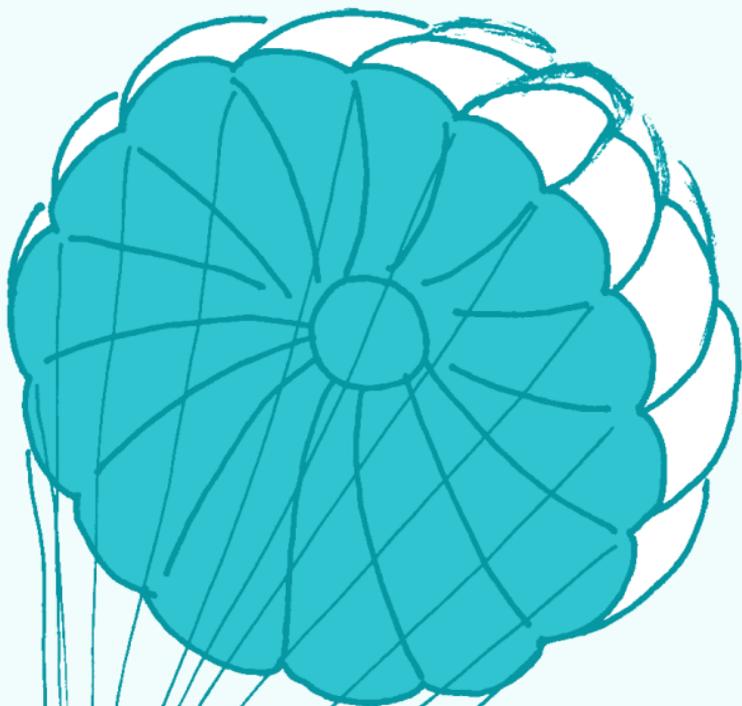


Celebrating



Cross-cultural Perspectives

Who are Third Culture Kids?

Known by many names¹, Third Culture Kids (TCKs) are individuals who have spent a significant proportion of their childhood overseas, outside of their parents' home culture². Former U.S. president Barack Obama is the most recent and famous example³⁻⁵. Born in Hawaii to parents of American and Kenyan heritage, Obama spent four years of his childhood in Indonesia where he attended a local public school and became fluent in the native language. Today, one of his most noteworthy traits include his seamless ability to interact and connect with people of different backgrounds and cultures^{6, 7} from all walks of life. The children of refugees, mission-



Third Culture Kids spend
a significant proportion of
their childhood overseas.

ary families, military personnel and international employees to name a few⁸, TCKs are ever growing in number⁹. As a group they have come to represent the overlapping and the coming together of many different cultures, challenging us in making room for new and expanding cross-cultural perspectives.

What does cross-cultural mean?

Commonly used to describe the unique experiences of TCKs, the term cross-cultural can be understood as the overlapping and coming together of many different cultures. With international ties strengthening and globalization on the rise, more and more families are finding new work opportunities abroad, causing children to grow up

overseas at a higher rate now more than ever¹⁰. In making room for Third Culture Kids, we're opening up more opportunities to celebrate new and diverse cross-cultural perspectives!

Challenges of the Hidden Immigrant

Along with a fair share of benefits including proficiency in multiple languages, high adaptability, and a global perspective¹¹, as a group TCKs also suffer from their own set of unique challenges and risks¹². Often described as having a “hidden immigrant” experience, the issues they face easily go unnoticed¹³. As a growing demographic in our society, it is important that as adults these individuals are provided with the space and the resources they need to understand who



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they are and how they can play a role in their many different environments¹⁴.

Managing a World of Distress & Grief

A childhood of constant moves and new beginnings can mean a series of constant goodbyes, one after the other, making for a world of distress and grief¹⁵ that can be hard to process as adults. Having missed out on many significant cultural events in their time abroad, adult TCKs can often feel like foreigners when returning to their own native country¹⁶. To address this, several studies have arisen to help provide culturally sensitive counseling and therapy for adults suffering from feelings of

Common Issues of TCKs

Issues coping with emotional distress and grief

Issues developing a sense of belonging & identity

Feelings of detachment and rootlessness

Trouble maintaining close relationships

Trouble settling down in one place

Problems relating to family and friends of a different background



Cross-cultural means the overlapping and coming together of many different cultures.

rootlessness, grief and little sense of belonging^{17, 18}.

