

## Expanding Cultural Competency for Clinicians Encountering Third Culture Kids (TCKs)



### □ ***Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest***

- Employed by Center for Change
- No other conflicts of interest identified

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## Learning Objectives

- Expand cultural sensitivity, understanding and competence related to identifying and working with third culture kids (TCKs)
- Learn to identify trauma that may be present in culturally diverse patient populations specifically with TCKs.
- Identify strategies we, as providers and as organizations, can employ to increase effective, trauma-informed, culturally responsive treatment.

“ TCKs are *individuals who have lived outside their passport country during developmental years* ”

### invisible minorities

PolVan Cultural Identity Model

Foreigner  
Look *different*  
Think *different*

Hidden  
Immigrant  
Look similarly  
think different

Adopted  
Look different  
Think similarly

Mirror  
Look similarly  
Think similarly

## Who might identify with a Complex, Minority or non-visual identity?

- ❖ Individuals with minority religious affiliations or cultural backgrounds
- ❖ Individuals with minority sexual and or gender identities
- ❖ Individuals with less visible disabilities
- ❖ Veterans
- ❖ International adoptees
- ❖ **Third Culture Kids** or Individuals/ TCKs, TCIs /Cross Cultural Kids (CCKs)/ Bi-Cultural Individuals, global nomads
- ❖ Any individual with multiple identities

“ A third culture kid is a person who has spent a significant part of her or his developmental years outside the parent's culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background. ”

-David Pollock

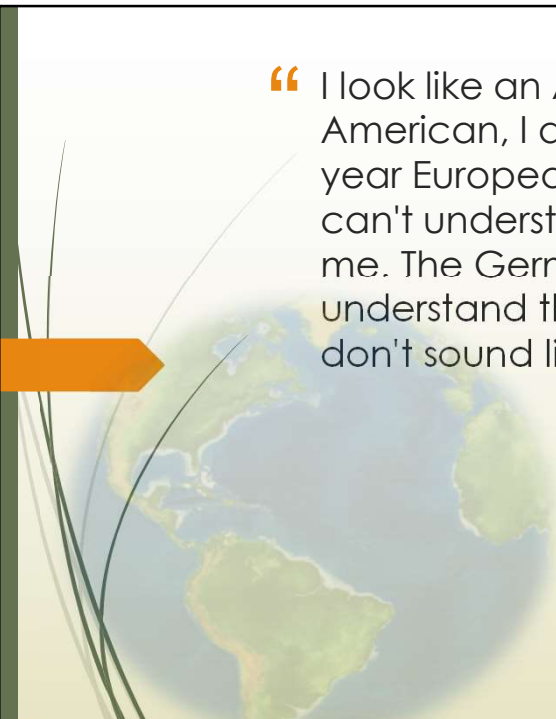
Individuals who have lived outside their passport country during developmental years

## Why a training and focus on TCKs?

- Expatriate (expat) numbers continue to increase as globalization increases; between 7 and 9 million Americans are living abroad either temporarily or permanently and about 4.5 million children in English language schools abroad\*
- Mental health treatment is increasingly accessed by internationally mobile individuals and families
- Increased understanding of this population supports us as providers in multicultural sensitivity, competence, intelligence and effective practice
- Many families return home at some point or teens attend college in the United States where they will then seek services
- As a provider YOU may decide to work overseas in a TCK rich environment
- As a provider you may find some of these conceptualizations around loss and grief useful with a range of patients

## TCKs/Third Culture Kids

- Also referred to as cultural hybrids, cultural chameleons, cross culture kids (CCKs) global nomads
  - ❖ Most Common Specific Groups: Military, Nonmilitary government/state department/ healthcare, community development, aid, education, business, religious (missionary kids: MKs)
  - ❖ Around 250 thousand minors with American citizenship are currently living/studying abroad, some with multiple citizenships
  - ❖ The United States has its own cultural diversity within its borders
  - ❖ Globalization and cultural complexity continues to expand



“ I look like an American, I sound like an American, I am a Black American with a 15 year European experience since I was 9. Blacks can't understand me, Whites can't understand me. The Germans are wondering how I understand them and the British are saying you ” don't sound like us...

