The Grey Area:  
Looking into the world of Third Culture Kids

by

Anastasia Goana Go Ying Ying® (Tilburg University)

anastasia.goana@gmail.com

April 2017

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/
The Grey Area: 
Looking into the world of Third Culture Kids

Anastasia Goana Go Ying Ying
ANR 836813

A Master’s thesis  
With the Department of Culture Studies: Global Communication  
Tilburg University/ Universiteit van Tilburg  
Under the Direction of Prof. Dr. K. Yağmur  
Second reader: Prof. Dr. A.M. Backus
Acknowledgements

I first came across the term Third Culture Kids during a round of discussions in my last year of studies in Simon Fraser University when my classmate and friend, Kharthik, turned to me and said, “Don’t you know what TCK is? That’s us, in a nutshell”. I could not believe that there existed a term that encompassed us- the kids who have moved around considerably throughout the course of our lives. My interest in the topic thus ensued but only really took off after during the course of my Masters’ Degree in Tilburg University. And, this course of research has indeed been an extremely enriching process.

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and guidance of my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Kutlay Yağmur whose wealth of knowledge constantly amazes me. It was a luxury having you as my supervisor. Thank you for the trust that you placed in me and in my work. I am also grateful for the support of Prof. Dr. Ad Backus, Dr. Piia Varis and Dr. Jeff van Der Aa. Thank you for constantly checking up on me and, for offering to answer any queries that I had.

The ideals of identity and belonging that were explored throughout this thesis stemmed from my personal feelings of unrest on these topics. The people who bore the brunt of such feelings are my parents. Thence, heartiest thanks to my beloved parents, to my sister, Crescencia and to my brothers, Gregory and Tommy, who have been my rock and support system. I feel blessed to be showered with your love and continual emotional support. Thank you for believing in me and, respecting my dreams and life choices.

Much appreciation to treasured friends, Monika Nemcová, Martijn Daemen, Viktoriya Shek, Kharthik Gounder, Exuperius Tax, Cas Van der Meer, Ander Gutiérrez Bejarano, Yorick Valk, Iris Pieterse and Eline Willemen. Thank you for your constant reassurances and optimism.

Last but certainly not least, I am deeply appreciative to each TCK who was eager to share their experiences and life stories with me. Thank you for participating in my research and for your reflections. Without you, there would have been no thesis and no story to tell.
Table of Contents

1 Introduction 5
  1.1 Viewpoint of this research 8
  1.2 Third Culture Kids 10
  1.3 Mixed-heritage children 11
  1.4 Research questions 12
2 Methodology 13
  2.1 Approach
     2.1.1 In-depth interviews
     2.1.2 Use of social media
  2.2 Qualifications 17
  2.3 Participants 18
  2.4 Data collection and instrumentation 21
  2.5 Data analysis procedures 23
3 Keynotes and themes 24
4 Discussions and the Analyses of Interviews 25
  4.1 The chameleon
     4.1.1 Adaptation and Choice
     4.1.2 The Identity Denial curtain 29
  4.2 The transculturating self 32
     4.2.1 Transnationalism in the context of holidays 35
  4.3 Social Anchoring 39
     4.3.1 Enoughness 42
     4.3.2 Culture as a Verb 48
  4.4 The fluidity of belonging 52
     4.4.1 Addressing the transient self 56
     4.4.2 The in-between 54
  4.5 A word on language 57
     4.5.1 Context-based language 59
     4.5.2 Language and its links to emotions, personality and identity 62
     4.5.3 Languaging 63
     4.5.4 Group belonging based on language and accents 65
  4.6 The problem with the question “Where are you from?” 69
5 Concluding Remarks 74
  5.1 Implications of this research 72
  5.2 Suggestions for further studies on TCKs 74
Bibliography 82
Appendix 82
Abstract

Superdiversity has brought with it a multitude of things— one of which being, the increase in the number of Third Culture Kids (TCKs). The purpose of this research is to add to the current literature on TCKs, as well as, to showcase the importance of taking upon a social constructivist approach to view the concepts of culture and belonging. Accordingly, the conception of identity would also be adjusted. The first phase of the project involved a literature review to expand the perimeters of TCK. I then conducted interviews with 10 participants. The last phase involved the transcription and analysis of these interviews. Upon the examination of these accounts and by way of challenging deep-seated perspectives, it becomes clear that there is a dire need to move away from stagnant outlooks of identification and belonging.

*Keywords:* Third Culture Kids; transculturating; social anchoring; enoughness, transient
The Grey Area: Looking into the world of Third Culture Kids

1 Introduction

In line with globalization and superdiversity, the link between a settled sense of place, belonging and identity has been called into question as human populations; cultural representations and artifacts become increasingly mobile. Superdiversity, as defined by Vertovec (2007), is “the diversification of diversity”. This term was coined to encompass the ways in which the world has transformed into one that is far beyond globalized.

Wimmer (2009) argues that in the age of globalization, and even more so in today’s superdiverse world, simple ideas of belonging are seriously challenged by the socio-cultural reality of our societies. In this school of thought, Blommaert and De Fina (2016) noted, “superdiversity offers […] a broad range of opportunities to revise and rethink parts of [the] conceptual vocabulary in [order] to arrive at more […] accurate tools for thought and analysis” regarding our world today. Still, as the authors point out, “within these new paradigms, identities are often still understood in dichotomous terms as either micro or macro, individual or social, local or global” (ibid). Due to the multiple identifications of individuals, such views are deemed problematic. Deaux and Verkuylten (2014) point out that, “[m]inority and integration research is often embedded in [the] ontology […] that assumes that ethnic groups are cultural groups and that people who belong to an ethnic group ‘have’ the culture of that group”. This stance is largely embedded within essentialist approaches which is, to a large extent, still dominant in the field of language culture and identity as much of the research that has been conducted on acculturation portray the notions of bounded ethnic communities and fixed categories of belonging and identity (Berry, 1997; Smolicz, 1981; Ward, 2006). This outlook contends that identity has a “deep biological essence” and is “unchangeable, and indicative of abilities and traits” (Hong, 2006). In other words, should a person identify to be a member of one group, be it culture or identity, he or she cannot be part of another. These frames of references are still widely used by researchers and government officials today. Even within the field of biculturalism, concepts of national belonging, language
use, ancestry, kinship, religion, and ethnicity appear to showcase deeply entrenched points of view (Berry, 1997; Smolicz, 1981; Ward, 2006).

Lamont and Small (2008) (as cited in Deaux and Verkuyten, 2014) stated, “[l]iterature on inequality, race and ethnicity often lacks sophistication in the way culture is conceptualized. This is illustrated in many practices such as the use of culture and ethnicity as interchangeable”. Stevens (2004), whose work is on immigrants, of Moroccan descent, who reside in the Netherlands, measured “two acculturation dimensions (orientation to one’s own culture and the dominant culture)”. He had used the label “Moroccan immigrants” to describe participants who had some sort of connection to Morocco despite the fact that, within the group of adolescents, “30% were born in Morocco, 69.5% in the Netherlands, and 0.5% in another country”. The very label and placement of the Moroccan immigrants, regardless of where they were born, champions the essentialist view that identity traits are “deep” and “biological” (Hong, 2006). In another study on “dual heritage adolescents of Maori and Pakeha descent with single heritage Maori and Pakeha youth” of New Zealand, albeit associating her work with biculturalism and identity, the arguments that Ward (2006) has presented in her work are very much based from a eurocentric point of view. The underlying assumptions that she makes in the research design and approach that she takes in her hypothesis, adds to the perspective of neglecting the dynamic nature of language, culture and identity. Smolicz’s “core values theory” (1981; 1992) contends, as core values, language, religion, traditions, family structure, political organization and food, among others, form the core of a group’s culture, which is crucial for maintaining a group’s continued viability and integrity. On one hand, the theory “has proved useful in attempts to understand the patterns of maintenance, modification and loss of minority languages in [...] plural [societies]”, on another, in our increasingly superdiverse world, there is a movement towards features such as fusion food, language and identity (Smolicz, 1992). It is inaccurate to treat “ethnic minorities” as fixed categories and to ignore the multiple natures of language use and identification.

Despite the fact that “anthropologists have [...] shown that culture is not a very useful basis for the definition of ethnicity”, these ethnic and racial categories are still being used to define peoples (Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014). An implication of this is “a static and reified notion of
culture” and an overarching strong “sense of ethnic identity” (ibid). Furthermore, “[m]ultiracial and multicultural people [...] often experience situations in which they are asked to define themselves in singular terms” (Sanchez, Shih & Wilton, 2014). This occurrence is due to the fact that, “multiple identities are [generally] not perceived as overlapping and as a culture” and these “racial and cultural categories are [inherently] exclusive” (ibid). Grosjean (2015) highlights the notion that “bicultural person[s]” often face a problem of “categorization” as, cultures are generally understood to be “absolute”. “[I]n this sense”, “cultures do not readily accept that a person can be part of their culture and also part of another culture” (ibid). Additionally, Cheng et al. (2014) whose work is “on the socio-cognitive processes and outcomes of biculturalism” showcases that these group memberships that form people’s identities are always regarded either as in “harmony” or in “tension”. Such angles of references have their roots in “previous acculturation work examining variations in acculturation patterns and biculturalism” (ibid).

An official means of categorization used by most countries is the Census, which is in fact, a channel of championing the primordialist concept that identity is a fixed entity. Such mediums “are good examples of utilized methods in large-scale or even nationwide demographic studies” (Extra & Yağmur, 2004). Since the nineteenth century, this “link with citizenship was effectively forged” when “nation-state[s] emerged as the basic political and economic unit of modern world” (Lister, 1997). This lead to the linking of the “nation with culture and ‘race’” [which was thus] institutionalized in different ways through the boundaries around citizenship” (ibid). The information gathered from the Census is used by “government ministries”, “local authorities”, “bodies of research”, “private and public companies”, “journalists”, “students and pupils”, as well as, “the general public” for purposes of “research, business marketing”, “national, regional, and local socio-economic programmes” and “constructing planning forecasts” (Extra & Yağmur, 2004; New World Encyclopedia, 2013; The State of Israel, 2016). Canada, which is a country famed for being multicultural and “inclusive”, is one such country that relies on the Census “to provide a statistical portrait of the country and its people” (Extra & Yağmur, 2004). In it, the Census asks a multitude of questions that, on the most part, inquiries about citizens’ identities. This includes racial, ethnic, gender, national, regional, organizational, religious and personal. Considering that the questions asked in the Census are, to a large extent, static, I argue that the Census is a by-product of the essentialist approach to culture and identity.
As Wimmer (2009) raises in his explanation of the Moermanian view on “race” and ethnicity, should all Hispanics be placed into the same grouping, the differences between “Mexican, Guatemaltec, and Honduran” cultures are discounted and taken away. Similarly, by merely presenting a limited amount of options for self-categorization, the Census belittles the differences between cultures and identity, as well as, disallows the individual to further explain his or her heritage. The result of “a single story” of one’s identity is thus presented (Adiche, 2009). Correspondingly, Extra and Yağmur (2004) state, 

[p]eople remain loyal to their roots as a continuation from the past, even if their culture is mixed with other cultures. This holds in particular in a context of migration and minorisation. In such a context, people often look for their roots in order to distinguish themselves from other people, and thus to express distinctiveness (ibid).

This, I felt, was a rather intriguing aspect considering that superdiversity is not particularly a “new” concept (Blommaert & De Fina, 2016). As Blommaert and De Fina noted, “[r]eflections and theorizations on identity within sociolinguistics and discourse analysis [has occurred for] the last two decades [and] have moved more and more towards context-sensitive, social constructionist understandings” (ibid).

1.1 Viewpoint of this research

The results of the literature examined, presented in the earlier section, show that the notions of language, culture and identity are still very much embedded within the parameters of essentialist approaches. This present study focuses on the importance of taking upon a social constructivist approach to view the concepts of culture and belonging. Accordingly, the conception of identity would also be adjusted. Jackson (2008) claimed, the “[s]ocial constructionist theory is a rejection of essentialist claims about […] identity in that it holds that who we are manifests from local, cultural and historical contexts”. Extra and Yağmur (2004) stated that research on identity has shown that, “identity [is a concept that is] not easy to define”. When talking about identities, it “commonly refers to a whole variety of partial identities, [including] nationality, gender, age, socio-economic status, language use, religion, or particular norms and values” (ibid). It is “grounded in social interaction and depends on verification by others” (Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014). In this viewpoint, identity is a complex that is abstract, complex and dynamic. One’s
particular social context defines a part of the larger human pool of potential from which a personal identity can be constructed (Yağmur, Personal communication, November 3rd 2015). It is maintained through social interaction and it begins to influence interaction through shaping expectations and related behavior (ibid).

Settles and Buchanan (2014) contended, “[i]dentification with a social group occurs when individuals see themselves in terms of a group they belong to and accept the group membership as a part of their self-concept and self-definition”. Through this, “individuals derive a sense of meaning and guidelines for understanding the world and interacting with others. Identities provide perspective, or a particular way in which to view the world” (ibid). For this, I focused my research on consciously attempting to ensure that I did not put a “label” on my participants. Rather, the labels used, in this research, arose from themselves and were in their own words. This is why, much the subtitles that will ensue in Section 4. Discussions and the Analyses of Interviews were taken from the interviews with the participants.

In this research, I will attempt to address two main aspects. First, adding to the scope of Third Culture Kids (hereon referred to as TCKs). In it, I will showcase why and how children of mixed-heritages should also be considered as TCKs. This will be done so by exploring the original definitions of the term and showcasing that mixed-heritage children feel the issues experienced by TCKs as well. Secondly, through the experiences of TCKs, I will impress upon the current problems of essentialist approaches towards language, culture, belonging and identity. Considering that this research will be largely based on the notions of TCKs’ identity and belonging, it will also highlight and attempt to account for the feelings of frustrations of TCKs when faced with the questions- “Where are you from?”, “Where are you really from?” and, “What is your actual background?”
1.2 Third Culture Kids

The original exegesis of TCKs was contrived by sociologists John and Ruth Hill Useem in the 1950s and, was used to depict “the children of American Foreign Service officers, missionaries, businessmen, educators, etc., living in India” who “have spent, at least part of their childhood in countries and cultures other than their own” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Tannenbaum & Tseng, 2015; www.tckidNow.com, 2016). According to this definition,

the first culture [is seen to be] the country from which the parents originated (the home culture), the second culture as the country in which the family was currently living (the host culture), and the third culture as the expatriate community in the host country (Tannebaum & Tseng, 2015).

