TREADING THROUGH SWAMPY WATER:

GRADUATES' EXPERIENCES OF THE POST-UNIVERSITY TRANSITION

A thesis presented to the

Faculty of the College of Education

University of Canterbury

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

By

April Lillian Perry, B.A., M.Ed.

2012

Treading Through Swampy Water

The title of this thesis was inspired by the way one of the participants described her post-university transition. Upon analysing the data, I found that this description encapsulated the essence of what the group of recent graduates involved in this study experienced in life-after-university.

This thesis is dedicated…

First and foremost to my best friend and husband, Lane, who has been my inspiration from start to finish.

Second, to the twenty young adults who participated in this research… this process would have been impossible without you.

Third, to the people of Christchurch, New Zealand… those from my adopted home who were mentally, psychologically, or physically affected by the earthquakes that so devastatingly struck our city.

Abstract

Bridges (2004) defines a transition as "a natural process of disorientation or re-orientation" marking the turning points of life (p. 3). One such turning point that has recently attracted the attention of higher education is the shift from university to life-after-study. Some universities, especially in the U.S., have developed programmes and courses to help prepare and support students for this transition. However, most of these educational initiatives have been developed without empirical research that explores graduates' needs. In this research, therefore, I have sought to understand the experiences and perspectives of recent graduates in the post-university transition with the hope that this may inform potential institutional practices.

Twenty young, recent graduates, who were broadly representative of their (U.S.) university's student population in terms of degree, gender, and ethnicity, were selected to participate in this research. They engaged in recorded, semi-structured interviews and email interviews over a six-month period. Transcripts of interviews were analysed using typical qualitative procedures informed by interpretivism, symbolic interactionism, naturalistic inquiry, and narrativity. Results indicated that despite individual variability, participants shared some common perspectives. Four main themes emerged from the data. Three illustrated the difficulty of the post-university transition (*shifting identities, searching,* and *unmet expectations*), but the fourth illustrated how participants used people and resources (*stabilisers*) to foster support and balance in their transition. Furthermore, participants offered a range of suggestions about ways their institution might help graduating students better prepare for this transition and life-after-university. Recommendations based on these suggestions provide ideas for *career preparation, emotional support,* and *practical life skills* that institutions might choose to implement.

Acknowledgements

I often dreamt what it would feel like when I was to this point of writing my acknowledgements. Describing this educational endeavour as challenging would be an understatement. It is designed to be difficult, to stretch one's mind and abilities in new ways; however, I found this process even more challenging than some of my peers have, as working in solitude with only the company of a blinking cursor on a computer screen is dialectic to what makes me feel alive. Nevertheless, here I am feeling nostalgic, as I know the end of this journey is not only the end to my PhD pursuit, but it is also the end to a chapter in my life.

In the last four years, I feel as if I have grown into myself… not only professionally and academically, but personally. Living abroad in this beautiful country, my adopted home, has challenged me, inspired me, and influenced me. I wise man (ahem, my husband) once said, "If you ever want to know what it is like to feel different, then just go somewhere that you will be." When we moved to New Zealand four years ago, we did not know a single person, but we will soon be leaving this amazing place having been shaped by hundreds of people that have poured into our lives. For this reason, I must take time to acknowledge mentors, colleagues, family, and friends, as I cannot separate the people who have helped in my PhD journey from those who have supported me personally over the past four years… as the two are one in the same.

I would like to start by acknowledging and thanking the loving and merciful God whom I serve. People that know me know that my faith is important to me. However, I also aim to respect and embrace the faiths and non-faiths of those around me, and I therefore do not speak abundantly or evangelically about my faith beliefs. Nevertheless, my hope is that everyone who knows me has seen and felt love and grace exemplified in my life, as *that* is what I believe to be my calling as a Christian.

I am immensely grateful for the many people who have helped with my research:

To the twenty research participants – I feel like I entered a small fragment of your lives, but somehow grew to know an intimate aspect of you during that time. I have fond feelings for each of you and am so grateful for your emotional investment and time in this project. My hope is that when you read your quotes in this thesis, you are taken back to a place and time that you remember, but also a place and time that you have now grown and moved.

To my two supervisors, Judi Miller and Marion Bowl – I am filled with emotion when I think about the role you both played in my doctoral journey. Kind words and thank-you's will never be enough to articulate how much you both have done for me. Judi, you are so kind and understanding. You communicated with me and supported me in the exact way that I needed it. You challenged my thinking and approach, but did so with such grace and patience that I was able to learn, explore, and discover on my own. Marion, you are the most organised, on-top-of-it academic that I have ever met. Even from across the world, you have taught be how to be critical and analytical in my research approach. You have challenged and stretched me in ways I did not think I could be, but you did it because you believed in me. And sometimes, your faith was the only thing that pulled me through. I can honestly say that this journey would have been impossible without either of you. You are an incredible team, and your strengths as supervisors created a perfect balance for my thesis journey. I love and cherish you both dearly.

To colleagues and mentors who have offered their professional support – Phil Gardner, Heather Maietta, Michelle Morgan, Billy O'Steen, and Missy Morton, thank you for spending countless hours with me at conferences, over email, working on publications, talking about the importance of the senior-year transition, and teaching me. To the University of Canterbury, the College of Education, and the postgraduate community, thank you for

academic and financial support. To those who inspired me to pursue a career in higher education – Roger Webb, Kathryn Gage, Steve Kreidler, Gayle Kearns, and Cole Stanley, thank you for living passionately and loving your work contagiously.

To those who offered personal and emotional support throughout this journey:

To my Family:

To Lane, my best friend, life partner, and motivation – You not only inspired and encouraged me to pursue my PhD initially, but you were right beside me for each tear and triumph along the way. If it were not for you, I would have never believed in myself enough to start this journey, nor had the perseverance to finish it. You, more than anyone else, know how much of a challenge this was for me, and it was often you pulling me off of the floor and from my puddle of tears that kept me from calling it quits. I am so proud of myself for making it here, and I hope you know that I am only here because of your love and faith in me.

To Arthur, my brother and partner in crime since 1983 – You were the first person that made me realise that education and being smart was 'cool'. You encouraged and challenged me to look at the world in different ways. You introduced me to *Strengths Finder* nearly a decade ago, which has offered so much meaning and passion in my life. I love that we have so much in common, and that God has gifted us both with the ability to build special relationships and communities with those around us. Having you live with Lane and me in New Zealand for 20 months was such a special time. I believe pursuing our doctorates simultaneously bonded the three of us in such deep and meaningful ways. Thank you for being a part of the day-to-day journey of my PhD and life abroad!

To my Mom, Kimmy, who is consistently my number one fan in life. You deserve acknowledgement for not only your amazing parenthood abilities, but your professional

abilities too. I do not think many PhD students can say that their mother read and helped edit their entire thesis, like you have. You have cheered me on in every pursuit I have made, and you emphatically support and trust my life decisions… even the ones that take me across the world. It was often a text or call from you saying how proud you are of me that got me through another daunting day of research. I could talk for hours on how special you are to me, but with regard to my PhD, it was your tireless interest, even when it was not interesting, that has made me feel so supported. Thank you – the most selfless, generous, and loving Mother.

To my Dad and Step-mom, Art and Kathryn, who have encouraged me and helped me believe that I am capable and worthy of this PhD. I have always been a Daddy's-girl, and even as an adult, it amazes me how quickly my father's love can calm me and give wings to my dreams. I am so lucky to have a father like you, who has emulated perfectly what real love is. And subsequently, I found and married a man that similarly demonstrates love, peace, and positivity. Thank you for being the stable, consistent voice of logic, wisdom, and love. You both, Dad and Kathryn, have been so good about asking and being truly interested in my PhD studies and future pursuits. Thank you for constantly reminding me of how proud you are of me… it has made this difficult process seem more valuable.

To my grandparents, Maurine (Grandma), the late Art Jr. (Grandpa), the late Mary (G-Barr), and the late Lloyd (Grandaddy Allen), who paved the way for me to live the life I have. To Grandma, my last living grandparent, you lie in the sweetest part of my heart. Even though I have been far away the past few years, we have had some incredibly valuable conversations. You are intuitive, sensitive, and know that the power of your words can ignite inspiration. I love the way you love your family… the way you love me… and the way you always will. Thank you for always being so proud of me. To Grandpa (1925-1999), who showed me that

with the right amount of charisma you can get just about anywhere. I know you're looking down and giving me a little wink, saying – I knew you could do it! To G-Barr (1925-2009), who showed me that you have to colour a little outside the lines to truly live life. If you were here, I think you would challenge me to have at least one hearty laugh every day, and for you – I will! To Grandaddy Allen (1924-2011), thank you for showing me that it is never too late to make a fresh start.

To my extended family, who have each invested in my life and PhD journey in an important way. Aunt Mary, you were the first female I ever knew to have a PhD… before I even knew what that really meant. You live a life of example, and one that I aim to emulate. Your passion for education, service, social justice, and loving others was always demonstrated, and I hope you know that you have given me something to aspire to be like. Willy, you are generous, kind, patient, and steadfast. Thank God there are people like you and Lane to keep the Mary's and April's of the world in line! Cousin Matty, you have always challenged me to think differently than the mainstream. Even though life has taken us far distances a part, our kindred spirits are only a thought, email, or holiday away, and that alone is comforting. Uncle Dave and Aunt Kathy, you all have been my second parents, and subsequently huge influences on my life. It amazes me how a bear-hug from you, Uncle Dave, and a short talk with you, Aunt Kathy, can help inspire and direct my life path. Specifically with my PhD, your encouraging words and excited faces when we visit make everything seem worth while. Thank you for your support in this journey. Brandon, Ryan, and Zac (and Shawn), I find it fascinating that all of us cousins, Arthur included, have morphed into very similar people. I love the way that our life paths, interests, and personalities have somehow merged and created a special and inexplicable bond. I always describe my relationship with you more as siblings than cousins, because I feel so close to each of you. Thank you for being on this journey with me, and for always being so excited to spend quality time together.

To my in-laws, Lane, Debbie, Whitney (Tyler, Jayden, Cashton, and Rylen), Heather, and Nicki – I say it all the time, but I could not be more proud to be a Perry. You all have welcomed me as one of your own, and I cannot express how important and valuable you each have been in my PhD journey. Deb, Whit, Heather, and Nicki, you all have become my dearest girlfriends, and I am so lucky to have married into a family that has such a special love. Missing out on Jayden, Cashton, and Rylen's young lives has been one of the hardest parts of living so far away, and I cannot help but get excited for the day when we are all close again.

To my Friends:

I have always had strong friendships, as relationships with others are the central focus of my life. So many friends have played vital roles throughout my life path, but there are a few people that I must acknowledge who have specifically supported me in my PhD journey.

To my friends in the U.S., who many of you have visited us in N.Z. – Keelee, Lori and Kenneth, Leia, Lisa and Phil, Bob and Lindsay, Nathan, Nate, and MG. Thank you for your endless love, support, and friendship. You have so graciously been interested in each step of my PhD journey and have gotten more than your fair share of boring thesis talks and long emails. And yet, you listened intently and supported me unwaveringly. Each of you knows how special your friendship is to me, and subsequently, this process would have suffered without you in my life. Thank you… for being you.

To my N.Z. friends, who have become my 'family' in the last four years – You all know I would have never made it through my PhD or living this far from my actual family without each of you in my life. No matter how far apart our lives may lead us, we have created a special bond that will never take us away from each other… and that is comforting. To the

Kiwi Gang – Prita and Dan, Amrita and Joe, and Louise and Andrew, simply put – you all let us in, gave us a place to belong, and offered friendships that will last a lifetime. You have shared your homes, your families, and your hearts. Thank you for making each event special and important… For example, singing Christmas carols at the top of your lungs at Chris and Cathy's house [Dan's parents; one set of our Kiwi parents], because you know how much I love Christmas and how homesick I was at the time. To my office-mates, which have in turn become some of my dearest friends – Kata, Caralyn, Tab, and Si. You all have been a part of my daily PhD progress, and your empathic ear and supporting words have been the soul behind my motivation. The PhD process is often a lonely one, but the community that we have created has made this process bearable. Thank you for sharing in my frustration, tears, milestones, and everything in-between. I truly treasure the segment of life that we shared and look forward to maintaining our lifelong friendships. To my fellow expats, who understand what it is like to live abroad and forge relationships that in turn serve as family – Joe and Amy (Brooklyn and Lincoln), Krystina and Lee, Lisa and Ben, Therese, and Erin and Paul (Indra). What I love the most about our special relationship is that as expats we share a like-mindedness, and that regardless of where our lives take us next, we will meet again. Even though all of you, with the exception of the Flammer's, have left Christchurch in the last year, I have full confidence that even if we never live in the same place again, our hearts will always be in the same place, and therefore, we will be friends for a lifetime. To Matty and Ben, who are the most thoughtful and dependable people I know. Thank you not only for your friendship over the years, but also for loving Riley as much as we do. Every time we leave town (which is often and sometimes for long periods of time), I know our house and our precious pup are in great hands. Maybe we will treat Riley less like a baby when we actually have kids, but for now she is our special girl, and I joke that she also deserves a PhD after the long hours she has spent beside me.