-Unique

## *The TCK dilemma*



### *TCK Histories*

- **Military**
  - Army BRATs (British Regiment Attached Traveler)
  - Often move regularly based on 2-4 year assignments
  - Generally live on or near foreign military bases
  - Children may share similar experiences with frequent moves nationally even if they never relocate overseas
- **Business** (oil, tobacco, technology, import/export)
  - “business kid”
  - More likely to live in multiple countries
  - Typically have high interaction with host countries but not always
  - High host country interaction may be narrow or broad
  - May or may not live a privileged lifestyle

## TCK Histories cont...

- **Nonmilitary Government/Healthcare/Education** (embassy, community development, aid, international universities, teaching)
  - Foreign service brats or “diplomat kids”, embassy families, DEA, Edkids, NGOs
  - Often 2-4 year term commitments with structured supports but some long term overseas commitments as well
- **Religious**
  - Children of missionaries (MKs)
  - typically spend the most time overseas -85% of MKs spend more than 10 years in foreign countries
  - Of all TCKs, MKs generally have the most interaction with local communities and the least interaction with people from their passport country and again, interaction may be narrow or broad

“ ...I'm from Ottawa, Canada. Actually that's a lie, but that's the answer I give to acquaintances....My father is a half-French and half-Vietnamese peacekeeper and my mother is Ethiopian...And where do I belong? I'm not French, Vietnamese, Ethiopian or Canadian...”

-Brice Royer

*The TCK dilemma*

“ When I’m in Singapore, I say I’m from Chicago/Seattle and when I’m in America I say I’m from Singapore. When I would meet a “true blue” Singaporean in college, I would get nervous because then I would have to explain my life story and why I had an American accent and couldn’t speak Singlish – why I wasn’t “truly Singaporean”.

-Abi

## *The TCK dilemma*

“ A third culture kid is a person who has spent a significant part of her or his developmental years outside the parent’s culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK’s life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background.

-David Pollock

Individuals who have lived outside their passport country during developmental years



## TCKs/Third Culture Kids- Commonalities

- 90% report feeling "out of sync" with their passport country peers
- 90% report feeling as if they understand other cultures/peoples better than the average American
- Most report feeling connected deeply to their host countries... all of them and have the expectation of returning to their "home" country
- Most have grown up with the cultural expectation of higher education. Almost 90% attain college degrees (based on 2009 data) 45% of TCKs report attending 3 universities before earning a degree
- Twenty-nine percent of TCKs report having received an advanced degree

## TCKs/Third Culture Kids- Commonalities

- Tend to be fluent in two or more languages
- Tend to be well traveled and comfortable with a cross cultural lifestyle
- Lack a sense of "where home is" but also report feeling nationalistic
- Are at higher risk for depression and suicide than peers\*
- Often used to frequent moves, school changes, leaving homes, friends and pets, frequent deployments, long parental absences
- Are generally excellent at following cultural cues, "blending in" and disappearing into the wood work

## Recognizing TCKs

- Are excellent at calculating time differences and money conversions
- Have relationship connections that are not physically present
- Can struggle with making and keeping deep relationships
- Get nervous whenever a form indicates to enter a "permanent address." (Many address forms only offer US style address formatting)
- Have a life story uses the phrase "then we moved to..." 5 or 6 ...or 12 times

## Recognizing TCKs

- May experience culture shock upon returning "home"
- Often have a love-hate relationship with the question "Where are you from?"
- Can feel uncomfortable being in the ethnic majority
- Don't consider the USA or anywhere "home", may call it "passport country."
- Have additional complex identities as well
- Have school memories that include days when school was canceled due to monsoons, riots, demonstrations or bomb threats
- May NOT have memories or knowledge of home country historical events and social norms

## Commonly Expressed Benefits of having a TCK experience

- **Expanded World View**
  - Cross cultural competency
  - High cultural intelligence
  - Large numbers of varied relationships
- **Learned adaptability**
  - Travel
  - Relationships
  - Experiences
- **Comfort with being different and appreciate multiple identities**
- **Ability to blend in**
- **Global education**