In this sense, TCKs are seen as individuals who “integrate aspects of their birth culture [...] and the new culture [thus] creating [the] ‘third culture’” (www.tckidNow.com, 2016).

Based on the literature that I have found regarding TCKs, it should be noted that TCKs are notorious for their “global mindedness due to the disconnection from their culture of origin and mother tongue and having had to spend a significant part of their developmental years outside of their parents’ culture without having full ownership of any” (Barros, 2014). Much research on TCKs place their focus on “psychological aspects”, “cultural identity and acculturation processes” as well as “personality traits” (Tannenbaum & Tseng, 2015). Upon having read up on them, I posed the following preliminary questions:

1. Are TCKs limited to the original definitions alone?
2. Can individuals who have multiple identifications be considered as TCK, as well?
3. What are the perimeters of the TCK spectrum?

From there, a literature review on mixed-heritage and mixed-ethnicity children emanated.
1.3 Mixed-heritage children

As opposed to the TCKs, there exists, in the literature, a wide range of research on mixed-heritage children. Those that I came across however, largely focused on how to raise a “biracial child effectively”, how to help one’s bi-racial child adapt especially so in a mono-racial society, factors to help “mixed heritage children” “cope” in schools, and integration (Lewis, 2016; Mok, Cheng & Morris, 2010; Padilla, 2006). In going into early theories regarding persons of mixed-ethnicities, I came across Park’s (1928) definition of a “marginal man” (as cited in Goldberg, 2012; ibid; Padilla, 2006; Sanchez, Shih & Wilton, 2014),

a cultural hybrid man, a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples; never quite willing to break, even if he were permitted to do so, with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted because of racial prejudice, in the new society in which he now sought to find a place. He was a man on the margin of two societies which never completely interpenetrated or fused (ibid).

Although Park had used this term to refer to an “emancipated Jew”, the notions that he raised has been the starting point in early theories of persons of mixed-ethnicities (ibid). This “model proposed that biracial individuals were trapped between social worlds and not a full member of either” one (Sanchez, Shih & Wilton, 2014). What Park’s definition ultimately suggested, is that, from as early as 1928, there has been recognition of “people who possess multiple racial or cultural identities struggle with identity confusion and acceptance from others” (Sanchez, Shih & Wilton, 2014). This was interesting to me, considering that this “marginal man” model has been extended to the “study [of] race and ethnic relations, culture contact, and migration” within the fields of sociology and has been “a remarkably fruitful source of intellectual stimulation [...] over the past [...] decades” (Goldberg, 2012).

Padilla (2006) stated, “[e]arly writers on the topic of interracial unions [...] argued that the offspring of mixed marriages suffered from identity and adjustment conflicts and that these children held a low self-image and lacked a strong social network”. The author also made mention of “Stonequist’s (1937) analysis [that] mixed racial people [...] were often marginalized and suffered from anomie because of their disconnection from members of their parent’s social groups” (ibid). Furthermore, increase of “intermarriage patterns in the past three decades” has
showcased “two mechanisms: a weakening of ethnic attachments and the resulting increase in contact with potential mates of other groups” (ibid). This is also mentioned by Park (1928) who explicitly stated that *the marginal man* “is, par excellence, the ‘stranger’”.

Considering that children of mixed-heritages fit into the model of multiple identification, I contend that they too be considered as TCKs. Like TCKs, they too struggle with issues of identity, self-fashioning, self-presentation, connections and disconnections to various cultures. Furthermore, as observed later on in my collection of data; some of these mixed-heritage participants had parents who were TCKs as well.

For the purposes of this research, the terms TCKs, mixed-heritage kids, “dual identity and bicultural identity” will be used interchangeably. And, the term “multiple identities” falls under the spectrum of the aforementioned terminologies (Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014).

### 1.4 Research questions

It was convincing to me, especially after having researched on Park’s model of the *marginal man* that, mixed-heritage individuals could fall under the spectrum of TCKs. The main research question of this thesis then materialized:

How can one investigate and understand the ethnolinguistic and cultural identification of TCKs?

The following sub-questions eventuated:

1. How do TCKs fall into the spectrum of culture, belonging and identity?
2. Independent of language and ethnicity, what other features do TCKs relate to?
3. Does the length of time that one spends in a country have anything to do with one’s sense of belonging?
4. How does the concept of “being neither here nor there” affect identity formation?

---

1 This is also inclusive of “Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs)” (Tannenbaum & Tseng, 2015). As the authors suggest, one does not outgrow being a TCK, the “‘third culture experience’” shapes oneself and transcends through to adulthood (ibid).
2 Methodology

2.1 Approach

2.1.1 In-depth interviews

As previously mentioned in Section 1.2 Essentialist approaches, there are loopholes when it comes to essentialist approaches towards language, culture, identity and belonging. Thus far, there has not been a quantitative study approach that has been effective enough to incorporate the various aspects of the study of culture, identity and belonging, in a way that qualitative methods can. For this reason, a qualitative approach was adopted for my investigation regarding Third Culture Kids. The inclination towards choosing this approach stemmed from the fact in-depth interviews fall into the classification of qualitative approaches and which would enable me to “answer the whys and hows of human behavior, opinion and experience” (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013). Qualitative research method approaches “[give] meaning by rearranging, examining, and discussing […] data [to convey] an authentic voice, or [remain] true to the original people and situations that [is being] studied” (Neuman & Robson, 2012). Accordingly, participants were given the opportunity to freely narrate their experiences.

2.1.2 Use of social media

In the preliminary stages of my research, I had initially wanted to hold my interviews face-to-face however; these person-to-person attempts were not particularly successful. This was largely due to the fact that I had close relations with those whom I knew were from mixed-heritage backgrounds. For this reason, I turned to social media for participants. I wrote a public Facebook status, which stated:
Almost immediately, I found that people were very willing to help in that; I received notifications that people were sharing my status. I also shared a similar message on some Third Culture Kids forums that I found on Facebook namely: University Third Culture Kids, Third Culture Kids: Radio Station, Denizen: For Third Culture Kids, Third Culture Kids Everywhere, Cross Cultural Kids Everywhere and, TCK: A Home for Third Culture Kids. There, I posted:

Almost immediately, I found that people were very willing to help in that; I received notifications that people were sharing my status. I also shared a similar message on some Third Culture Kids forums that I found on Facebook namely: University Third Culture Kids, Third Culture Kids: Radio Station, Denizen: For Third Culture Kids, Third Culture Kids Everywhere, Cross Cultural Kids Everywhere and, TCK: A Home for Third Culture Kids. There, I posted:
The reason that I had shared that I was a TCK too was because, I wanted to see if by sharing this aspect of myself, people would be more willing to share their experiences with me. This proved to be of a boon as later, during the interviews, I found that participants whom I reached out to me via these social media platforms were more willing to go deeper into their frustrations of identity and belonging as opposed to those whom I had some sort of acquaintanceship with [Please refer to Section 5.1 Implications of this research].

Out of all the Facebook groups, I found Third Culture Kids Everywhere to be the most responsive. Immediately, people started contacting me via Facebook message, as well as, by commenting on my post. Once I received messages from these willing participants, I created a Google form, which I shared to my participants. In a week, I received 42 responses.

In the Google Form, I introduced my research, explained the purpose of my study and, described the study procedures. I also included the benefits of being in this study, confidentiality; the participants’ right to refuse or withdraw, rights to ask questions and report concerns and consent. This can be seen in Figure 3:
Introduction
Thank you for your interest in taking part in this research regarding Third Culture Kids. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this study is to investigate ethnonomological and cultural identification of Third Culture Kids. Ultimately, this research will be part of a Master's thesis project and will be presented as a paper.

Description of the Study Procedures
If you agree to be in this study you will be kindly asked to do the following things:
- First, You will be asked to fill in a Qualifications form. Should you wish to continue participating in the study, I ask that you kindly return both this consent form as well as the Qualifications form before March 2nd, 2016 (Wednesday).
- Second, you may be chosen to participate in an Interview. This Interview may occur via face-to-face or video call. There may also be a follow-up interview.
- There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks.

Benefits of Being in the Study
Your participation and honest answers will be highly appreciated as they may add great value to the growing literature on the social constructivist approaches to language, culture, and identity. With the increasing number of children born to dual (or more) heritage parents, I hope to be able to better understand the link between a settled sense of place, mobility and identity.

Confidentiality
The records of this scientific investigation will be kept strictly confidential.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw
The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time without affecting your relationship with the investigator of this study or Tilburg University. Your decision will not result to any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of our interview material.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns
You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Anastasia, at anastasia.goona@gmail.com or by telephone at +31 6 2863 7427. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you.

Consent
By responding to this Google Form, this would indicate that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. Should you wish, you may be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigators.

Fig 3: “Consent to Participate in a Research Study”. Taken from:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/13q0Zyf000R2hjXiWakCEjxbvUeRax1iI_JOPeItLc08/edit
In it, I asked questions regarding the participants’ name, age, languages spoken, countries lived in, citizenship(s), parents’ heritage or nationalities and lastly, there was an option if the participant would be willing to participate in the interview.

2.2 Qualifications

Simultaneously, I created certain conditions for my choice. They were as follows:

1. Participants should be able to speak 2 or more languages.
2. Participants must have lived in 2 or more countries.
3. Participants had to be between the ages of 20 and 32

Through this, I eliminated participants who had lived in less than 2 countries and those were outside of the age range that I had specified and was left with 33 participants.

Fig 4: Chart showing the number of countries that participants had lived in

---

2 The reason for the third condition was because, I think that by this age, they would be old enough to have stabilized their notions of the self, while at the same time, young enough to have experienced transnationalism with technological affordances.
Through this, I selected 16 participants, had 4 participants for maybe and, rejected 22 participants. I had attempted to select 6 participants that I would be able to interview in-person and 6, through Skype calls.

### 2.3 Participants

The study relied on the analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with 10 participants\(^3\). I had left out 2 of the interviews that I conducted. The sample consisted of voluntary Third Culture Kids. 3 of the interviews were conducted face-to-face whereas, 7 of the interviews were conducted via Skype call. Out of the participants, 8 were female and 2 were male. All the informants were between the ages of 20 and 32 years of age. The number of countries that participants lived in ranged from 2 to 10 (Mean: 4.1 countries). They spoke between 2 to 6 languages (Mean: 4.1 languages). And, they understood between 3 to 11 languages (Mean: 6.2 languages). This information can be found in the table below:

\(^3\) For confidentiality purposes, please note that the names of the participants have been changed. Only the researcher has access to the actual names of these participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>Ethnic Identification based on Ancestry</th>
<th>Current residence (at the time of interview)</th>
<th>Languages spoken</th>
<th>Languages understood</th>
<th>Countries lived in (Length of time spent)</th>
<th>Interview held</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Father: Greek Mother: French</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Greek French</td>
<td>Greek French</td>
<td>Greece (22) France (½ for exchange program &amp; every summer) Netherlands (1)</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Father: Dutch Mother: German</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>German Dutch</td>
<td>German Dutch</td>
<td>Germany (19) USA (1) Netherlands (5)</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Father: German Mother: Persian</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>German Spanish</td>
<td>German Spanish</td>
<td>Spain (6) Germany (13) Australia (1) Norway (3) Netherlands (½)</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniella</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Malaysian Father: Punjabi Mother: Chinese</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>English Malay</td>
<td>English Malay</td>
<td>Malaysia (23) Australia (½)</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eloise</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Father: Egyptian Mother: Dutch</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>English Dutch</td>
<td>English Dutch</td>
<td>USA (22) Netherlands (9) Belgium Taiwan (½) South Africa (1)</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Spoken Languages</td>
<td>Where</td>
<td>Comments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleur</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>French national, his mother was Dutch and his father was French</td>
<td>Malaysian (her mother was Malaysian of Tamil origins and her father was Indian of Tamil origins)</td>
<td>French, English, Spanish, Hindi, Mandarin, Arabic</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Pakistan (½), Thailand (5), Central African Republic (1), Malaysia (4), Switzerland (½), ex-Yugoslavia (Serbia) (6 weeks), Nepal (4), Ukraine (1 ½), France (1 and every summer), United Kingdom (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giliana</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>Polish/ Belarusian/ Russian</td>
<td>Malaysian (her mother was Malaysian of Tamil origins and her father was Indian of Tamil origins)</td>
<td>Russian, English, Belarusan, Italian (but now forgotten)</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Belarus (17), Canada (2 ½)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>USA (WASP)</td>
<td>Puerto Rican (Spanish, African &amp; Boricua descent)</td>
<td>Portuguese, English, Spanish</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Poland (2), Venezuela (3), Bolivia (½), Nicaragua (3), Peru (4), USA (4 &amp; boarding school every year), Brazil (2), Angola (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivana</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>Dutch, English</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Netherlands (10), USA (10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenna</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>German</td>
<td>English, German, Spanish, Italian, French</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Germany (2), USA (12), Italy (4), Spain (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Table showing the details of the participants. Pseudo names have been used.
2.4 Data collection and instrumentation

Before starting the interviews, I asked for their informed consent for taping the conversation in order to use them for research purposes. After I explained the basic aim of the research, the interviewees were informed that their names would not be used and shared with formal institution. During the course of the interviews, some of the informants appeared to be worried about this due to the nature of their jobs or their parents’ jobs. Others were concerned as some sensitive remarks had been made amidst the interviews. I reassured them that pseudo names would be used in this research. For the parts of the interviews that they seemed to be uncomfortable with, I asked them again, if those sections should be included in the final recording. On top of using a recording device, I also took notes of each interview that was held.

