

**Real graduates,
real transitions,
real stories:
A real insight to
life**

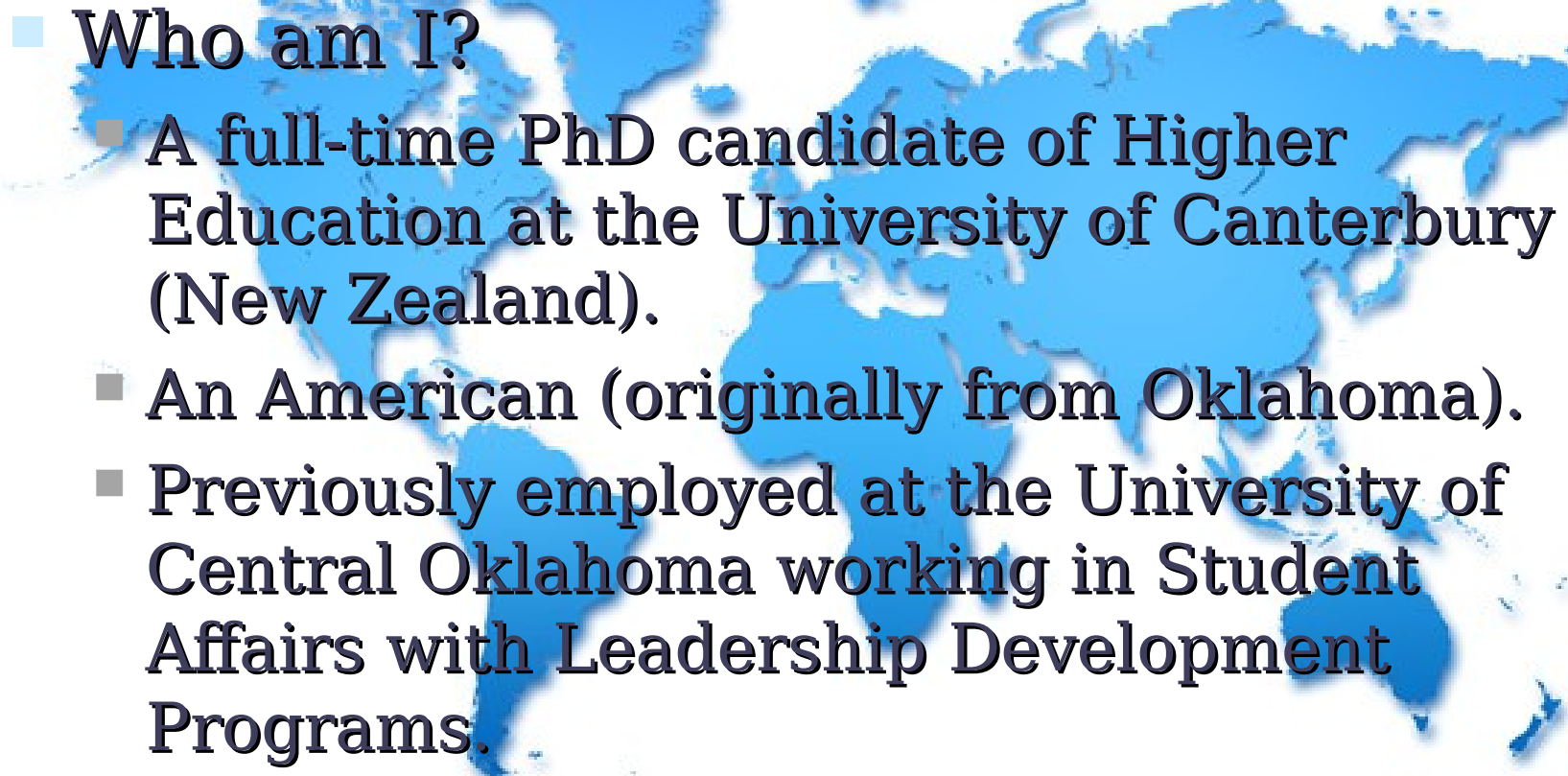
after college

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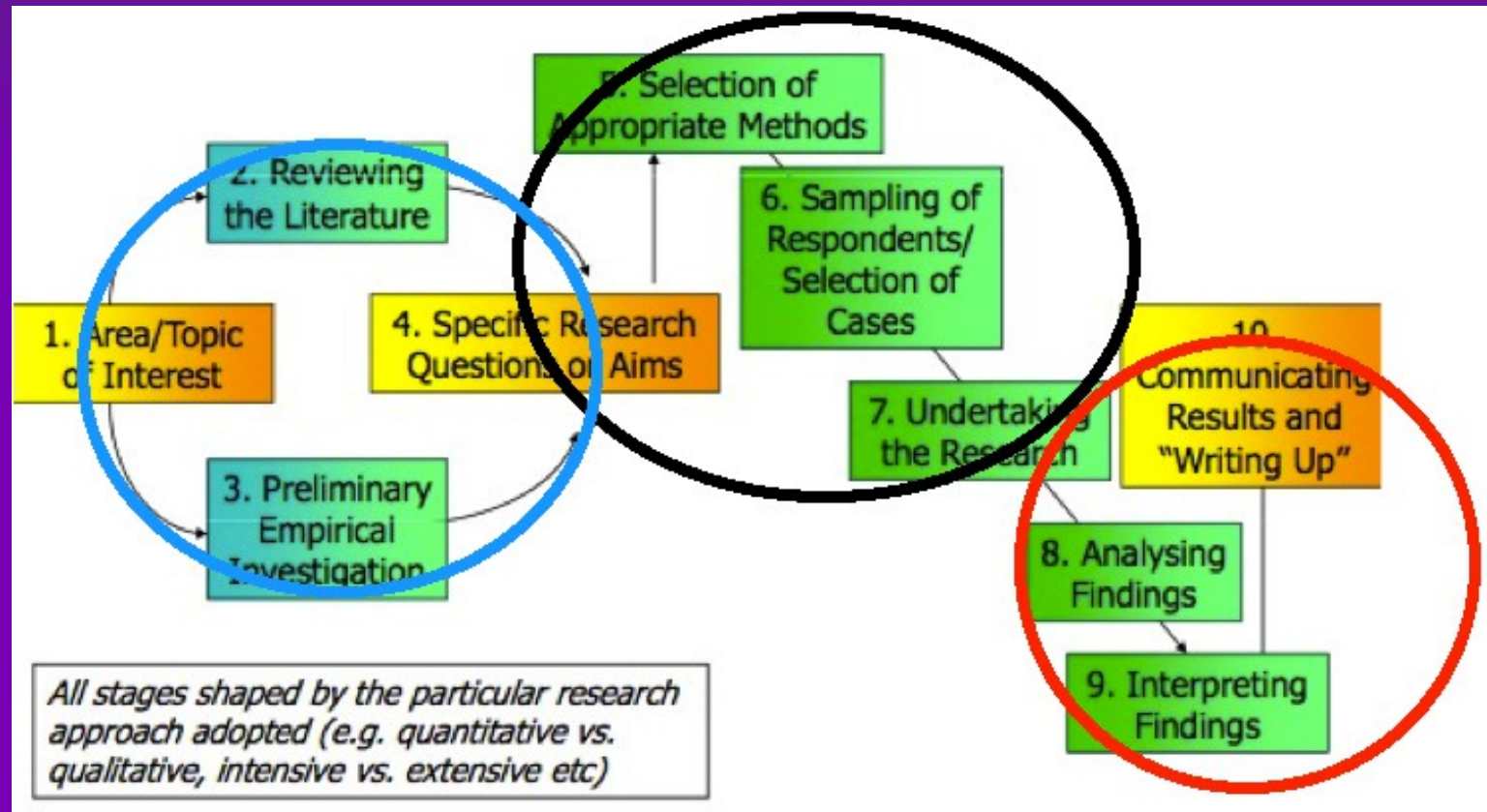
Christchurch, New Zealand

Introductions

- 
- **Who am I?**
 - A full-time PhD candidate of Higher Education at the University of Canterbury (New Zealand).
 - An American (originally from Oklahoma).
 - Previously employed at the University of Central Oklahoma working in Student Affairs with Leadership Development Programs.
 - **Who are you?**

Our Discussion Today

- Overview of my Research Study



- Group discussion

My Story... the Context

- My post-university experience
- My professional experience working with undergraduates
- My masters thesis
- Now PhD

Research Questions

- What are the experiences of recent university graduates? (lived experiences)
- What are the perspectives of recent university graduates? (thoughts and emotions associated with their lived experiences)
- What are the implications for institutions wishing to support these students/graduates?