Feelings of Detachment & Rootlessness

Having to inhabit a wide span of different environments and places¹⁹, TCKs are often never able to fully immerse themselves into any single community. Many times into adulthood the choice to keep staying on the move becomes easier than facing the struggle that comes with learning to put down firm roots²⁰. For this reason, many have founded online groups²¹ centering on giving TCKs the platforms they need to connect with others who share similar experiences. These spaces address a wide variety of different topics such as applying for visas, attending university, and more.

Are you a Third Culture Kid?

Here are a few tell-tale signs:

.....
You grew up outside your parents' home culture
.....

.....
You lived in many different countries as a child
.....

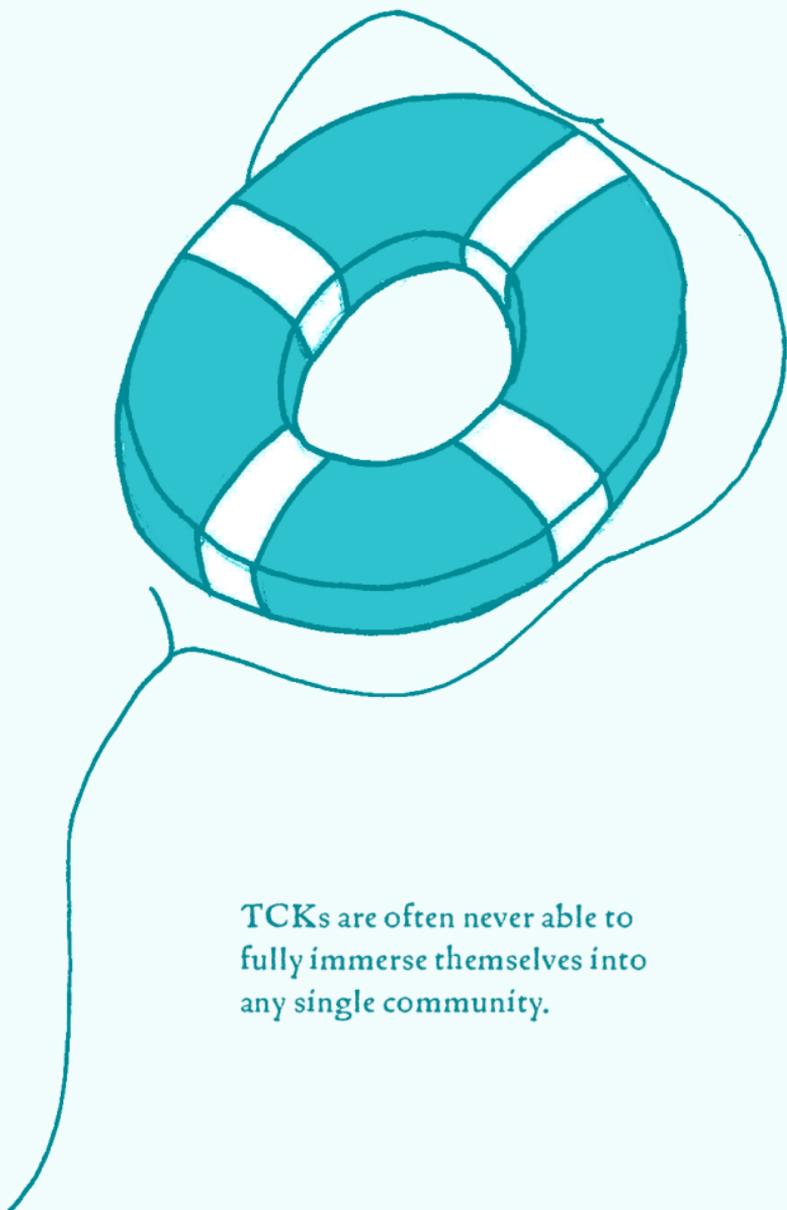
.....
You have trouble answering the question,
"Where are you from?"
.....

.....
You often have had to leave many family and
friends behind
.....

.....
You have made friends from all around the globe
.....

Migration as a Series of Losses & Changes

Recently, a growing number of research between Latin America and Europe confirms the very real effects that migration has on one's health²². Rather than a journey to a destination, migration can be better understood as a continual process of adapting to a series of changes that occur before, during and after migrating²³. Known as migratory stress, this ongoing process may include struggles such as keeping in touch with family and friends or learning a new language and culture. As migratory conditions become increasingly more dangerous²⁴—in an age of militarized borders, rising xenophobia and unfair immigration policies—the advantages of certain Third



TCKs are often never able to fully immerse themselves into any single community.