On the most part, I held the interviews with a conversational tone. This however, was dependent on the nature of the interviews. Participants were encouraged to freely share their experiences, express their opinions and, tell anecdotes. I did not stop the participants, at any time, during the interviews even when it appeared that they were contradicting themselves or seemed to have gone off tangent. This was because; I wanted them to speak freely without feeling like there were boundaries or limitations attached to what they had to say. This was done so, in order for me to better understand TCKs’ thoughts, opinions and frustrations. For me these were crucial points as they were indications that the participants had trusted me enough to lead me to their train of thought. Please refer to the Appendix for the interview guide.

2.5 Data analysis procedures

The conversations were all digitally recorded and transcribed. And, the names of the interviewees were anonymized for data storage. All the transcripts were read thoroughly and rigorously.

Data was analyzed using a grounded theory approach to interpret meanings embedded in the texts. Considering that the theories emerged are “built from data or grounded in data”, this approach enabled for “conceptualization and operationalization [to] occur simultaneously with data collection and preliminary data analysis” (Neuman & Robson, 2012). Within the realm of the grounded theory approach, open coding was used in the analyses of the first two interviews.
Open coding, brought “themes [that were embedded] deep inside the data” “to the surface” and, this led me to the next stage of my coding method (ibid). Later, when I began to see recurring themes, the selective coding method was used. This was done across the remaining eight interviews and, allowed for the pulling out of specific themes that prevailed across the participants’ experiences. This process of coding enabled me to engaging in “linking” conceptualizing and grouping the various themes (Saldaña, 2009). The creation of the coding categories led to the condensing and grouping of codes that conveyed similar themes (ibid).
3 Keynotes and themes

As expected, there were a multitude of issues that were brought up by the participants during the course of the interviews. While some participants were willing to go deeper in terms of sharing their thoughts, feelings and experiences early on in the interview, not all of them were. Some needed prompting while others seemed a little more closed off. Nevertheless, the ideals of identity and belonging were raised throughout the course of the interviews. In the process of this research, the point regarding participants’ hobbies and interests has been eliminated as not all the participants gave me a response. This question was asked via email, after having held the interviews, as I interested to see what other modes of identification or groups these participants saw themselves as part of.

In accordance to the themes that emerged from the data, I divided my analyses in accordance to the broad categories of belonging, language, culture and identification and labeled them as such, in Section 4: Discussions and the Analyses of Interviews:

4.1 The Chameleon
4.1.1 Adaptation and Choice
4.1.2 The Identity Denial Curtain

4.2 The transculturating self
4.2.1 Transnationalism, in the context of holidays

4.3 Social Anchoring
4.3.1 Enoughness
4.3.2 Culture as a verb

4.4 The fluidity of belonging
4.4.1 Addressing the transient self
4.4.2 The in-between

4.5 A word on language
4.5.1 Context-based language
4.5.2 Language and its links to emotions, personality and identity
4.5.3 Langusing
4.5.4 Group belonging based on language and accents

4.6 The problem with the question, “Where are you from?”
4 Discussions and the Analyses of Interviews

This section presents the main findings and analyses of data gathered during the course of my research with TCKs. The central aim of this study was firstly to showcase that individuals who fit into multiple identification categories could too be included in the TCK category. Secondly, to better understand TCKs. And lastly, to reveal why it is crucial to move away from essentialist approaches and to move towards social constructivist views on language, culture, belonging and identity.

Extra & Yağmur (2004) stated, “[s]elf-identification implies emotional allegiance to a particular group” and as such, while looking for participants in the beginning of my study, I had asked the participants specifically if they considered themselves to be TCKs or citizens of the world. The very fact that they responded to my request upon reading my status was, to me, an indication of their own “self-identification” in the aforementioned grouping. This “concept of self-identification [has been argued to be] closely related to the concept of self-esteem” (ibid). And, “self-esteem […] can be positively or negatively influenced by [one’s] identification with a particular group” (ibid). The notion of identity and belonging is one that is exceedingly elaborate. As such, these ideas will be brought up in various parts of this section. It may be useful at this point to state that some of the interview segments that will ensue in this section may appear to fall under multiple thematic categories. This was also the case in Tannenbaum and Tseng’s (2015) as they stated, “[g]iven that the issues explored are intertwined and closely related, some of these quotes can be placed in more than one category”. I contend that this showcases an aspect of how these segments of language; culture, belonging and identity are linked. As Andrea had illustrated in her interview:

The fact that it is incredibly difficult to put all of that into words, into one uniform story. (Andrea)

Considering the complexity of it all and that the aim of this study was multifold, I did not classify the responses in accordance to the questions that I had posed for the participants. The responses that the interviewees gave tapped on several features and themes at a time.
4.1 The chameleon

4.1.1 Adaptation and Choice

I think I adapt with groups of different people and in different countries. For example, the way I acted in Taiwan was very different from the way I acted in… I don’t know actually, I can’t think now. I don’t know actually because it’s still me. Same like in the USA. I know how to be […] both. But […] my dad used to hate that. He used to say that I’m, like a chameleon. But I’m not a chameleon! I was always so defensive. (Eloise)

In this section of the paper, the analogy of the chameleon will be used to discuss the ways in which the TCK is able to adapt his or her behaviors and actions, whether knowingly or unknowingly, to the surroundings that he or she finds himself or herself in. The image of the color-changing reptile was taken from an interview that I had with Eloise who shared that, her father had used this imagery to label the change in her behavior as she moved from one context to another. Like the chameleon, the TCK has the ability to cater himself or herself to go from one social situation to another. As previously discussed in the Introduction section, language, culture, behavior and identity are features that are intertwined. For this, one’s self-presentation, mannerisms and behavior are thus revealing of one’s identity.

Christina stated the following:

I choose on a daily basis. I think who I am is like, me. And, when people ask me where I am from, that is not that important to me because I see myself as a mixture of all those three. (Christina)

In the above context, Christina introduces the notion that identity is a choice in her statement. Although she insinuates that this is a conscious decision that she takes upon, it should be noted that this could too be done so subconsciously. While Eloise’s words (as seen in the beginning of this section) were largely based on behavior and Christina had described her perception of identity, both statements highlight the notion that behaviors can be circumstantial and that; different aspects of identity can be seen as options that an individual has. These points raised by both interviewees are reminiscent of Shakespeare’s As You Like It, where he wrote, “All the world’s a stage, and all men and women merely players” (Craig, 1914; SparkNotes Editors, 2003). In it, Shakespeare drew reference to the Goffman’s (1956) dramaturgical analysis of the
self, which entails that people engage in “performances” in their daily doings (Cicchini, 2012; Goffman, 1956). Goffman states, “[w]hen an individual appears before others, he wittingly and unwittingly projects a definition of the situation, of which a conception of himself is an important part” (ibid). An interesting aspect that he draws to attention is the point that there is the existence of “the self [as] projected by the individual [who is seen to be a] performer” in various contexts (ibid). No matter the context, “[t]he round of activity [has thus] become dramatized” (ibid). This can be seen in an interview with Jenna who stated:

I think it involves a little bit of performance for the first bit and then things come up slowly. So like, “Where are you really from?” comes out slowly. (Jenna)

In the above context, Jenna also draws upon Goffman’s “presentation of [...] performances” and showcases that the presentation of oneself is dependent on the social dynamic (ibid). It can be observed in this context that Jenna appears to have deliberately engaged in a “performance” (ibid). Drawing back to the earlier example that I had previously mentioned in the beginning of this section⁴, Eloise seemed to be less aware of the enactment.

The idea of identity as a dynamic choice is also observed in the discussion of how individuals often put on the “role” of what is expected of one’s heritage or ethnicity “during social interaction” (ibid). In the case of TCKs who identify with multiple features, this choice involves the deliberate decision to expose and highlight certain aspects of one’s identity. This is seen in the following example with Andrea:

At a dinner setting with international friends, for fun reasons espouse my Greekness and be making jokes on the Greek side of me or, playing the Greek role. But, it would be, you know, in a performative kind of manner not because I feel particularly Greek or anything.

(Andrea)

⁴“I think I adapt with groups of different people and in different countries. For example, the way I acted in Taiwan was very different from the way I acted in… I don’t know actually, I can’t think now. I don’t know actually because it’s still me. Same like in the USA. I know how to be… Like sort of, both. But [...] my dad used to hate that. He used to say that I’m, like a chameleon. But I’m not a chameleon! I was always so defensive”. (Eloise)
In her statement, Andrea, who is of French and Greek descent\(^5\), showcased how she caters her behavior in accordance to the context. Settles and Buchanan (2014) contend, “identification reflects the extent to which individuals place importance on their group memberships”. On these grounds, I found her conscious enactment of the Greek role to be rather thought provoking. This suggests that Andrea perceives her French identity as an aspect of herself that is more serious than that of her Greek identity. The Greek role performance can be seen as a means of mocking this aspect of her identity, which could possibly suggest\(^6\) some kind of discomfort that she may have with her Greek identification.

In another interview, Fleur raised a similar point:

> Depending on [whom] I am speaking to, I would feel more Asian or more French. Or rather, which part of myself I want to identify with more. If I were to introduce myself to a group of French people then, I would feel and come across more French. And, when I am introducing myself to a group of Asian people then I would be like, “Yeah! I am totally Malaysian!” (Fleur)

As observed, Fleur explicitly stated how she consciously chooses to raise certain aspects of either her French or Malaysian identity depending on the group of people that she finds herself interacting with. Like analogy of the chameleon, both Andrea and Fleur highlight how the ability to be responsive towards their surroundings.

Christina also claimed:

> That’s what I love about having different nationalities because I can just decide who I am, kind of. (Christina)

Again, like Fleur, Christina drew to attention the idea that she has the ability to choose between different aspects of her identity.

---

\(^5\) I am describing her as such as this was the way that she had introduced herself to me during the interview

\(^6\) This is a speculation, on my part as a researcher, because I had attempted to delve deeper into these features however, I had the sense that Andrea was not necessarily comfortable with sharing this aspect of herself with me. As such, I chose not to press on further.
It is crucial to note that this choice is not based on the individual alone. This is because, the people whom an individual interact with are dynamic and may too pass a judgment for themselves. Deaux and Verkuyten (2014) state that audience members have the ability “to accept or reject an identity that a person opts to present”. Accordingly, there is the possibility that, “others may categorize individuals into different groups than individuals would categorize themselves” (ibid; Settles & Buchanan, 2014). In her interview, Daniella made mention of the following:

Because of my skin color, I was always mistaken for being [part of another ethnic or social grouping]. I hated that. I didn’t like it and I always had to explain myself. Then, people would always ask me questions. That was how it was like growing up. (Daniella)

In the above context, Daniella raises a few points. One of which is with regards to phenotypical features, which has resulted in a situation where she was thought to be of other ethnic or social groupings by members of the “audience” (Goffman, 1956). The very words, “I hated that. I didn’t like that and I always had to explain myself” reveals her frustrations. This suggests that the parties whom she interacted with wielded a considerable amount of power to an extent whereby, she felt uneasy. This displeasure that Daniella voiced, in the above context, discloses that the decision to focus on specific aspects of one’s identity should be taken gravely as, there are historical and political implications associated with such ethnic and social groupings. These implications will be further elaborated on in the next section, 4.2.2 Identity denial.

---

7 For purposes of confidentiality and cultural sensitivity, Daniella had requested for me to leave out the group that she had made mention of during the interview out.
4.1.2 The *Identity Denial* curtain

An interesting facet of choice regarding *rejection* was raised in an interview with Harry as he stated:

I’m not sure if I choose because, when I say I choose, I feel like it comes at a cost, like I am rejecting the other. The rejection, in a way, is for me saying that I am different. Rejection, in itself, is representative of how I feel. Identity, whether you reject it or not, is whatever is the most truly with you. And so, you can just accept it or, just whatever resonates with you. (Harry)

This very aspect of rejection of a certain identity or rather, an aspect of one’s identity, put forward by Harry, points to what Sanchez, Shih and Wilton (2014) touted as “identity denial” and what Padilla (2006) referred to as “ethnic denial and hostility”. *Identity denial* can be defined as the active suppression of an aspect of one’s identity in the event that an individual is pressured to opt between the various identities that he or she may be associated with (Huynh, 2013; ibid; Wang, Minervino & Cheryan, 2012). Prior researches on this concept reveal that it can take place both implicitly and explicitly (Huynh, 2013). This refers to the inhibition of a certain aspect of one’s identity when forced “to choose between [one’s] multiple racial identities” (Sanchez, Shih & Wilton, 2014). Through my research, I found that this term is often used in the context of “visible ethnic and racial minorities” within nations (Huynh, 2013; Wang, Minervino & Cheryan, 2012). It insinuates that the individual is seen as a “‘perpetual [foreigner]’” (Wang, Minervino & Cheryan, 2012). Some examples from previous studies noted that this included Asian Americans, “Iranians in Canada” and “Turks in the Netherlands” (Huynh, 2013; ibid). *Identity denial* is deemed to be “a form of identity miscategorization”, “a type of social identity threat” as it entails that the “individual is not recognized as a member of a group to which he or she belongs” (ibid). While *identity denial* may occur in as “a subtle, exclusionary experience”, it may also take place in the form of “a blatant questioning of belonging” (Huynh, 2013). By actively making a choice to indicate that one has relations with a specific social grouping and by resonating with one group over another, there are implications of historical matters that are introduced and called to question. Often, a variety of “identity assertion techniques” are used in order to cope with identity denial (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; ibid). These include “demonstrating
awareness of popular [...] culture” that assumed to be typical of a certain social grouping and, “engaging more in [...] practices to assert [a specific] identity” (ibid).

Although researchers have traditionally referred to *identity denial* in the context of racial and ethnic groupings, I contend that this concept can be extended to other cultural aspects (ibid). This includes features like the use of language, consumption of foods, engaging in certain practices and norms among others.