Last but not least, I'd like to acknowledge and thank the communities in which we have been a part – the Rotary community and the ReChurch community. Stuart and Leslie Batty, our Rotary hosts, very quickly became our Kiwi Mum and Dad when they opened their home, arms, and hearts to us. Leslie has not only taught me the basics of cooking, but she has had endless motherly-talks with me… something I know my own mother is glad that I have here in Christchurch. The Batty's have been a special part of our lives in N.Z., and subsequently our lives forever. I look forward to the day when our future children get to visit Grandma and Grandpa Batty in New Zealand.

In conclusion, I'd like to thank all of you who have opened your homes, hearts, and ultimately yourselves to Lane and me. You have shaped my experiences through this journey, and thus have shaped me… forever… for the better.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Foreword

Personal Statement

My Story

When I meet someone who is doing research, the first question I ask is, "Why are you researching this topic?" It never ceases to amaze me how often people's answers are somehow rooted in some personal experience. Similar for me, my choice of research focus for this thesis was influenced by a personal experience. Since this personal experience provides both a context and subjective perspective that I need to acknowledge for my research, I will describe it here.

I graduated from university with a good grade point average and had filled my resume with evidence of my participation in numerous campus activities and accolades, such as student body vice president, new student orientation chairperson, vice president of my sorority (a student club affiliated with the National Panhellenic Association), homecoming queen, student leader of the year, and so on. I had repeatedly been told that I was going to be very successful when I graduated, and I never thought twice about the difficulty of getting a good job. Shortly after I completed my undergraduate degree in Broadcast Communication, I moved to Los Angeles, California to pursue my dream of working in the entertainment news industry. I knew the path to pursuing my goals might be a hard road, but I followed all the 'right steps' and had successfully completed a competitive internship at an international news programme the previous year, and thus believed that I would be able to get a job somewhere in this industry. Nevertheless, my expectations were not met, specifically in terms of jobs, friends, and moving to a new city. I struggled to find jobs that interested me and also met my salary expectations. I found myself applying for positions that were below my skill level

which did not require a degree qualification, yet I was competing against other applicants who had Master's qualifications. I also struggled personally during this time. Moving to a new place, meeting new people, and making friends were harder than at university. I shared an apartment that had a rent of $2,100 per month, and my savings account was dwindling fast. On top of all of this, I was emotionally distraught. I felt that I was a failure, that I had let myself down, and had not met the expectations of others.

My situation made me question many things. For example, "Is anyone else going through this?" "Why is it so hard to find a job?" "Why do I feel so lost and alone?" I wondered where I had gone wrong. I struggled to find my new place in the world and to emotionally understand what I was experiencing. I felt like I had spent twenty-two years preparing for my life after university, yet this 'life' was illusionary. Years of education, leadership training, and organisational experience still seemed to leave me feeling isolated and wondering what the next step of life would be.

I struggled for nearly a year before moving back to my hometown, where I began a job at my alma mater university. I worked in student services doing public relations, fundraising, and event planning. I was later promoted to working with student activities and leadership programmes. Soon, I became aware that students were experiencing similar situations to those I had experienced. I then decided to pursue a Master's degree in Adult Education in order to further my qualifications for working with university students. For my Master's thesis, I conducted a small scale quantitative study with final-year students and recent graduates through a 'Senior Year Experience Needs Assessment Survey'. This survey assessed students' and graduates' career skills, practical life skills, and emotional preparedness for life after university. I compared the data on final-year students and graduates in these three areas to determine a need for a 'Senior Year Experience Seminar'

that aimed to better prepare final-year students for their futures. The results indicated that there was a need for institutional support in this area of transition. Therefore, I determined that further research in this area was needed, and I decided to facilitate a formal, in-depth study on the post-university transition. This decision led to me pursuing my doctoral degree in Higher Education, exploring the transition experiences and perspectives of recent university graduates.

Connecting My Story to the Research

As a researcher, I believe it is impossible to separate myself and my previous experiences from the research, and I recognise that this results in some form of personal bias. I cannot ignore that my experiences have shaped how I view the world, and thus interpret data, but they have also helped to inform the approach I took to this study – encouraging people to talk and write about their experiences. Nevertheless, I recognise that this research is not about my experience, but that of the research participants, and I have had to constantly keep my experiences bracketed (Creswell, 2007).

I understand that each of the research participants' experiences have followed a different path from mine. Therefore, instead of seeking affirmation or similarities to my experiences within this transition, I sought their perspectives. I communicated the message to the participants that I believed there was 'enough importance to this transition' to make it worth researching, but I did not release any information about my personal struggles or triumphs related or unrelated to this transition. I was careful to not tell them my story, as I did not want them to feel or think that they needed to affirm or deny my experiences. I wanted their stories and their perspectives, and I did not want my story to skew how they communicated their lives to me. My previous experiences are the heart of what drives my passion for helping others and researching with people in transition, but I have aimed to do so without letting my personal

biases influence the findings and outcomes. Specific strategies that I have used to ensure this are discussed throughout this thesis.

When I think about my study and its focus on the notion of transition, I cannot help but think of T.S. Eliot's poem *Four Quartets: Little Gidding*. This poem is the story of a journey. This metaphor of a journey relates to my study in many ways: the individuals who have participated in the study have embarked on their own journey in post-university pursuits; I, as a researcher, am on a journey to better understand that which I am exploring; and I, as a doctoral student, am on a journey of self-exploration, growth, development, and change. I mention Elliot's poem here for his description of the journey's end.

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.
> Through the unknown, remembered gate
> When the last of earth left to discover
> Is that which was the beginning.

<div align="right">T. S. Eliot, Four Quartets: Little Gidding, 1942</div>

This portion of the poem communicates to me that the end of a journey is often the same place as the beginning. However, as one is transformed through the exploratory process, the final destination is perceived differently than what it was the first time, as it has been with this research journey. While I am still mindful that my initial, personal experience influences my view, along the way my ideas and perceptions of this transition have changed and progressed.

I have started this thesis with a personal statement in order to lay the foundation of this study. I believe this sets the tone for why I have explored what I have, recognises the potential for bias I may have, and focuses the lens by which I have viewed the project. Building from this, I address the focus, purpose, and context of the study in the following chapter.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Focus of the Study

When I started this research, I had certain ideas about what I would be researching and what I 'expected' to find. The topic I wanted to research, the [1]post-university transition, has remained consistent, but my approach has changed throughout the research process. As a former higher education practitioner, I began planning my research project with a set of ideals and beliefs about the role of a university. Not only had I worked with university students and graduates, but I identified with many of their transition concerns, and therefore empathised with them. I approached this project with the idea that universities 'should' and 'must' do something to better prepare their graduates for life after study. I assumed that universities 'owed' it to their students to prepare them professionally and emotionally for the graduate transition. I believed that fostering student development and growth was a vital aspect of the holistic university experience, and that that experience did not stop on graduation day. As a student services practitioner, I believed it to be part of my role to facilitate and advocate for services which supported that transition. Although I still retain many of the ideas with which I began my research, my perspective on the role of higher education, students' transition, and how they interact has changed.

I came into this process with the conviction that my research would transform student services in higher education, and that the findings would pave a way for final-year students and recent graduates to have a better transition into life-after-study. Soon after starting the research, I realised that my interests lay less in the 'obligation' of universities to their students and in evaluating and assessing final-year transition programme outcomes, but more

---

[1]Substantial thought went into determining the words that best describe this transition. 'Post-university transition' was selected based on its inclusiveness of an international audience. Within an American-English context, this term could also be used synonymously with 'post-college transition'.

in exploring the experiences and perspectives of students and graduates facing this transition. I still wanted to address the research through the context of higher education, but I wanted to explore the role of institutions from the students' perspective, as opposed to seeking measurable outcomes that I thought universities 'should' produce. This also resulted in a methodological shift discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of recent graduates and their perspectives on the transition from university to post-university life. The research aim was to illuminate the complexity of transition, and from participants' perspectives, make recommendations for institutions wishing to better prepare and support their students for life-after-study. The following research questions guided the study:

- *What are the experiences of young, recent university graduates?*
- *What are the perspectives of young, recent university graduates?*
- *What are the recommendations for institutions wishing to support their graduating students?*

In this research, *young* graduates were defined as those who studied directly from secondary school through university, and were entering a full-time, non-academic environment for the first time (approximate ages 22-24 years old). *Recent* graduates were defined as those who were in their first year after completing an undergraduate degree.

Context of the Study

In order to better understand this study and what is presented and discussed throughout this thesis, it is important to first describe the context in which this study was set. This research

focuses on the transition of 21st century university graduates; therefore, I will briefly address their attributes, the current higher education environment they have left, and the current economic climate they have entered. This provides a clearer picture of the research, and contextually frames the study.

Young, Recent Graduates

Given that the individuals who participated in this study were between the ages of 22 and 24, and thus born after the year 1985, they are in the generation referred to as the 'Millennial Generation' (Howe and Strauss, 2003; Coomes and DeBard, 2004; Lowery, 2004; Strange, 2004), also known as Generation Y, Baby Boomer Echo Generation, the Next Great Generation, and the Technological Generation (Howe and Strauss, 2003; Newton, 2000; Coomes and DeBard, 2004). Individuals from this generation have grown up in a society where they have had opportunities to become familiar with personal computers, cell phones, and the internet. According to Newton (2000), although this generation is facing many of the same developmental issues as previous generations, "today's students have grown up in a world of revolution, where rapid changes have provided a new expansiveness in information, a multiplicity of potential life experiences, advancing technological sophistication, and pluralistic social models to emulate" (p. 8).

The literature demonstrates that members of this generation are different as learners and students from those in the past, primarily due to their exposure to and knowledge of technology (Newton, 2000; Howe and Strauss, 2003; Coomes and DeBard, 2004). Additionally, the research suggests that their reason for attending university has become more career driven. For example, when asked why they attended college, 75 per cent of participants of one survey said, "to get a job" or "to make more money" (Wood, 2004).

According to Gedye, Fender & Chalkley (2004), 84 per cent of undergraduate students responded that "employment opportunities" were their reason for pursuing a degree.

The research participants in my study were graduates from a U.S. institution (discussed further in Chapter 4) and have grown up in fast-paced, multi-tasking, global society with access to more information at their fingertips than any other previous generation (Lowery, 2004). This is important to consider when reading about the participants' experiences and perspectives, as certain aspects of being a 'millennial' have impacted their expectations, perceptions, and transition beyond university.

Current Higher Education Environment

Higher education in the U.S. has been affected by local and global change. Two aspects of this change are massification and marketisation (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004; Canaan and Shumar, 2008). In terms of massification, federal legislation establishing Land Grant institutions (1862) and the GI Bill (1944) were important as they each signalled that universities were not only for elite. However, it was the social movements of the 1960's and early 1970's that were most significant in the massification of higher education. Women's and civil rights activism brought pressure to bear on governments and institutions, which paved the way for more minorities and women to enter university (Kerr, 1991). Due to these societal changes, higher education began to undergo a major shift in student demographics.

As a result of neoliberal influence both in the U.S. and elsewhere, higher education has changed globally with an increase of marketisation. Neoliberalism is a term used around the world to describe a political-economic ideology that de-emphasises or rejects positive government intervention, focusing instead on achieving progress by encouraging free-market methods and supporting the privatisation of state-owned enterprises. Thus, the term

neoliberalism signalled a shift in thinking about the purpose of higher education from it being a social good (self-improvement, contribution to society) to an economic good (buying a better paid future) (Harvey, 2005). Higher education is also coming at a much higher personal cost to students, and that cost accompanies a higher set of expectations of what that degree can offer (LaRocque, 2003; Scott, 2006). As institutions are less governmentally funded, they grow more reliant on individual student fees and external donations. According to Canaan and Shumar (2008, p. 5), the neoliberal university "competes to sell their services to student 'customers' in the educational marketplace." In their exploration of how the university uses its students as capital, Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) defined academic capitalism as, "the pursuit of market and market-like activities to generate external revenues" (p. 11).