## TCKs/Third Culture Kids- Within Group Differences

- May desire to settle down **or** stay on the move
- May **or** may not identify with their "passport country"
- May view their experiences as positive **or** negative **or** both
- May easily adapt everywhere **or** struggle to adapt anywhere
- May **or** may not have had extensive exposure/education/experimentation related to drugs and alcohol
- May rely on significant local family/social support **or** be highly independent (by necessity or choice)
- May **or** (more likely) may not have a good understanding of American culture and history



“

*The issue is that transition always involves loss, no matter how good the next phase will be. Loss always engenders grief and the greater you have loved a situation or place or people, the greater the grief.*”

-Ruth Van Reken

## Common Risk Factors

- **Identity Crises** occur frequently- especially when a TCK lives abroad extensively before they have completed the developmental task of identity formation or during the adolescent development years when identity is solidified psychologically.
- Difficulties often emerge when TCKs are expected to “repatriate”
- Culture shock during repatriation can be unexpected by the individual and/or the family
- Cultural rootlessness/cultural homelessness can persist

## Common Risk Factors Cont...

- Trouble fitting in/**Adjustment Struggles**
  - Quick to jump into new relationships but also to bail
  - Approach any new relationship with caution
- Difficulty engaging locally in the passport country due to reticence, hostility, arrogance, or feelings of disloyalty
- **Uneven Maturation/Asynchronous Development/Prolonged Adolescence**

## Considerations related to TCK Loss


- Loss and separation (often multiplied) can lead to unresolved grief
- **Grief** can be **ambiguous**, not always equally shared by family members and can go unaddressed from move to move
- Grief may be existential focusing on loss of safety, loss of trust, loss of personal identity\*
- **Traumas** can be **a-typical** and **disenfranchised** related to abrupt and or high threat transitions- evacuations, war zones, natural disasters, political instability
- Repeated **broken attachments** can be seen as "normal" in highly mobile communities

## Considerations related to TCK Loss

- **More significant mental health concerns and family dysfunction** can be masked or missed with frequent moves and transitions
- Fear of denying the good (experiences do not have to be either/or) or "I have no right to complain" mentality
- **Examples of Ambiguous Losses**
  - Loss of community
  - Loss of status, identity
  - Loss of pets and possessions
  - Loss of role models/relationships

## Resiliency Factors and Supports

- Increased awareness of transitional stressors has improved both informal and formal supports and resources in the last 25 years
- Increase in annual conferences, re-entry seminars, books, websites, specialized therapists and emerging research
- This population can be highly educated and well resourced\*
- Supportive close knit families and communities\*
- Technology has provided new ways to maintain relationships, travel, and share data and experiences
- Second and third generation TCK families continue to add to understanding and assisting next generations (FIGT)
- Colleges are placing increased emphasis on multicultural organizations/housing and global education (Lewis and Clark in Portland OR)



## Key Principles of a Trauma Informed Care

- Safety
- Trustworthiness and Transparency
- Peer Support
- Collaboration and Mutuality
- Empowerment, Voice and Choice
- Cultural, Historic and Gender Issues



## Tips for Practice


- ❖ Notice when a client pauses or only partially answers a question related to background or experience and be curious about that
- ❖ Consider asking about where she's lived initially rather than where she's from or what's troubling her.
- ❖ Consider charting out a "history of mobility" for any client who shares about multiple moves (national or international)
- ❖ Assess for loss (traditional and ambiguous) Ask about things left behind
- ❖ Assess for depression and suicidality



## Building Resilience

### 3 main components

- Identifying and establishing and *investing* in Social Supports
- Getting Back to Normalcy (and what this may mean for a TCK)
- Meaning Making



## Tips for Practice

- ❖ Recognize and help put language to the possibly paradoxical nature of their experience (Dialectic skills)
- ❖ Evaluate for substance use/abuse
- ❖ Express curiosity about who and what they identify as support and how they stay connected
- ❖ Notice what is NOT talked about
- ❖ Check for current effective supports: peers, family, school, friends, mentors, organizations and help expand this as needed





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