

THE UNIVERSITY
OF ADELAIDE
AUSTRALIA

**Back home: Distress in re-entering
cross-cultural missionary workers and the
development of a theoretical framework for
clinical management**

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

*Roads go ever on
Under cloud and under star,
Yet feet that wandering have gone
Turn at last to home afar.
Eyes that fire and sword have seen
And horror in the halls of stone
Look at last on meadows green
And trees and hills they long have known.*

Gandalf looked at him. 'My dear Bilbo!' he said. 'Something is the matter with you! You are not the hobbit that you were.' And so they crossed the bridge and passed by the mill by the river and came right back to Bilbo's own door. 'Bless me! What's going on?' he cried.
(Tolkien, 1999, pp. 276-277)

For my husband, Derrick, with my heartfelt thanks

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ABSTRACT

A high proportion of cross cultural aid workers and missionaries who may also be involved in aid work are known to suffer from significant psychological distress on re-entry. In the Australian primary health care system, Australian general practitioners are most often the first point of contact for those with psychological distress. There is, however, little acknowledgement or understanding in the medical literature of the distress of this particular group in Australian society and their management in the general practice setting. This thesis addresses these issues with an analysis of the experiences of 15 returned adult Australian missionaries.

The thesis presents an analysis of evidence and builds theory using predominantly qualitative methods. Firstly, I comprehensively explore the evidence for the nature of the distress suffered by these re-entering missionaries. Through analysis of their accounts of their day-to-day lived experience during the interactive transition of their re-entry, I demonstrate the importance of their loss and grief, particularly their disenfranchised grief, as part of their psychological distress. I describe a new type of disenfranchised grief: self-absorbed disenfranchised grief. Some missionaries appeared to have less distress than others, which has led me to categorise two groups of re-entrants, the resilient and fragile. Further exploration of these missionaries' psychological distress led me to focus on the nature of their resilience. I demonstrate the psychological, social and spiritual constructs which increase resilience in this group in the context of multiple losses and grief as well as the role of their identity disparities. I also demonstrate a link between resilience and identity disparities.

Secondly, the results of this thesis together with the existing theoretical models for loss and grief enable me to build an evidence-based theoretical framework to address psychological distress during re-entry. I show how the Dual Process Model, which addresses

loss and grief after bereavement, may be modified to address loss and grief during re-entry based on the findings of this study. Within this framework I also demonstrate the facilitators and barriers that affect the missionaries' psychological distress during re-entry. I offer this model as a framework for dealing with missionaries' psychological distress during re-entry in the clinical setting.

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DECLARATION

This PhD “by a combination of conventional written narrative presented as typescript and publications that have been published and/or submitted for publication” is consistent with the minimum standards set down in the Academic Program rules outlined in the Adelaide Graduate Centre’s postgraduate program rules (PhD rule 7.1-7.7 and specifications, 2010) and the Faculty of Health Sciences PhD by publication guidelines specific to the School of Population Health and Clinical Practice available at (web link accessed November 26, 2010):

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Choice of journals in this portfolio of publications is justified as follows.

International peer reviewed journals were chosen as this topic, whilst important in the Australian context, addresses issues which are relevant to the global community.

Omega – Journal of Death and Dying is the most advanced and internationally recognised journal on the subject of death and dying and is one of the journals which also address non-death loss and grief, one of the central themes of this thesis and the topic of the first article. It has also devoted an issue (Volume 61, Issue 4, 2010) to the Dual Process Model and appeared to be the most appropriate journal for the fourth article which described another use and adaptation for the Dual Process Model related to re-entry. It is an official ADEC (Association for Death Education Counseling) Affiliated Journal (2009 ISI Impact Factor: 0.554). *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* is a journal which provides an authoritative forum and a single point of reference for the growing number of professionals and academics working in the expanding field of mental health and religion (2009 ISI Impact Factor: unavailable)

which is closely related to the topic of this thesis. *The Journal of Religion and Health* (2009 ISI Impact Factor: 0.358) is a journal which explores the most contemporary modes of religious and spiritual thought with particular emphasis on their relevance to current medical and psychological research. This journal was particularly appropriate for the third article about the relationship between identity disparities and resilience in re-entering missionaries which had not been previously described.

Signed:

Dated:

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Prof Justin Beilby
(Co-Supervisor)

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Susan Selby and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

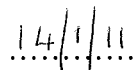
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Back Home: A Qualitative Study Exploring Re-entering Cross-cultural Missionary

Aid Workers' Loss and Grief.

Omega 2009, 59, 19–38.

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Conceived and conceptualised manuscript orientation and structure, developed study design, carried out literature review, undertook familiarisation of data, identification of thematic framework and predetermined concepts as major themes, coded the data, compared data and undertook concept mapping, wrote the manuscript and acted as the corresponding author. I certify that the statement of contribution is accurate.

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My contribution to this paper involved: Contribution to data interpretation and manuscript evaluation. I certify that the statement of contribution is accurate and permission is given for Susan Selby to include this paper in this thesis for examination towards the Doctor of Philosophy.

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Resilience in Re-entering Missionaries: Why do Some do Well?

Mental Health, Religion and Culture 2009, 12, 701–720.

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Special People? An Exploratory Study into Re-entering Missionaries' Identity and Resilience.

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Cross-cultural Re-entry for Missionaries: A New Application for the Dual Process Model.

Omega 2010-2011, 62, 329–351.

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