There is a debate within the academy on the shifting role and purpose of the 21st century University. It is outside the scope of this study to enter into a detailed discussion of this debate, but it is important to note this ideological shift, as the participants in my study have been exposed to marketisation. I was conscious that this shift could affect my participants' perceptions and expectations of their degree, and thus their transition into post-university life. Furthermore, had I facilitated this study twenty years ago, the students' perceptions of the value and purpose of their degree, as they graduated and transitioned into life-after-study, would have inevitably been different than what it is now. This is important to remember when reviewing the literature on this topic and the research findings of this study.

Current Economic Climate

It is important to note the current economic climate that the research participants entered upon graduation. The participants in this study completed their undergraduate degrees in May 2009. This date was untimely in terms of the transition from study to work, as it was in the midst of the global economic recession of 2009. My interest in this topic and the purpose of

the study was not driven by the economic recession, but the contracting labour market inevitably played a role the participants' transition.

The U.S. unemployment rate started to increase in early 2009 and reached an all-time high of 10.1 per cent in October of 2009 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). During this time, businesses were trying to stay afloat, and people were fighting to keep their current jobs; therefore, few were hiring new graduates entering the workforce. In addition, employers' expectations of new hires were shifting (Hanneman and Gardner, 2010). In Hanneman and Gardner's (2010) survey on employability skills of new hires (completed by 900 employers), they found that "the characteristics of today's starting job resemble the job many young adults attained after seven to ten years of work experience. Because of retirements, employers can no longer start new graduates in positions that allow them to learn the ropes; rather, new graduates need to know the ropes before they even arrive for the first day of work" (Gardner and Perry, 2011, p. 315). Faced with the economic recession, rising unemployment rates, and shifting employer expectations, the participants in this study entered a labour market that was not optimal for a smooth and successful transition.

Context Summary

In summary, the participants in this study have been exposed to the massification of higher education and the marketisation of institutional choice. They are likely to have higher expectations of the value of their degree and to have attended university with the purpose of career advancement. Finally, they entered the job market amidst the 2009 economic recession. This information helps set the scene for the research process, the research participants, and their post-university transition.

Outline of Thesis

In this chapter, I have addressed my position as a researcher, and noted how the study focus has shifted. I then listed the three research questions which guided this study and provided the purpose and aim of the research. Finally, I addressed the context in which this study was set and the factors that have contextually shaped it.

Chapter Two is a review of previous literature relevant to my study. First, I discuss current practices for students in transition and how these practices have come into relevance within the higher education sector. I then present previous literature on transitions, and specifically address definitions, approaches, themes, and models of transition. Lastly, I present literature on two specific aspects of the post-university transition: career/workplace transition and personal/emotional transition. Throughout this chapter, I discuss the potential link that may be made between previous transition literature and career/student development literature, and how if linked together, it may serve as a foundation for informing the role of institutions in supporting their final-year students.

Chapter Three is a description of how I have approached this study and explains how my epistemological and ontological positions have influenced my beliefs about research. I describe the paradigm of inquiry (interpretivism) with which my views most align and the theoretical framework that underpins my research approach. Lastly in chapter three, I discuss three contributing approaches that have been useful in constructing the design, analysis, and presentation of the research, which include symbolic interactionism, naturalistic inquiry, and narrativity.

In Chapter Four, I outline the research design and methods that I have used in this study and link them with my methodological beliefs. I describe how the data were collected and how

each decision in the data collection process was negotiated. Also, in this chapter, ethical issues, the process of data analysis, and strategies for addressing rigour are discussed.

In Chapter Five, I introduce each of the twenty research participants to demonstrate their subjective individuality. I present basic information about them, such as their degree of study, their career path after graduation, and other salient aspects of their transition. This is used to set the stage for presenting the research findings in the subsequent chapters.

In Chapters Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine, I present the research findings through the data and emergent themes. Here I reduce and organise twenty sub-themes into four main research themes (shifting identities, searching, unmet expectations, and stabilisers). The themes are defined and the data from the participants' interviews are used to illustrate each sub-theme. Also included within these chapters is a synthesis of literature, as I compare and contrast these findings with relevant research. The findings presented in these chapters address research questions 1 and 2 – *experiences* and *perspectives* of graduates.

In Chapter Ten, I present additional data and recommendations for institutions regarding students in transition (research question 3) based on the participants' perceptions. Recommendations for action are presented in three categories: career preparation, emotional support, and practical life skills.

I conclude the thesis in Chapter Eleven by providing a study synopsis, demonstrating the strengths and limitations of the study, and listing opportunities for future research.

Chapter 2

Review of Relevant Literature

Introduction

Initiatives in higher education for students in transition originally started with a focus on first-year students (transition into university). First-year programmes were established for the purpose of increasing retention, grade point average, and student satisfaction (Fidler and Moore, 1996). Student development theories, such as student involvement theory (Astin, 1996), student departure theory (Tinto, 1993), social support theory (Reis, 1996), student development and learning theory (Stage, 1989), identity development theory (Akens, 2002), and cultural diversity theory (Gordon, 1991) were used to formulate and design these transition programmes. Following the development of courses, services, and seminars to assist the transition of first-year students, research has assessed the student outcomes attributed to these courses, services, and seminars. Empirical results have provided evidence that these initiatives have ameliorated the effect of this transition for students, as well as increased student retention rates, cognitive skills (active thinking, intellectual engagement, academic skills), personal development (social, emotional), satisfaction with the institution (faculty and peers), and engagement in the learning experience (National Survey of First-Year Seminars, 2000/2003/2006/2009; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin, 2002; Engberg and Mayhew, 2007; Friedman, 2008).

As interest and research regarding first-year initiatives increased, conversations were drawn toward final-year students and support initiatives for leaving university. In 1990, John N. Gardner, one of the pioneers in first-year transition research, convened the first national conference on the 'Senior Year Experience'. The initial purpose of the conference was "to

discuss issues surrounding the senior transition and share different institutional interventions" (Gardner and Van der Veer, 1998, p. 13). Another focus for discussion was the need to "connect the two ends of this continuum of the undergraduate experience" (Gardner and Van der Veer, 1998, p. 14). This conference was directly related to the implementation of final-year support initiatives and programmes over the coming years (Gardner and Van der Veer, 1998).

In 1998 Gardner and Van der Veer edited a book entitled *The Senior Year Experience*. Gardner noted that research was limited at the time "because the topic [had] only recently received attention in the higher education community" (p. 4). The purpose of the book was to establish a general understanding of the senior year (final-year) transition, demonstrate how institutions had already responded, and call for more research focusing on this aspect of student development. In the book, the authors challenged and encouraged the higher education sector to assess graduate outcomes, improve services for students leaving university, and work collaboratively within university units to do so.

Shortly after, in 1999, the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (NRC) conducted the National Survey of Senior Seminars and Capstone Courses. This survey was distributed to accredited colleges and universities to assess what types of services, programmes, and courses they offered for their final-year students (National Survey of Senior Seminars and Capstone Courses, n.d.). The NRC collected responses from 707 institutions, and based on the survey results, organised five categories into which support efforts for final-year students may be classified. Demonstrated in the list below are the five categories with brief explanations including examples of institutions that utilise them (Henscheid, 2008a).

1.) Senior seminars and capstone courses.
Of the survey respondents, 75% of institutions offered a senior seminar or capstone course through an academic department with the goal of "fostering integration and synthesis within the academic major" (Henscheid, 2008a, p. 83; National Survey of Senior Seminars and Capstone Courses, n.d.).

2.) Programmes that prepare students for careers.
Minnesota State University-Moorhead, Bridgewater State College, and Saint Louis University each offer programmes to help seniors prepare for their careers through courses, networking, and "disorientation" programmes.

3.) Opportunities for students to make intellectual connections across course work.
Allegheny College, Otterbein College, and Monmouth College facilitate this experience through senior showcases, legacy symposiums, and group projects.

4.) *Events that celebrate the achievement of becoming a college senior.*
Bridgewater State College, Cornell College, and Colorado College embrace this celebration as an opportunity for seniors to facilitate closure to their undergraduate experience through senior expos, alumni activities, and senior class mottos.

5.) Activities that work toward cohesion among the senior class and alumni.
Lynchburg College, Columbia University, and Cornell College host senior class pledge campaigns, e-communities, ongoing career counseling, and donation solicitation.

The NRC survey results and Henscheid (2008a) demonstrated that few institutions offer formal, comprehensive transition programmes, and that most institutions offering services for final-year students do so in the form of cross-campus collaborations between career service centres, alumni relations offices, and academic units. It is noted that although 75 per cent of the surveyed institutions offered senior seminars or capstone courses, most of those were facilitated through the students' academic major. This meant that the focus was most likely on subject-specific material, not on the other aspects of transition including job-searching skills, personal life skills (for example: banking, taxes, loans), and emotional preparedness. Although the survey was useful in identifying how and what institutions offered their final-year students, it did not demonstrate any outcomes of these initiatives.

In attempt to demonstrate the value of the five final-year support initiatives from the national survey, Henscheid (2008b) linked them to typical, projected institutional learning outcomes. Henscheid (2008b) estimated that most universities include learning outcomes such as good communication skills, critical thinking, qualitative and quantitative reasoning, sensitivity to others, service and civic responsibility, and global reasoning. She then connected each of these learning outcomes to one of the five types of final-year initiatives from the survey. This is the only research I have found which explores the potential outcomes of final-year initiatives, and although it be important to explore such outcomes, Henscheid's analysis was not based on empirical research, but rather her subjective, anecdotal opinion.

When I began my research, a decade after the publication of *The Senior Year Experience* and nearly two decades after the initial conference on final-year student transitions, I found that the only research on the final-year transition was the NRC survey and Henscheid's work on learning outcomes. This scarcity of evaluative research contrasts with extensive research on the outcomes of first-year programmes. Furthermore, I was concerned to learn that the design of the current final-year programmes had come not from researching the experiences and needs of students/graduates (Dominick, 2009; National Resource Center, 2009), but rather from what seemed to be anecdotal experiences and the ideas of well-intended practitioners. This encouraged me to consider the needs of graduates by seeking their experiences and perspectives as they left university, and use these views to establish recommendations for institutions.

In establishing this research focus, I had to first determine the literature that was relevant. Because I viewed the shift from university to life-after-study as a transition, my first review was of the transition literature; specifically definitions, themes, and models of transition, which is discussed in Part A of this chapter. This literature helped to establish if leaving

university was a transition and could thereby serve as a foundation for practitioners in higher education to draw from when determining their role in preparing students for life-after-study. Furthermore, I found that the literature on transition research helped make sense of the experiences and perspectives of recent graduates and served as a guide in the analysis process. I then explored literature on what I believed (see Foreword) to be primary aspects of the post-university transition: career transition and personal transition. I reviewed literature on career development theory, student development theory, research on workplace transition, and research on emotional aspects of leaving university, which is discussed in Part B of this chapter. Some of the relevant literature was determined by my research questions, but as I analysed the data, I found that unanticipated themes emerged, prompting me to explore additional literature. This review of relevant literature is divided into two parts – Part A: Foundations of Transition Literature and Part B: The Post-University Transition.

Part A: Foundations of Transition Literature

There are key aspects of the literature on transitions that serve as the foundation for this study, which I have divided into four sections. Within *definitions of transition*, I discuss a variety of transition definitions and outline how defining this term was useful to my study. I then discuss the literature on *type, context, and impact of transition* and how this literature is relevant to higher education practitioners when working with final-year students. Next I discuss *recurring themes in adult transition,* and how and why these themes were important in my research, specifically in the analysis of data and subsequent emergent themes. Lastly in Part A*,* I review *models of transition*, evaluate their similarities and differences, and discuss how they have informed my study.

Definitions of Transition

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) defined transition as "an event or nonevent that results in change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and/or roles within the setting of self, work, health, and/or economies" (p. 27). They explained the use of the word *nonevent* by recognising that some transitions are obvious (such as graduation, job entry, marriage, birth, death), but others may be subtle changes (such as loss of career aspirations and the non-occurrence of anticipated events). "Thus a transition can be both an event and a nonevent – if it results in change" (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 43). Williams (1999) explained that most transitions are associated with significant life events in the course of which changes to individuals' roles, their view of themselves, their world, and their environment require restructuring. Schlossberg et al. (1995), Williams (1999), and Bridges (2004) all use change to describe an aspect of transition, but none of them use change and transition synonymously. Bridges (2004) provides the clearest demarcation – he described *change* as situational (for example: consequent on a new job or a move to a new city), but *transition* as psychological – not just an event, but what one has to go through to incorporate those changes into one's life. He defined transition as "the natural process of disorientation or reorientation" (p. 3).