During the analysis of data amassed, I found that *identity denial*, in the case of TCKs, occurs more in a way of shielding a facet of one’s identity rather than furiously subduing it. For this reason, the imagery of the *identity denial* curtain came to mind (See Figure 5)

![Identity Denial Curtain Diagram](image)

**Option 1:** Hypothetical situation where individual chooses to reveal all aspects of his or her identity

**Option 2:** Hypothetical situation where individual senses an awkward situation and shields segments of his or her identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legend</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Window</td>
<td>Representative of Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curtain</td>
<td>Representative of Identity Denial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 5: The *identity denial* curtain
In Figure 5, the window is representative of an individual’s identity whereas the curtain represents an instance of identity denial. The curtain functions in a manner whereby the individual has the ability choose exactly what facets of identity he or she wants to reveal, in accordance to the situation. In some sense, the curtain can be seen as a shield, which operates, should the TCK feel that an awkward situation might arise. The identity denial curtain can be seen in-action as Christina stated the following:

> When I have the feeling that I am perceived negatively, I just don’t talk about that side.

(Christina)

Jenna employed one such example of the identity denial curtain in the following example:

> In North Africa, I felt safer speaking German. I felt we have a better reputation, in this scenario. In Israel, I would speak English but I don't like giving people the impression that I am associated with American English. Because, there is too much pain connected to the USA. (Jenna)

In the above example, Jenna reveals the ideas of consciously choosing what language to use and what language to stay away, according to the context, when an individual senses that something is amiss, can be observed. This is reminiscent of Jackson’s (2008) argument where he stated, “individuals make calculated decisions about the languages they speak and the identities that those choices engender”. It can thus be argued that, in the context of the identity denial curtain, the active shielding and “[resistance of] negative identities imposed upon [TCKs] by others” is of “greater significance” than that of other “[groupings of] identity” (ibid).

The notions of identity denial can also be seen in the conscious decision to bring out certain aspects of one’s cultural identity over another.

> I was in Israel when I was little and I don't know if people responded to hearing the language or to hearing what said. But, there was a more positive response to "I am American" than to "I am German". And, that made sense because I was in Israel. That was a marked difference. But I've never felt like I can't speak this over that. (Jenna).
4.2 The transculturating self

Ortiz (1995) introduced *transculturation* as a means to describe the “creation of a new cultural phenomena [as a] result of [a] union of cultures”. This term was used to detail the consolidation, amalgamation and the fusion of various cultures (ibid). The “transculturating self” was introduced by Monceri (2009) on his work on identity and “the process of individual ‘becoming’”. In line with this approach, he showcased how it is adamant to pay close attention to the terms used in the field of research associated with identity, culture and belonging. He states, “the ‘transculturating self’ aims to evoke the picture of the individual perspective in the process of its own changing [...] within infinite different contexts and through infinite and reiterative interactions with both internal and external diversity” (ibid). Taken at face value, the difference in terms transcultured and transculturating appear to have a dissemblance of merely a change in verb and yet, this seemingly insignificant alteration signifies considerably different features in the field of language, culture and identity. In his arguments, Monceri showcased how “the self is not a product but a process [in] which the individual perspective continuously changes together with the world it creates, without any possibility of solidifying” (ibid). He debunks this notion of the “transcultured self” by commenting on how “[i]dentity is not natural [and that] it is inescapably cultural” (ibid). And as such, outlines how “collective identity” is always in motion, “potentially multiple and [is] subject to change” (Ashmore, Deaux &, McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; ibid; Tannenbaum & Tseng, 2015). Similarly, Bakić-Mirić (2012) contend, one develops one’s “self-image [...] from [one’s] family, gender, cultural, ethnic, and individual socialization process” and as such, identity refers to [one’s] reflective views of [oneself] and other perceptions of [one’s] self-images” (ibid).

Among the participants, there was a recurrent theme of the *transculturating self*, in a sense that, features that TCKs came into contact with and interacted with, play a role in forming his or her identity. While some of these aspects were time-sensitive, others appeared to be independent of the time spent. For instance, Christina, who had spent 6 years in Spain, 13 years in Germany, 1 year in Australia, 3 years in Norway and ½ in the Netherlands claimed:
Even though I am not Norwegian, I would say that I feel Norwegian. What makes your identity is like…. When you look at the identity of a country. For me, the question is—what is typical for persons who are living there? Their customs, food etc. And, when you move to a different country, the longer that you stay there, the more these things take over. (Christina)

In the above context, Christina states in her interview that the *transculturating self* is not based on time but rather, with the characteristics of the varying cultures. And in her experience, despite having spent the most number of years in Germany, she identified more with the characteristics of Norway than that of Germany.

On the other hand, Brian, who had spent 19 years in Germany, 1 year in the USA and 5 years in the Netherlands, claimed:

> People always ask me are you Dutch now or are you German? I always say that I am both but I feel more connected to Germany. That’s because of two things. One is because I was born there. And where I grew up. So somehow, I would identify with that country. But I think what’s even more important is the time you spent in that country because it really brand marks you. Since I lived 19 years in Germany so essentially, all my younger adulthood life, I spent there. So, I think I am more German. (Brian)

Daniella also raised a similar point:

> I am always a Malaysian at heart. It’s where I grew up, where I lived my whole life before coming [to Australia]. (Daniella)

In their respective interviews, both Brian and Daniella showcased the ways in which they understand the *transculturating self* to be. They highlight that the amount of influence that one culture has over another, in the making of their identity, is based on how much exposure there is to them.

Moving away from the aspect of time, other aspects of the *transculturating self*. This can be seen in the following examples:

> Multiple places have had an impact in the way I see the world. (Jenna)

---

8 This excerpt will be used again in *Section 4.3.1 Enoughness* to discuss the aspect of TCKs’ sense of belonging
I learnt very quickly how to see things from multiple perspectives. I didn't know if I really liked that or if I really thought about it till much later, actually. You can easily figure out that there are different systems of doing things and different ways of looking at things. (Eloise)

I feel like I have a broader outlook on life than most people. Once you've experienced living in a different culture, having that, being in between both countries, you kind of have a sense of understanding for the other people who have gone through that experience too. (Ivana)

In the above contexts, the participants drew to attention the common theme of the dynamic transculturating self. The exposure to multiple cultures has played a role on their ways of belonging and thus, affected the ways in which they view the world.

In his interview, Harry stated an instance of the transculturating self:

So the values that I hold to my core were and are given to me by people I know from all these different communities. The piecing of things together, the many fragments, the lack of any actual solid identification to be able to say, “I’m Peruvian”, “I’m American”, “I’m this”, “I’m that”. Things that would really hold me down to the rest of the world. (Harry)

Harry displayed how the transculturating self-concept is highly relevant in describing the relationship between identity and culture for him. He calls to attention several features in his interview. The notion of the transculturating self comes through here as he reveals how he gets a sense of self from the experiences that he goes through from the outside world, “from all these different communities” that he has encountered. Harry also describes himself to be a person who is made up of fragments that have been pieced together and depicts his sense of identity in a way that is “[lacking] of any actual solid identification”. This speaks to the notion of the transculturating self. In the debunking of the “transcultured self”, Monceri (2009) revealed that the term “transcultured self” implies that there is a “possibility for the self to crystallize in a being which would simply include features coming from different cultural contexts” which, he has shown to be an inaccurate manner of thinking of identity. By talking about his sense of identity as different parts that make a whole, Harry highlights the idea of the transculturating self.
4.2.1 Transnationalism in the context of holidays

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2016), the term transnationalism “refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people and institutions across the borders of nation-states” (2016). This appellation is focused on the interrelations and correspondence that individuals continue to preserve after having moved away from their countries of origin (IOM International Organization for Migration, 2010; Faist, 2010; Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). And, is used to “capture [...] communities [and other] social formations, such as transnationally active networks, groups and organizations” (ibid; Levitt, 2004). This concept, that “emerged in academic discourse” in the 1990s, has “served as a prominent research [lens] to view the aftermath of international migration and the shifting of state borders across populations” especially so in this day and age of globalization and mobility (Bruneau, 2010; ibid). This is because, it debunks traditional “[c]onceptualizations of migration, migrants and immigrants [which] have progressively become insufficient, as they evoke ‘images of permanent rupture, of the uprooted the abandonment of old patterns and the […] learning of a new language and culture’” (Nemcová, 2016). Transnationalism is much more accurate in its depiction of the ways in which the “lives of migrating people […] comprise not only [of the] host societies, but also ties with societies in the home countries” (ibid).

Although transnationalism was used in the context of communication, I contend that its ideals can be stretched to incorporate other aspects of culture. One of which can be seen in the celebration of holidays. I had originally hypothesized that, for TCKs who had moved around during their childhood, there would be certain holidays and celebrations that transcended the borders of nations. Despite the fact that rituals are subjected to changes, mixing and shifting over the course of time, they are undeniably culturally determined and shaped. Taking this into consideration, the celebrations of holidays highlight individuals’ affiliations to group belonging. As such, I posed the questions, “What kind of holidays did you celebrate growing up? Were they always based on the country that you found yourself in or, were there some that your family celebrated no matter the context?”
In their responses, the participants revealed that my aforementioned hypothesis did exist but it was not one that affected all of them. For instance, Fleur claimed that the celebration of holidays was not dependent on the country that her family found themselves in in that,

We would always celebrate Christmas because my dad really likes Christmas. We would celebrate Deepavali because my mum really likes it […] we don’t really celebrate others […] but when we were in Nepal, we celebrated Holi. (Fleur)

In the above context, other than her experience of Holi in Nepal, Fleur showed how the celebrations of holidays were based on her family’s preferences.

For some of the participants, they detailed how the celebration of holidays was based on the context that they found themselves in. Ivana, for instance, shared how there was an initial intertwining of both Dutch and American holidays that was celebrated by her family but as they grew older and when they moved to the USA, this did not continue:

When we grew up in Holland, we had a really Dutch childhood so we had Sinterklaas and those kinds of holidays. We did all of them. But we also got […] presents from our American grandmother for Christmas so, we would celebrate Christmas more elaborately than the typical Dutch household would. After moving to America, […] we kind of stopped celebrating Dutch holidays […] But we also didn’t pick up on American holidays that much. I mean, we got to see fireworks but that’s about it. It’s not like we have a big huge party or something (Ivana)

Eloise and Giliana too raised similar points in their respective interviews on how the celebration of holidays were dependant on the context that they found themselves in. Giliana, for instance, stated that much of the holidays that she used to celebrate in Belarus are not being celebrated now in Canada, where she currently resides, because they are based on the Russian Orthodox calendar. Furthermore, the lack of presence of her family members in Canada does not compel her to celebrate these holidays.
In another interview, Daniella also made mention of the following:

I used to celebrate everything from Chinese New Year to Thaipusam, everything. But when I moved to Australia, most of these holidays are not celebrated here. I felt like it is only when you don’t have something then you realize- Oh! It’s such a big part of me. Culture-wise, I’m attached to all these celebrations. (Daniella)

In the above context, Daniella showcased several key features. First, on how the celebration of holidays was based on the country that she found herself in. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, she detailed the importance of these holidays to her identity, thus showing the aspect of transnationalism in the context of other cultural features. The celebrations that she used to celebrate in Malaysia were then, a ritual to her. The change in context from Malaysia to Australia raised the awareness of cultural differences within her and as such, in the new context of Australia, these celebrations are realized to be a core aspect of her identity.

Christina stated:

Germany and Spain are very similar so we celebrated […] all the Christian holidays basically like, Christmas, Easter […] but the only Persian holiday that we celebrated every year [is] actually for the 21st of March [for] the New Year (Christina)

The celebration of the “beginning of the Spring” is called Norooz (also Nowruz, Navroj, Nouruz, Nawroz, among other spellings)” (Central Asian Group; n.d., HuffPost Religion Editors, 2016; Iran Chamber Society, 2016). It was “[originated] in Persia” and is celebrated today by countries such as Azerbaijan, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (ibid). In Section 4.3.2 Culture as a Verb, Christina had made mention of how her mother, over the timespan of three decades, has adapted to a large amount of German customs and traditions so much so that:

I think she is more German than my dad (Christina)

And yet, she brings with her, the celebration of Norooz for Christina’s family. This suggests that the celebration of Norooz is an aspect that, for her mother, is part of her being. I contend that the celebration of Norooz by Christina’s family is a clear indication of an aspect of transnationalism in a way that, the celebration of certain holidays are features that can transcend through national boundaries. Thus, revealing of how the transnationalism can be understood in the context of various aspects of culture.
In this section, I have attempted to explore how the notions of *transnationalism* and *the transculturating self* are notably linked for TCKs by showing how there is an established sense of belonging to each country or culture that the TCK comes into contact with. Having moved from one context to another, the exposure to varying cultures ultimately plays a role in the development of identity of the individual.
4.3 Social Anchoring

Features such as, “race/ethnicity, gender and age are some […] categories [which] have been described [to be] primary natural and superordinate” (Settles & Buchanan, 2014). In the field of Sociology, these attributes fall under the category of “ascribed statuses” (Crossman, 2016; Sociology Guide.com, 2016). These have been described to be entities that “are fixed for an individual at birth” (ibid). Due to the visibility and stability” of these traits, they are regarded as attributes that are dominant and “beyond an individual’s control” (ibid; Settles & Buchanan, 2014).

The problem with accepting the “primacy of […] social categories” is that it feeds into essentialist notions of culture, belonging and identity (Settles & Buchanan, 2014). Especially so in the case of TCKs, such viewpoints are highly inaccurate as these “acculturation models [emphasize and bank on ideals] that the multicultural person would preserve and identify with their original cultural identity” (Sanchez, Shih & Wilton, 2014). It assumes that culture; identity, belonging and sense of place are stagnant features. It neglects the idea that an individual may not be particularly concerned with their so-called “original cultural identity” and that, “the individual [may] choose to classify herself or himself” using means other than these “ascribed characteristics” (ibid; Settles & Buchanan, 2014; Sociology Guide.com, 2016). Additionally, it does not take into account that the self is a dynamic that is perpetually transculturating (as discussed in Section 4.2 The transculturating self).

