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Michelle Thrasher  
Exploration of Coping Styles  
Utilized by Students during Study  
Abroad Re-Entry

### **ABSTRACT**

This quantitative study asked the question: what are the coping styles utilized by study abroad students during the re-entry period? The exploratory nature of the study then examined the relationship of eight variables on coping styles; gender, age, previous travel experience, number of languages spoken, having other family members who studied abroad, how supported they felt by home institution, race and coping style in relationship to the biggest challenge they faced.

This research was conducted using an anonymous online survey made available to any past study abroad students. The survey asked for information about family history, travel experience and demographic information in addition to incorporating a pre-existent coping styles measurement scale; Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) Ways of Coping measurement scale. The 85 participants in this study primarily ranged from 19-30 years old and were required to have studied abroad in the past.

Major findings corroborate with research in suggesting that measuring coping styles is difficult due to the variety of influential factors. This research will hopefully aid in exploring the re-entry experience and add to limited to literature on re-entry and coping.

# **Exploration of Coping Styles Utilized by Students during Study Abroad Re-Entry**

A project based upon an independent investigation,  
submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Social Work.

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2010

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Academic and economic trends are being increasingly affected by globalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Globalization is helping to amalgamate social, cultural and ideological norms which are facilitating new ideas and social constructions (Dash, 1998). As the world is becoming increasingly interconnected, competition is expanding world-wide and globalization is stimulating the internationalization of college campuses (Knight, 1994). For Higher Education this means interweaving international perspective and adjustment of missions and goals to include international perspective into the realm of teaching, research and basic functioning and programs at academic institutions so that students can compete within the increasingly global market (Jackson, 2008).

Increased investment is being put into creating a “knowledge society,” meaning creating highly educated personnel who can work internationally in a variety of capacities in order to remain competitive and aid in economic growth (Altbach & Knight, 2007). As a main approach to the creation of these global partnerships, greater value is being placed on study abroad as a short term essential to internationalizing and long term response to economic competitiveness in the United States (Smith, 1983). Currently, study abroad is being looked at as a primary catalyst and measurable indicator of success in internationalizing an academic institution (Dutschke, 2009).

*Study abroad* is a general term referring to any opportunity for a student to travel to another country to live and take classes for either a short term program or a long term program (Open Doors, 2011). In addition to providing a new destination to study, study abroad endeavors

ask students to welcome and even seek out new cultural experiences, generate new responses and new ways of thinking, reflect on experience in a new culture and temper their emotional arousal (Savicki, Adams, Wilde & Binder, 2004). A demanding experience like this can create a new understanding about oneself but can also cause distress and affect students differently (Dolby, 2007).

Similar to the intercultural adjustment experience for students when they arrive in a new country is the re-adjustment back home when they return home. This is referred to as the *re-entry* period (Gaw, 2000). The re-entry process and its impact has been minimally researched and the literature and research on student experience in this field remains fragmented (Szkudlarek, 2009). The cultural transition of re-entry is a multifaceted phenomenon which encompasses different aspects of emotion, behavior and cognition (Szkudlarek, 2009). It is marked by feelings, emotional reactions and mental responses by all those who experience it.

Research on the re-entry experience and students readjustment patterns is not consistent (Brabant, Palmer & Gramling, 1990; Gaw, 2000). Additionally, some students go abroad and experience little to no issue with adjustment (Matsumoto, LeRoux, Bernhard & Gray, 2004). Moreover, it is difficult to generalize about the impact of foreign study on an individual (Whalen, 1996). Minimal studies exist that examine coping styles utilized by students during the re-entry transition; most only focus on the psychological stressors during this time (Brabant et al, 1990; Chamove & Soeterik, 2006; Gaw, 2000; Uehara, 1986, Ward et al., 2001; Westwood et al., 1986; Wilson, 1994). Some students are able to transition better than others during the re-entry period and administrators and student support staff are inquisitive about this difference (Gaw, 2000).

This project attempted to answer the question: What are the coping styles used by study abroad students during the re-entry process in relationship to eight variables: gender, age, race, previous travel experience, number of languages participant speaks, having family members who have studied abroad, how supported they felt by home institution, and biggest challenge they faced after returning home. The researcher attempted to explore these variables in relation to coping through the utilization of a quantitative study which is exploratory in nature.

This research project attempts to contribute to the limited research on students' study abroad re-entry experience and to the even smaller pool of research on students' utilized coping. It more specifically tries to examine how students cope with the impact of studying abroad during the re-entry period. Social work and mental health therapists on college campuses are in the position to be able to make valuable contributions to the field of higher education. Social workers, who are trained to carefully consider a person within the context of his or her environment and past experiences, are well suited to understanding the integrative process to adjusting to the return home after study abroad and affiliated intercultural adjustment (NASW, 2012).

Using the data acquired from an online survey this researcher created, the present investigation attempts to explore utilized coping styles in relationship to the study abroad re-entry period. With many gaps in available research and literature, this inquiry attempts to explore relationships which may speak directly to the need to better address and support student distress after returning home from study abroad. This researcher will also explain the methodology behind the research and created study. In the final chapters on findings and then discussion, this researcher will disclose the discovered data, how it correlates with the existent

literature, discuss how this affect social workers and higher education administrators alike and pose future directions for continued research.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to explore the coping styles utilized by study abroad students during their re-entry period, after they return home from studying abroad. This study examines the coping styles these students use within the context of an increasingly globalized world and internationalized college environment. Thus, this chapter will review literature from the following areas of study: changing environment of higher education in response to globalization, study abroad and re-entry history and trends, impact of identity development on coping styles, and students' use of coping skills and their effectiveness.

#### **Globalization**

The world is becoming increasingly interconnected economically, culturally, politically and socially. This phenomenon is referred to as globalization, the catapult to internationalization (Altbach, et al., 2007; Jackson, 2008). Social, cultural and ideological norms are fusing to facilitate new ideas and social constructions (Dash, 1998).

The change in the way people view the world, our place in it, and the increasing access to it affects academic and economic trends that are a growing reality of the 21st century (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The policy based response to these effects of globalization is internationalization: “any systematic sustained effort aimed at making higher education more responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalization of societies, economy and labour markets (Knight, 19, 1994). This process has led to integrating international processes into teaching, research and functioning of the institution (Jackson, 2008). Globalization reflects an

unchangeable trend worldwide, but internationalization represents the many responses and processes we choose to create in response to globalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

### **Internationalization**

Increased investment by academia leadership is being put into creating a “knowledge society,” meaning creating highly educated personnel who can work internationally in a variety of capacities in order to remain competitive and aid in economic growth (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The majority of American institutions have updated their mission statements or goals to reflect a commitment to international competence and involvement. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) advocates global education to prepare students for the increasingly global world. Students must compete internationally. In order to meet this challenge universities must incorporate international and intercultural dimensions into most departments in universities such as teaching, research, and service (Stromquist, 2007). This includes endeavors such as promotion of study abroad and greater recruitment of international students, to distance education and combinations of partnerships abroad, internationalized curriculum, scholarly collaboration, and extracurricular programs to include an international and intercultural dimension (Altbach, 1998; Biddle, 2002; de Wit, 2002; Jackson 2008).

Completing an international experience brings dimension and reality to global issues like homelessness, hunger and AIDS (Wilson, 1994). The exposure provided by international experiences often allow an individual to be more willing to change behavior patterns and be open to different opinions. Such change could mean students will gain an ability to be flexible and have an easier time adjusting to new things, allowing for growth in self confidence and adaptability (Wilson, 1994). McIntosh (2005, p. 23) proposes as global citizenship, “the ability



to see oneself and the world around one, the ability to make comparisons and contrasts, the ability to see ‘plurality’ as a result . . .and the ability to balance awareness of one’s own realities with the realities of entities outside of the perceived self .”

Internationalization asks higher education and students alike to retain cultural roots while being open to new influences. A major goal of internationalization is to train young people to see the world in multiple terms (Lambert, 1993). American institutions are restructuring academic institutions in order to meet these needs. Experiences can help shift students into a revelation of intercultural competency and transition from ethnocentrism toward ethno-relativism (Lambert, 1993). Knowing how to provide this atmosphere without solely relying on sending students outside of country seems to be a present task at the feet of internationalization.

Effects of globalization are calling for citizens that can function, negotiate and succeed internationally (Cooper, 2007). Existent research remains unfocused due to the complexity of internationalization and the variety in ways that is is defined for each academic institution (Kehm & Teichler, 2007).

Because the field of internationalization is still emerging, the young nature of internationalization and subsequently study abroad student experience and re-entry period, there are few “experts” and minimal funding which only allow a few researchers or faculty to make it their specialty. This reality directly affects the amount and type of research on internationalization being produced and a review of available literature does not clearly suggest a future research agenda (Kehm & Teichler, 2007).

Moving forward in internationalizing a campus, universities must move from not just development but to evaluation as well. Field leaders have created frameworks for such work and

perhaps it will help fill the deficit in research on study abroad re-entry. This includes clarifying goals, reviewing what is being done and what is available at specific institutions, and coming up with a strategic plan that encourages change with policy and programs (Dutschke, 2009).

Overall, the international activities of universities have expanded in volume, scope and complexity during the past two decades (Dutschke, 2009). Globally, educational investments abroad equal a capital flow of more than 30 billion dollars in 2003 (Aviles, 2003). This includes greater emphasis on foreign language studies, discipline and area studies, study abroad, student exchanges and international research (Dutschke, 2009). These changes within American academic institutions have been unprecedented. The future for internationalization of college campuses is not clearly set out but collaboration and partnerships globally are undeniably a growing part of the future (Cooper, 2007).

As a main approach to the creation of these global partnerships, greater value is being placed on study abroad as a short term essential to internationalizing and long term response to economic competitiveness in the United States (Smith, 1983). Currently, study abroad is being looked at as a primary catalyst and measurable indicator of success in internationalizing an academic institution (Dutschke, 2009).

### **Study Abroad**

Study abroad, as previously described, refers to any opportunity for a student to travel to another country to live and take classes for either a short term program (summer or eight weeks or less), mid-length program (one or two quarters or one semester) or a long term program (one academic or calendar year). For the purpose of this paper I will solely focus on college student's study abroad experiences and statistics (Open Doors, 2011).

Study abroad is supported institutionally, organizationally and nationally. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of state leads a wide range of academics, professional and cultural exchanges. These efforts for graduate and undergraduate students are contributions towards the goal of increasing mutual understanding and respect between people of the United States and people from other countries, a parallel goal of internationalization (Witherell & Soman, 2011). International Education (IIE), the leading non-profit education and cultural exchange organization in the US is home to leading professionals in the field and produce valuable research and resources for institutions and leaders alike (Witherell & Soman, 2011).