Hassler (2008) described transition as "an in-between stage of life… putting you at unfamiliar crossroads" (p. 2). Golan (1981) defined it as, "a period of moving from one state of certainty to another, with an interval of uncertainty and change in between" (p. 12). Similarly, Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McCee (1978) used *development transition* to mean "turning points between two stable periods" (p. 49). Parkes (1971) used *psychosocial transition*, which he defined as "the abandonment of one set of assumptions and the development of a fresh set to enable the individual to cope with an altered life space (p. 103). Spierer (1977) noted that transition involves "important consequences for human

behaviour" (p. 6). He went on to explain, like Schlossberg, that some consequences are obvious (going bald, losing a job), but that others may remain unnoticed by friends and society. George's (1993) interpretation of transition emphasised the unnoticed changes. He suggested that transitions may refer to "changes in status that are discrete and bounded in duration, although their consequences may be long-term" (p. 358). While each of these definitions emphasises different aspects of transition, most scholars explain transition as a process, rather than an event, and involve not just a visible or physical change, but also a developmental, psychological, or emotional shift. Based on a synthesis of these definitions, I assert that the process of leaving university and entering life-after-study is a transition. I refer to this as the post-university transition for the remainder of this thesis. Furthermore, it is this assertion (post-university transition) that I attempt to demonstrate and clarify through the experiences and perspectives of recent graduates.

As I prepared for data collection, there was not a particular definition that presented itself as most relevant to my study. This variably encouraged me to consider asking each research participant for their personal definition of transition. However, when I did this, many of them gave similar explanations to Hassler's (2008) description of an "an in-between stage of life." Moreover, as I further analysed the data, I found Schlossberg's definition (an event or nonevent that results in change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and/or roles within the setting of self, work, health, and/or economies) to be helpful, as it most accurately described the various elements of the post-university transition that the participants described. Therefore, for this thesis, I have adopted Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) definition of transition.

Type, Context, and Impact of Transition

Considering that I am discussing transition literature for the sake of determining if and how it may be relevant to informing higher education practices and responses to students leaving

university, I draw from Schlossberg's transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995; Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson, 2006; Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg, 2012). It should be noted that I rely heavily on Schlossberg's, and her co-authors', research in the following sections, as she is a pioneer in her field and revered for setting the standard in transition literature. Her early work in the late 1960's studied (primarily through questionnaires) the transitions of 322 middle-aged men pursuing undergraduate degrees, in which she explored their motivation for change and contributing trigger events. As her transition research continued through the 1970's, she developed a model for counsellors to use in guiding clients through transition (Schlossberg, 1981). The study that first tested the model involved 53 NASA employees whose jobs had recently been eliminated because of reduction. Through questionnaires and in-depth interviews, she explored if and how organisational support could help buffer job loss. Her findings supported her previous research, and the model was demonstrated as useful (Schlossberg and Leibowitz, 1980).

Schlossberg's seminal work, specifically her model, has been continually reviewed, revised, and reiterated for the past three decades (1981-2012), and subsequently become more robust, applicable, and relevant with each iteration. Based on this research foundation, Schlossberg et al. (1995) explained that transition is a cyclical process of moving in, moving through, and moving out. In approaching transitions, determining the *type, context*, and *impact* of the transition is essential (Anderson et al., 2012). Here I address these three factors of transition and their relevance to this study.

Transition Type. Schlossberg identified three types of transition: anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevent (Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995; Goodman et al., 2006; Anderson et al., 2012). *Anticipated* transitions are defined as "gains and losses of major alterations of

roles that predictably occur in the course of the unfolding life cycle" (Pearlin and Leiberman, 1979, p. 45). These include transitions that most people expect to face in their life (for example: marriage, first job, children, retiring). *Unanticipated* transitions are "the non-scheduled events that are not predictable" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 41). These usually involve crises, such as divorce, losing one's job, and illness or death of a family member. *Nonevent* transitions are those "an individual had expected but that did not occur, thereby altering his or her life" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 42). Examples may include a job promotion that never happened, a marriage that never occurred, or a child that was never born that was desired.

In her discussion of types of transition, Schlossberg noted that not all transitions are discrete, but rather, may overlap with one another. For example, an individual may be planning to get married (anticipated), while also dealing with being let go from a job (unanticipated). Furthermore, what may be an anticipated transition for one person (for example: a planned pregnancy), may be a nonevent for another (for example: a wished-for child but unable to conceive). Schlossberg (1984) suggested that it is useful to think of these four types of transition "as being on a change-no-change continuum rather than discrete entities" (p. 46); meaning that, these transition types vary for each person depending on their situation, and thus the level of change is subjective. It is important to recognise the nuance that exists within the literature on transition, particularly the individualised nature and interpretation that distinguishes anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevent transitions.

Schlossberg's transition types allowed me to approach the post-university transition from a new perspective, and thus informed how I designed and planned my interactions with the research participants. Specifically, it gave me a clearer understanding that participants' post-university transition may not have been anticipated, and that it may have involved crossover

with other transitions, life events, and people. With regard to higher education practices, this is a lesson that can be informed from previous transition research. By helping students/graduates first determine the *type* of transition they are facing, higher education practitioners can perhaps help them more effectively move in, through, and out of it.

Transition Contexts. Schlossberg (1984) and Anderson et al. (2012) suggested that transitions should be approached in context, which include factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and geographic location. In determining context, Schlossberg (1984) suggested that one should consider the 1.) *relationship* to the transition, and 2.) the *setting* in which the transition occurs. The *relationship* may be (a) personal, (b) interpersonal, or (c) public. Schlossberg (1984) uses the example of retirement to describe the relationship to transition – "our own retirement, our spouse's retirement, and the local mayor's retirement all produce different reactions" (p. 54). We must ask – does the primary event start with the individual or someone else? (Anderson et al., 2012).

Schlossberg (1984) identified *settings* in which transitions occur. These may include: self, family, friends, work, health, and economics, and may even span the larger socioeconomic and political arenas along with issues around cultural diversity (Anderson et al., 2012). The context is determined by how the transition setting coincides with one's relationship roles (Anderson et al., 2012). For example, a personal transition in a work setting – being promoted; an interpersonal relationship in a family setting – a friend going through a divorce; or a public relationship in a health setting – church leader being diagnosed with a terminal illness. Each of these situations can result in a different action or reaction, and subsequently a spectrum of different emotions and thoughts.

The *relationship* and *setting* (environment) of a transition affects one's reaction, and if that context is established, progress in the process of moving through and out can be made

(Anderson et al., 2012). This literature underpins my understanding that, for some, the post-university transition may only include self and work, whereas for others, it may encompass transitions with their family and friends, their health, and even the economy and wider society. This was particularly useful when analysing the data and determining the factors which contributed to how the data was organised and presented. Although Schlossberg's research and writing is aimed toward counselling practitioners, it seems there are some important tactics which the higher education sector could utilise to support final-year students.

Transition Impacts. "For an individual undergoing transition, it is not the event or nonevent that is most important but its impact; that is, the degree to which the transition alters his or her daily life" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 45). Schlossberg identified four factors of impact – relationships, routines, assumptions about self and the world, and roles. Anderson et al. (2012) explained that the more a transition alters (or impacts on) one's life, the more likely coping resources are needed, and the longer it takes for adaptation. Coping resources can manifest in many different formulations, but it is important to recognise the individualised nature and nuance that accompanies a person's transition experience. When approaching transitions, it is important to assess type and context, but Anderson et al. said that determining the impact is "the most important consideration in understanding an individual's reactions" (2012, p. 46).

I had expected to find that transitions impacted each person differently, but the literature helped me consider how the degree of *impact* may influence the need for or use of support efforts. This was particularly relevant as I analysed the data and examined which participants seemed to seek or use available resources most often to help them cope with their transition.

Knowing this information and linking it to practice when designing support initiatives for final-year students is fundamental to the usefulness and value of those initiatives.

Schlossberg's theory on transition *types, contexts,* and *impacts* demonstrates possible practices which could inform higher education practices in approaching final-year students. If connections can be made between (a) these descriptions and interpretations of how to approach transitions, (b) student development theory and the role of higher education, and (c) the experiences recent graduates have had in the post-university transition, then perhaps the higher education sector could create empirically derived practices that foster desired outcomes for student in transition. Additionally, it is clear that transitions are a complex phenomenon that demands a clarification and deeper understanding of the transition type, context, relationship, and impact experienced by those in transition. This literature underpins, supports, and justifies a robust investigation into the post-university transition.

Recurring Themes in Adult Transition

Historically, transition research has aimed to explore patterns or themes in the transition process. These methods have been critiqued over the years primarily for their lack of inclusiveness or consideration for women and minorities (Eastmond, 1991). In 1981, Schlossberg first presented her model of transition. Although this model has been adapted over the years (1984, 1995, 2006, 2012), Schlossberg's work has endured and has been recognised for its inclusiveness and allowance for flexibility, subjectivity, and complexity in the transition process not accounted for in previous transition research (Kerka, 1991). For this reason, I use Schlossberg's themes here to guide the discussion on recurring issues in transition. However, I also include other research addressing similar themes.

Through her synthesis of transition research from fifteen theorists (including Erikson, 1950/1968; Neugarten, 1979; Riegel, 1973), Schlossberg (1984) identified six recurring themes in adult development. These included: identity, intimacy, autonomy and satisfaction, generativity, competency, and belonging versus marginality. Her later work remained inclusive of the themes, but she reorganised and presented them differently when presenting new research findings. In this section, I discuss the themes of *identity, autonomy, self-efficacy, spirituality, intimacy, and belonging and mattering.*

While preparing the research and being guided by the research questions, I found many of Schlossberg's themes interesting and applicable to my study. However, their relevance was confirmed when I analysed the data from my study and found similar themes as being particularly relevant to the transition experiences of recent graduates.

Identity. Underlying all other themes in transition is identity. "Identity has characteristics of stability and change. With changes in perspective, changes in circumstances, or changes in role, the identity theme re-emerges" (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 29). So, what is identity and how is it formed? These are questions that transition researchers and theorists of all types have continued to explore and attempt to better understand. What seems to be agreed upon, across all schools of thought, is that identity formation is multi-dimensional, and the more it is explored, the more factors and dimensions are discovered. Jones and McEwen (2000) described the multiple dimensions of identity as being encompassed in a context (family background, sociocultural conditions, current experiences, career decisions, and life planning), with core identity at the centre (personal attributes, personal characteristics, and personal identity), and with multiple identity factors such as sexual orientation (McCarn and Fassinger, 1991; Wheeler-Scruggs, 2008), race (Helms, 1995; Phinney, 2000), gender (Josselson, 1987; Moradi, 2005; Chin, 2009), culture, class, and religion (Fowler, 1991)

orbiting within and through the context and core. Anderson et al. noted that "multi-dimensional identities are difficult to fit into one dimensional models of development" (2012, p. 17). This indicates a need for exploration of new models of development that are sensitive to the complexity of an individual's identity to provide insight into the iterative nature of this.

As identity relates to young adults' transition, Young, Marshall, Valach, Domene, Graham, and Zaidman-Zait (2011) noted that "during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the locus and burden of the acquisition of an adult identity shifted from the society to the individual… Whereas social roles and occupations were once mostly assigned by family members or the immediate social context, individuals in late modern society are now mostly expected to select where they 'fit'" (p. 87). Thereby, the freedom of choice is often also accompanied with the burden of searching for meaning (Young et al., 2011). This literature became increasingly relevant as I analysed the data. This led to further exploration of the literature on identity development in young adults.

Emerging adulthood is a distinct stage of development that "has been recently coined to describe a period with common themes and characteristics spanning the ages between 18 and the late 20s" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 11). I had previously explored the literature on emerging adulthood, as it primarily related to the developmental stages of family life and working life (further explored in Part B of this chapter). However, it was not until I analysed the data that I became aware of its relevance in relation to identity formation. When the traditional developmental markers which signal adulthood (for example: leaving parental household, onset of marriage or cohabitation with a chosen romantic partner, onset of childbearing and parenting, completion of education, and entering the labour force in a full-time job) are delayed, "transitions into adult roles may relate to lower identity achievement" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 12). Furthermore, the trend of young adults in industrialised

societies to postpone transitions has risen in recent years across all markers of adulthood (Arnett, 2006). This literature was specifically helpful as I interpreted and organised the presentation of the data, which demonstrated similar patterns of identity formation and developmental tasks in the post-university transition.