With the advancements of science and technology in the 21st century, alterations can indeed be done on these traditionally unfluctuating ascribed statuses such as, various “gender reassignment”, “craniofacial” and “facial aesthetic” surgeries to name a few (Kalaskar, Butler & Ghali, 2016). As Monceri (2009) asserted, “[t]here is no natural identity, not even the sexual/gender one”. For this, “[i]t is a remarkable phenomenon that the idea of ancestral links can survive in spite of many cultural changes and adaptations” (Roosens, as cited in Extra & Yağmur, 2004). In Section 4.1 The chameleon, I had used the analogy of the chameleon to describe the changing nature of identity and the power of individual choice regarding that. In this section, the term social anchoring will be used to describe one’s belonging. Social anchoring
was derived from Blommaert and Varis’ (2015) notion of “light communities” and “microhegemonies” which they had originally used to describe patterns of consumption and online culture, in their exploration of “contemporary identities”. In their work, they champion the notion that “[i]dentities have always been subject to prescriptive ‘how to’ discourses [and that,] there is or has been no lack of guides and instructors [when it comes to] identities” (ibid). They explained that when one purchases an item, what he or she is ultimately does is, “buy the ‘adjectives’ that come along with it (ibid). They state,

Consumption […] becomes an essential ingredient in an escalating culture of accountability [which has been and still is] escalating [largely] due to the use of social media [that is heavily intertwined with our lives today. In it] every aspect of our being and our lives can be questioned by others, and needs to be motivated, explained, rationalized (ibid).

Such patterns of behavior can be broken down into “infinitesimally small […] chunks” and, each aspect is deemed to be crucial as they contain essential “specific bits of identity” (ibid). Although the authors had originally used this idea of light communities to describe consumption patterns, I contend that this notion, especially in relation to TCKs, can be extended to traditionally so-called heavier communities including one’s ethnolinguistic and cultural identification, as well as, one’s belonging to a settled sense of place. I argue that these definitions are, in fact, a more relevant means of placing people into categories, rather than traditional anchored point of identification. This is on the grounds that such “specific arrangements or configurations […] rarely occur as a random or flexible complex […] as [together, they form] ‘essential’ combinations of features that reflect, bestow and emphasize [the] ‘authenticity’ [of one’s identity]” (ibid). For these reasons, one’s points of interests and social contexts are much more suited “emblematic features” (ibid).

In her interview, Jenna stated the following:

It is kind of hard to tell someone like that that your childhood matters, like your personal childhood, not sanctioned by any ancestral powers. So yeah, that was difficult, I think, to communicate. I, kind of, waited for people who were a bit more open-minded and engaged with them more. (Jenna)
When things get a little bit deeper in a relationship, I will just choose TCK because that is the realest thing for me. It's not about "these are my ancestors and this is my heritage". But more like, "this is actually what influences my thinking". It's TCK, which is none of the above. (Jenna)

In both contexts, Jenna draws to attention that the experiences that she has gone through are things that have shaped her identity today. Jenna refers to the idea that it is commonplace to use matters of heritage and ascribed statuses to define oneself as she speaks of the difficulties that she faces in attempting to explain how, in her opinion, it is her childhood which is a more defining revealing factor in the formation of her identity.

Christina and Eloise also raised similar points:

The difference is that I don’t identify myself with a place; I identify myself more with people. For me, moving is not that hard because I don’t have a place where I belong. Everything is home to me. (Christina)

I don’t want to just be in one box. I’m not so bound by defining myself to a set of definitions or rules to one place. (Eloise)

Taken together, these “social ‘spheres’” combine “such micro-hegemonized niches [to] make up ‘the’ [different facets of] identity” (Blommaert & Varis, 2011). In the above contexts, both participants in their respective interviews raise the point that home is often linked to “one place”, “a place”, “a set of definitions” and “a set for rules”. In other words, home is essentially understood to be a place that is stable, unchanging, “associated with stasis, boundaries, identity and fixity” (Ahmed, 1999). As TCKs, these “complexes” and “repertoire[s]” of the “relationship between identity, belonging and home” is one that is dynamic and always at play (Blommaert & Varis, 2011; ibid). For this, the stable, unchanging notion of home does not apply for both Christina and Eloise.
4.3.1 Enoughness

Blommaert and Varis (2015) highlighted, “[m]ost of what we do in organizing our lives is oriented towards conformity to others”. Identity and belonging are not merely characteristic features but rather, processes and activities. In order to claim that an individual is part of a certain group, it is adamant to get social cues right. In this sense, some level of conformity within particular cultures is required “in order to be recognizable by others” (ibid). This suggests that the individual has to understand the “micro-hegemonies” which are specific sets of normative regulations that dictate the employment of definitive details and be able to engage and play around with the micro-practices in order to “[get] it right” (ibid). Similarly, Liebler (2016) stated, “[s]ociety has subtle rules or norms about what it takes to be seen and socially accepted as a member of each race group”. And in another research, Deaux and Verkuyten (2014) claimed, to be regarded as an authentic member of a group “depends on one’s ability to master the tools of” the particular grouping and this includes features like “the right language, clothes, pasture, attitude and bodily gestures” (ibid). Although the authors had used these definitions in the context of African American [youths]” (Liebler, 2016), “hip-hop culture” (Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014), consumer culture, “[t]he chav culture” and “hijabista” culture, respectively (Blommaert & Varis, 2011; 2015), I contend that these viewpoints can be stretched to inculcate traditionally stable points of identification.

On the topic of “recognizability”, Blommaert and Varis (2015) claimed,

Recognizability is about getting all the details right, about composing a jigsaw of features that are in line with the normative expectations that generate recognizability. Such arrangements are intricate and put pressure on the resources people have at their disposal; they are compelling, and not only in dominant sociocultural strata (ibid).

The authors stressed how it is crucial for individuals to be recognized and acknowledged by others in order to claim to be part of a certain group belonging (ibid). Enoughness is “having ‘enough’ of the features specified” in order to be “admitted into an identity category” (ibid). This calls to question the variety of features that are characteristic of a certain culture. Deaux and Verkuyten (2014) claimed, “[s]peaking and reading a particular language is often an important
criterion for successful identity claims” and also made mention of previous “studies [which]
have shown that a lack of ethnic language proficiency [has made] it difficulty [for individuals] to
feel fully accepted by co-ethnics” (ibid). In the course of this research, enoughness is recognized
with regards to the functions of physical features, points of identification, as well as, points of
reference.
In the context below, Christina highlighted enoughness based on physical features:

I think it’s because I don’t look German. I’m always asked, “Where are you really from?”

(Christina)

The point of enoughness is raised here, as Christina does not “look” particularly German. During
her interview, Christina had shared that she looked “less German” in comparison to her sister.
For this, it was common for her to be faced with the question, “Where are you really from?” As
previously mentioned, people whom an individual communicate with have the power to
categorize and classify the individual into different social groupings (See 4.2.1 Adaptation and
Choice). For this, Christina’s sense of belonging is questioned here due to her physical features.

Daniella too raised the notion of enoughness in her interview:

Because of the way I look, sometimes, people would explain to me as if I don’t understand them. To me, that was very insulting. (Daniella)

In the context of Australia, where Daniella currently lives in, occasionally, she would come into contact with people who would pass a judgment that she is unable to communicate proficiently in the English language. And, would speak to her as such.

Enoughness can also be determined due to a lack of sense of belonging by participants. It can be argued that the lack of sense of belonging is closely with the lack of a point of reference. This can be seen in the following examples:

I don’t look different but there’s definitely a cultural difference that is hard to explain.

There is something there that is just different and you can’t really identify yourself with either one. (Ivana)

Ivana hints at the notion that social categorization and perspective are strong features even within the same ethnic group. She shared her experiences living in the USA, where she spent 10 years of her life, as a half Dutch and half American individual. At the time of the interview, Ivana had recently “moved back” to the Netherlands [in her own words]. Unlike Christina and Daniella in
the above examples, Ivana indicated that while she had fit in physically, there were other features that put her apart from other Americans and Dutch people.

In another example, Jenna, who is of American and German descent, and currently resides in Germany, makes mention of the following:

I felt like- Oh wow! I physically fit in and I get enough superficial cultural communication to fit in. I felt really happy but something went missing. (Jenna)

Like Ivana, in the above context, Jenna draws to attention that although she had “fit in” physically to the surrounding contexts that she found herself in, the lack of sense of belonging was not merely based on physical attributes and the knowledge of cultural communication. These attributes were “superficial” to her and were inadequate for her to feel a sense of belonging. She also stated:

This is theoretically supposed to work right? I'm supposed to be German, I'm supposed to get the banter, the guys... I'm supposed to be able to understand them. I don't understand German guys- how they date, what they do, how they flirt; it doesn't make any sense to me. It's supposed to, apparently. (Jenna)

Here, Jenna also indicated that mere ethnicity and heritage links are not enough to understand different facets of a country’s culture and practices. There is an expectation for her to be able to comprehend these features which are “supposed to work” for her but, as she reiterates several times, “I don’t understand”, “it doesn’t make any sense to me”. The repetition of the words, “I'm supposed to” thrice, in the above context, as well as her choice of words are indicative of her vexation and, reflects her feelings of frustrations regarding this expectation.

In another interview, Fleur described her feelings:

When I hang out with a group of people then I realize that, perhaps, I am not as much as the rest of them. Sometimes, I don't understand their references and when they switch to that language, I feel left out because I don't understand it. It is during those moments when I feel like I am not "properly" Malaysian. This is also the same with French people. I don't know some of the slang, references or pop culture. (Fleur)

Being surrounded by other Malaysians and French, it stood out to Fleur how she was not wholly like the others. Such feelings, I argue, can be attributed to the comparison to others around her. This can be linked to another aspect of belonging, which is due to the lack of point of reference
that TCKs experienced with others, especially from those who are from the so-called “same” culture or ethnic grouping that TCKs claim to be from. Settles and Buchanan (2014) explains it as such, “group memberships (and knowledge about individuals in those groups) are typically based on historical experiences and the social context”. The lack of knowledge and exposure to Malaysian and French practices, cultures and point of references, which thus resulted in Fleur feeling like she the lacked of enoughess to the various cultures to which she commented,

I feel like I don’t necessarily belong more than the feeling that I do belong. (Fleur)

Andrea too experienced this, as she stated:

This continued throughout and even still is the case, not having the same cultural points of reference with my friends whenever they would comment and laugh about X Greek series or the other song etc. I would rarely know them and rarely understand it and I would always feel umm… Kind of… Different. (Andrea)

Regardless of usually spending most of her time in Greece and only spending summers away in France and being surrounded by people whom supposedly share the same ethnicity and heritage cultures that she is from [or at least, half of her], Andrea felt this lack of sense of belonging due to the lack of point of references that she shared with her peers. This is a clear explication of how a mere two out of 12 months away in a year can result in feelings of difference and lack of enoughness.

Two of the participants, by my definition of TCK, fell under the TCK spectrum. However, through their responses, it was clear that there was no lack of sense of belonging in terms of identity issues as opposed to the others. Brian reported the following:

People always ask me are you Dutch now or are you German? I always say that I am both but I feel more connected to Germany. That’s because of two things. One is because I was born there. And where I grew up. So somehow, I would identify with that country. But I think what’s even more important is the time you spent in that country because it really brand marks you. Since I lived 19 years in Germany so essentially, all my younger adulthood life, I spent there. So, I think I am more German. (Brian)

---

9 This excerpt was previously used in Section 4.2 The transculturating self in the discussion of the aspect of time on identity and belonging.
For Brian, his birthplace, the time spent in a country, exposure to the culture and practices make him “more connected to Germany” than to the Netherlands. And as such, it is clear to him that he is “enough” to be regarded as German.

Giliana explained:
There are a lot of Belarusians who are leaving the country right now so, I wouldn’t say that I am any different from them. Because, Belarusians are quite mixed- It’s a mix of Lithuanians, Russians and Polish people (Giliana)

In the context where she was born and raised, Belarus, Giliana explained that majority of its citizens are, like her, “quite mixed”. For this, she does not feel particularly different from other Belarusians.

Although, at the beginning of my research, I was curious to see if one’s socioeconomic status (SES) would have an impact on one’s identity and belonging, due to the sensitive nature of such questions, I chose not to bring this point up during the course of the interviews. However, in giving examples, one of my participants, Harry brought these features up himself.

My reality was different from theirs, as much as I fit in with them. It wasn’t that I wasn’t one of them 10. I had certain privileges in my life that others did not. I went to the school where you know that if you attended that school, you were rich. I was regarded as an elite. But even within this realm, there were differences. I wasn’t evangelical enough and my parents weren’t Christian enough. People there were usually these and more American. (Harry)

[The other Americans] had a strong community basis but this wasn’t my experience. This is because of my mother and the way she raised us [in terms of constantly interacting with the people who lived on the streets]. I didn’t understand or resonate with what USA was. It was different for me. It was easier for me to identify a lot more with my poor friends who did not stigmatize me. […] You can bridge gaps and make friends with both poor and rich friends but it doesn't mean that there the gap does not exist. It does. (Harry)

Harry is a 21 year-old individual who has an American passport and has spent his life in 8 different countries. In his interview, he shared his experiences as an individual who owns an

10 With reference to others whom, like the participant, came from a higher SES background.
American passport and attended American schools across the world but had no clear vision on exactly how he could present himself as an American. He shared that, it was due to the nature of his parents’ jobs that resulted in a situation whereby, and he had to constantly move from one country to another. The only constant was that, the schools that he attended were always related to the USA.

When I came to the USA, there was a reverse cultural shock. I realized that I don't feel American. I understand these people but they are very plastic to me. It is easy for me to stigmatize and villainize them. There was and there still is a really strong internal struggle, for me. I perceived and imagined them to be different. And, I am perceived to be different, as well. I still get frustrated with Americans. (Harry)

The expectation of being American but not having lived in the USA is not a fair expectation. You would see it in someone else but you won’t necessarily understand or resonate with it. (Harry)

I would say that I bonded more with the indigenous people rather than all of the other expatriates (Harry)

In the above contexts, Harry draws to attention several points. The reference to Americans as “them” was, to me, rather interesting considering that officially, he has many links to the USA. This includes holding an American passport, having a father who is American, having parents whose work are heavily intertwined with the USA, attending American international schools and American boarding schools. In this way, he showcases that belonging is not merely about having or being born into official points of identification including attending a school linked to the USA, or having an American passport or attaining a certain education level or socioeconomic status. The lack of sense of belonging to a group, and in this instance to be an American, is not based on official documents, ethnicity, language and religion as, he shared these features with his so-called fellow Americans but it was still not “enough” for him to feel like he could “understand or resonate with it”. The categorization of Americans as “them” is a clear indication that Harry does not consider himself to be a member of this group and does not identify with them. Secondly, by explicitly stating that he “bonded more with the indigenous people rather than all of the other expatriates”, it highlights the fact that he is aware of the differences between both groups. And, finds himself in between both groups- hinting at the notion that he is not “enough” for either
one". Still, despite the lack of *enoughness*, he is expected to behave as an American and to be able to resonate with other Americans. This will be further explained in the next section of this paper, 4.3.2 *Culture as a verb*.