Government, business, and education leaders have long argued that study abroad participation must increase to ensure our nation's future security, economic prosperity, and global leadership (CIEE 1988, 1990; NAFSA: Association of International Educators 2008; Bikson and Law 1994; Lincoln Commission 2005; NASULGC Task Force of International Education 2004; Treverton and Bikson 2003). The support and push for increasing the numbers of students who study abroad is extensive. The Lincoln Commission established by Congress in 2004 recommended legislation that would increase the number of American students studying Abroad motivated by the sentiment that global competence is a national need and this is one way to get there. A goal to get one million students studying abroad by 2017 has been established (Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen & Pascarella, 2008). Such goals will need help with funding. Consequently, there is bill proposed to increase funding toward study abroad, the Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act, which would allocate \$80 million dollars per year toward study abroad scholarships (Salisbury, et al., 2008).

**Trends.** International Education leaders are working to ensure that all students have the opportunity to study abroad and improve intercultural capabilities (Chow et al., 2011; Polsky, 2004; Dolby, 2007 ). IIE with the support of the government, are working to not only increase the number, but the diversity of American students who are going abroad through increasing scholarships, and funding. Study abroad advocates are not forgetting about the disparities among participants of study abroad across, race, gender and academic majors. Despite current efforts (Council on International Education Exchange 1991; Lincoln Commission 2005; NAFSA 2003), minorities continue to be under represented among participants abroad. In 2005, they made up 17% of all study abroad participants. Female students also outnumber males and the distribution of majors still favors humanities and social services (Salisbury et al., 2008; Dolby, 2007)). Little research exists exploring study abroad intent, however it was found that financial constraints, and lack of awareness were common barriers for potential minority students. Whether or not these are true barriers or justifications is unknown but further research is necessary to better understand barriers for all types of students (Salisbury, et al., 2008).

Although there is increasingly more support and advocacy for study abroad, just over one percent of all US students enrolled in higher education are studying abroad, which is roughly 14% of all undergraduate students(Open Doors, 2011). Study abroad by students enrolled in US higher education is increasing and has more than tripled over the past two decades. Statistics show that in the year 2009-2010 270,604 US students studied abroad for credit that year, about 10,000 more students than the previous year (fast facts). In order to continue the growth and encouragement of study abroad on college campus an increasing number of scholarships and financial aid is being created for students(Witherell & Soman, 2011).

Prestigious universities like Harvard, who often pave the way for new trends in higher education, recently announced that they are working toward a study abroad requirement and would like to see 25% of their students go for at least a semester. The rest of Harvard students will be expected to study during a summer session (Polsky, 2004).

The destination trends of study abroad affect the study abroad student experience while they are abroad and when they come home during the re-entry period (Szkudlarek, 2010). Currently, trends continue to remain with primarily European destinations, with a recent surge in China as a host destination. The open doors report (2011) also found that increasing numbers of students are choosing less typical and traditional study abroad locations. Strategic partnerships between American institutions and selected ones abroad are also influencing student destination choices and increasing more specific opportunities for students in places like Africa, Asia and Middle East (Witherell & Soman, 2011). The push for students to study abroad in these specific locations correlates with our country's international interests and also means an increase in "cultural distance" for the student and therefore potentially more difficulty with adjustment and re-entry (Searle & Ward, 1991; Szkudlarek, 2010).

**Student impact.** Some research exists regarding the psychological aspects of American students studying abroad (Hunley, 2010). Adapting to a new culture can have both positive and negative consequences (Matsumoto et al., 2004). The ability to adjust well in a different cultural environment is usually a new feat for college students and there are both psychological and behavior adjustment that need to be made (Lucas, 2009; Shannon, 1995; Savicki et al., 2008). It is easier for some students over others. This cultural adjustment can impact students in many

different ways while they are abroad and when they return to their home country. Administrators need to be aware and prepared for a variety of issues (Matsumoto et al., 2004).

Administrators and government leaders are hoping that in an effort to “internationalize” by means of studying abroad, students will be able to articulate their varying roles in the world as an American citizen (Goode, 2008; Dolby, 2007). Dolby (2007) suggests studying abroad with the intention of broadening perspectives of geopolitical realities and toward understanding different cultures can push students toward confronting personal biases and often forces students to negotiate their national American identity. This often internal and sometimes unconscious feat comes with successes and challenges (Savicki et al., 2008; Dolby, 2007). More theoretical work on the relationship between study abroad and identity is needed so that administrators and students can better prepare for how a student can manage their relationship to the broader world in relation to their own national identity (Dolby, 2007).

Developing or building onto one’s identity by becoming a culturally competent citizen, which will be referred to more in depth later, does not come without struggle and can affect a person’s ability to succeed academically, socially and interpersonally (Dolby, 2007). A person’s identity can also determine the degree to which he or she experiences *culture shock* (Sussman, 2004). This is a short period of shock and adjustment that the average student experiences while abroad (Oberg, 1960). In fact, later research done by Sam and Eide (1991) found that students’ mental health declined while abroad and some of the common findings included depression, anxiety, paranoia and somatic issues (Hunley, 2010; Ryan and Twibell, 2000).

Other common experiences when students struggle to adjust abroad include loneliness, and detachment from community (Matsumoto et al., 2004). These often negative consequences

of poor adjustment during study abroad can lead to early return to home country, emotional distress, lack of communication, diminished school and work performance and diminished interpersonal relationships. All counterproductive results to the original intention and hope for students while abroad (Matsumoto et al., 2004).

Not all negative adjustment experiences end badly (Matsumoto et al., 2004). Often students can find coping skills to help them persevere. On the other hand, some students do go abroad and do not experience any issue with adjustment at all. These students positive adjustment experiences include gains in language competence, self-esteem, self and worldly awareness, self-confidence, stress reduction and positive interpersonal relationships that they often maintain (Matsumoto et al., 2004). Better consideration and more research needs to be considered in order to understand the process students go through to becoming global citizens and what supports they may need to have a positive adjustment.

**Coping.** It is very difficult to generalize about the impact of foreign study on individuals (Whalen, 1996). Research done by Savick et al. (2004), has reported increased positive adjustment due to sharing of general information, future host culture information and ongoing coaching concerning coping strategies with students in order to better prepare them for their adjustment endeavors. Additionally, individuals with good emotional regulation, openness, flexibility and critical thinking skills are found to have a higher potential to adjust well.

Pitts (2009), argues for the power of communication in helping students manage their intercultural experiences. The uncertainty from expectation gaps often affects stress levels and then calls on a students' external resources. Talk can help students evaluate, interpret and modify their experiences (Kim, 2001). Validating a students experience as "normal" can even help their

adjustment. Communication with peers and advisors can help spur other internal coping skills and can normalize new and often destabilizing experiences. This type of support is ideal for short term experiences abroad and should be monitored and tapered for programs lasting longer than a few months in order to make sure students continue to move forward in their intercultural growth (Pitts, 2009).

Lucas (2009) and Goode (2008), suggest better preparing faculty abroad can also make a difference in assisting students abroad in order to ensure a positive experience. Mental health issues are rising for American students abroad and faculty are often less prepared and have less resources when abroad (Goode, 2008).

Although there are many ways individual cope with adjustment and identity development, it is important to note the psychological dimensions of the intercultural experience are collaborative with learning and are often the most impactful ways in which students learn while studying abroad (Whalen, 2001). Helping students to manage these psychological dimensions before they become negative and harmful to the individuals adjustment and experience is key. This is important to the adjustment abroad and the re-entry adjustment for students when they return home.

### **Re-Entry Period**

*Re-entry* is the most utilized term used to refer to the process an individual goes through when they return home from abroad. Literature applicable to re-entry can date back to 1944 when there was an examination of returning armed forces veterans (Gaw, 2000). Since then the re-entry process and its impact has been minimally researched and the field remains fragmented but the term has expanded to refer to different groups of people such as professionals, military,



and students (Szkudlarek, 2010). For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on the re-entry experience college-aged students after returning from a study abroad experience.

The cultural transition of re-entry is a multifaceted phenomenon which encompasses different aspects of emotion, behavior and cognition (Szkudlarek, 2010). It is marked by feelings, emotional reactions and mental responses by all those who experience it (Rohrlich et al., 1991). The most prominent research regarding the re-entry process is Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) model of reverse culture shock, the W-curve. This is an extension of Oberg's (1960) original creation of the U-curve theory about culture shock.

**Psychological.** The W-curve proposes a linear four phase process that an individual goes through when they return home after studying abroad: euphoria, culture shock, acculturation and then stable state. There is very little empirical support available for this model yet it remains very present in literature and practices today (Szkudlarek, 2010).

Regardless, researchers acknowledge significant psychological impact during re-entry (Isogai, Hayashi & Uno, 1999; Martin, 1991; Matsumoto et al., 2000; Pitts, 2009; Searle & Ward, 1991; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). Individuals can experience considerable emotional distress, even at clinical levels, for as long as six months after returning (Furukawa, 1997). It is reported that as much as 70% of all individuals re-entering after living abroad experience significant discomfort related to re-entry (Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall, 1992).

**Identity.** Researchers would also argue that the amount a student experience identity change also directly correlates with the level of difficulty in re-entry adjustment (Gaw, 2000; Szkudlarek, 2010). The very intention of study abroad, to shift ways of thought and how one identifies, means personal transformation and shift in cultural identity and sense of belonging.

These identity shifts come as a result of behavioral and social adaptations made while abroad. Returning home would then naturally cause increased awareness of an individual's shift in identity and may cause a lot of distress (Sussman, 2000; Szkudlarek, 2010).

Researchers have found a correlation between identity development, intercultural development and the intensity of re-entry. The more secure the re-entry individual's identity (around race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc), the less severe the re-entry transition (Sussman, 2000).

**Students.** When students go through re-entry they often have difficulty integrating back into their college communities socially and interpersonally. Not only does reconnecting with their friends become difficult but there can be a diminished sense of excitement and a lack of understanding from friends and family (Brabant et al., 1990). Students have reported feeling like they do not have that much to talk about with old friends and they notice how they have changed which often separates the student from the family environment. This experience can be alienating and psychologically stressful for the student (Szkudlarek, 2010).

Chamove et al. (2006) created a questionnaire which tested psychological adjustment. One of the statistics included 53% of students reporting problems when returning that could be comparable to loss from death. More psychological distress can mean more loneliness and lower levels of functioning (Hunley, 2010).

Re-entry experience and reverse culture shock symptoms are often parallel to the study abroad experience itself and original culture shock symptoms. However, students do not usually expect difficulties returning home like they did when they originally went abroad. The surprising nature of the re-entry experience can often be even more difficult than the initial

culture shock itself (Westwood, 1986). Some of the additional symptoms experienced during reverse culture shock include, regretting returning home, problematic value conflicts, issues with interpersonal relationships and observed psychological changes (Gaw, 2000).