Identity formation is a fundamental aspect of student development (discussed further in Part B of this chapter), and based on student development theory, higher education practitioners attempt to offer support and foster opportunities for students to develop their identities in the university years (Strange, 2004). Perhaps a bridge connecting the counselling sector (transition literature) with higher education practices (student development literature) may better inform initiatives that support final-year students and recent graduates as they form new identities beyond university and into adulthood.

Autonomy. Anderson et al. (2012) defined autonomy as "independence or self-directed freedom" (p. 109). Schlossberg (1984) drew upon Erikson's (1950) definition that autonomy is "having our own attitudes and ways of doing things and not being afraid to hold our own opinions or do what we want to do" (p. 32). Goodman et al. (2006) linked feelings of autonomy to satisfaction, and substantiated that people who feel in control of their lives tend to describe their lives as happier. The concept of 'locus of control' (Rotter, 1966) is often associated with one's level of satisfaction. When a person has an internal locus of control, they believe they are in control of what happens to them and are in charge of their own destiny. Someone with an external locus of control believes that fate, the environment, and other people are in control of their life, rather than themselves.

This literature was particularly relevant in analysing the data, as the participants often described aspects of their post-university transition as a time of uncertainty and lack of

control. Moreover, they expressed their search for internal happiness and desire for personal fulfilment.

Self-Efficacy. This theme has combined and replaced two of Schlossberg's (1984) original recurring themes of *generativity* and *competence*. She described generativity as renewal, achievement, and feelings that one has done something worthwhile for future generations. Schlossberg (1984) explained the crisis of generativity as "the feeling that life is static, that one is in a rut… one feels boxed in, frightened about the future" (p. 33). She explained competence as "the expression of a universal need to expand boundaries, investigate the world, and achieve mastery over it… it is often vitally important to people's well being that they become aware of their strengths and abilities" (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 35). Moving from incompetence to competence is usually made by learning and pursuing new activities (Schlossberg, 1984). Concepts used to support this theme are Erikson's (1950) 'initiative versus guilt' (taking pleasure in initiating action versus letting others initiate action) and 'industry versus inferiority' (carrying something to completion/mastery versus being passive and feeling inadequate).

In her revised approach to transitions, self-efficacy is used to describe "the belief that one can make a difference in one's own life and have an impact on one's own environment" (p. 114), and that one can cope effectively with a new problem (Anderson et al., 2012). Self-efficacy, generativity, and competence also relate to identity formation, as each constitutes an affirmation of the self. Although intermitted aspects of these themes such as new activities, new found confidence, and acceptance of one's situation emerged throughout the data, and specifically in later interviews, the 'crisis' of these themes (feelings of being in a rut) were more prevalently demonstrated.

Spirituality. This was not one of Schlossberg's original themes, and I had not explored the literature on this topic until after I analysed the data and learned what an important role it played in the participants' transition. Jung (1933), in his theory on human development, presented spirituality as a process of achieving wholeness. However, Jung and other researchers (for example: Hudson, 1991; Gerzon, 1996; Howell, 2001) emphasised that this theme played a particular role in midlife transitions. Other researchers, such as Levin (2009), Graham, Furr, Flowers, and Burke (2001), Myers and Williard (2003), and Anderson (2005) suggested that spirituality and faith may assist mental and physical healing, provide people with meaning and purpose, and assist with one's ability to cope with transition.

*Intimacy. "*Intimacy covers a wide range of human ties: spouse, lover, parents, children, friends. Intimacy is marked by free interchange and disclosure, by reciprocal expressions of affections, by mutual trust, empathy, and understanding" (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 30). Anderson et al. (2012) placed this as a theme under relational transitions, as opposed to individual transition. Interpersonal relationships are important in times of transition, as they are a strong source of support and also add depth and meaning. Schlossberg used isolation as the antithesis to intimacy. Young et al. (2011) addressed this topic in terms of romantic relationships. They noted that "entry into a committed, theoretical permanent romantic relationship in the form of marriage has traditionally been viewed as one of the markers of becoming an adult" (Young et al., 2011, p. 133). They also noted that the status or change in relationship may also be an event which triggers a transition. Literature on intimacy, and specifically romantic relationships, became relevant in the analysis of data and in determining what participants valued and desired most in the post-university transition.

Belonging and Mattering. This theme has also been categorised within relational transitions, as opposed to individual transition. In Schlossberg's (1984) original presentation of themes of

transition, she called this 'belonging and marginality' and used the metaphor of a seesaw – when environments change or roles shift, individuals may shift from a sense of belonging to feeling marginalised. "The larger the difference in role and the less knowledge beforehand about this role, the more marginal that individual will feel" (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 38). Anderson et al. (2012) described 'belonging' as being central or peripheral in a group (for example: home, family, work, social clubs), and noted that it is important to establish and re-establish this in transitions. This theme increasingly grew relevant in my research as the participants repeatedly shared experiences of being a part of something at university (for example: student club, residential hall, sorority) that was no longer a part of their lives post-university. This aligns with Schlossberg's (1984) perspective on what leads to a person feeling marginalised.

"Mattering, the need to be appreciated, noticed, and acknowledged, is a concern of people at all stages of life and can strongly influence behavior" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 153). Schlossberg and colleagues provided many examples of transition where the mattering theme emerges, but in relation to this research, mattering was most relevant when participants desired to know that they were understood and not alone in their feelings (searching for camaraderie, empathy, and support).

Schlossberg was careful to emphasise that adult development does not unfold in predictable stages, yet there are some regularities and continuities, as demonstrated in these themes. Schlossberg noted that once these issues arise they are not resolved forever; "they are not sequential, rather recurring and overlapping with no regularity" (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 21). I wanted the findings in my study to be informed by the data and not restricted by the literature; therefore, I was careful not to assume that Schlossberg's themes would be consistent with my findings. It was not until analysis, when I compared Schlossberg's themes

to the emergent themes in my study, that I realised the relevance of this literature, specifically the themes of identity, spirituality, intimacy, and belonging and mattering. This further demonstrates that leaving university and entering life-after-study is a transition and advances my proposal that there may be a link between higher education practices and transition literature.

Models of Transition

In this final section of Part A, I highlight models of transition that have influenced how counselling practitioners have approached transitions, which may also help inform potential higher education practices for supporting final-year students.

Researchers have examined life transitions from multiple disciplines, but most transition models have been approached from a psychological perspective. From this perspective, Adams, Hayes, and Hopkins (1976) developed a 'seven stage transition cycle', and Lewis and Parker (1981) re-worked Adams et al.'s cycle and developed a similar 'seven stage transition curve'. Adams et al.'s and Lewis and Parker's cycles primarily used developmental terminology (for example: denial, acceptance, integration). Nicholson and West (1989) developed a 'five stage transition cycle' and used behavioural descriptions (for example: preparation, adjustment, renewal). Fisher and Savage (1999) developed a 'nine stage personal transition curve' and used more emotional descriptors (for example: anxiety, fear, depression).

Williams (1999) expanded on Adams et al's. (1976) highly cited transition cycle by demonstrating the different levels of emotion that coincide with each stage of transition (Figure 2.1). He suggested that the stages of transition may encompass a range of positive and negative emotions. For example, within some transitions, the first emotion may be

'excitement' leading to a 'honeymoon' period, while other transitions may start with feelings

of 'numbness' leading to 'disbelief' or 'denial'. This is specifically relevant to the post-

university transition, as some individuals may view graduation as a positive event, while

others may have felt distressed viewing it as a loss.

Figure 2.1 Williams' Transition Cycle (1999, p. 611)
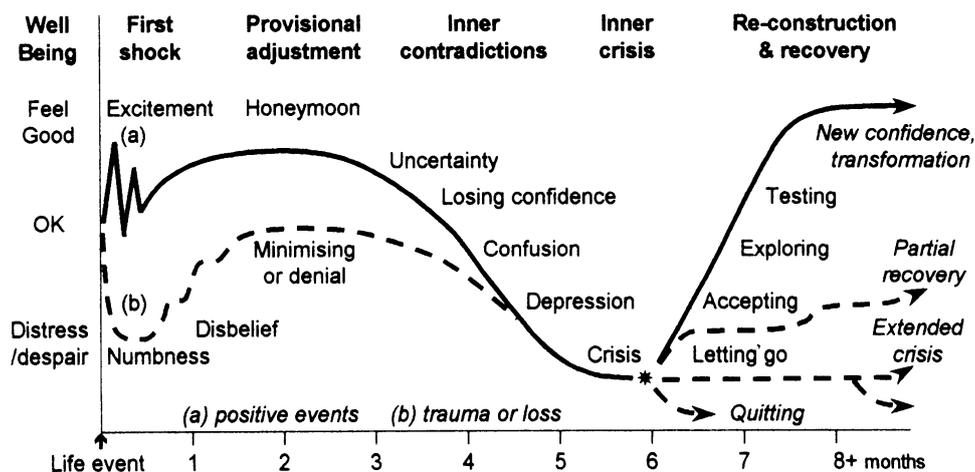
Reviewing Williams' (1999) graph demonstrated how emotions may have an effect on the

subsequent stages of the transition. According to Williams (1999), every transition regardless

of the initial emotions, may be accompanied by feelings of confusion, depression, and crisis

at some point.

A potential weakness in Williams' (1999) work is his assertion that individuals encounter

transition stages within a specific timeframe (approximately eight months) and in a specific

order. It seems possible that individuals encounter the stages of transition at different times

based on the type, context, and impact of the transition, as Schlossberg's (1984) research

demonstrated. Although it may be more difficult than Williams implies to contain a transition

process within a specific timeframe and order, this model suggests a range of emotional

reactions that one might experience in the course of transition. For this reason, I found

Williams' model helpful when interviewing the research participants over an extended time frame. This model informed my research design and guided me to ask the research participants to chart their emotional state throughout the data collection period.

Bridges (2004) identified transitions as a combination of three phases: an ending, a neutral zone, and a new beginning. Although transitions start with an ending (for example: finishing a degree), not everyone experiencing an ending goes through these phases in a prescribed order (Anderson et al., 2012). The neutral zone is the period after an ending but before a new beginning (for example: after one has graduated, but before one has found a job or made future plans). This stage is often accompanied with an inevitable let-down (Chickering and Schlossberg, 1998). Bridges (2004) described this as a period of emptiness, between old life and new life. New beginnings are when the ending and neutral zone are finished (Bridges, 2004). "These beginnings often take the form of external career changes" (Anderson et al., 2012).

Anderson et al. (2012) used Bridges' three phases to support their three-stage model of: approaching transitions, taking stock of coping resources, and taking charge. This is presented in *Schlossberg's Transition Theory*, (originally referred to as a transition model), displayed in Figure 2.2. Schlossberg's model/theory begins with determining the type, context, and impact of transition, as previously discussed in this chapter, which then informs the best perspective for approaching the transition. The next phase is the 4S System (*Situation* – change in roles; *Self* – personal responses to change; *Support* – does a range of sources exist? Were they disrupted by transition?; *Strategies* – taking action to change the situation, change its meaning, or change oneself) that is the model for which Schlossberg is most famously known. Schlossberg's model is used to address how each person confronts transition differently depending on each of the 4S's (Anderson et al., 2012). The final phase

of 'taking charge' includes strategies for practitioners or individuals in transition to utilise in 'moving out' of the transition (Anderson et al., 2012).

