*

**Are you currently employed, or have you ever been employed, by a news or broadcasting agency (NBC, New York Times, etc...)?**



*Almost 92 percent of respondents have never been employed by a news or broadcasting agency and of that number, only 7.5 percent hope to be.*

**Are you currently employed, or have you ever been employed, by a governmental organization  
(State Department, FBI, etc...)?**



*Governmental organizations and agencies were more popular than news and broadcasting agency—but only slightly. Of those who participated, 79.2 percent have never been employed by a governmental organization and only 11.3 percent hoped to be sometime in the future.*

## **(Document 1) Survey Questions**

### **Survey 1:**

1. How old are you?
  - a. 18-22
  - b. 22-26
  - c. 26-30
  - d. *Other (please specify):*
  
2. Where were you BORN?  
*Country:*
  
3. Where you born in the same COUNTRY as one or both of your parents?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
4. What do you tell people when they ask where you are from?  
*Free response:*
  
5. How many different COUNTRIES have you lived in?
  - a. 1
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
  - d. 4
  - e. 5
  - f. 6
  - g. 7
  - h. 8
  - i. 9
  - j. 10+
  
6. Please list the COUNTRIES you have lived in. If needed, please list additional countries in the comments section at the end of the survey.  
*Country 1:*  
*Country 2:*  
*Country 3:*  
*Country 4:*  
*Country 5:*  
*Country 6:*  
*Country 7:*  
*Country 8:*  
*Country 9:*  
*Country 10:*

7. Please select your classification:
  - a. Full-time student
  - b. Full-time employee
  - c. Both
  - d. *Other classification:*
  
8. Which of the following terms are you familiar with? You may select multiple.
  - a. Third culture kid (TCK)
  - b. Global nomad
  - c. Missionary kid (MK)
  - d. Military brat
  - e. Expat brat
  - f. None of the above
  - g. *Other term(s):*
  
9. Do you consider yourself, or would you allow yourself to be described by any of the following terms?
  - a. Third culture kid (TCK)
  - b. Global nomad
  - c. Missionary kid (MK)
  - d. Military brat
  - e. Expat brat
  - f. None of the above
  - g. *Other term(s):*
  
10. Use the comment box below to add any additional information.  
*Free response:*

## **Survey 2:**

1. What is/was your area of study in college?  
*Major 1:*  
*Major 2:*  
*Minor 1:*  
*Minor 2:*  
*Other:*
  
2. Are you currently employed, or have you ever been employed, by a governmental organization (State Department, FBI, etc...)?
  - a. Yes, I am currently employed by a governmental organization.
  - b. Yes, I used to be employed by a governmental organization.
  - c. No, I have never been employed by a governmental organization.
  - d. No, but I hope to be.

3. Are you currently employed, or have you ever been employed, by a news or broadcasting agency (NBC, New York Times, etc...)
  - a. Yes, I am currently employed by a news or broadcasting agency.
  - b. Yes, I used to be employed by a news or broadcasting agency.
  - c. No, I have never been employed by a news or broadcasting agency.
  - d. No, but I hope to be.
  
4. Do you currently work, or have you ever worked, for a non-governmental organization (NGO)?
  - a. Yes, I currently work for an NGO.
  - b. Yes, I used to work for an NGO.
  - c. No, I have never worked for an NGO.
  - d. No, but I hope to.
  
5. If you have graduated from college, did you move “back overseas”?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. No, but I plan to.
  - d. No, and I do not plan to.
  - e. I have not graduated from college yet.
  - f. *Other:*
  
6. Do you work, or have you ever worked, in a job that requires extensive travel?
  - a. Yes, I currently work in a job that requires extensive travel.
  - b. Yes, I used to work in a job that required extensive travel.
  - c. No, I have never worked in a job that required extensive travel.
  - d. No, but I hope to.
  
7. Do you work, or have you ever worked, in a job that requires multiple language skills?
  - a. Yes, I currently work in a job that requires multiple language skills.
  - b. Yes, I used to work in a job that required multiple language skills.
  - c. No, I have never worked in a job that required multiple language skills.
  - d. No, but I hope to.
  
8. Do you/would you want your children to grow up with the same lifestyle as you?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Undecided
  
9. Did experiences as a TCK shape your academic interests and career choice?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. It shaped my academic interests but not my career choice.
  - d. It shaped my career choice but not my academic interests.
  - e. Undecided

10. As a TCK, do you find yourself to be more open to other cultures and customs or less open to other cultures and customs?
- a. More open
  - b. Less open
  - c. Neither
  - d. Undecided
  - e. *Other:*

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