Culture childhoods²⁵ celebrate the benefits migration can have with the safe travel conditions provided by a supportive state infrastructure. In their complex narratives of stress, belonging and identity Third Culture Kids reveal crossroads²⁶⁻²⁸ to a variety of broader cross-cultural childhoods and immigrant issues.

About the Author

Aliyah N. Campbell is a Jamaican-American artist and illustrator with a B.F.A. in graphic design from St. John's University (2019). Raised by an immigrant mother, she spent her childhood moving around as a military brat; living on naval bases across the U.S., Cuba and Spain. The time she spent in Southern Spain as an adolescent had the

greatest impact on her values as an artist, nurturing a respect and appreciation for artisan crafts and traditions. As an illustrator her work spans a wide range of social topics, with a particular focus on health, wellness and education. In 2018, she was awarded the Social Actions Initiative Award (2018) by the Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS) as a part of the Health and Migration project.

Notes

1. In the English-speaking world they have also been called global nomads, cultural chameleons, expat kids, and invisible or hidden immigrants.
2. Sun Young Park, "Third Culture Kids' View On Immigration and Global Citizen-

ship,” *SIR Journal of International Relations* (2017), <http://www.sirjournal.org/op-ed/2017/1/20/third-culture-kids-view-on-immigration-and-global-citizenship>

3. Ruth E. Van Reken, “Obama’s ‘Third Culture’ Team,” *The Daily Beast*, November, 26, 2008. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/obamas-third-culture-team?ref=scroll>.

4. Steph Yui, “Marking the end of a TCK presidency,” interview by Rupa Shenoy, *Otherhood*, Public Radio International, September 29, 2016, audio 00:18, <https://www.pri.org/programs/otherhood/marking-end-tck-presidency>.

5. Other famous examples include Kobe Bryant, Isabel Allende and Audrey Hepburn.

6. Van Reken, “Obama.”

7. Park, “Third Culture Kids.”
8. Park, “Third Culture Kids.”
9. Yui, interview, audio 0:38.
10. Yoko Hisano, “The narratives of adult third culture kids: cultural identity development and psychological support upon reentry to one’s home country” (*Thesis, Dissertations, and Projects*, 2015): 2, <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/theses/687>.
11. Sun Young, “Third Culture Kids.”
12. Van Reken, “Obama.”
13. Yui, interview, audio 6:30.
14. Hisano, “Reentry,” 30–31.
15. Vivero, “Cultural Homelessness,” 7, 12.
16. Hisano, “Reentry,” 28.

17. Hisano, "Reentry," 3–4, 18.
18. Vivero, "Cultural Homelessness," 7.
19. Gabriel Asselin, "Next Stop, Cold Lake: Patterns of Mobility, Military Brats and Oil-Patch Kids," *Anthropologica* 56 no. 2 (2014): 423-434, Canadian Anthropology Society.
20. Rachel Cason, "Interesting interview with Rachel Cason, adult third culture kid, researcher," interview by Janneke Muyselaar-Jellema, *Drie Culturen*, August 25, 2015, <http://drieculturen.blogspot.com/2015/08/interesting-interview-with-rachel-cason.html>
21. Some examples include the online magazine Denizen, TCK Town, and Life Story Therapies.

22. Jonathan Veletanga, “¿Cómo afecta la migración en la salud de los ecuatorianos?” *Edición Médica*, August 10, 2016, <https://www.edicionmedica.ec/secciones/profesionales/-c-mo-afecta-la-migraci-n-en-la-salud-de-los-ecuatorianos--88404>.
23. Roberta Villalón, “Una aproximación sociológica crítica activista al estudio de salud y migración: el caso ecuatoriano,” *Revista CS* 29 (2019): 113, <https://doi.org/10.180.46/recs.i29.3481>
24. Joseba Achotegui, “Emigrar hoy en situaciones extremas. El síndrome de Ulises,” *Aloma* 30, no. 2 (2012): 83, <http://www.revistaaloma.net/index.php/aloma/article/view/171>
25. Rachel May Cason, “Third culture kids’: migration narratives on belonging, identity

and place.” (PhD diss., Keele University, 2015), 36.

26. Pooja Makhijani, “Please Don’t Call My Child a Third Culture Kid,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 21, 2016, <https://blogs.wsj.com/expat/2016/04/21/please-dont-call-my-child-a-third-culture-kid/>.

27. Paniz Khosroshahy, “Immigrant vs. expatriate: on being a third culture kid,” *Gal-dem*, May 23, 2016, <https://gal-dem.com/third-culture-kid/>.

28. Park, “Third Culture Kids.”

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