For an individual that is still in college and most likely still developing their sense of self, the re-entry process can be more shocking than an adult who already has a strong foundation of self (Gaw, 2000; Sussman, 2000; Hunley, 2000; Szkudlarek, 2010). Although researchers agree with psychological impact from re-entry, there is still not a universal experience and it does not affect every study abroad student. Empirical results regarding the re-entry experience and students readjustment patterns are not consistent (Brabant et al., 1990; Gaw, 2000).

Universities often do not provide meaningful opportunities to help students re-integrate into the American college culture that they had been away from for 6 or more months and this can severely impact their psychological well-being (Doyle, 2009). Szkudlarek (2009), examines the reentry process for many different populations. However, she notes that research has shown that returnees that are younger tend to have more difficulties than those that are older (Szkudlarek, 2009). Young adults are often still exploring their identities. Without a strong sense of identity before study abroad, the inevitable interacting of home and visiting cultures can often lead to tumultuous shifts in student's identity development (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weiskirch & Rodriguez, 2009).

### **Identity Development**

Identity is what is reflected of an individual's collection of experiences and perspective (Erikson, 1959). It is what portrays people differently from everyone else and how we determine the likeness and differentness between ourselves and others (Lewis, 2003). Identity is built of

inner qualities and abilities and personal and societal expectations. It is the core of what people use to navigate through the world and make decisions for themselves (Berman et al., 2004).

Identity development is one of the major psychosocial tasks of adolescence and early adulthood. This developmental process often causes imbalance for individuals as they experience increased self-awareness, and confrontation with value related ideological issues (Berzonsky, 2008; Pitts, 2009). Young peoples' level of distress around this varies and some experience more severity in which it interferes with the normal developmental process and can then increase the risk for maladaptive functioning (Gfellner, 2011).

Identity formation is a crucial part of human development (Lewis, 2003). The crux of its importance occurs during adolescence and young adulthood. This influential time is when people are developing the way they think, and exploring and determining what ideologies and values they believe for themselves (Erikson, 1959). This age range is also the time when students study abroad and perhaps by understanding a students identity process we may better reflect on what study abroad students endure in addition to the expected intercultural adjustment and can further ruminate about how that may affect their ability to cope.

A few theorists are being highlighted in the exploration of identity development during the young adulthood period. More specifically to explore relationships between the young adulthood identity development in addition to the study abroad variable and how it may effect coping specifically during the re-entry experience. Erikson and Marcia represent foundational theorists of identity development who have helped shape current theorists today (Seaton & Beaumont, 2008). Kim and Sussman are more modern theorists who put focus on cultural identity in relation to identity formation. It is this writer's hope that these will form a good

foundation for understanding and exploring the influence of identity on psychological factors experienced and coping skills used during the study abroad re-entry process.

**Marcia's Theory on Identity.** Marcia (1966), who built on to Erikson's founding identity development model, developed a classification system in order to better understand the process of identity development and the varying multi-lateral movement that may occur between the stages depending on the individual (Lewis, 2003).

According to Marcia (1966) the classification system is composed of four ego identity statuses: identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure and identity diffusion (Lewis, 2003; Waterman, 1982):

- Identity achievement stage - the stage at which someone has experienced a crisis period and since developed firm commitments.
- Moratorium stage - the stage at which someone who is currently in a state of crisis around who they are and is seeking alternatives.
- Foreclosure stage - the stage at which someone has never experienced crisis but is committed to particular values or beliefs.
- Identity diffusion stage - refers to the stage at which an individual who is not firmly committed and actively trying to figure it out

It is understanding the process of identity development that allows us to better understand the amount of difficulty or ease an individual may experience. This may then directly affect their emotions, and adjustment (Waterman, 1982). It is the emotions that are the organizers and motivators of life cycle identity construction which affect the process of identity exploration and

commitment the four identity statuses that Erikson and Marcia created. Emotions can motivate actions, alert us to change, and communicate with self and others (Strayer, 2002).

**Kim's and Sussman's Theories on Cultural Identity.** Heritage and cultural identities more often than not have emotional ties for individuals (Israelashvili, 2011). Historically the arena and psychological constructs of cultural identity have been without theoretical foundation and have therefore relied heavily on social identity theorists (Pitts, 2009). Although there are differences between cultural and social identity they both influence and affect the process of identity development (Sussman, 2002).

Social identity development theory lacks attention to cultural distinction in exploring behaviors, symbols, and lifestyles that certain individuals may share (Boski, Strus &Tiaga, 2004). More recent research has been expanding social identity theory and integrating traditions, behaviors and distinctions from different ethnic groups. The varying cultural distinctions among people in relation to their identity has formed cultural identity (Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett &Ybarra, 2000).

While some theorists are specifically looking at differing cultural identity based on individuals here in the United States including the adaptation of immigrants (Cassarino, 2004) other theorists are focusing on what happens to US individuals adaptation to living elsewhere (Gaw, 2000). For the purpose of this research the cultural identity theory focused on will pertain to US individuals traveling and living abroad.

Kim's (2001) theory looks at the relationship between cross cultural adaptation and development of a new or more encompassing cultural identity. This relationship, Kim theorizes, is within a "stress-adaptation-growth paradigm" and suggests that cultural identity is evolving

and that specifically the cultural identity of travelers have both negative and positive consequences. Historically, this cultural transition cycle which develops and effects an individual's identity ends when the traveler returns home (Sussman, 2002). More recently theorists and researchers are taking that cycle another step further in the exploration of its effect on adjustment and identity.

Sussman (2002) has recently developed Kim's cultural transition cycle and has developed the Cultural Identity Model (CIM), a more interdisciplinary and encompassing model which considers the re-entry period as an influence on cultural identity and uses a social psychological framework. This model is within a contextual framework, one specific to travelers from cultures that are high in individualism, and low in cultural identity in terms of salience and centrality.

Sussman (2000) proposes four main ideas for its foundation:

- I. Cultural identity is an aspect of self-concept
- II. Cultural identity is transient upon the commitment of a cultural transition
- III. Cultural identity is dynamic and vacillates, often influenced by other disturbances with self
- IV. Cultural identity is a mediator between cultural adaptation and the experience of restoring home country identity

Cultural identity and how individuals negotiate this piece of themselves with their social identities formulates the entire identity process. How well this negotiation plays out strongly influences which dimension, commitment or crisis, an individual will experience within Marcia's identity framework.

Social or cultural identity formation is an ongoing psychosocial process in which an individual's characteristics are challenged, internalized, labeled, valued or organized. The coordination with self-awareness is what forms the identities that an individual displays (Gfellner, 2011). The process of identity development is not a linear one and can change during different times in an individual's life. Reflective consideration of alternative identities or beliefs, new developments of meaningful commitments and major incidents in one life may prompt a shift or change in identity (Waterman, 1982).

There is generally a progressive identity development from adolescence to adulthood (Erikson, 1959). However, development timing would indicate that the most extensive advances in identity formation are occurring during college years (Waterman, 1982). With this said, current trends and commonalities in college experiences such as study abroad, may very well be influencing and adding to the identity development process for students. These shifts are often very challenging for students and can cause psychological distress and call for coping skills that may not have been developed or previously needed (Schwartz et al., 2008).

## **Coping**

**Theory.** Psychodynamic and ego development theories provide the framework for understanding how people cope with difficult situations (Suls et al., 1996). Coping is a conscious process used to alter one's perception of stressful events in order to reduce distress and minimize changes in environment (Suls et al., 1996). Coping involves purpose, choice and shift which involves a person's reality and his or her logic and future oriented thinking (Cramer, 1998; Suls et al., 1996). Coping and defense mechanisms can be confused, but defense mechanisms are negating, distorting of intersubjective reality and logic and allow for impulse expression.



People can relieve their stress using defense mechanisms without directly addressing the problem (Cramer, 1996).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984), blurred the distinction between conscious and unconscious processes. According to Suls, David and Harvey (1996), individuals use both conscious and unconscious mechanisms to deal with stress and therefore the outcomes of coping and defense mechanisms are similar; however, the difference lies in the psychological process involved and the conscious nature of coping (Cramer, 1996). This conscious nature of coping means it depends on student's skill level or previously learned ways of coping. This is important in understand how coping may be utilized in response in returning home from study abroad and how administrators and mental health therapists may help student adjust or use these conscious skills.

Part of the original research on coping among the psychoanalysts and within ego development included a heavy emphasis on personality and individual differences as strong influential factors (Suls et al., 1996). These influences are part of what makes measuring and researching coping so difficult. Coping became seen as a transaction process which emphasized the exchange between person and environment (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). This explored emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping which was influenced by an individual's appraisal of the situation in two ways: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal (Suls et al, 1996).

In primary appraisal an individual assesses what is at stake and in secondary appraisal individuals evaluate what coping resources and options are available. Depending on the encounter different coping skills may be used depending on an individual's appraisal (Folkman

& Lazarus, 1980). Lazarus and Folkman (1980) developed a self report measure of coping based on this theoretical model known as the Ways of Coping which has been one of the most widely employed measures of coping (Suls et al., 1996). This same measurement tool was used in this research as a way to try to measure coping styles utilized by students specifically during re-entry experience after returning home from study abroad.

Although at one time dismissed, most recent research has renewed the link between coping and personality ( Amirkhan, Risinger, &Swickert, 1995; Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995; Suls et al., 1996). This affects how we understand how coping styles are selected and specifically in the context of this research, why some study abroad students may use certain coping styles over others.

Research found that situational factors alone do not explain the variation of coping styles and that both situation and personality better explain the variation of coping behavior (Parkes, 1986; Watson & Hubbard, 1996), the appraisal of an event as stressful (Gunthert, Cohen & Armeli, 1999) and the effectiveness of coping strategies (Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995). Amirkhan et al.(1995), identified the personality variable, extraversion, as one of the most highly influential on coping in a positive way due to disposition to seek social support , problem solving and optimism.

**Influential Factors.** When considering influential factors on coping and its effectiveness, variables such as socio economic status, culture, and age have produced some trends but it is difficult to isolate these traits from every other influential factor that might impact an individuals ability to cope and choice of coping style (Brantley et al, 2002, Cheng at al., 2009). To review some of the research regarding these variables, a study by Brantley et al.

(2002) found that low income persons are associated with increased overall coping. Culturally, African American make up a disproportionate percentage of the low income population which influences the cultural make up (Brantley et al., 2002). Plummer and Slane (1996) specifically looked at ethnic difference in coping in the context of African American and Caucasian middle income individuals. Results found that in the context of Lazarus & Folkmans (1984) 8 ways of coping, African American participants used more coping styles than Caucasians (Plummer & Slane, 1996). Specifically, this ethnic group was found to use two emotion focused coping strategies more than caucasians: distancing and positive reappraisal. These may be a result and reinforced by the African American social structures (Brantley et al., 2002). While there are reasons to believe that different ethnic groups may use different coping strategies differently, it is difficult to draw conclusions concerning solely ethnic differences.