### 4.3.2 Culture as a Verb

I remember 4th of July in Colorado. Everyone put American flags in their yard but we didn’t. We came back and someone had put a flag in our yard. My father got very very angry and I remember that. That didn’t happen in Maryland. (Jenna)

In the above context, the imposition of behavior and therefore, imposing of identity by Jenna’s neighbors raises the notion that to live in the USA, to claim a certain identity needs to come with behaviors and actions that showcase that one is American. As her family did not put up the American flag on the 4th of July, they had engaged in a behavior that stood out for her neighbors, which they took it upon themselves to fix. The phrase *culture is a verb* was taken from my interview with Jenna where she had used this phrase to describe how culture is thought of and practiced in the context of USA versus Germany. Considering that this was one of the key features that came up during the course of my research, I thought that naming this section *Culture is a Verb* is most appropriate on the topic on intertwining behavior and identity.

In another example, Jenna stated:

> When we moved to Maryland, I was small and, for some reason, we didn’t fit into the neighborhood. I’m not sure why. I think it’s because everyone had lived there for a long time. I think that was what was going on. Church was strong and I wasn’t baptized. (Jenna)

Similar to the explication that I had made mention of earlier in this section, again, the point on *enoughness* is once again brought up here. Jenna’s memory of Colorado was one that- in order to present oneself as American “enough”, her family was expected to engage in behaviors like putting up the American flag on the 4th of July. In Maryland, in order for Jenna to be regarded as American “enough”, this did not just include physical features but also included religious practices and one’s belief system. Baubock (as cited in Muir, 2007) argues, “‘[m]igrants are not members of a society the day after their arrival… Membership is acquired gradually and mainly
as a function of the length of residence’’. To claim a certain identity ‘‘does not merely mean skin in the history of the Americas. It means culture’’ (Wallerstein, 1990). This includes the knowhow to behave and act as a certain identity. Communities are dynamic and in many cases, there are no real borders that govern these groupings. What exists instead, are implicit rules that members are expected to intentionally and unintentionally follow. To be part of disparate communities, one is assumed to know the implicit and explicit rules of each group, to consider oneself part of them, as well as, be accepted by other members in the group that they claim to be from. These rules have to be ‘‘[perfect] and [precise and] require sustained and disciplined focus on the detailed micro-practices of ‘getting it right’’’ (Blommaert & Varis, 2015). Thus, what is seen as being ‘‘deviant’’ is not being able to fit into the model that people have of a certain culture (Wallerstein, 1990).

Regarding the presentation of the Canadian identity, Giliana drew comparisons to Belarusians as she stated:

At work, I am expected to present a Canadian identity, not my own. Although tourists and guests sometimes ask, ‘‘Where are you from? Where did you get your accent?’’ So, this signifies that they know that you are from elsewhere. Still, they expect you to behave as you are a Canadian. (Giliana)

Belarusians don’t smile. Belarusians don’t ask you, ‘‘How are you doing?’’ and they don’t wish you, ‘‘Have a good day’’. It’s just not in the culture. People just didn’t do that. Here, you have to smile all the time. That was the hardest thing for me because I had to learn to smile and to be polite. I was never polite until I moved here. These were changes for me that I hard to learn. It doesn’t matter how bad you feel inside, you just have to smile all the time. (Giliana)

In the above contexts, Giliana reveals how she had to learn and adapt her behavior in accordance to the context that she found herself in (Refer to 4.2.1 Adaptation and Choice). As with Jenna’s statements, she too showcases, there exists an expectation to think, act and resonate in a certain manner to prove one’s claim to a specific identity.

---

11 “here”, with reference to Canada
Another aspect of *culture as a verb* is illustrated in the ways in which TCKs engage in actions attempt to prove that they do belong to specific identity groups:

When people say, “You’re not really Asian”, for me, I am. I eat dhal, nasi lemak, I like chilli. (Fleur).

Fleur raises two aspects in the above context. Firstly, the point of *enoughness* is raised here with the words, “not really Asian”, which is the viewpoint that others have of her. Others have recognized her lack of so-called Asian features that leads to the second point. She responds with “I eat dhal, nasi lemak, I like chilli” which showcases that the way in which she thinks of culture. One of the indicators that she is part Malaysian is her knowledge and consumption of Malaysian cuisine. *Culture is a verb* is seen here as she shares that she too partakes of these foods. The consumption of Malaysian cuisine is a symbol that she appreciates this aspect of her heritage.

*Culture as a verb* can be seen in the way that Christina reflects upon her mother, who is of Persian descent but has been living in Germany “for over 30 years”:

I think that the longer you spend in the country, the more you become. For example, […] my mother […] came to Germany when she was 18 and […] has been here now for over 30 years and I think she is more German than my dad [as] she has adapted to a lot of German traditions and things and ways of being (Christina)

Christina provides a clear explication what Blommaert and Varis (2011) meant when they stated, “[t]he benchmark for being admitted into an identity category (as a ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ member’) is ‘having enough’ of the features specified for them”. Christina highlights the notions of how her mother engages in the “mobilising [of] authentic identity discourse about oneself” and adjusts her *ways of being* to, what is deemed by Christina to be, *a lot of German traditions and things*. In this sense, she has paid close attention to and “[attended] to the most infinitesimally small details” of the different aspects of German culture.

The aforementioned examples regarding *culture as a verb* highlights the notion of *enoughness*, which can be defined having “enough” of the emblematic features to be recognized and acknowledged as a member of an identity category. The issue of authenticity is thus raised in the case of the TCKs’ identity and belonging because, in order to be deemed as “authentic”, an individual must know and understand the micro-practices of the various cultures that he or she
claims to be from (ibid). I think that this is the point that can be made about TCKs and *enoughness*. Jenna succinctly put this, as she stated:

Maybe it’s because I am not acting the way they expect. So maybe, that sets them off a bit. Maybe if I perform culturally differently then maybe they would be more like, “You’re less them and more us”. But maybe, it’s also about how Americans think about identity. It’s more verb-based and a little noun-based. (Jenna)
4.4 The fluidity of belonging

Within the realm of social anchoring and light communities, another theme that was raised during the interviews was regarding the fluidity of belonging for TCKs. A pattern of how the participants were able to go from one context to another was observed. This notion can be seen in Christina’s interview as she stated:

I think it’s like I belong to everything, a little bit. But nothing completely. Not belonging fully to anything. (Christina)

In my discussion of TCKs thus far, I have showcased how TCKs do not fit into standard notions of groupings. I have also attempted to address the varied challenges that TCKs face in their social identification and belonging as a result of this. In this section, the notion of how TCKs belong in the in-between of cultures and identities will be discussed. Elements of social anchoring, as well as, factors that play into the transculturating self (Refer to Sections 4.3 Social Anchoring and 4.2 The transculturating self, respectively).

4.4.1 Addressing the transient self

According to the Oxford University Press (2016), transient is both an adjective and a verb and which means “[l]asting only for a short time’ impermanent” and, “[a] person who is staying or working in a place for a short time only”. I thought that this term was most suitable for this section to discuss the transient sense of belonging that TCKs find themselves in. Transient does not necessarily refer to the amount of time spent in a country but rather, the way that the sense of belonging is often temporary. Such notions of temporary sense of belonging can be attributed to several features. One of which, is due to the TCK gets treated by others. Or rather, how other in a specific ethnic group that an individual claims to be from, views the way that he or she gets treated. Fleur’s experience is as follows:

They say that I don’t get all the specificities. They say that I get treated like a White person so I am not technically Asian. I always argue that I am. And others are puzzled by the fact that I can speak French despite not having lived in France before. It is difficult to rationalize and figure out for yourself. Not only for yourself, but also for others. (Fleur)
In her interview, Fleur shared that, within certain realms, she is an accepted member of the various social groupings that she claims to be from but this so-called acceptance is often short-lived. This speaks to the details that come alongside with *enoughness* as importance is placed on the specific details (as observed in Section 4.3.1 *Enoughness*). In order to be identified as a member of a social group, the TCK has to have “enough” of the emblematic features to be recognized, acknowledged as a member of an identity category. Often, this “benchmark” is a “slippery terrain, because ‘enough’ is manifestly a judgment, often a compromise, and rarely a black-and-white and well-defined set of criteria” (Blommaert & Varis, 2015). And, a consequence of not being able to get the micro-practices right is having to continuously explain oneself to others, as seen in Fleur’s experience.

In another interview, Harry mentioned the following:

As a little kid, I used to hold on to this wishful belief that I was Polish as a way to identify with something. So, I guess the default thing for me was to think that, the place as to where I was born in was rather strong. It was different for the rest of my family, you know... my sister was born in Virginia; my brother was born in Puerto Rico so [their claims to identity were stronger than mine and] they were all more American than me. They may, have some legitimacy to them [but] I don't feel that way. I can't feel like... and I don't want to call myself that. I wasn't born here so I don't feel that legitimate. I don't want to be American but that's what I am. And, even though it's just paper... I just remember saying to my dad, you know "Am I Polish?" and he would turn to me (in a laughing/ as if mocking me) and say, "You thought you were Polish?" And that just destroyed me. He blatantly laughed. And, I would say “but what is it? Why am I American?” He would say, "Because you're American. You're born to a diplomat so you're American!" And somehow, this... You know, the empirical reality gave me some kind of emotional truth. (Harry)

In the above context, Harry gave an illustration of his frustrations, as a TCK, of not feeling like he is able to claim identification to a certain country or culture. His feelings of being transient are highlighted above.
4.4.2 The in-between

In a book by Pollock and Van Reken (2009), the authors looked to Pollock’s (1999) work and stated, “‘because [TCKs] have grown up with different experiences from those who have lived primarily in one culture, TCKs are sometimes seen as slightly strange by people around them’.” When I read these words, I was puzzled. And during the course of this research, I wanted to understand precisely what it was that made TCKs come across as *slightly strange*. Was it the inability to identify with traditional social groupings? Was it due to the belonging of more than one social group? Or, was it due to TCKs’ feelings of being within the *in-between*?

Looking at TCK as a group, the places where TCKs fit in are within the *grey area*, the *in-between* “small spaces of uniqueness, of things that [are not] shared with others” (Blommaert & Varis, 2015). During their respective interviews, the participants asserted that they often felt as though they belonged in the “between” zone of conventional markers of identification. This is observed in the following excerpts:

> I see myself as a mixture. When I’m in Germany, I’m a foreigner- kind of and, kind of not. And, when I’m in Iran, it’s the same and it’s the same as Spain. I think it’s because I don’t look German. I’m always asked, “Where are you really from?” (Christina)

In the above context, Christina highlighted the point on how she did not fully fit into the categories of German, Iranian or Spanish. In this account, she showcases how she wanted to fit herself into these groups of belonging but she is being denied of that. Such a denial is further explained in *Section 4.1.1 Adaptation and Choice*. And consequently, her sense of belonging to those various groups would *always* be challenged.

While Christina recounted her experience of being challenged? In another interview, Harry showcased how the groups that he belonged to accepted him. But it was him to set himself apart

> I am half Latino and half White. White people would say that I’m White. Latinos would say, “You’re gringo but you’re one of us too”. I’m never really one or the other. (Harry)

You get a certain level of pride, you know, I can’t explain it. I don’t know what it’s in. It’s a level of pride, you know, I belong to everywhere. (Eloise)
Am I allowed to say that I am more Asian now but French tomorrow? Is that legitimate? People have called me out on it before. (Fleur)

I feel like I belong where everyone is different. That’s when I can really be myself. So, that’s where belonging actually comes in. But, in terms of everything else, including religion, it’s kind of hard. (Jenna)

Everyone is tethered to a country, a nation [and] an idea… And, TCKs tend to either go between that or conform but usually, between either one. (Harry)

My siblings and I live between worlds. Our parents are staunch and grounded in particular elements between those worlds. So it’s interesting to see the contrast between them and how we both didn’t identify. (Harry)

In the above contexts, it is observed that, having to explicitly choose between traditional points of identification is an aspect that does not particularly work well for TCKs. TCKs fit in the in-between, which are not particularly concrete points of identification. For TCKs, the sense of belonging to social groupings is not a matter of black and white; there is no clear-cut definition to encompass feelings of belonging. This ultimately affects a TCK’s sense of identity:

You know, the identification with everything and not with anything. It becomes who I am, to a certain degree. Between them, it’s one of those two or, not with any one of those two. The lack of identity is what allows me to be who I am. (Harry)
4.5 A word on language

In their work, Deaux and Verkuyten (2014) used the examples of “Chinese-Canadian and Chinese Dutch youth” to showcase the close relationship that language has with culture, belonging and identity. As previously mentioned in Section 4.3.2 Culture as a verb, in order to claim one’s belonging to various social groupings, one is expected to know how to act as a member from those specific groups. In the case if the ethnically Chinese youths in both Canada and in the Netherlands, the authors made the point that the inability “carry on a conversation” in the various Chinese languages made them feel like they were “not Chinese ‘enough,’ or not ‘really’ Chinese because they lack critical attributes of Chinese culture and, therefore are not fully able to ‘do’ Chinese” (ibid). They also raised a similar point regarding language and identity in their illustration of the “South Moluccan youngsters living in the Netherlands” (ibid). The authentication of Moluccan identity is regarded by “the ability to speak the Malay language” which is telling of the ties between language, belonging and identity.