Previous Literature

- Transition in general
 - Adams, Hays, and Hopson (1976) – Seven Stage Transition Cycle
 - Newman and Newman (1975) – Development through Life
 - Schlossberg (1989, 1995) – Transition Theory/Life Events Theory
- Career Transition
 - Super (1957, 1990) – Career Transition Theory
 - Lea and Leibowitz – (1992) – Adult Career Development

Previous Literature

- Students in transition
 - Chickering (1969) - Identity Theory
 - Tinto (1993) - Student Retention Theory
 - Gardner (1989)
 - Fidler (1996)
 - Barefoot:
 - National Survey for First-Year Curricular Practices (2002)
 - National Survey for First-Year Co-Curricular Practices (2002)
 - National Survey on First-Year Seminars (2006)
 - Foundations of Excellence in the First-Year of College (n.d.)

Previous Literature

- Post-undergraduate transition
 - Gardner and Van der Veer (1998) – Senior Year Experience
 - National Survey of Senior Seminars/Capstone Courses
 - List of Resources on this topic (mostly quantitative research involving seniors or program evaluation): <http://sc.edu/fye/resources/syr/resourcelistings.html>
 - Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) – Only previous study found that has facilitated research involving *graduates*.

Methodology

- **Qualitative Research...**

aims to capture in-depth human behavior and reasons for that behavior... the *how* and *why* not just the what, where, and when.

- This research aimed to...

- Tell real life stories

- Capture the transition *process* not product (focus on people not a thing).

- Lay a foundation of qualitative data to better understand individual transitions

- Explore deep rather than wide

Research Design

- Who?
 - Young, recent university graduates
 - Broadly representative of their university in terms of gender and area of study
 - Responded voluntarily to advertisement or snowballing method
 - 20 individuals total

Research Design

- What?
 - In-depth monthly interviews (1-2 hours in length)
 - Sectional journaling
 - Voluntary artifacts
 - Scaling using a transition chart (monthly)*
 - Incorporation of emergent themes in interviews*
 - 1-year follow up focus group*

*Participatory Emergent Design
(Rapport/trustworthiness)

Research Design

- When?
 - The research was facilitated over a 6-month period.

Participants graduated	May 2009
Research Facilitated	November 09 to May 2010

Research Design

- Where?
 - The research was facilitated in Oklahoma, USA and electronically from NZ (using email, skype, and phone).

Analysis

- Methods of Analysis
 - Margin coding and cross coding
 - Cross case analysis
 - Time series analysis
 - Manual analysis
 - Internal validation through deviant case analysis

Findings: Real Stories

Stories of participants... Spectrum of transition

(RQ 1-experiences and RQ 2-perspectives)

Meet Carley: She's employed part-time in a non-degree required job (that is not related to her major), lives with her boyfriend, relies heavily on her Mom financially, visits a psychologist weekly (started immediately after graduation), and is on anti-depressant and anti-anxiety medications.

Findings: Real Stories

When asked her feelings on 'where she is in life right now', this is what Carley said:

“I just feel like it’s a change that I know is happening, but its not like I can really control it. I guess I have control over what I do each day, but I don’t have control over how I’m going to feel in a year... and on. I don’t even know... I feel like life is completely out of control, and you can only control so much of it... I don’t know... I can’t really explain what I mean. I kind of just feel like this is how its always going to be... life... is always going to be like this. I feel stuck in not knowing... I don’t know.... I feel stuck in so many ways.”

(January, 8 months after graduation)

Findings: Real Stories

Stories of participants... Spectrum of transition

(RQ 1-experiences and RQ 2-perspectives)

Meet Christine: She's employed part-time in a degree-required job (that is indirectly related to her major), shares an apartment with friends, spends most of her time job searching, and is trying to find that balance in her life between being a free, independent young-person while also managing her responsibilities and seeking direction and stability in her life.