Cultural background influences the experience of stress and how those stressors are interpreted which can contribute to the variety of coping strategies used (Slavin et al., 1991). While we know low income populations experience increased stress and African Americans disproportionately make up this group, culturally, African Americans have a greater chance to develop a wider range of coping due to their increased overall stress (Brantley et al., 2002). Just as any other factor on coping ethnicity and socio economic status cannot be considered alone in terms of understanding coping behavior.

A myriad of other factors can be of importance as well including such things as gender and religiosity (Israelashvili et al, 2011). Israelashvili (2011) suggests the best way to uncover the coping and culture complexity is to conceptualize it as a multi-dimensional construct. Ethnicity alone has a limited role in shaping coping, while religiosity and gender and how these

group memberships impose certain stresses, are larger determinants of coping (El-Sheik & Klaczynski, 1993). The complexity of understanding how coping is used by a single person is evident. Now if an individual enters into a new environment, such as a new university in a new country, intercultural adjustment becomes another factor influencing coping.

**Intercultural Adjustment in Coping.** Searle et al, (1991) suggest that within coping is consideration of two kinds of adjustment; psychological adjustment as referred to previously and sociocultural adjustment referring to the travelers ability to “fit in” and effectively interact with host culture. The relationship between these varies depending on context but traveler’s emotional states, cognitive perceptions and personal traits are large factors in adjustment and coping (Searle et al., 1991). Coping and adjustment in reference to an intercultural context are interwoven but research agrees the larger the differentiation between home and host culture the larger the coping and adjustment demand is on an individual (Oguri et al., 2002; Pederson et al., 2011; Rohrlich et al., 1991; Searle et al., 1991).

Overall, Coping is not a linear process. It is a process that can enhance resources for future coping and increase self-esteem. It is found that individuals draw upon previous experiences to help them deal with current problems (Aldwin, Sutton and Lachman from Suls et al, 1996). Coping is often difficult to measure and research suggests the longer the interval of time between the stressful event and the coping assessment, the more the identified coping response will be subject to memory biases and inadequacies in the report (McCrae & Costa, 1986).

**Effectiveness.** How do we know if coping is effective? The structure of coping and the best way to measure it remains unresolved due to the expansive variety of variables that may

influence coping styles (Suls et al., 1996). Overall, researchers still do not seem to have a comprehensive understanding of the structure of coping and all its influential factors which demands continued theory and research development. However, coping seems unable to be divorced completely from understanding that there are individual differences and personalities which affect ones ability and style of coping (Suls et al., 1996).

Suls et al., (1996) suggests that the effectiveness of coping and the choice of which coping strategy may be influenced by individual differences. Cheng (2009), agrees that there are differences in how some people choose some coping strategies over others by way of coping flexibility of the individual which reflects a person's ability to formulate flexible strategies to handle different stressful situations under changing circumstances (Cheng, 2009).

A higher coping flexibility allows an individual to use more ways to cope and therefore often to greater coping effectiveness. Using multiple coping strategies is adaptive and if the end result is improved quality of life, decreased psychological distress, and decreased physical illness then the coping strategies have been effective (Brantley et al., 2002). Effective coping would also mean that individuals report lower levels of anxiety, depression and fewer symptoms of stress (Cheng et al., 1999; Fresco, Williams & Nugent, 2006). These possible benefits of effective coping help reiterate the need to better understand the relationship between re-entry concerns and coping.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Research Design**

This researcher conducted an quantitative study which asked: What are the coping styles used by study abroad students during the re-entry period in regards to eight variables: gender, age, race, previous travel experience, number of languages spoken, having other family members who studied abroad, how supported they felt by their home institution, and the biggest challenge they faced?

As referred to earlier, *re-entry* refers to the process study abroad students experience when returning home from studying abroad for a summer, semester or year abroad. The researcher attempted to answer this question through the utilization of a quantitative study which is exploratory in nature. Since little research has been written documenting or measuring the coping styles used by college students during the re-entry period of study abroad, the quantitative method is most appropriate in measuring this particular student population experience. As Rubin & Babbie (2008) suggest, this method is conducted when there are few studies available to reference. In exploratory research the focus is on gaining insights and familiarity with the subject area. As such, in this case, what is the relationship of coping and re-entry? What variables is coping affected by in reference to the study abroad re-entry period? A quantitative study with an exploratory nature allowed for this researcher to make observations, look for patterns and explore hypothesis (Rubin & Babbie, 2008).

In order to explore this research question, this researcher created and distributed a survey that was made available to past study abroad students from a variety of Universities between the

ages of 18-50. In seeking participants from a variety of institutions, the researcher sought to learn about study abroad student's re-entry experience from a variety of home institutions among other varying factors.

The instrument used in this study was an online survey consisting of three major parts: demographic information, family history and previous travel, and a pre-existent coping styles measurement tool. The use of a pre-existent coping styles measurement tool in the third part of the survey helped ensure more reliability (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). Online surveys provide a way to reach a large number of individuals anywhere in the world. Additionally, considering college students all have access to the internet, this suits the researcher's intended prospective respondents. The method for analysis of this research was statistical analysis with the help of a data analyst from Smith College.

### **Sample**

The participants pursued in this study are from a variety of identities and current ages but all studied abroad during traditional college ages of 18-21. The respondents included students that have studied abroad in the past 2 months to 15 years ago from a variety of institutions. Inclusion criteria consisted of; previous or current college student, and have studied abroad during their current or past college career for a summer, semester or longer previous to taking survey. Two factors excluded participants: if they were an international student or if they were a non-traditional student and therefore were older or younger than the average student in their position. With all these factors in consideration, this researcher was able to get a total of 85 surveys completed.

This researcher recruited survey participants by snowball sampling. A post was placed on the social network site, facebook, which asked for past study abroad students to voluntarily complete a survey which is being used for a Master's thesis and then share with other eligible friends (Appendix E). Additionally friend's and colleagues of this researcher were contacted via email and facebook with the request to share the survey invitation with eligible participants.

Due to the timeline limitations and the difficulty of accessing current college students through study abroad advisors directly, this researcher felt this would be the best way to access participants. Rubin and Babbie (2008) suggest that this method is conducted when it is difficult to find participants for a study. It is useful in that it asks participants to share or suggest study with more potential participants.

The student recruitment email provided an introduction of researcher, brief explanation of the study, explanation of the requirements and a reminder of the survey's voluntary nature including self consent by clicking on survey link (see appendix C). Students were informed about the secure website the survey was created on and that they could exit the survey at any time without submitting any of their data. Additionally, the researcher designed a screening survey question to verify that they met the inclusion criteria for the study and at the end of the survey provided them with the opportunity to ask any questions they may have have.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Quantitative data was collected from a pool of 85-100 participants between the months of March and April, 2012. Participants were asked to click on the link and fill out an anonymous survey from survey monkey about research related information including: demographic information, family history, travel experience, general satisfaction with study abroad and coping



style measurement tool. The demographic data that was collected previous to the coping styles measurement consisted of: age, year of study, gender, race, language skills, and family history.

The second part of the survey asked the students to complete previous travel experience and family history information including: previous travel, financial support and study abroad support. Additionally students were asked about their general experience abroad and general sense of contentment with support abroad and after returning. These questions were ask as a way to ground coping styles data in the student experience and as a way to measure other interrelated factors.

The last part of the survey consisted of the pre-existent coping styles measurement tool originally created by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The version of the measurement tool used in the survey was adapted from a yes/no format to a likert five item scale that described coping options and was made available to public domain (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985) (see Appendix B for public domain verification). The instrument contained 67 items that described a broad range of cognitive and behavioral strategies people use in managing internal and/or external demands in specific stressful encounters (Folkman, 1986). For this study it was used in reference to the study abroad re-entry period. The tool was constructed by Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) based on their own theoretical framework. It produced eight scales: one problem focused, six emotion focused and one of problem and emotion focus (Folkman, 1985).

This measurement tool was chosen for its accessibility on the public domain and its previous use in measuring a college student population (Folkman communication, 1985). After completing the survey which approximately took participants 20-25 minutes, the participants received a thank you message and contact information for counseling services and study abroad

offices for each University should they have follow up questions or concerns.

Participant's confidentiality will be protected due to the secure website, Survey Monkey, which the survey was created on, in addition to the lack of contact between researcher and participant. The risk of participation is very limited due to the nature of this quantitative study. After reading an introduction and description of the survey students were directed to click on the survey link if they consented to participate in the research and subsequent survey. An online voluntary survey did not force anyone to participate in anything they do not want to. Additionally, if they decided that they did not want to finish participation they were able to close out of the survey at any time without submitting any material. Additionally the nature of the survey has specifically been designed with language in mind that will be cognizant of not triggering or marginalizing anyone (See Appendix E for a copy of the full survey).

### **Data Analysis**

After the target number of 100 responses was accumulated the researcher closed the survey. The researcher, using Survey Monkey tools, produced a secure website populated excel sheet from the submitted survey data. This raw data excel sheet was submitted to a data analyst, Marjorie Postal, from Smith College. The data analyst then returned the data coded as directed by the coping styles measurement tool creator. The data analyst also populated the demographic and family/travel history information in reference to the data on utilized coping skills. A list of the desired comparable variables in addition to questions to explore beyond utilized coping skills were sent to her with the raw data excel sheet in April 2012. After reviewing the data further, content theme analysis will be used to look for trends and relationships between the previously listed variables and student's re-entry coping skill used (Rubin & Babbie, 2008).

## **Strengths and Limitations**

One strength of this study was its attempt to measure the study abroad re-entry experience from a new angle. While there are some studies available on the re-entry period for study abroad students, little looked at coping styles. This study's exploratory nature allowed for relationships to be explored about this particular student experience and student's utilized coping styles. Additionally, research that does exist on coping and intercultural transition does not look at this particular age range or population (Brabant et al, 1990; Chamove & Soeterik, 2006; Gaw, 2000; Rogers & Ward, 1993; Uehara, 1986, Ward et al., 2001; Westwood et al., 1986; Wilson, 1993). Another strength is the use of an existent measurement tool which increased reliability due to the fact that it has already been used with a similar population and adjusted. The increase in reliability would suggest less random errors (Rubin & Babbie, 2008).

A limitation to this study was the narrow sampling pool. Although diverse in types of universities and location it is not representative of the entire college population by any means. Limitation in regards to diversity of participants, and number of participants was to be expected as well. Another limitation is the use of an existent edited survey due to its lack of cost. This may not have been the best measurement tool available but was most accessible to this researcher.

Another limitation to this study was the timing of the survey in comparison to the student participants return from study abroad experience. The length of time that had passed since the student experienced the re-entry period varied and most likely affected survey responses. Unfortunately due to the timing of this work and the need for a certain number of students for validity purposes, the researcher was unable to only target student recently experiencing the re-

entry period.