Drawing to attention the very practice of “language testing in the context of immigration and ‘integration policies’”, Blommaert, Leppänen and Spotti (2011) showcase the importance of language within societies. In line with the aforementioned, they highlight how “[f]ull membership of a nation [is] predicated on full (and exclusive membership of an ethnolinguistic community)” (ibid). Considering the role that language plays in one’s sense of belonging, culture and identity, it is of importance to understand “why people display certain language practices” as they are revealing of a multitude of features (Jackson, 2008). As shown in the sections on 4.1.1 Adaptation and Choice and 4.1.2 The Identity Denial curtain, TCKs have the ability to “make fluid choices regarding language use about how and when to belong to certain groups” (ibid). As such, the role of languages is an intriguing factor that should be discussed and analyzed. In this section, different aspects of language will be explored in the social aspects of language and how it manifests itself in my research on TCKs.
4.5.1 Context-based language

One of the qualifications that I had in choosing the participants for this study was that, they report that they are able to speak two or more languages. Considering that all the participants were, in this sense, multilingual, I was interested to find out if different contexts would evoke the use of different languages. The participants reported that the use of different languages was based on the context that they found themselves in. This theme of context-based language rang throughout the responses of all the participants. This was reminiscent of Blommaert’s (2013) words as he chimed, “we perpetually adjust our language repertoires to those we have to communicate with, often coming up with entirely new forms of language use”.

Brian reported the following:

[The languages that I speak] would really depend on the context. It would depend on which people I am with. If I [were surrounded] with people who only speak English […] I would not scream enthusiastically in German […] I would scream in English. Same with the Netherlands or in Germany, I would adapt to the language automatically […] the only thing I recognize sometimes is anger; it’s a different state (Brian)

In his interview, Brian shared that he is able to communicate fluently in all the three languages of English, German and Dutch. And in the above context, Brian showcased that his use of different languages was based on the people whom he found himself with at the present moment.

Andrea also mentioned of this phenomenon:

I would speak French to my mum […] number one would be French and number two would be English, depending also on whether it is oral or written communication. We would most often write to each other in English, for some reason. It’s easier perhaps [but] I have to say that the setting really plays a large role. When we’re in Greece, we communicated in Greek with mum as well. (Andrea)

During the course of her interview, Andrea had shared that she was raised consciously bilingual by her parents. She explained that her mother, who is a native French speaker, also ran a language school, which enabled her to, from an early age, be exposed to the English language. Andrea was also exposed to the Greek language from an early age considering that she lived most of her life in Greece. For this, Andrea has native command of all three languages. In the
above context, Andrea raised two noteworthy points- firstly; despite the variety of languages that Andrea can communicate to her mother in, it is observed that the language that both parties choose to speak is dependent on context that they found themselves in thus showing another instance of context-based language use. Secondly, the mode of communication determined the language used in the interaction between two parties who share the same languages of communication. This is also seen in Christina’s interview as she stated:

With my mum, we speak German when other people around and we speak Farsi when it’s just her and me […] we text in German because, [Farsi] is in Arabic letters and it takes me forever to write (Christina)

As in Andrea’s interview, Christina raised the points that the context plays a defining role in the language chosen to interact in and, that the language chosen to communicate in is selected based on the communicative device.

Another interesting phenomena arose regarding context-based language use. It is as follows- should the person whom the TCK is interacting with, be able to speak in more than one of the languages that the TCK can communicate in, the TCK still continues to speak in that one language that he or she first started speaking to the other party in. This can be seen in the examples that Eloise and Christina presented:

[For conversations between my boyfriend and me, although] we [are] both in the Netherlands and [are able to communicate fluently in Dutch], we speak English to each other. This happens even when we’re in a group of Dutch friends and everyone is speaking Dutch. Some random Dutch words do come up but, on the most part, we will still turn to each other and speak English. That stays our home connection (Eloise)

Regarding my mum and I, we both speak Dutch outwards but to each other, English. I don’t know if there is a meaning attached, per se. It was just our connection, our bond. (Eloise)

The language that I speak brings out a different kind of person and when I switch my language, I also switch my personality. When I speak Norwegian with my boyfriend, for example, it’s weird because we are different persons. So, we stick to English. (Christina)
In the above contexts, Eloise and Christina reflect upon their use of English in their relationships with others. Coincidentally, English is a language is made mention of in both their interviews. The English language functions as a “connection” and a “bond” between Eloise and her boyfriend, as well as, her and her mother, respectively. Similarly, although Christina is able to communicate in Norwegian, she states that the speaking of the Norwegian is “weird because we are different persons” thus explicitly showing how the various languages are linked to different aspects of her personality and identity. It can be observed that language ultimately acts as an anchor point for both participants in their various relationships. This point creates the prerequisites of how different languages can be linked to different emotions which will be discussed in the next section, Section 4.4.2 Language and its links to emotions, personality and identity.

4.5.2 Language and its links to emotions, personality and identity

Contradictory to essentialist theories of language, Tannenbaum and Tseng (2015) challenged traditional views in their findings as they stated, “given their way of living and their patterns of schooling, socialization, and acculturation”, in the case of TCKs, “L2 is more dominant than L1”. They also found that “proficiency in L1 was not correlated with any of the language-identity scores” but instead, L2 is more “central to [TCKs’] language repertoire and their sense of identity” (ibid). Furthermore, they found that, “L2 emerged as the most preferred language for various emotional circumstances and expressions” (ibid). This suggests that, different languages are used to express various emotions and, “different experiences of self” (ibid). This is best described in their participants’ report of “‘[s]ome languages can express to me emotions that other languages can’t’” and, “‘When I’m angry I use [Language A] because I don’t know how to swear [in Language B]’” (ibid). Another feature that the authors made mention of was, “the more languages [that one spoke], the more they tend to report [having] several dominant languages” (ibid). These findings were of stark contrast to previous theories on language and identity as, it was traditionally believed that L1 is closely related to “the construction of self-identity” (ibid).

As the Chinese saying goes, “学一门语言，就是多一个观察世界的窗户” (pronounced: xué yī mén yǔ yán, jiù shì duō yī gè guān chá shì jiè de chuānghù). When translated to English, this phrase literally means: Learning a new language gives an individual another window to look at
the world. This proverb rings through as we explore the notion of language and its links to emotions, personality and identity, in an attempt to further comprehend the intersection between language and culture. Language is a subset of culture and it is through culture that one gets a sense of identity. While identity and language are both shaped through culture, culture too, is shaped by language, and as seen in this section, language shapes identity (Tannenbaum & Tseng, 2015). For multilinguals, different languages can also be used in the expression of different emotions (ibid). Makihara (2005) argues, “the larger sociocultural context” is learnt when one learns a language. And through culture, an individual gets acquainted with “cultural ideas about language and personhood” which is key to the development of identity. In the following examples, the notion of how varying languages are means of bringing out different aspects of an individual’s personality, draws certain kinds of connections, especially so in close relationships can be observed.

In this current study, there was a recurrent theme of how the use of different languages triggered a different aspect of one’s personality and different aspects of emotions. This is clearly seen in Fleur’s interview, as she stated:

> When I speak French, I feel like I’m a slightly different person. Perhaps, I would speak quicker and there is more subtlety in the language. So, like more potential for jokes and quick word games. And I am much better in that in French and I am also more sarcastic in French. So it brings out a different side of my personality. (Fleur)

Fleur’s words were reminiscent of Grosjean’s (2015) findings on bilinguals where it was reported that, “[m]any bilinguals […] change their attitudes and behaviours when they change language”. While some found themselves to be “more aggressive and more tense in one of their languages, [others found themselves to be] more reserved and gentle in the other” (ibid). This was also an occurrence that was mentioned in Brian’s interview:

> With anger, it’s […] more in German and English. In English because I watch a lot of television programs that are in English and, in English, you see a lot of good expressions in English […] but well, I see it in basketball sometimes. When I am so exhausted and I just can’t think anymore and when something is going really badly then, I do curse in German as well, but very seldom. (Brian)
Harry too made mention of a similar point:

I feel like my voice is different and my persona can be a little different. If you speak to me in Spanish, I will be more calm and centered. Like, I am a person who talks to people on a profound level. In English, I can be all over the place sometimes, like woohoo! In Portuguese, I am a little wild but also calm— a little of both. I’m not a different person but, it just brings out a different side of me. (Harry)

Meyrowitz (1985) argues, “[s]tages of socialization [...] affect the identity of the individual even though the stages are largely arbitrary, social, and information-bound”. As “language and socialization” are intertwined, this indicates that with the learning of language, comes with it, “the larger sociocultural context” in which, an individual gets acquainted with “cultural ideas about language and personhood [which ultimately] influences the ways that children develop communicative competence and practice” (Makihara, 2005). As such, the notions of language, culture and identity are undoubtedly entwined with one another and have the capabilities to bring out different aspects of one’s identity. Looking at the aforementioned illustrations, the use of languages by TCKs in this study, it can be observed that contrasting languages are used in different contexts and “the use of each language may come to be associated with a shift in a large array of behavior” (Grosjean, 2015). These are positioned according to the “social roles and emotional attitudes” of the individual, whom the individual is interacting with and the “different contexts” (ibid). These suggest that language is indeed a medium that brings out distinct aspects of one’s personality.
4.5.3 Languaging

Grosjean (2015) contended, in his research on bilinguals that, bilinguals have the ability to “bring in [or] to borrow a word or short expression from [another] language and [easily] adapt it morphologically (and often phonologically) into the base language”. This, he explains, is not the same phenomenon as “code-switching, which is the juxtaposition of two languages” (ibid). Grosjean’s argument can be illustrated in the following excerpts:

There are some words that I don’t really bother to translate. I will sometimes throw words together. I don’t know why but my brain does that a lot too actually. I shortcut whatever is the quickest way to say something. Sometimes you come up with interesting mishmash of whatever two or three languages. (Eloise)

In the above context, Eloise made mention of what Grosjean (2013) had referred to as the active “borrowing [of specific words from a particular language] is the [active] integration of one language into another”. The explicit statement, “I shortcut whatever is the quickest way to say something [which often comprises of an] interesting mishmash of […] two or three languages” is a clear illustration of what Grosjean had put forward. This can also be seen in Ivana’s interview, as she stated:

Actually, my mum and I, kind of, have our own language. Like, we speak Dutch but we also put other English words in between. This is also the same with texting. Also with my sister, I guess. I just kind of mix the two languages in sentences. Sometimes I don't even notice but sometimes, I do. (Ivana)

In both their respective interviews, Eloise and Ivana raised the notions of borrowing words and putting together a terms whilst communicating with individuals who shared the same knowledge of languages as they did. This highlights the view that language is constantly changing and, a large part of it is not only dependent on the context that the individual finds oneself in but also, whom he or she finds oneself communicating with.
4.5.4 Group belonging based on language and accents

In his work on sociolinguistics, Blommaert (2013) stated, “[l]anguage is one of the most immediate and sensitive indexes of diversity. Small differences in accent and speaking betray someone’s regional, social class, ethnic, and/or gender backgrounds”. In another article, Nicholas (2011) showcased that there exists a perceiving of “a direct link between linguistic competence and cultural identity”. This aspect of language that was observed during the course of the study was with regards to group belonging based on the language that an individual speaks and the accents that an individual has when he or she speaks a language. For the purposes of clarity, accents in the context of language use will be referred to as language-accent.

In the following example, Daniella categorizes herself into the “English-speaking group”:

Predominantly, everyone has to speak our national language, or rather, the country’s national language. Most of my friends and I speak English. My family speaks English as well. So, that’s my first language. I belong to an English-speaking group. (Daniella)

The above example showcases the significance of language in that, it is not merely a tool for communicative purposes but they also appear to be identification markers for TCKs.

In many of the examples that the participants gave, language-accent also arose. Language-accent was revealing of a number of features. On one hand, it showed how TCKs did not fully belong to various social groupings that they claimed to be from and as such, stood out. This is seen in the context of Harry’s interview:

Although I didn't have an accent speaking Spanish when I was a kid, I had an accent no matter where I was. There was always a regional way of speaking Spanish and, I didn't sound Peruvian or Nicaraguan. I talked like my mum and everyone would say "You're American!" It wasn't that I couldn't speak Spanish because my Spanish was perfectly fine. It was just that my Spanish clearly wasn't the same as theirs. In some ways, I was stigmatized. And the easiest way to point out the difference to me and say, "You're American!" (Harry)

On another hand, language-accent functioned as a means of showing how the TCK belonged to certain social groupings. Eloise, who has spent a large part of her life in the USA stated:

I will never lose my American accent. (Eloise)
Her American accent is one of the defining factors of how she is a member of the USA. It highlights the links between language, *language-accent* and a sense of belonging. Jenna, who stated the following, also mentions this:

> In Spain, people think I am French sometimes. I will tell them that I am German even though I don’t think in a German way and, I will end the conversation. So, in Germany, I have to come up with something else or a pass because I have the local dialect. So people will say, “Okay, you’re Swabian”. (Jenna)

The above context illustrates how Jenna’s Swabian accent allows for her to be recognized as a member of the community. This speaks to the notion of *enoughness*, which was discussed in Section 4.3.1 *Enoughness*. It also highlights the view of how *group belonging* can be *based on language and accents*.
4.6 The problem with the question “Where are you from?”

Maya Angelou once said, "The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned” (Hirsch, 2014). Her words ring through and resound especially with regards to TCKs. The four words “where are you from?” appear so casual and is one that is brought up in almost every social interaction ranging from dinner parties, classroom settings and so on.

It appeared to me that for TCKs who have lived in three or more countries in the course of their lives, it came across as the most “dreaded” question. When asked, some of the participants laughed before asking, “are you serious?” and others sighed before responding. There were two main categories of responses regarding this question, one of the groups included participants who have lived in two countries and in the other, included participants who lived in three countries and more. The following presents some such responses.

For participants who lived in two countries, the answer was rather straightforward. This was seen in the responses of Ivana, Giliana, Daniella and Brian, as they stated:

I am Dutch because I was born and grew up here. (Ivana).