Findings: Real Stories

When asked her feelings on 'where she is in life right now', this what Christine said:

"I think the best way to describe how I feel is that sometimes it's like going through puberty all over again! That's because of all the changes (of course they're different kinds of changes)! It's like I'm up and down and up and down and up and down.... it's like some freaky bipolar roller coaster or something! I've never felt so confused in all my life. It's so many emotions wrapped up into one with a nice pretty bow! Okay, I'm done with the cheesy analogies... I've been fairly happy the past month, I suppose. Getting those interviews actually made me feel good about myself again! I felt so proud to be able to call home and tell them all about it. But, some part of me feels like maybe I need to be doing more with my life. I have no idea what that "more" might be- grad school maybe? I think I've started to kind of focus on what's important in my life though and what I truly get joy from."

(February, 9 months after graduation)

Findings: Real Stories

Stories of participants... Spectrum of transition

(RQ 1-experiences and RQ 2-perspectives)

Meet Macey: She's employed full-time in a degree-required job that is exactly what her degree was in, she recently bought her first home where she lives with her husband (who got married within the time frame of this study).

Findings: Real Stories

When asked her feelings on 'where she is in life right now', this is what Macey said:

“Basically since I graduated in May, its just been one new thing after another... so its been like that for so many months now, that I'm like - okay, is this ever going to stop. Because I graduated, got a job, got engaged, bought a house, got married... and I'm like - what's the next thing going to be? ...And now that I'm where I wanted to be, I'm happy and content with that... but then again, I don't feel like I know what I'm doing... I feel like everyday I'm learning stuff.”

(I)

Findings: Real Transition

- Participants' Definitions of the Post-University Transition:
 - “Going from comfortable to not comfortable... that’s what the definition of transition should be... From old to new... from old experiences that you’re good at to new experiences that are up in the air.” (Talon, research participant)
 - “I’m in a transition into adulthood... and not to just know who I am and what I want, but really finding it... and having it... and working towards it.” (Lisa, research participant)
 - Transition is when you leave one thing, and you’re not there anymore... and you’re on your way to another thing, but you’re not there yet either.” (Justin, research participant)
 - “To me, it would be moving from your college self the next step and trying to figure it out. And to me... even in the transition when you’re in the middle of the ‘oh, what do I do now’... its still a change for the college self.” (Jade, research participant)

Common Emergent Themes

- 1.) Uncertainty/lack of direction
- 2.) Expectations (preconceived ideas set by self, family/friends, society)
- 3.) Need for community and/or being involved or a part of something (ie: team, cohort, community group, volunteering)
- 4.) Comfort zone/level... leaving it and the search to find it again.
- 5.) Focus/desire for deeper, more meaningful relationships... (friendship, partnership, individual community, camaraderie in this transition).
- 6.) Torn/conflicted between being young and free vs. desire for responsibility and stability (searching for balance)

Common Emergent Themes

- 7.) Faith/spirituality
- 8.) Search for true happiness and fulfillment
- 9.) Comparing self to others
- 10.) Life skills
- 11.) Health and body/self image
- 12.) Money/finances/debt
- 13.) Increase in professional development and career confidence
- 14.) Situational acceptance and new confidence

Two Overarching Themes

- 1.) Recent graduates' expectations of their degree is quite different than their actual experiences (reality) after graduation (specifically in terms of job obtainment, position level, salary, and other related items).
- 2.) Recent graduates have shown to be experiencing high levels of uncertainty in many aspects of their lives (specifically in career direction and choices, relationships, personal identity, living situation, self-image, and finances).

Other Interesting Findings

- Advice for upcoming grads
 - Pre-graduation advice
 - Career advice
 - Emotional/Affective advice
 - Things-to-know-that-I-didn't advice
 - Life-after-college advice
- The Scaling Chart

Coming Full Circle

“I think that universities should start off being real with the students about the job market, what they can do with their major, what extra trainings they need, etc. I think our students feel lost when they leave because professors do not give applicable advice for graduates. If students knew going into graduation that they would more than likely still be looking for a job a year later, students might decide to continue their education or chose another career path that best suits them.”

(Jill, research participant)

Implications for Institutions (RQ 3)

- Final-year/post-graduation seminar
- Support groups for students post-graduation
- Holistic career services offered to recent alumni
- Enhanced internships and mentorship programs with professionals in their career field
- Continued university staff mentorship/counseling post-graduation
- Community service/volunteer efforts for recent graduates and young professionals

Discussion

- Questions
- Ideas/Feedback
- Stories
- Current Practices
- Other research

Where to from here?

- Utilize the information you've shared with me today
- Complete/write dissertation
- Submit November 2011
- Defend early 2012

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Thank You!

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