### **Researcher Bias**

This researcher has studied abroad before and experienced difficulties during the study abroad re-entry period. Therefore, holding the bias that most students do experience re-entry difficulties. Additionally, this researcher also imagined that certain coping styles would be more prominently used due to personal experience. Aside from being a previous study abroad student, this researcher has also been an administrator or staff in two different study abroad offices. Another bias is the use of the Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) coping styles measurement tool due to its accessibility, lack of cost and its popularity in past use. Now that the research procedures have been described this researcher will discuss the results of this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

This chapter intends to provide the results from the survey created which gathered demographic information, family history and participant travel experience in addition to utilized coping styles in reference to the re-entry period. First this chapter will describe the participants and demographic information. Then this chapter will discuss the pre-existent coping styles measurement scale utilized in the survey and its results in reference to the eight variables. Lastly, this chapter will report participant's comments regarding their biggest challenges during the re-entry period.

Data analysis of this survey's pre-existent measurement scale of coping styles did provide some limitation in reference to this population. The lack of its specificity in regards to the study abroad experience, its length in number of questions and its inability to provide stand-alone coping style results that could be compared to one another, the research provides minimal results in terms of understanding coping.

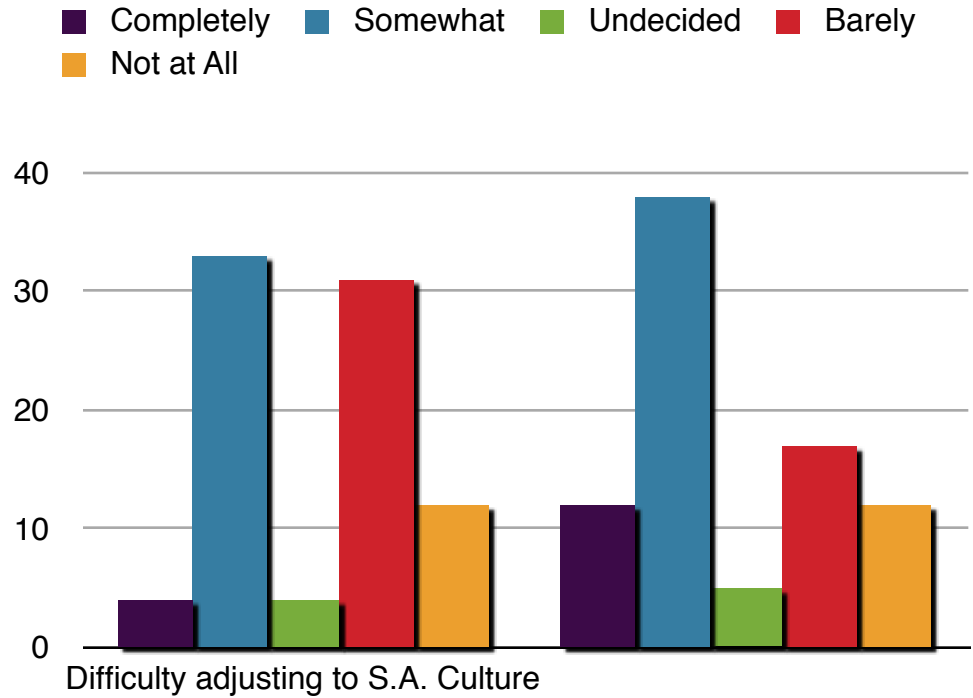
#### **Demographics and Participants**

The participants in the sample consisted of previous study abroad students who primarily studied abroad between the years 2005 - 2011. During this time 94.1% reported having financial assistance from family and 5.9% did not. Of the student participants, 22.4% are between ages 18-21, 38.8% between ages 22-25 and 30.6% between ages 26-30. Of these students, 37.6% studied abroad during a fall semester, 50.6% during a Spring semester and 12.5% during the summer. The total sample population consists of 85 participants, 84.7% female and 15.3% male.

Data also explored racial representation and cultural exposure. Racially, 89.4% of participants identified as White, 3.5% African American, 1.2 % Latino and 4.7% multi-racial. A large majority of the population was born in the United States and grew up in a household where one language was spoken. A smaller percentage (8.2%) of participants grew up speaking two languages at home and 1.2% spoke three languages. Of these same participants, currently 45.9% of participants speak two languages, 12.9% speak three or more languages and 41.2% currently speak one language.

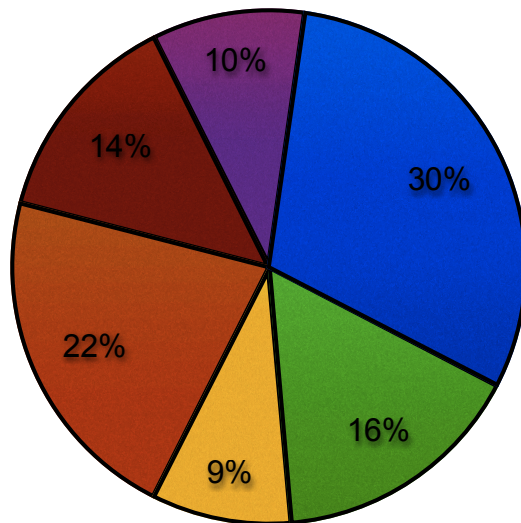
Participant travel experience and support was also measured in this study. Of all the participants, 90.6% reported traveling outside of the United States before studying abroad, 8.2% had not. Majority of these students (94.1%) had support from family to attend their study abroad program and 45.9% had other family members who had previously studied abroad, 51.8% did not have a previously family member study abroad. Additionally, 76.5% of participants studied abroad only once, 15.3% studied abroad two times and 7.1% studied about three or more times.

A Likert scale (Completely, Somewhat, Undecided, Barely and Not at All) measurement, created within the survey in order to explore satisfaction and support while studying abroad, indicated that 47.1% of participants were happy to be coming home from study abroad, 20.0 % felt completely happy and 18.8% felt barely happy. Of all participants, 83.5% indicated they overall had a positive study abroad experience and 12.9% reported having a somewhat positive experience abroad. While abroad, 48.2% reported feeling completely supported by their home institution, 31.8% said they felt somewhat supported. Additionally, research explored difficulty adjusting:

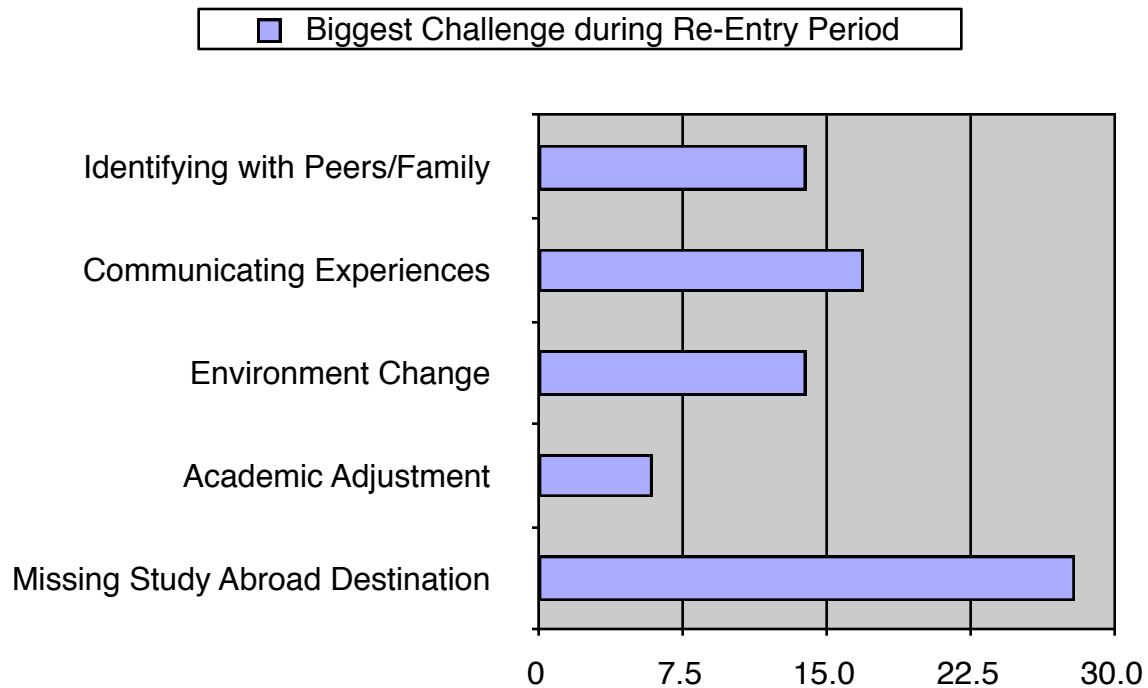


In attempts to measure the most difficult transition time after returning home from study abroad results show the following: (participants were allowed to select more than one choice)

- First Week
- Second Week
- Third Week
- First Month
- Second Month
- Third Month



This researcher also explored what the biggest challenge was during the re-entry period after studying abroad.



### Coping Styles Measurement

The second part of the research focused on measuring coping styles used by study abroad students during the re-entry period. The 66 Coping Styles questions utilized in the Folkman and Lazarus (1984) Ways of Coping scale are broken down into 8 coping style subscales. These subscales will be looked at in addition to the results of 8 research questions explored within the coping style measurement scale results in order to identify specific coping styles and better understand the coping style utilization in reference to a student's study abroad re-entry period.

The 66 coping style questions are broken down into 8 coping style subscales. Each of these were created by summing the specified groups of questions. Before combining questions into coping style subscales, Cronbachs alpha was run for each group of questions in order to test for internal reliability. All of the subscales had alphas indicating acceptable to strong internal



reliability. Alphas are presented in the Table 1, along with descriptive statistics for each Coping Style subscale.

<b>Coping Style Subscale</b>	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbachs Alpha	N	N of items
Confrontive	3.77	2.81	0.61	85	6
Distancing	4.32	3.01	0.72	85	6
Self Controlling	5.99	3.69	0.67	85	7
Seeking Social Support	5.37	3.78	0.79	84	6
Accept Responsibility	2.15	2.29	0.68	85	4
Escape/ Avoidance	5.38	4.69	0.79	85	8
Planful Problem Solving	5.62	3.39	0.69	85	6
Positive Reappraisal	8.51	3.70	0.70	82	7

In order to further analyze the Coping Styles results, eight research questions were created to explore coping style in exploration of relationship to participants demographic information. This researcher explored the following questions:

- Is there a difference in coping style by gender?
- Is there a difference in coping style and race?
- Is a difference between coping style by participant current age?
- Is there a relationship between between participants previous travel experience and their identified coping style?
- Does the number of languages a participants' speaks influence their coping style?
- Do participants who have family members who have studied abroad identify different coping styles than others?

- Is there a relationship between coping style and amount of support felt by home institution?
- Is there a relationship between identified study abroad challenges and coping style?

**Gender.** T-tests were run to determine if there were differences in each of the eight coping style by gender. There were no significant differences in any of the coping styles.

**Race.** Due to lack of diversity in participant pool it was not statistically feasible to run any tests to measure for differences in coping.