Figure 2.2 Schlossberg's Transition Process (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 68)
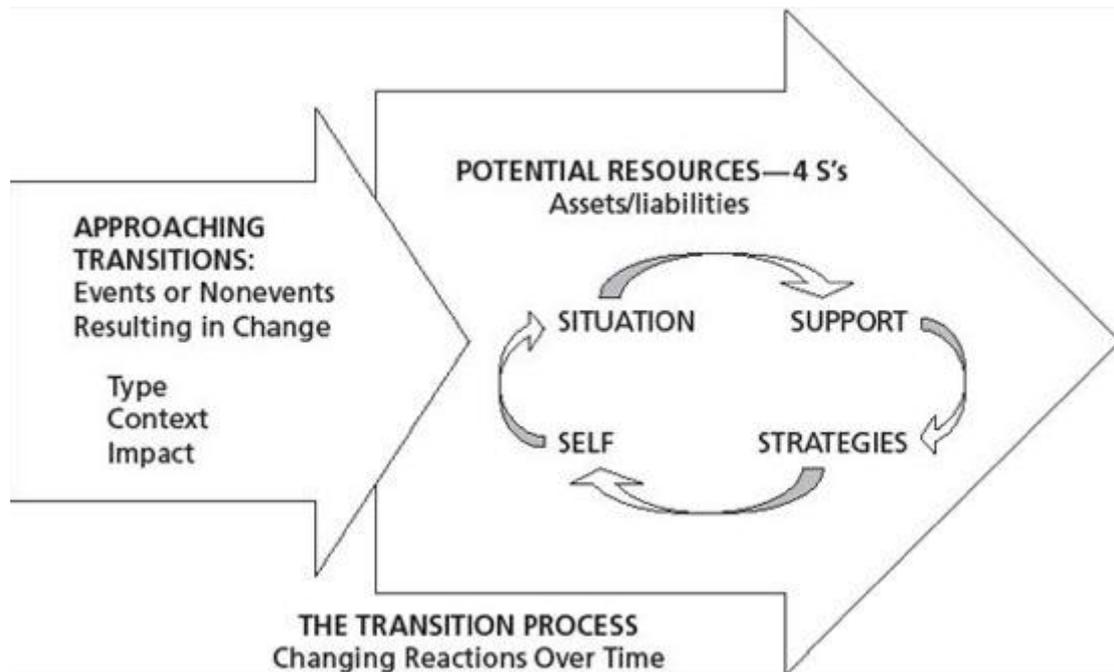
The strength of Schlossberg's cyclical model is its inclusiveness of multiple factors and dimensions of transition, which highlight the complexity and subjectivity of transitions for each individual. Although it contains many variables (each of the 4S's contains multiple factors), which has led to some criticism (Summers, 2002), it is known for being one of the most practical and useful tools for counselling practitioners (Kerka, 1991). I have reviewed Schlossberg's model as it, along with multiple other aspects of her research, has been useful in the framing of my study and the subsequent analysis and interpretation of data. When identifying themes and patterns in the data, I drew upon Schlossberg's model to compare and evaluate my findings.

Part B: The Post-University Transition

In the second half of this chapter, I move from presenting broad transition literature to discussing research that has been conducted on specific aspects of the post-university transition, which include the career/work transition, as well as personal/emotional elements of transition. I discuss the literature here in four sections: career development theory, workplace transition, student development theory, and personal and emotional transition.

Career Development Theory

As addressed in Chapter 1, the majority of students who are pursuing higher education in today's society are doing so for career-related purposes; therefore, it is important to review research on career transitions. I first present career development theories and then collectively discuss their relevance to my study.

There are multiple definitions of the term *career*, which have been adapted over the years. Arthur, Hall, and Lawrence (1989) described career as "the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time" (p. 8). Other definitions include notions of career as a subjective construction (created by individuals) rather than something that is objective like a job or occupation (Patton and McMahon, 1999). The idea of *career development* implies that career is dynamic and progressive, developing over one's life span (Sears, 1982; Pryor, 1985; Brown and Brooks, 1990). Brown and Brooks (1990) defined career development as "a lifelong process of getting ready to choose, choosing, and, typically continuing to make choices from among the many occupations in our society" (p. xvii). Individuals in this process are also influenced by other factors, including family, personal values, and social context. Similarly, Wolfe and Kolb (1980) noted that career development involves one's whole life, not just occupation. Patton and McMahon (1999) added that career development

"encompasses the individual, the environment, the interaction, and change as key elements" (p. 4).

Career development theory has expanded and shifted greatly over the last fifty years (Patton and McMahon, 1999). In order to approach and understand this shift in a broad sense, Patton and McMahon (1994) organise nearly twenty career development theories and models into three categories: theories of content, theories of process, and theories of content and process. Patton and McMahon (1999) compare the similarities and differences between the theories based on each theory's emphasis on 'content' influences (intrapersonal, social, and environmental) and 'process' influences (recursiveness, change over time, and chance).

Theories of Content are historically at the origins of career development theory (Parsons, 1909; Holland, 1966; Dawis and Lofquist, 1976; Bordin, 1990; McCrae and John, 1992; Pryor, 1993; Brown, 1996). Patton and McMahon (1999) described the essence of these original theories as "a matching process between self-knowledge and world-of-work knowledge that leads to career choice" (p. 33). The theories in this category emphasise intrapersonal systems, and specifically personality. The 1950's were a time of change in career theory, as the idea of career choice shifted to be viewed as "part of a developmental process rather than as a matching exercise" (Patton and McMahon, 1999, p. 36). Thus, *Theories of Process* are referred to as life span approaches. Ginzberg's Theory was the first to deviate from the original theories, focusing instead on career choice as a developmental process that started at a young age (Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad, and Herma, 1951). Next in this category is Super's Life Span, Life Space Approach (1957), which included his *life-career rainbow*. Super's (1957, 1990) widely acclaimed career theory identified five stages of career development: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline.

According to Super, these five vocational stages correspond with life stages of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, middle adulthood, and old age.

Patton and McMahon (1999) explained that as theories of content (matching) and process (development) have been refined over the years, they no longer stand alone as explanations of career development. Rather, they suggested "that the key concepts of these theories are parts of a complex interaction that cannot be viewed as objectively as those of earlier theories" (p. 58). *Theories of Content and Process* attempt to address the complexity of context and place emphasis on both content and process (Krumboltz, 1979; Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg, 1986; Peterson, Sampson, and Reardon, 1991; Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1994; Young, Valach, and Collin, 1996). These theories "take into account the complex society in which we live and the many influences on career decision makers" (Patton and McMahon, 1999, p. 59). Therefore, this later work in career development theory is more likely to throw light on the issues that I am exploring.

An understanding of career development theory was useful as I interviewed individuals who were starting their careers and transitioning into their first professional jobs. As I analysed the data, I drew upon Super's theory to compare my findings. Although his theory remains developmentally focused (theory of process), it has been adapted to encompass aspects of both content and process. Super D., Savickas, and Super C. (1996) explained that "life-span, life-space theory has sought to make it clear not only that the ages of transition between the stages are very flexible but also that *each transition itself* involves re-exploration and re-establishment" (p. 134). In terms of the post-university transition, as institutions are developing initiatives that aim to prepare students for their future careers, it is important to look toward previous career theory that may inform practices.

Workplace Transition

There is an extensive body of literature on the transition from study to the workplace. However, it mostly focuses on the entry jobs of secondary school graduates, which was not the focus of my study. The limited research which is available on the post-university transition is primarily discussed in terms of emerging adulthood, work readiness, and the importance of professional work experience for undergraduates, which I discuss here.

Emerging Adulthood. In determining what defines adulthood, certain markers have been explored to indicate achievement (for example, movement from education to work, establishment of long term relationships, possibly parenting, and numerous other psychosocial transformations) (Young et al., 2011). The process and/or time period of moving toward achievement of these markers has been defined as emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004). According to Super's Career Development Theory, emerging adulthood falls within the *exploration* stage. Super et al. (1996) described the impetus of these individuals as shifting *from* psychosocial in nature manifested in the form of expectations *to* individual career development and working conditions.

Hogan's (1981) study identified the key transitions in early adulthood as completing formal education, followed by first full-time job, followed by marriage. Arnett (2004) identified Hogan's research findings to be primarily objective transitions, as his research demonstrated the key factors of emerging adulthood to be more subjective, such as accepting responsibility for one's self, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent. Farner and Brown (2008) conducted a study of 520 participants from ages 18 to 28 years, and found results supporting aspects of both Arnett's and Hogan's studies. From the results, they distinguished three categories in defining adulthood: maturity and acceptance of responsibility, financial independence, and living independently. When asked what defined

adulthood, nearly half of the participants answered 'having a career' as the major factor (Farner and Brown, 2008).

The literature on emerging adulthood was first relevant to my study when I designed the research. Because I had decided to ask the participants for their definition of transition, this literature encouraged me to also ask when they thought they would be through this transition, if defined as such. The participants answered my question by providing similar markers to those noted in the literature as achieving adulthood. Further relevance of this literature was demonstrated in data analysis as the participants identified themselves being in a similar stage in life as that described in the literature as emerging adulthood.

Work Readiness. The research demonstrates that as emerging adults graduate from university and enter their first professional jobs, there is often a disconnection in terms of new hire readiness for the workplace (Graham and McKensie, 1995; Gedye et al., 2004; Hart, 2008; Hanneman and Gardner, 2010). Some of the studies that have explored this issue are from the employers' perspective (Hart, 2008; Hanneman and Gardner, 2010), which is useful in that it identifies desired skills for young professionals to possess upon job entry, and subsequently may inform higher education initiatives that aim to prepare students for the workplace. However, those studies do not explore this transition from the graduate's perspective, who is often trying to 'second-guess' employers' expectations and navigate post-university life. Here, I present the few studies which have explored students'/graduates' perspectives on the workplace transition.

Graham and McKensie (1995) conducted a study involving 15 public and private organisations in the U.K. seeking how to maximise the retention and contribution of new graduates to their jobs. The research involved interviews and focus groups with both recent graduates (new hires), and employers (for example: recruitment and training personnel and

line managers who work with new graduates). Two of the highlighted research findings included culture change/shock for the new graduates – as zones of comfort changed from a university environment to that of the unknown workplace, and the expectations of both the graduate and employer not being met.

Gedye et al. (2004) conducted a comparative study of the differences between geography undergraduate students' career *expectations* and geography graduates' career *experiences*, which included their perceptions of the value of a degree. The highlighted differences between student expectations and graduate experiences were in areas of job-searching, verbal presentation, and leadership. The findings demonstrated that the students (pre-graduation) had higher perceptions (expectations) of their skill level in these areas than that which was actually demonstrated (experienced) by the new hires (post-graduation).

Graham and McKensie's (1995) and Gedye et al.'s (2004) studies begin to demonstrate a mismatch between what students believe about their skills and the perceived value of their degree (expectations) pre-graduation in contrast to what they experience in post-university life. This information was particularly useful as I analysed the data which explored the participants' perceptions of their degree, if they felt prepared for life after university, and if their expectations of their degree were met. Additionally, this research may be useful in informing higher education practices.

Two other studies have approached this transition from a student/graduate perspective (Kaufman and Feldman, 2004; Dahlgren, Hult, Dahlgren, Segerstad, and Johansson, 2006). Kaufman and Feldman (2004) researched final-year students' experiences with regard to occupational identity formation during the undergraduate years. They found that interaction with peers was one of the most important features in forming self-perceived occupational identities. In addition, Dahlgren et al. (2006) summarised a finding from Kaufman and

Feldman's study that, "the experience of college for some students constituted a symbolic entitlement for certain occupations and careers, and that they perceived themselves as deserving better jobs because they were highly educated" (p. 571).

In Dahlgren et al.'s (2006) study, 36 individuals from three different Master's programmes (Political Science, Psychology, and Mechanical Engineering) were interviewed once during their final-year of study and once 18 months after graduation. The research aimed to explore identity formation and knowledge formation from study to the workplace. Their findings demonstrated a high degree of continuity between student and professional novice for the participants from the Psychology programme, but discontinuity or transformation for those from Political Science and Mechanical Engineering. They attributed this to the focus placed on professional skills gained in the Psychology programme and the likelihood of emphasis on transition preparation based on the nature of the subject.

These studies were not only useful in analysing my own research findings, but also in exploring literature which may inform institutional practices for preparing and supporting students in the post-university transition, specifically regarding professional/occupational identity and managing expectations. If it is true that students, who had more knowledge on or preparation for transition, demonstrated higher continuity in the workplace transition, then it would seem appropriate to further explore opportunities for transition preparation to be taught.

Professional Work Experience for Undergraduates. Lastly in reviewing literature on workplace transitions, there is a small body of research that considers the importance of work experience for undergraduate students. This research is particularly relevant in identifying how institutions may support students in preparing for their careers.

Evans (2003) expanded on Super's (1957) career theory by stating, "Individuals need a clear understanding of their abilities, interests, and other personal qualities, as well as opportunities to experience various roles and receive feedback" (p. 184). Candy and Crebert (1991) stressed the importance of exposing students to the workplace (real situations) before graduation, because the workplace environment is different to classroom experiences. Wood (2004) emphasised the role and importance of higher education counsellors and practitioners in facilitating educational opportunities for resume writing, job searching skills, and interviewing skills, as well as assisting students to keep up with current job trends and employer expectations. Farner and Brown (2008) suggested that higher education and business sectors have opportunities for collaboration in supporting students as they shift from study-to-work. They suggested internships, job shadowing, informational interviews, and apprenticeships as ways for this.