I am always Malaysian at heart. It’s where I grew up, where I lived my whole life before coming here [to Australia]. (Daniella)

I would say that I am from Belarus. (Giliana)

In the replies above, it is seen that the question “Where are you from?” was rather clear-cut as they understood it to be as such:

The question, “where are you from?” is for me, “where are you born in”. (Brian)

---

12 The main motivation for this section stemmed from my own curiosity of how TCKs felt when faced with this question. As a TCK myself, I have always had personal feelings of unrest regarding this very question.
For other TCKs who have lived in three or more countries, it appeared that they did not have a straightforward answer of a country that they associated themselves with but rather, their sense of identification was based on where their parents were from. Fleur illustrated the following:

I would say that I am half French and half Malaysian and if they ask, “But where are you really from?” I would still say the same. There is nothing more to say, I wouldn’t have a better answer than that. (Fleur)

In the above context, Fleur reveals a number of features— one of which is that, the question of “where are you from?” for her is a link to her ethnic identification based on ancestry. Another aspect that she raises, in this context, is that, there exists an expectation that the answer to “where are you from?” is country. Considering that, in her response, Fleur did not directly pinpoint to a country where she is so-called from, the questioner rejected her answer by repeating the question again to her.

As illustrated in the contexts below, time was a factor in most of the participants’ replies to the question, “where are you from?”:

Depending on how long I want to take. (Andrea)

It depends on my mood and how much I feel like people want to listen to my story.
(Christina)

Usually my answer will be that it is a long story. Sometimes I feel like it, sometimes I don’t. Sometimes I give people a nice story or if there is a reason as to why that came up, I will explain it. But other times, I just don’t bother. (Eloise)

On top of the time factor that is recognized in Andrea, Christina and Eloises’ response, the notion of the identity denial curtain (from is Section 4.1.2 The Identity Denial Curtain) is also observed here. The three participants exposed that their responses were based on how long [they] want to take and by doing so, their replies toward the questioner, be it a long extended version or a shorter summarized version, are revealing of their ability, as TCKs, to choose exactly what they want to divulge in accordance to the situation.
The participants who were most affected by the question, “where are you from?” were those who expressed their frustrations about being unable to fit so-called perfectly into a compartment or a specific categorization. Eloise claimed:

I find it hard or weird that other people need to compartmentalize you. I find that people who have moved around a lot or even people with a broader sense of thinking don’t see it as a problem. But people, who don’t have that, really need to compartmentalize. (Eloise)

In the above context, Eloise takes some of her frustrations of the inability, on her part, to identify wholly with specific social groups, out. Similarly, Christina, in her interview, illustrated her frustrations of being questioned again, after having shared with others that she is German. She stated the following:

They ask me where I'm from and I say that I'm German. And they say, “No! Where are you really from?” And then, I say, “man, I just told you that I'm German” […] I get really pissed off and I insist […] What I don’t like is when people tell me where I’m from, that is something I don’t like. When I tell you where I’m from then, it’s fine but, if you tell me where I am from then, I don’t like. (Christina)

Like Eloise, Christina expressed her resentment and to some extent, irritation of being questioned, “where are you from?” This can also be seen in Harry’s interview as he revealed his reply to the question:

I just keep it simple. I hate it. I don’t like it. I don’t have any interest when people ask me that unless you’re interested and really want to know. Typically, I won’t bother. It turns people off when I say; “I am from here and there” and I think- why do you want to know where I am from. I don’t actually say that and I am not mean towards them. I [simply] act completely uninterested. (Harry)

In the above response, Harry revealed a somewhat nonchalant attitude towards the question, which is, an attempt, on his part, to get the questioner to dismiss his or her curiosity on this topic.

As Pollock and Reken (2009) state, “[h]ome connotes an emotional place- somewhere you truly belong. There simply is no real answer to that question for many TCKs”. It is observed that for TCKs who have lived in three or more countries, being asked the question “Where are you from?” is essentially, a means of categorization that seemed to frustrate most of them. It appeared that for these TCKs, the essence of the question takes away from and discounts the life experiences of these individuals. On these grounds, they appeared to be apathetic and detached.
Adiche (2009), in her TED talk claimed, “Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person”. Her words ring through Harry’s words as he stated,

If you really want to know, if there is a small chance that you might understand what I’m saying, then we’ll talk. If it is so that you can look at me with some kind of prejudice or bias, then… I don’t care (Harry).

For these TCKs, having to categorize themselves into these specific categories of identification or, denied or questioned a particular identification after having given a reply is a means of having this power taken away from them. This is taking into account that, “[i]dentification establishes a psychological link between the individual and the group (Verkuyten, 2011). As soon as people identify with their group, that group becomes the basis for thinking, feeling and acting” (ibid). Consequently, the question “Where are you from?” is a reiteration and a blatant reminder for TCKs “that a core identity of theirs is at best questioned, at worst denied” (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). Although Cheryan and Monin (ibid), had originally referred to Asian Americans in their study, I think that these arguments can be raised in the context of TCKs’ sense of belonging and identity. When continuously faced with this repudiation, over time, “[individuals] often feel uprooted, marginal or ambivalent” (Grosjean, 2015).
5 Concluding Remarks

In a world where individuals are expected to choose within the parameters of black or white, TCKs stand in the in-between, the grey area. Extensive research in the literature and the findings that I amassed has led me to conclude that culture; belonging, language and identity are undoubtedly multi-layered phenomenon. The focal group of the study was TCKs whom, have been shown to face difficulties in identifying with such traditional social groupings. And throughout my research, I have attempted to showcase that there exists a “strong link between language and identity” which is still very much embedded within the parameters of essentialist approaches (Nicholas, 2011). And, much of the current models regarding culture, which are still widely used, are insufficient to fully understand the realities of identity and belonging.

5.1 Implications of this research

In the case of TCKs, the exposure to social groups are multifold considering the myriad of cultures that TCKs are exposed to as they go about their lives. In the exploration of the realities that TCKs face with regards to their ability, or lack thereof, to identify with traditional social groupings, the goal of this research was to showcase that there is a need of movement towards adopting social constructivist ideals of language, culture, belonging and identity. This is taking into account that the temporary experience in various places leaves marks on the TCKs’ transculturating identity, habits, behaviors and sense of belonging. Commenting on Britain in 1996, Black (1996) pointed out, “there exists considerable evidence that people of 'mixed race' will constitute a steadily growing sector of […] society”. Accordingly, there is a growing number of TCKs and it is adamant to get their views and understand their stories from their points of views. In much of the research that I encountered, the perspectives and standpoints of TCKs are merely mentioned. Books that I came across on TCKs appeared to be more focused on expressing the “benefits” that come along with being a TCK including, “expanded worldview[s]” and “cross-cultural enrichment” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). They also stated the expanded upon the limitations and “confused loyalties” of TCKs on the topics of “politics, patriotism, and values” (ibid).
In discussing the topics treated here, it should be noted of the pertinence of social media in this 21st century, which has allowed for the creation of identities for TCKs themselves. As previously mentioned in Section 2.1.2 Use of social media, I realized that the participants who I had interviewed via Skype were more willing to go deeper and share their experiences with me. Referring to Horton and Wohl (as cited in Meyrowitz, 1985), Meyrowitz (ibid) stated, “the new media lead to a new type of relationship which they call ‘para-social interaction’. They argue that although the relationship is mediated, it psychologically resembles face-to-face interaction”. In reflecting upon the process of my research, I thought that this could be attributed to the fact that I had reached out to them on TCK online platforms. Additionally, I had also divulged that I too identified as a TCK. Conceivably, this could potentially reveal that I could possibly understand some of the situations that they faced.

After all, “[t]he largest social space on earth these days is the virtual space” (Blommaert & De Fina, 2016). In their discussion of the hipster culture, Maly and Varis (2015) noted that, “[t]he internet [is a medium] that has been intrinsically intertwined with the rise of the hipster”. Similarly, I contend that the “internet [and, in particular, social media, is] one of the primary instruments in the globalization of the [TCK] culture” (ibid). With the rise of the Internet, online magazine platforms, such as Denizen, tckworld.com and tckidnow.com, catered specifically for TCKs are able to take off. And, in the case of TCKs, the pertinence of “electronic media [has begun] to blur previously distinct group identities by allowing people to ‘escape’ informationally from place-defined groups and by permitting outsiders to ‘invade’ many groups’ territories without ever entering them” (Meyrowitz, 1985). This is indicative of some main features- firstly, of the growing recognition of TCKs and secondly, of how new media has enabled for the allowance of group belonging to transcend through space and across time differences.

Throughout this research, I attempted to highlight the vastness and veracity of social constructivist ideals of language, culture, belonging and identity. As Blommaert (2013) chimed, “[t]here is a need to unthink and rethink some of the most basic concepts in social science-notions such as community, identity, and […] citizenship”. As previously mentioned, at this point, much of the research that I have found with regards to language, culture, belonging and identity is too overreaching and static. To remedy these deficiencies, the adoption of the social
constructivist notions is crucial. This is to ensure that the complexity of language, culture belonging and identity would be recognized and, consider that, the “‘self’ has no clear meaning and cannot be unambiguously defined” (Monceri, 2009). Only then, would we be able to further address and delve into the misconceptions that have been very much ingrained in larger society. It is also; adamant to pay close attention to the terms used this field of research. Within social science, for instance, “[t]he concepts of ethnicity, identity, and culture are often used interchangeably” (Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014). This is problematic as it creates confusion and it “can hamper our understanding of social and psychological processes” (ibid). While these features are correlated, they are not the same and mean vastly different things. It is crucial to understand the differences between them. Furthermore, as showcased earlier in Section 4.2 The transculturating self, it is crucial to pay attention to the verb-tense of words, especially so when it comes to notions of identification and belonging.

Within the field of sociolinguistics, there has been record “a long-standing record of analyzing and interpreting linguistic diversity” (Parkin & Arnaut, 2014; Pérez-Milans, 2015). This can be observed in Pérez-Milans’ (2015) words as he stated,

Linguistic and cultural practices are no longer examined against the background of abstract standard languages, uniform views of speakers and stable group identities. Rather, such practices are investigated with reference to the fragmented repertoires that people acquire, construct and mobilize by positioning themselves and others in ways that have consequences for their distinct degrees of control over access to different social spaces (e.g., formal versus informal), symbolic resources (e.g., institutionalized forms of recognition through certificates) and materialities (e.g., jobs) throughout the course of their life trajectories (ibid).

Such viewpoints, as raised by Pérez-Milans (ibid), have lead to the “[gradual] opening [of] new terrains of investigation [as well as] methodological questions in the social and political sciences [and] in the humanities” (Parkin & Arnaut, 2014). Blommaert (2012) too mentioned of this point as he stated, there exists a “growing awareness that globalization and its superdiverse outcomes generate considerable conceptual difficulties [in that, we have to move away from] relatively stable […] and non-dynamic [viewpoints and move towards a more] dynamic [and] mobile” understanding of language”. After all, “sociolinguistic systems are characterized by mobility”
There is indeed a dire need to engage in a gradual process of creating conditions that will enable a more social constructivist approach regarding culture, belonging and identity. I think that, raising awareness and bringing these to light by making the conscious effort in seemingly tiny features would aid in the movement towards a social-constructivist approach to acculturation studies. The aforementioned can be done so by researchers and universities, whom produce literature, followed through by journalists and media figures. Then only, can such points of view be trickled down to wider society. Although it would probably take a considerable amount of time, if we keep following along this route, in time to come, social constructivist notions, as seen in sociolinguistics, would be increasingly accepted in other areas of study.

5.2 Suggestions for further studies on TCKs

As the descriptions, in the study, demonstrate, much research remains to be done on the issues of social-constructivist approaches to language, culture, belonging and identity. Only then, would we be able to get more done regarding TCKs. As noted, TCKs who have multiple identifications have faced different challenges of belonging than that of individuals who can claim their roots and, connection to a specific social grouping. To claim belonging and to be accepted as a member of disparate communities, one had to know, understand and practice the implicit and explicit rules of each group. Accordingly, where possible, further research on TCKs is needed. First-hand experiences, accounts and points of view from TCKs should be thoroughly explored. By doing so, it would enable a more accurate grasp of the actualities that TCKs face. It is suggested that further work should build on the conceptions of belonging, identity and ethnolinguistic and cultural identification of TCKs.

During the course of my study I found that different languages brought out different aspects of one’s personality, so it would be interesting to see what results would yield if the participants had the option to speak in a language that they were most dominant in. As such, perhaps, a larger sample size with the support of more researchers or a longitudinal study on TCKs, one that involves communication in more languages other than English could be beneficial.
At this point, there is no clear pattern documenting the manners in which TCKs communicate or in the way that they put together different words from varying languages. However, a life-long project following a particular group of TCKs may prove useful for further studies. This study would involve in-depth periodic interviews with parents who are committed to adding to the literature on TCKs. And perhaps, considering the denizen-nature of life of each TCK, a multidisciplinary, multinational team of scholars would be needed to look into the world of TCKs.
Bibliography


http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/transnational-migrants-when-home-means-more-one-country


Appendix

The following presents the guide that I had used for my in-depth interviews with the participants.

1. How would you describe yourself?
2. In the national context that you live in, what major groups are there (ethnicity, linguistic, religious etc.)? To which groups do you think you belong to?
3. In the context that you live in, do you think that there is a hierarchy of belonging? In other words, is one group belonging kept at a higher esteem than another? (If so, why do you think this is so?)
4. What contributes to this hierarchy formation?
5. What makes one group less prestigious than another?
6. Do you differ from others in your personal identification?
7. How was it like for you growing up?
8. Where did you grow up?
9. Why did you move?
10. How was it like for you moving?
11. Tell me about some of your experiences when you moved to a new place/ entered a new social sphere
12. Which countries/ cultures have you spent most of your life in?
13. Would you say that those countries/ cultures played a part in forming your identity/ If yes, how? If no, how?
14. What languages do you speak?
15. What languages can you understand?
16. What languages do you speak on a daily basis, at present?
17. What languages do you speak to your family members?
18. Are there differences in language use when speaking to individual family members?
19. What languages do you use while texting?
20. Do the languages you speak have any special/ personal meanings to you?
21. How would you describe your relationship with language and/or with each of the languages that you speak?
22. Do you react differently to different languages?
23. What language do you typically use when you are happy?
24. What language do you feel “gets” you when you are sad?
25. What language do you typically use when you are angry?
26. Have you ever been perceived negatively because of the language that you speak?
27. In the case of two competing identities, how do you choose your own belonging?
28. How would you typically react to the question- “Where are you from”? 