**Current Age.** Oneway Anovas were run to determine if there were differences in each of the eight coping style by age group. Ages 31 and above were combined into one group due to limited numbers in each age category. There was a significant difference in Seeking Social Support ( $F(3,78)=4.158, p=.009$ ). A Bonferroni post hoc test was run to determine which groups were significantly different. It showed the 18-21 year old group had a significantly higher mean on the seeking social support subscale ( $m=7.47$ ) than the 26-30 year old group ( $m=3.9$ ), suggesting greater use of that coping. There were no significant differences in any of the other seven coping styles by age group.

**Previous Travel Experience.** T-tests were run to determine if there were differences in the eight coping styles by whether respondents had previous travel experience before studying abroad. There were no significant differences in any of the coping styles.

**Number of Languages.** Oneway Anovas were run to determine if there were differences in the eight coping styles by the number of languages the respondents spoke. No significant difference was found.

**Family members who Studied Abroad.** T-tests were run to determine if there were differences in the eight coping styles by whether other family members have studied abroad. A significant difference was found in "accept responsibility" ( $t(67.53)=3.143, p=.002$ , two-tailed). Those who had a family member study abroad had a higher mean in accepting responsibility ( $m=3.0$ ) than those who did not have a family member study abroad ( $m=1.45$ ). There were no significant differences in any of the other seven coping styles.

**Support from Home Institution.** Spearman rho correlations were run to determine if there was a relationship between how supported they felt by their home institution and each coping style. No significant correlations were found.

**Study Abroad Challenge.** Oneway Anovas were administered to determine if there were differences in the eight coping styles by the biggest challenge faced after returning home from studying abroad. A significant difference was found in the Escape/avoidance coping subscale ( $f(4,74)=2.895, p=.028$ ). A Bonferroni post hoc test showed the difference was between the group who said the biggest challenge was identifying with peers/family ( $m=8.64$ ) and those whose biggest challenge was missing study abroad destination ( $m=4.21$ ). This suggests that those who indicated their biggest challenge was identifying with peers and family used escape and avoidance as a coping mechanism significantly more often than those who indicated their main challenge was missing their study abroad destination.

In addition to having participants identify a category indicating their biggest challenge returning home, this researcher also provided room for participants to submit specific comments. Twelve participants added additional comments, some of the participants reported difficulty with things such as:

1. “Readjusting back to the number of responsibilities I had before I left; classes, work, extra-curricular activities and friend groups.”
2. “Reconnecting with shifted social dynamics within friend groups.”
3. “American advertisements were overwhelming and loud on my return; it was a struggle to watch American TV for the first few months of my return due to this.”
4. “ I grew very close to my host family and was painfully homesick for them when I returned to the U.S.”

The re-entry experience for study abroad students is never the same from one student to the next. This research attempted to find coping styles utilized during the re-entry period in reference to trends and similarities regarding participant demographic information, previous travel information and family history. The difficulty in measuring coping styles is due to the many other influential factors, the number of participants and their lack in diversity which were some of the limitations to finding more conclusive research. However, the data did provide results that reflect the difficulties in trying to measure coping and some information that could be useful to mental health therapists and higher education administrators alike.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

#### Overview of Study

This study was designed as an exploratory quantitative study to survey the coping skills utilized by students during the re-entry period after they return home from study abroad. This study sought to explore coping styles in relationship to social support, support of family members, race, and the selected challenges. Folkman and Lazarus' (1984) Ways of Coping scale was used to measure coping styles utilized by students. This measurement scale identified eight coping scales

1. Confrontive Coping;
2. Distancing;
3. Self-Controlling;
4. Seeking Social Support;
5. Accepting Responsibility;
6. Escape-Avoidance;
7. Planful Problem-Solving;
8. Positive Reappraisal;

Eight variables were researched in relationship to the Coping Styles Measurement scale findings. These variables include

- gender;
- age;
- previous travel experience;

- number of languages spoken;
- having other family members who studied abroad;
- how supported they felt by home institution;
- race;
- the biggest challenge they faced;

As established in Chapter II, minimal research is available on the re-entry period of study abroad and especially in the context of coping (Szkudlarek, 2009). The increasingly globalized nation is demanding increased internationalization of college campuses and therefore, there is a large push for more students to study abroad. As the number of study abroad participants increases, more students will be experiencing the documented associated psychological distress such as depression, anxiety, paranoia and somatic issues (Hunley, 2010). While administrators have begun to get a better handle on its effects while abroad not enough attention has been allocated to understanding the similarly parallel process of returning home during the re-entry period after studying abroad.

There were several motivations for this study:

1. This researcher's general interest in identity development during young adulthood;
2. This researcher's interest and experience with study abroad as a participant and administrator;
3. Lack of research and personal desire to gain a better understanding of the re-entry period for students and administrators;
4. Attempt to better integrate what is known about study abroad stressors and coping;

## **Implications**

The major questions addressed in this research project were: What are the coping styles utilized by study abroad students during the re-entry period after returning home from study abroad? Within the context of these identified coping styles this research explored how coping styles were affected by gender, race, age, previous travel experience, number of languages spoken, having other family members who have studied abroad, how supported they felt by their home institution, and coping style in relationship to the biggest challenge they faced.

This research's findings, as supported by literature, indicate measuring and researching coping styles is challenging due to its ability to be affected by a variety of factors and variables. Much of the explored data was unable to produce concrete relationships and results. This supports Suls (1996) suggestion that the best way to measure coping is still unresolved.

**Gender.** Gender alone does not influence a type of coping style utilized during the re-entry period. Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley and Novacek (1987) research suggested that men and women show essentially the same patterns in coping. Gender differences they found were associated with being consistent with western societal values. In the case of this study, no relationship was found with gender either however there were a limited number of male participants which may have skewed the results.

**Age.** Coping patterns of younger and older groups are generally appropriate to their stage of life (Folkman et al., 1987). This study supports the literature around the influence of age on coping. The 18-21 year old age group from this study was more likely to seek social support as a coping style than the other age groups. While this age range is indicative of the typical college age population which is known for being one of the more social periods in life, this

researcher would also like to recognize that a participant's ability to recall their past utilized coping skills may have also influenced this study's results.

The nature of this study asked participants to recall past coping skills from a previous age and time in their life. The fact that this study did not show significant results and correlation between older age brackets and associated coping styles, which would have also been supported by the literature, may suggest that participants did in fact try to recall past coping skills and not answer according to their current skill set.

**Race.** Due to the lack of diversity in the study sample, race was unable to be examined as a potential variable which may affect coping style. Historically, a lack of racial and ethnic diversity in study abroad participants is documented in research and recognized as a deficit and needed area of improvement in the field of study abroad (Brantley et al., 2002). Although this study was unable to explore race in the context of coping style, statistically this study's participant ratio is not far off of national statistics on study abroad participants and therefore continues to highlight the need of improving access.

**Previous travel experience and Number of languages spoken.** This study found no relationship between coping style and previous travel experience or coping style and number of languages spoken by the participant. This researcher's bias is what initiated the exploration of the possibility that these two variables may influence the coping style utilized by a student.

**Having other family members who have studied abroad.** Participants who have had family members who have previously studied abroad reported using the Accept Responsibility coping style more than others. Perhaps this suggests that the awareness the study abroad



participants gained from family members regarding study abroad allowed them to be more responsible in their decision making and problem solving while managing stress abroad.

A second possibility for this relationship may be that through family members previous study abroad experience they felt more prepared for what was to come and how to handle it. Literature on the current college student generation, referred to as the Millennial generation, suggests that students are consulting parents when making personal decisions and that only 7.73% of that time are they not unquestioningly following their what their parents dictate (Pizzolato, 2011). This relationship between the Millennial generation students and their parents may explain why their advice may be deemed so valuable and play a part in how students use a more mature coping skill of Accepting Responsibility during re-entry.

This researcher was surprised with these results and with no directly relatable research on re-entry or coping and parental influence to support either of these conclusions it only remains a plausible theory until further research can be carried out.

**How supported they felt by their home institution.** Results of this study show no significant correlation between a coping style and how supported they felt by their home institution. This suggests that without conclusive evidence, more support from home institution does not necessarily reduce stress for students which would then not necessarily influence their coping.

These results do not entirely correlate with existent research that suggests that support from home institution while abroad minimizes stress and therefore positively affects the study abroad process (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). It should also be noted that the available research

is specifically in regards to the time while the student is abroad not during re-entry. While many administrators apply abroad research to the re-entry period, it is in need of its own research.

**The biggest challenge faced abroad.** After asking participants to choose their biggest challenge abroad this researcher then explored the relationship between their selection and their utilized coping styles. Results show that participants who selected Identifying with Peers/Family as their biggest challenge also utilized the Escape/Avoidance coping style more than others.

Research suggests that identity development is one of the major psychosocial tasks of adolescence and young adulthood and that the most advances are made during the college age time frame (Gfellner, 2011; Waterman, 1982). As a part of that process individuals are likely to experience a heightened sense of self in relation to others. Study abroad can often provide the opportunity to develop self author-ship; construction of an internal identity separate from external influences and eventually form an ability to take part in relationships without losing one's internal identity (Jones & Abes, 2004; Juhasz & Walker, 1987)). With this in mind, perhaps these results may suggest that while a re-entry student may have difficult identifying with friends and family members from home, with time and adjustment the individual can learn to dually hold their new sense of self and autonomy while maintaining relationships that may have changed or shifted. Therefore, perhaps using escape/avoidance coping style allows the individual the time needed to continue in their development and re-adjustment.

Another possibility for this relationship in the data may be related to what the student is able to tolerate at that time. A study abroad participant who is re-entering into their home environment and who is not able to identify with their primary contacts in the same way as they were able to previously, may find the change too overwhelming to manage initially. Perhaps

avoiding the issue all together is the best way for some students to cope at that time. Berzonsky (1989), proposes that the use of avoidant behavior suggest reaction to anxiety and someone who is in the diffused part of identity development. Therefore, this could suggest that a study abroad participant who is re-entering and experiencing avoidant behavior may be in the identity diffusion stage of development which refers to an individual who is not firmly committed and actively trying to figure it out (Lewis 2003, Waterman 1982). In the context of re-entry this could be a plausible state for a re-entry student who is negotiating and collaborating their study abroad experience and home experience and what that means for their identity.

**Identity.** Although this study specifically explores the coping styles during re-entry it is also being suggested that where a study abroad student is in their identity development may directly influence their re-entry experience just as much as coping if not more. As suggested previously, identity development is a key phenomenon during the study abroad years (Gfellner, 2011). Similarly to identity research, coping literature suggests that coping is complex and influenced by many variables and therefore makes measurement of solely coping or identity development difficult to report and examine (Suls et al., 1996; Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995; David and Sulz, 1999; Lee-Baggley et al., 2005). Coping literature recognizes the embedded influence of personality and identity and this largely influencing factor should be further recognized in future re-entry literature.