These efforts can provide important links for students between study and work, but this often opens the door to a much deeper discussion on the role of the university. Although this research points toward practical ways that institutions can support the workplace transition, as listed above, some may argue that this is not the role of the university. Holden and Harte (2004) summarised Harvey's (2001) argument by saying "a critical purpose of higher education is not so much the delivery of employability skills in some generic sense, but the development of critical lifelong learners" (p. 274). Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick, and Cragnolini (2004) suggested that it is unrealistic for universities to guarantee that their graduates will possess all the skills needed in future occupations. However, they emphasised that "universities should guarantee that their students will all have the opportunity to learn and develop generic skills and abilities during their undergraduate study" (p. 148), and that the extent to which this is done is based largely on individual attitudes and motivation of the students. This emphasises the shared role and responsibility for institutions to produce

graduates that have lifelong learning skills and understand the value of such, for the businesses sector to provide occupation-specific training opportunities for new hires, and for students/new hires to carry motivation and drive.

In this section of workplace transition, I have presented the research and discussed the relevance of emerging adulthood, workplace readiness, and professional work experience for undergraduates. Although this research was useful in the analysis of my findings as I was able to draw comparisons, it was particularly relevant to my exploration of potential practices for higher education by demonstrating particular work-related issues that recent graduates experience.

Student Development Theory

Although the career transition is a distinct factor in the post-university transition, Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) demonstrated that there is more to the post-transition than career development and obtaining a job. In this section, I present and discuss the relevance of student development theory as an important component in the exploration of the post-university transition.

With regard to student development in the university years, McEwen (2003) described *development* as "becoming a more complex individual (with, for example, a more complex identity, more complex cognition, or more complex values)… [development] involves change, and it may include growth; but more specifically, it represents a qualitative enhancement of the self" (p. 155). Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978) noted the importance of understanding students in developmental terms; how that development occurs, and how university environments can influence or foster that development. McEwen (2003) noted that who students are, and the previous experiences they have had, shape their

development throughout university. Many student development theories were used as a foundation for establishing and informing initiatives for first-year students, as discussed in the introduction of this chapter. Moreover, student development theories that I disucss here may inform practices for final-year students,.

Student Departure Theory and Rites of Passage. Tinto's (1988) Student Departure Theory suggests that student success is often dependent upon the extent to which the student is integrated into the campus environment, socially and academically. Although Tinto's theory primarily focuses on student retention within the first year of university, the foundations of his theory with regard to integration within new environments and subsequent success may also be transferable to students'/graduates' integration and success in life after university. Tinto's theory builds from Van Gennep's Rites of Passage (original text 1960) to inform his argument. Van Gennep (2004) addressed the formalities, traditions, and rituals that societies (wider and micro) use to signify the movement or 'passage' from one time, entity, or segment to another; for example, baptisms, initiations, weddings, graduations, funerals, and other such ceremonial markers of an ending or new beginning. Van Gennep (1960/2004) identified the three stages in a Rite of Passage as *separation*, which involves separation of the individual from past associations; *transition,* in which the individual begins to interact in new ways with members of the new group; and *incorporation,* which involves taking on new patterns of interaction and the establishment of competent membership in the new group. Using the work of Van Gennep and Tinto may provide a theoretical foundation to inform higher education practices for final-year students, as they leave (separate or depart from) university (old group) and enter (interact and establish 'incorporation' in) life-after-study (new group).

Seven Vectors of Development. Through Chickering's (original text 1969) seminal research of undergraduate students at 13 small colleges in the U.S., findings suggested that "establishing

identity is the central developmental issue in the college years" (Evans, 2003, p. 181). Using

new research findings in 1993, Chickering and Reisser revisited the study and determined

what they coined *The Seven Vectors of Development* that contribute to the formation of

identity in the university years: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through

autonomy toward interdependence; developing mature interpersonal relationships,

establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity.

Although not rigidly sequential, the vectors "do build on each other and lead to greater

complexity, stability, and integration" (Evans, 2003, p. 182). In *developing competence*,

Chickering and Reisser (1993) explained the importance of intellectual competence (skill to

comprehend, analyse, and synthesise), physical and manual competence (athletic and artistic

achievement), and interpersonal competence (communication, relationship building, and

teamwork skills). *Managing emotions* includes confronting emotions, developing skills for

dealing with and communicating emotions, and building awareness of appropriate emotional

behaviour. *Moving through autonomy toward interdependence* goes beyond independence

and self-sufficiency and toward interdependence – being in control of one's self while also

recognising the connections of mutuality with others. *Developing mature interpersonal*

relationships includes appreciation of differences and the capacity for intimacy. In

establishing identity, Chickering and Reisser (1993) included personal stability and

integration in a variety of contexts, such as body appearance, gender, and sexual orientation.

Developing purpose includes developing clear vocational goals, making meaningful

commitments to specific personal interests and activities, and establishing strong

interpersonal commitments. Chickering and Reisser (1993) described *developing integrity*

similarly to establishing identity and purpose, but place emphasis on developing values and

beliefs while understanding the relativity and appropriateness of such.

Chickering's findings support the previous research on transition literature (for example: Schlossberg's recurring themes). This similarity demonstrates that although these vectors may be important to develop in the undergraduate years, these themes also seem to continue to arise (and subsequently need to be addressed) as students prepare to leave university and confront other adult transitions throughout their life-span. Higher education practitioners have adopted these vectors in creating programmes and initiatives for students; however, it seems as though the practitioners' emphasis needs to be shifted *from* fostering opportunities for students to 'master' each of these developmental skills in the undergraduate years *to* educating students about the continuous evolution of development and equipping them with such skills to approach future transitions. Nevertheless, this research on student development theory, in conjunction with literature on transitions, may be an important tool for establishing post-university transition initiatives.

Linking Student Development Theory with Transition Literature. Building on their previous work, Chickering (student development) and Schlossberg (adult transitions) co-authored a book, *Getting the Most Out of College,* in 1995. They researched and addressed a variety of developmental transitions that students may encounter during their university years. For the final aspect of their research, they interviewed six university graduates six months after graduation to discuss their transition. Based on their findings, Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) identified three sets of issues that confront students in this transition: 'making a career connection', 'clarifying a new identity', and 'developing a life span perspective'.

This is the only study I have found which links transition research/theory with student development research/theory. However, this was a small (only six one-time interviews) aspect of Chickering and Schlossberg's study on the holistic undergraduate experience. Although it was an attempt to uncover how higher education practices may be informed by

(a) linking transition research and student development theory and (b) exploring experiences of recent graduates, it seemed to further demonstrate the need for additional exploration in this area. This study was particularly relevant to my research in that it had a similar research design and explored experiences of recent graduates (as opposed to current students), and thereby served as a guide from which to build my study.

Other student development theories which may contribute to the knowledge of the post-university transition and are often influential in practice are: Cognitive Structural Theory (Wadsworth, 1979), which identifies change as a result of assimilation and accommodation; Self Evolution Theory (Keagan, 1994), which focuses on how individuals make meaning of their experiences; and Winston's Five Developmental Tasks (Winston, 2003), which identifies five career tasks important to achieve during the university years. Although I did not use these theories in analysing the data, they may be useful to further inform educational strategies for final-year students.

Personal and Emotional Transition

"Emotions and emotional processes play an integral part in the transition to adulthood… Emotion is regarded as being able to facilitate or inhibit our success in actions and life in general, our relationships, and our health" (Young et al., 2011). Although transitions are complex and individually subjective, it is widely recognised by transition scholars that individuals often contend with major frustrations as one phase of life ends and another begins (Vickio, 1990; Schlossberg et al., 1995; Gardner and Van der Veer, 1998; Williams, 1999; Young et al., 2011). Furthermore, despite the difficulty, the transition to adulthood has also been considered an exciting and enriching period (Young et al., 2011).

A number of researchers have suggested possible strategies for supporting and preparing individuals for the emotions which often accompany transitions, and specifically the emotional aspects of leaving university. These strategies include encouragement for students to: *reflect on and make meaning of the undergraduate experience* (Feiter-Karchin and Wallace-Schutzman, 1982; Weinstein and Meyer, 1991; Holton, 1993; Gardner and Van der Veer, 1998), *accept impending change* (Bridges, 2004; Chickering and Schlossberg, 1998; Gardner and Van der Veer, 1998), *find connections between academic experience and future plans* (Sax and Astin, 1998; Smith and Gast, 1998; Henscheid, 2008a), *seek integration and closure* (Chickering and Reisser, 1993; Gardner and Van der Veer, 1998), *increase behavioural and attitudinal skills demanded by employers* (Holton, 1993; Gardner, P. 1998), *recognise the stages of transition* (Schlossberg et al., 1995; Bridges, 2004), *link in-class and out-of-class learning experiences* (Kuh, 1996; Smith and Gast, 1998; Strange, 2004), and *develop lifelong learning skills (*Harvey, 2001; Crebert et al., 2004; Hart, 2008).

This literature was particularly relevant when I analysed the data where the participants expressed how they felt throughout their transition experiences. Moreover, this literature was important in exploring possible recommendations for institutions to support their final-year students. Although these strategies have been informed by previous research, presented throughout this chapter, none of these has come from researching recent graduates' experiences and perspectives of the post-university transition.

Chapter Summary

This chapter started with a discussion of current practices for students in transition and how these practices have come into relevance within the higher education sector. Within the introduction, I addressed the lack of research and evaluation of current final-year programmes and their intended student outcomes. Furthermore, I addressed the issue that

these initiatives had not been established from empirical research which explored recent graduates' transition after university. This lack of research foundation not only demonstrated a gap in the research, but brought into question the role of higher education in this transition and how practices may be better informed. I suggest a combination of two ways to explore these questions: 1.) draw upon and link previous research and theory from related fields to build a foundation for approaching this topic (which is what I presented in this chapter), and (b) explore recent graduates' experiences and perspectives on this transition to inform institutional strategies, if such need is demonstrated (which is what my research aimed to do).

In *Part A* of this chapter, I presented previous literature on transitions, and specifically addressed the definitions, approaches, themes, and models of transition. I argue that, based on this literature, students leaving university and entering life-after-study are in a transition, and thereby need to be approached as such. I discussed how this literature may serve as a foundation for and an important link in informing higher education practices for final-year students.

In *Part B*, I presented literature on two specific aspects of the post-university transition: career/workplace transition and personal/emotional transition. For this, I drew from career development theory, previous research on workplace transition, student development theory, and previous research on personal/emotional transition. I suggested that this literature may serve as a foundation for approaching students in transition and informing higher education practices; however, the gap in the research was further demonstrated as very few studies have approached these aspects of transition from the perspectives of recent university graduates.

Throughout this chapter, I discussed the potential link that may be made between transition literature (Part A) and career/student development literature (Part B), and how if linked together, this literature may serve as a foundation for informing the role of institutions in

supporting their final-year students (research question 3). With this knowledge base of the previous research and an understanding of its limitations, I now address how I approached the research (Chapter 3) and designed this study (Chapter 4) to further investigate this phenomenon and explore if/how institutions may be better informed in preparing and supporting their students for the post-university transition.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

When I began this research, I was originally interested in evaluating student outcomes that may be associated with final-year transition programmes. This was based on the assumption that these programmes had been designed and established from empirical research. When I learned that they were not, my interest shifted from measuring the post-university transition through quantitatively informed methods to exploring students'/graduates' experiences and needs of this transition qualitatively. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) explain that when doing research on social life, "the [quantitative] methods of the natural sciences are not appropriate because the social world is not governed by law-like regularities but is mediated through meaning and human agency" (p. 17). Therefore, the research required methods that explored the meanings recent graduates ascribe to this transition, which led me to exploring qualitative perspectives on how to collect, analyse, and present the data.

Qualitative research encompasses a number of paradigms such as interpretivist, post-constructivist, feminist, and cultural studies (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Hatch, 2002; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Within these paradigms, there are also many approaches for exploring knowledge and meaning. Bogdan and Biklen have written a number of books on the theory and practice of conducting qualitative research in the education sector. They describe a range of approaches within qualitative research paradigms that include symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, and idealism (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). As I explored qualitative methodology within the paradigm I most aligned, there was not one singular theory or approach that fit in its entirety with what I was aiming to explore and how I

intended to go about it. Rather, aspects of different approaches seemed to inform different aspects of the research. Therefore, in this chapter, I present these approaches and discuss their relevance to my research.