### **Limitations**

This researcher expected to find more evidence of direct relationships between the measured variables and indicated coping styles. However, due to the limitations of this research

and the participant pool not many significant relationships were able to be found with a majority of the explored variables.

The lack of size and diversity in the participant pool affected the results. Original sample size of 100 participants had to be cut down to 85 due to inappropriate participation or inability to complete the entire survey. Additionally the recruitment time frame did not allow for more participants to be pursued. While this researcher acknowledges the deficit in diversity of participants and therefore limitation in this study, the lack of study abroad accessibility to all students is recognized on a larger scale. The survey itself was approximately 90 questions making the completion time around 25 minutes. This influenced the participants' ability to complete it and deterred some individuals from even participating at all.

In order to measure coping style, the survey used a pre-existent measurement scale that had been previously used with the college age population but not specifically within the context of study abroad. The decision to use this specific tool was due to accessibility and funding limitations. However, its length and inability to appropriately address the specific nature of study abroad posed a challenge to participants and became a major limitation to this research.

In addition to the measurement scale limitations, the time frame of the study also was a challenge and influential factor on this study. Ideally this researcher would have preferred to select a candidate pool of only recent study abroad students. However, complications getting administration cooperation and the time frame of this research would not allow for this possibility since it did not correlate with the end of a university semester. Participants had to be solicited via social media website of their own efforts and by use of snowball recruitment tactics. These factors demanded that this researcher expand the recruitment pool. Since some

participants experienced longer gaps of time between their study abroad experience than others, this became an additional limitation due to the fact that it may have affected participant's reporting skills depending on their ability to recall a past experience.

While this study attempts to expand available research it also recognizes the limitation provided by a small body of previous research to work from. Literature on specifically the re-entry period is very minimal and there is no research related to re-entry and coping together. In fact, a lot of re-entry information has been gathered from study abroad literature. Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963) may have started the trend when they termed *reverse culture shock* to explain the re-entry period and described it solely as a parallel process to original *culture shock* (Oberg, 1960) with the same symptoms. This lack of research is a limitation because it does not provide any guidance in attempting to create new research and measurement within these fields.

In addition to these limitations this researcher would like to recognize the inherent biases present in this work due to this researcher's previous experience studying abroad twice, participating in alternative spring break trips and acting as a study abroad advisor. Not only did this researcher's experience abroad and work in international higher education instigate the creation of this research, it also influenced some expected outcomes which this researcher recognized and attempted to put aside for this study. Due to research and personal opinion this researcher was also biased in thoughts that a younger participant pool, which would be closer to the study abroad experience would produce more genuine results. Additionally, due to the academic and time frame constraints this researcher was biased in selection of the type of study and persistent in the creation of quantitative work.

Sending students to studying abroad with the intent to gain intercultural experience and become more globalized citizens is putting a new kind of demand on our students. We must better understand the study abroad adjustment process, psychological stressors and coping experience to better understand what we are asking our students to go through. There has been more attention and focus on how students have changed rather than understanding the process that was responsible for the change (Whalen, 2001). We must then better assess how we can give them room to learn but support them in a culturally appropriate way so that all goals are reached. We cannot move forward with increasing the number of study abroad students solely based on leadership's economical and political desire.

### **Application of Study Findings to Social Work Field**

For the overall field of clinical social work (CSW) this study offers some peripheral information on the variables that may impact a student's re-entry experience and even more so calls attention to the lack of research and literature. This researcher believes that this study can be valuable to the larger field of social work by adding to a limited body of literature on coping and the re-entry experience.

Social Workers are potential mental health providers to college students who have studied abroad and have a professional obligation to develop knowledge and remain proficient in practice. An increasing number of college students are studying abroad which could mean an increase in related psychological distress. If these students seek counseling services related to study abroad re-entry it is our responsibility, as social workers, to be abreast of the potentially related symptoms and stressors. This is in respect to embracing social work's value and emphasis of person-in environment (NASW, 2012).

Study abroad and re-entry are becoming increasingly common college experiences that may impact a student in a variety of ways and affect their ability to succeed or their quality of life while at the university. Although not every student may be negatively impacted by study abroad re-entry, it may be beneficial for CSW to inquire about this during intake should the client begin to report symptoms related to the psychological stressors identified in the literature. This could not only inform the CSW in their work but also provide an avenue for rapport building and further insight.

In many ways this research continues to support the idea that measuring coping skills is difficult aside from attempting to measure them in the specific context of study abroad re-entry. Literature suggests that there still is not a good enough way to measure coping (Suls et al., 1996). Measuring coping styles in the context of intercultural adjustment may not be a realistic or beneficial endeavor due to the variety of influential factors which make it challenging to identify coping aside from the myriad of other influences. With the number of students studying abroad increasing, a more successful way to understand their re-entry experience in relationship to how to support them with the associated psychological distress is necessary. Perhaps exploring research from a qualitative or ethnographic angle may produce more full picture results that could better serve the intended research (Rubin & Babbie, 2011).

This study has highlighted the need for further research into how to effectively measure coping styles, how to explore the re-entry experience and how to support students when return home from study abroad. A better understanding of the re-entry experience and process on college students would benefit college administrators, attrition rates and student's overall success and development in college. While it remains difficult to generalize a students experience due to

a variety of identity variables and cultural components, more literature is needed to continue to grow this field if higher education plans to continue to push an increasing number of students to undergo this intercultural endeavor.

## **Conclusion**

This study showed that while age and subsequent generational trends may influence coping behaviors, it continues to be difficult to measure coping as a stand alone tool. College students' identity development and large variety of attachment to different ethnic and cultural groups cannot be removed in trying to understand a student's experience. Although the available data provided interesting ways to consider coping styles, this study has highlighted its inability to understand a study abroad student's re-entry experience solely in terms of coping. This study has also highlighted the complicated process of intercultural adjustment and brought attention to the identity development process within the college student context. These in combination do not make understanding coping styles impossible but very challenging.

This research has also re-iterated the lack of diversity in study abroad participants and highlighted issues of access in relation to this area of the college experience. This chapter has served to generate hypotheses about what may be contributing factors to utilized coping styles but most significantly highlighted that this may not be the best direction to continue to research the study abroad re-entry period student experience.

It is this researcher's hope that this study will be useful for rejuvenating research in each of the study abroad re-entry and coping skills fields. Additionally, that a better tool for measuring the re-entry experience can be identified, accessed and used so that new information regarding how to best support and address re-entry issues may be attended to in future research. Clinical



Social Workers working within the field of Higher Education need to collaborate with study abroad offices in an effort to better explore and understand the study abroad re-entry period and how to provide appropriate support for those students that have difficulties. The increasing number of study abroad students need to be engaged upon their return home and supported in a way that will not only support the student but also enrich the University by holistically attending to the student and their development of becoming a globalized citizen.

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APPENDIX A

HSR Approval Letter

Smith College School for Social Work

March 8, 2012

Michelle Thrasher

Dear Michelle,

Very nice job and I thank you for making the requested additions. Your project is now officially approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

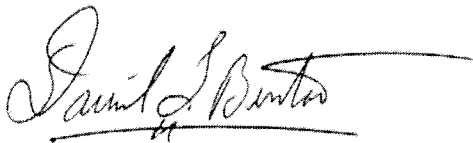
**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Best of luck with your project!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David L. Burton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David L. Burton, M.S.W., Ph.D.  
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Chad Kordt-Thomas, Research Advisor

## APPENDIX B

### Measurement Tool Permission

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN FRANCISCO

BERKELEY • DAVIS • IRVINE • LOS ANGELES • RIVERSIDE • SAN DIEGO • SAN FRANCISCO



SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

OSHER CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE AT UCSF  
1701 DIVISADERO STREET, SUITE 100  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94115

TEL: 415 353 7719  
FAX: 415 353 7554  
E-MAIL: FOLKMAN@OCIM.UCSF.EDU

SUSAN FOLKMAN, PH.D.  
PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE AND  
DIRECTOR

Dear Colleague:

The Ways of Coping that was revised in 1985 is in the public domain and you do not need special permission to use it. In 1988 the Consulting Psychologists Press made minor modifications to a few items. Their version is copyrighted, and has since been purchased by Mind Garden. If you wish to use their version and/or their scoring service, you'll need permission from Mind Garden. You can reach them at <http://www.mindgarden.com/> or Mind Garden, Inc., 1690 Woodside Road, Suite 202, Redwood City, CA 94061, USA, (650-261-3500). You might also want the manual for the Ways of Coping. It is available through the same publisher.

Sincerely,

Susan Folkman, Ph.D.  
Professor of Medicine  
Director, Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at UCSF

## APPENDIX C

### Recruitment Email

Hello fellow past study abroad student!

My name is Michelle Thrasher, and I am a second year graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. You are being invited to participate in an online survey exploring coping styles used by current or past college students after returning home from their previous study abroad experience during the re-entry period.

This information can aid in expanding research on the study abroad re-entry experience and give you an opportunity to share your experience and explore your coping styles. Additionally, these research results will be used in a thesis to help this researcher meet requirements to complete a Master's in Clinical Social Work at Smith College School for Social Work.


If you have studied abroad and agree to participate, you will be asked to complete an online survey which will take approximately 20 minutes. The survey will ask participants for information about personal background, family history and coping styles. The survey is created on a protected website, Survey Monkey, so your information will be protected and remain confidential.

Should you chose to participate, your personal experience and your valuable time is much appreciated. As a voluntary participant, if after beginning the study you decide not to participate, you can exit the screen at any time. Please share the link to this survey with any qualified friends.

go to survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/> 

Sincerely,

Michelle Thrasher, MSW Candidate

  
Smith College School for Social Work



## APPENDIX D

### Informed Consent

This study has received approval by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee. Please read the following letter of Informed Consent before Proceeding. Thank you.

Dear Participant:

My name is Michelle Thrasher and I am a masters candidate at Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a study to explore the coping styles utilized by individuals after returning home from study abroad. This study will contribute to a thesis I am writing in requirement for my degree as a Master of Clinical Social Work.

This letter of informed consent is to ensure you are informed and meet the requirements of this survey. If you are a past or current college student who attended an American institution and have studied abroad in the past you are eligible to take this survey.

If you are eligible and choose to participate in this research, you will be asked to complete a survey which will take approximately 20 minutes. The survey will ask for identity information and information related to your experience after returning home from studying abroad, referred to as the Re-Entry period. The survey is anonymous and completely online.

Participation in this study is not likely to be stressful. The risk associated with completing this survey is potential emotional discomfort related to remembering a past difficult situation. A benefit for participating in this study is an opportunity to share past study abroad re-entry experience and contribute to research.

The survey has been created on a secure website that will protect submitted information. Additionally, all information is confidential and there is no way to link an individual participant identity with their submitted data. The anonymous data will be available to this researcher and the data analyst only who has signed a confidentiality waiver. The information will be destroyed when it is no longer needed.

I truly appreciate you taking the time to participate. I am not able to compensate you financially for your participation but recognize how valuable your time is. A list of references is available for you at the end of the survey, whether or not you participate in this study.

Participation is voluntary. Any participant may chose to withdraw from the study at any time without saving any of their submitted data. Should you have any concerns regarding your rights or about any aspect of the study, please contact me at [REDACTED] or the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974.

If you are a current college student and looking for additional support go to your school's website and locate your mental health office to use drop in services or make an appointment. They are often referred to as Counseling or Psychological services.

If you are no longer a college student please refer to community resources or mental health care providers by searching behavioral health through your insurance provider. Contact information may be found online or on the back of your insurance card.

Sincerely,

Michelle Thrasher, MSW Candidate



## APPENDIX E

### Research Survey

Actual Survey can be found at the following link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/>

**Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles**

**1. Welcome!**

Welcome to the the Coping Styles survey. Thank you for taking the time to participate. What follows directly after this is the Informed Consent which also includes inclusion criteria. After making sure you are eligible, please move forward to the survey. If you find you do not fit the inclusion criteria, please skip to the end of this page and click on I DECLINE. There is a list of resources available at the end of the survey, whether or not you participate.

Thank you for your valuable time!

Michelle Thrasher, MSW candidate

**2. Participant Consent**

This study has received approval by the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee. Please read the following letter of Informed Consent before Proceeding. Thank you.

Dear Participant:

My name is Michelle Thrasher and I am a masters candidate at Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a study to explore the coping styles utilized by individuals after returning home from study abroad. This study will contribute to a thesis I am writing in requirement for my degree as a Master of Clinical Social Work.

This letter of informed consent is to ensure you are informed and meet the requirements of this survey. If you are a past or current college student who attended an American institution and have studied abroad in the past you are eligible to take this survey.

If you are eligible and choose to participate in this research, you will be asked to complete a survey which will take approximately 20 minutes. The survey will ask for identity information and information related to your experience after returning home from studying abroad, referred to as the Re-Entry period. The survey is anonymous and completely online.

Participation in this study is not likely to be stressful. The risk associated with completing this survey is potential emotional discomfort related to remembering a past difficult situation. A benefit for participating in this study is an opportunity to share past study abroad re-entry experience and contribute to research.

The survey has been created on a secure website that will protect submitted information. Additionally, all information is confidential and there is no way to link an individual participant identity with their submitted data. The anonymous data will be available to this researcher and the data analyst only who has signed a confidentiality waiver. The information will be destroyed when it is no longer needed.

I truly appreciate you taking the time to participate. I am not able to compensate you financially for your participation but recognize how valuable your time is. A list of references is available for you at the end of the survey, whether or not you participate in this study.

Participation is voluntary. Any participant may chose to withdraw from the study at any time without saving any of their submitted data. Should you have any concerns regarding your rights or about any aspect of the study, please contact me at [REDACTED] or the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974.

If you are a current college student and looking for additional support go to your school's website and locate your mental health office to use drop in services or make an appointment. They are often referred to as Counseling or Psychological services.

Page 1

## Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

If you are no longer a college student please refer to community resources or mental health care providers by searching behavioral health through your insurance provider. Contact information may be found online or on the back of your insurance card.

Sincerely,

Michelle Thrasher, MSW Candidate

### \* Consent to take Survey

I Consent

I Decline

### 3. Personal Background and Family History Questions:

#### What is your gender identity?

Male

Female

Transgender

not listed here, please specify

#### What race to do you identify as?

White

Black or African-American

American Indian or Alaskan Native

Asian

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

Latino/Latina

Hispanic

From multiple races

Some other race (please specify)

## Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

### Where were you born?

- U.S.
- Europe
- North America
- South America
- Central America
- Asia
- Africa

Other (please specify)

### How many languages do you currently speak?

- 1
- 2
- 3 or more

please specify

### How many languages did you speak in the household you grew up in?

- 1
- 2
- 3 or more

### How old are you?

- 18-21
- 22-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 35-40
- 40-45
- 45-50
- 50+

### In what state or U.S. territory were you raised?

Page 3

### Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

Did your family provide you with financial assistance while in college?

- Yes
- No

If Yes, please specify most appropriate percentage.

- Less than 25%
- 25%
- 50%
- 75%
- 100%

### 4. Study Abroad and Re-Entry Experience

\*Have you ever studied abroad?

- Yes
- No

What year were you in college when you studied abroad?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Extended senior

When was your most recent study abroad experience?

Which Semester?      Fall      Spring      Summer

Other (please specify)

**Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles**

**Did you travel outside of the US before studying abroad?**

Yes

No

If Yes, where?

**How many times have you studied abroad?**

1

2

3

4

Other (Please specify)

**Was your family supportive of your decision to study abroad?**

Yes

No

**Have other members of your family studied abroad?**

Yes

No

If Yes, Who?

**Overall, my study abroad experience was positive.**

Completely

Somewhat

Undecided

Barely

Not at all

**Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles**

**I felt support by my home institution while abroad.**

- Completely
- Somewhat
- Undecided
- Barely
- Not at all

**I was happy to be coming home from my study abroad experience.**

- Completely
- Somewhat
- Not decided
- Barely
- Not at all

**I had difficulty adjusting to the culture of my study abroad destination.**

- Completely
- Somewhat
- Undecided
- Barely
- Not at all

**I had difficulty adjusting to my home institution after studying abroad.**

- Completely
- Somewhat
- Undecided
- Barely
- Not at All



## Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

**During my return home from study abroad, I felt the most stressed or uncomfortable?  
(select more than one answer if appropriate)**

- The First Week
- The Second Week
- The Third Week
- The First Month
- The Second Month
- The Third Month

**My biggest challenge after returning home was:**

- Identifying with peers/family
- Communicating my experiences
- Change in environment
- Adjusting academically
- Missing my study abroad destination

Other (please specify)

## 5. Understanding Coping Styles

Please fill out this survey by reflecting on how you "coped" or responded to ANY difficulties specifically during the re-entry period (time when you returned to home country after studying abroad)

This part of the survey is about understanding the coping strategies used by students in reference to their study abroad re-entry experience. This measurement tool, The Revised Ways of Coping, was created by Folkman and Lazarus (1985).

This researcher would like to recognize that this scale may not entirely represent your study abroad experience. I appreciate your patience in completing this survey to the best of your ability in regards to your re-entry experience.

**\*Just concentrated on what I had to do next - the next step.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

### Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

**\*I tried to analyze the problem in order to understand it better.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Turned to work or substitute activity to take my mind off things.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*I felt that time would make a difference - the only thing to do was to wait.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Bargained or compromised to get something positive from the situation.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*I did something which I didn't think would work, but at least I was doing something.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

## Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

**\*Tried to get the person responsible to change his or her mind.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Talked to someone to find out more about the situation.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Criticized or lectured myself.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Tired not to burn my bridges, but leave things open somewhat.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Hoped a miracle would happen.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

Page 6

### Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

**\*Went along with fate; sometimes I just have bad luck.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Went on as if nothing had happened.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*I tried to keep my feelings to myself.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Looked for the silver lining, so to speak; tried to look on the bright side of things.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Slept more than usual.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

Page 81

### Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

**\*I expressed anger to the person(s) who caused the problem.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Accepted sympathy and understanding from someone.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*I told myself things that helped me to feel better.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*I was inspired to do something creative.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

### 6. Coping Styles Continued

(please continue to answer questions in reference to the time when you returned home from study abroad)

**\*Tried to forget the whole thing.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

## Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

### **\*I got professional help.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

### **\*Changed or grew as a person in a good way.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

### **\*I waited to see what would happen before doing anything.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

### **\*I apologized or did something to make up.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

### **\*I made a plan of action and followed it.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

## Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

**\*I accepted the next best thing to what I wanted.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*I let my feelings out somehow.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Realized I brought on the problem myself.**

- Not Used
- Somewhat Used
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*I came out of the experience better than when I went in.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Talked to someone who could do something concrete about the problem.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

### Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

**\*Got away from it for a while; tried to rest or take a vacation.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Tried to make myself feel better by eating, drinking, smoking, using drugs or medication, etc.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Took a big chance or did something very risky.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*I tried not to act too hastily or follow my first hunch.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Found new faith.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal



## Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

**\*Maintained my pride and kept a stiff upper lip.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Rediscovered what is important in life.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Changed something so things would turn out all right.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Avoided being with people in general.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

## 7. Coping Styles Continued (last page)

**\*Didn't let it get to me; refused to think too much about it.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

### Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

**\*I asked a relative or friend I respected for advice.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Kept others from knowing how bad things were.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Made light of the situation; refused to get too serious about it.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Talked to someone about how I was feeling.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Stood my ground and fought for what I wanted.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles**

**\*Took it out on other people.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Drew on my past experiences; I was in a similar situation before.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*I knew what had to be done, so I doubled my efforts to make things work.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Refused to believe that it had happened.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*I made a promise to myself that things would be different next time.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles**

**\* Came up with a couple of different solutions to the problem.**

Not Used

Used Somewhat

Used Quite a Bit

Used a Great Deal

**\* Accepted it, since nothing could be done.**

Not Used

Used Somewhat

Used Quite a Bit

Used a Great Deal

**I tried to keep my feelings from interfering with other things too much.**

Not Used

Used Somewhat

Used Quite a Bit

Used a Great Deal

**\* Wished that I could change what had happened or how I felt.**

Not Used

Used Somewhat

Used Quite a Bit

Used a Great Deal

**\* I changed something about myself.**

Not Used

Used Somewhat

Used Quite a Bit

Used a Great Deal

## Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

**\*I daydreamed or imagined a better time or place than the one I was in.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Wished that the situation would go away or somehow be over with.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*Had fantasies or wishes about how things might turn out.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**I prayed.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**I prepared myself for the worst.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

## Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

I went over in my mind what I would say or do.

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*I thought about how a person I admire would handle this situation and used that as a model.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*I tried to see things from the other person's point of view.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*I reminded myself how much worse things could be.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

**\*I jogged or exercised.**

- Not Used
- Used Somewhat
- Used Quite a Bit
- Used a Great Deal

## B. You have Completed the Survey!

Thank you so much for your time in completing this survey.

If you have questions or concerns regarding this survey you may contact the researcher at [REDACTED]

Page 21

### Study Abroad Student Re-Entry and Coping Styles

If you are feeling severe emotional distress or any suicidal ideation please contact local emergency services and dial 911.

If you are a current college student and looking for additional support go to your school's website and locate your mental health office to use drop in services or make an appointment. They are often referred to as Counseling or Psychological services.

If you are no longer a college student please refer to community resources or mental health care providers by searching behavioral health through your insurance provider. Contact information may be found online or on the back of your insurance card.

Thank you again for your time.

It would be appreciated if you could please forward along the introduction letter and survey link to any peers or colleagues that may be eligible. Thank you!