I begin this chapter by explaining my ontological and epistemological assumptions, as this provides a foundation for how I believe this phenomenon (of graduating university) can be explored and illuminated. This is followed by a discussion of the research paradigm that most aligns with my beliefs and was most appropriate for this study. Finally, I address the three approaches which I have drawn from that influenced how I collected, analysed, and presented the data.

Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

As a researcher I believe it is essential to address how I view the world before I can begin the interplay that occurs between me, the paradigm of inquiry with which I most align, and the phenomenon I seek to understand. Although I have gained a deeper awareness of my assumptions throughout my studies, I began this research with as a set of implicit understandings about reality and knowledge based on the experiences I have had and hermeneutic understandings that I have come to through reflection and attempts at making meaning.

I believe that reality is multiple, subjective, and socially constructed. Therefore, reality does not exist independently of our beliefs, interpretation, and understanding (Richie and Lewis, 2003); rather, it is historically specific and changeable. "If socially constructed categories are used to direct human social action, those categories are real because we are making them real" (Sprague, 2010, p. 92). This demonstrates the interconnectedness and influence that views of reality have on the framing of an inquiry, and that numerous constructed realities

based on individual interpretations must be explored holistically. Thus I believe that increased understanding will not lead to a singular, fragmented reality that is capable of being predicted and controlled, but rather to a deeper level of understanding (*verstehen*) of the phenomenon under investigation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

My view of reality has subsequently informed my view of knowledge (Guba and Lincoln, 2001). My epistemological view, what can be known about the world and how it can be known, has continued to develop and take shape throughout this research process, as qualitative methodology has provided a language to describe what I believe. Because I believe that realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructs, my view of knowledge and the relationship of the knower and what can be known is then transactional and one of a subjectivist (Guba and Lincoln, 2001).

I believe knowledge is a human construction comprising inter-subjective meanings that are time and context bound (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Greene, 2010). I also believe knowledge is value-laden, and that research is permeated by my values and interests, as the inquirer, even as I seek to construct others' sense of meaning and beliefs (Greene, 2010). Thus, I believe the researcher and the participant are interactively linked and co-construct meaning.

These beliefs and assumptions about reality and knowledge are informed by my "personal experiences, cultural ideologies, disciplinary training, philosophical commitments, and issues and problems identified by significant others," as addressed in the Foreword and Chapter 1 of this thesis (LeCompte and Preissle, 2001, p. 44). To ignore these factors would be to 'write myself out' of the research story, which would be an "incomplete portrait of the group under study" (LeCompte and Preissle, 2001, p. 45). Additionally, these views fall within a research paradigm that subsequently informs the way I believe I can study and gather information about the social world.

Research Paradigm

Based on my ontological and epistemological assumptions, my methodological assumptions are hermeneutical (of interpretation) (Guba and Lincoln, 2001). I believe "interpretation lays the groundwork for understanding, which is the process of interpreting, knowing, and comprehending the meaning of experience" (Denzin, 2002, p. 360). Therefore, my views fall within the research paradigm of interpretivism (Richie and Lewis, 2003; Maxwell, 2005; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007), also referred to as constructivism (Guba and Lincoln, 2001; Hatch, 2002). Higgs and Trede (2010) define the goal research in the interpretive paradigm as being "to understand, interpret, seek meaning, describe, illuminate, and theorise" (p. 34), which were my aims for this research project. Considering this, for a study that is exploratory in design and equivocally the first of its kind, alignment within the interpretive paradigm seems to provide the flexibility and open-endedness needed.

There are, of course, criticisms of the interpretivist paradigm, specifically with how validity is demonstrated, meanings are negotiated, and generalisations are made. In order to combat these criticisms, qualitative researchers use particular strategies to engender the validity of their research. Validity is established by "carrying out the inquiry in such a way that the probability that the findings will be found to be credible is enhanced and, second, demonstrating the credibility of findings by having them approved by the constructors of the multiple realities being studied" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 296). For credibility to be established, qualitative researchers must address their personal experiences and biases from the outset and recognise their role as an interpreter in the meaning-making process (I have done this in the Foreword, Chapter 1, and this chapter). Also, they must attempt to study the subjective states of their participants by not projecting their own biases and opinions onto the research participants (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). This can be minimised by asking open-

ended questions, being open with the participants, showing empathy, and building rapport (see Chapter 4).

A non-interpretivist would argue that a qualitative researcher cannot objectively report findings particularly "when the data must 'go through' the researcher's mind before they are put on paper" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p. 33). Although a researcher can be clear about their personal experiences that have contributed to their worldview and biases, it is inevitable that the researcher is, too, a product of the environment in which they are placed. Therefore, in making meaning, researchers can involve the participants in the interpretive process. This can be done through transcript checks, participant feedback on preliminary findings, and discussions on how the researcher has interpreted what the participants have said and if it is accurate (see Chapter 4, Strategies to Address Rigour). By doing this, reflexivity may also be developed between the researcher and participant. Reflexivity is an ongoing negotiation and renegotiation of the relationship with participants and becoming part of the social world that one is studying (Maxwell, 2005). "When reflexivity is successful, the inquiry findings represent primarily the meanings and values of the respondents, and the inquirer's role becomes one of translator" (Greene, 2010, p. 70).

Researchers who have a positivist perspective may argue that the interpretive approach cannot produce generalisations or provide objective results. Rather than being interested in producing generalisations, the qualitative researcher aims for transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Greene, 2010). Transferability can also come in the form of applicability – how the findings can be viewed or applied within other contexts at different times. Furthermore, the qualitative researchers' aim is not to provide objective results, but can set an 'audit trail' in place to ensure confirmability. This is the process which demonstrates that all the necessary steps have been taken and documented in a retrievable manner. This also provides

a sense of 'neutrality' to the research – that the processes and decisions can be traced by another (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In Chapter 4 (Strategies to Address Rigour) I describe the steps I have taken to ensure transferability and confirmability.

Overall, I have taken an interpretive approach to exploring the research and have used guidelines suggested by qualitative researchers to help combat the criticisms of this approach. However, additional approaches have helped shape and inform how I have addressed specific aspects of the research. I describe these contributing interpretive approaches below.

Contributing Interpretive Approaches

As I explored different interpretive approaches of inquiry, I found that multiple approaches helped to inform my research design, analysis, and presentation. Although one single theoretical approach in its entirety did not fit with the research aims, aspects of symbolic interactionism, naturalistic inquiry, and narrativity helped to guide the research. These approaches complement one another and support my beliefs on how meaning can be made through interpretations of interactions, stories, events, and life experiences.

Symbolic Interactionism. This approach has a long history in qualitative research, and its theoretical groundwork created a clean break from positivism (Hatch, 2002). Its foundations lie in the Chicago School, Mead (1909), Dewey (1938), and Blumer (1969) – who coined the term in 1937. Blumer (1969) identified three axioms that are fundamental to symbolic interactionism:

1.) Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them;
2.) The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows;

3.) These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (p. 2).

Researchers such as Becker (1964), Denzin (1992), and Bodgan and Biklen (1998) have continued to utilise and discuss this theoretical perspective throughout the twentieth century.

Symbolic interactionism works on the assumption that human experience is mediated by interpretation (Blumer, 1969). It is through interaction with others that meaning is constructed. Meaning may also be negotiated within a given group where common interpretations derive (for example: a classroom) as individuals share experiences, perspectives, and problems with one another (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). Symbolic interactionists call this 'shared perspectives'. Furthermore, meaning is always negotiable, as others who come into the group that see things differently, may influence meaning (Bogdan and Biklen, 2010).

Because meaning is constructed through interaction, interpretation is then essential. Thus, this approach is consistent with the interpretive paradigm in that meaning can be found through interpreting people's expressions of their understanding and perspectives on the world. Although this theory recognises that there are societal norms, beliefs, and rules, it is not these components themselves, but rather how they are defined and used, that is crucial to understanding and interpreting behaviour (Bogdan and Biklen, 2010). I believe that "people act, not on the basis of predetermined responses or predefined objects, but rather as interpreters, definers, signallers, and symbol and signal readers (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998, p. 25). By entering this defining process as the inquirer, I subsequently interpreted, defined, and made meaning of the situation in which the participants were also making meaning.

Symbolic interactionism was particularly useful in informing how I approached the study and explored and constructed meaning. Furthermore, this approach particularly influenced how I

analysed and interpreted the data. The difficulty with this approach is that the researcher may privilege some comments made by participants and assume these are most important to the participants. Thus, it was important to balance both the participants' and my own co-constructed meaning in order to reach an accurate interpretation.

Naturalistic Inquiry. Preceding and keeping with the axioms of symbolic interactionism, naturalistic inquiry also works on the basis that meanings are constructed through interaction and interpretation, and that the researcher and participant construct these meanings together. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined naturalistic inquiry by identifying five axioms of this approach:

1.) Realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic.
2.) Knower and known are interactive, inseparable.
3.) Only time- and context- bound working hypotheses are possible.
4.) All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish cause from effects.
5.) Inquiry is value-bound (p. 37).

Although the relevance of naturalistic inquiry to my study is demonstrated by these axioms and their consistency with my beliefs on reality, knowledge, and inquiry, the primary aspect of relevance is in the construction of the research design. Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that it is "inconceivable that enough could be known ahead of time about the many multiple realities to devise a design adequately" (p. 41). Therefore, the research design is expected to emerge based on interactions, meaning-making, and interpretations between the inquirer and the phenomenon (knower and the known). This aspect of naturalistic inquiry was particularly useful in informing my approach to the research and justified an emergent versus a priori design.

Although naturalistic inquiry has been an approach to guide multiple aspects of my study, there is an element of naturalistic inquiry that does not necessarily fit with my research. This approach is fundamentally based on observations of individuals in their natural setting by becoming a part of that setting as a participant observer. Because I was studying all aspects of the participants' lives (experiences and perspectives), there was not a specific setting in which the phenomenon was taking place; rather, life was the setting. Due to practical limitations, I was not able to observe every aspect of each participant's life, and subsequently could not serve as an authentic observer of 'natural' interactions. Therefore, this approach helped inform aspects of my study, but did not fit with my research in its entirety.

Narrativity. This approach is based on the understanding that narratives are not merely descriptive, but constitute social worlds and a way of knowing about the world. Narrativity (also known as narrative theory) posits that people make sense of their lives through story (Hatch, 2002). A foundational question of narrative theory asks "how can this narrative be interpreted so that it provides an understanding of and illuminates the life and culture that created it?" (Patton, 2002, p. 115). Chase (2001) emphasised the importance of *inviting* stories during in-depth interviews rather than asking for reports. She went on to explain that "narration is a complex social process, a form of social action that embodies the relation between narrator and culture" (p. 229). Narratives provide a way for people to share their lives and "teach us how to conceive of ourselves, what to make of our inner life and how to organise it" (Currie, 1998, p. 17).

When I was initially organising the research, I thought narrativity would help inform my study in two primary ways: 1.) allow the participants to elaborate on their experiences through stories within the phenomenon (for example: job searching story, family story), and 2.) serve as a way to present the data findings. Although eliciting stories was a helpful way

for the participants to make sense of and communicate information about their lives and transition, the data emerged in the form of themes rather than stories. Furthermore, a challenge in using narrativity on its own (without being combined with other approaches) is the decreased level of interaction between the researcher and the participant, and subsequently less information being shared about the environmental influences on the participants' stories. Therefore, this approach was helpful in designing the research, formulating questions to elicit stories, and analysing of the study, but it was not used to present the data, as originally thought, nor could it stand alone as the only approach in exploring the phenomenon.

Chapter Summary

I began this chapter by describing my reason for taking a qualitative approach in this research, and that I aimed to explore and illuminate the subjectivity and complexity of the participants' experiences in the post-university transition. Considering this, quantitative methods (for example, a survey) would not have fit with my research goals because I did not know what I did not know, and I needed an approach that allowed me to search for new meanings and interpretations.

Next I addressed my assumptions about reality and knowledge, how these views have been shaped by my previous experiences, interactions, and interpretations, and how these perceptions informed my research approach. I then discussed the interpretive paradigm in which I most align and the main criticisms of this perspective. I outlined how this paradigm served as an overarching framework to the study and provided a language to describe my approach.

Lastly, I addressed three contributing interpretive approaches which combined to inform my research design, analysis, and interpretation: symbolic interactionism enabled understanding around the participants' interactions, interpretations, and meaning-making; naturalistic inquiry served as a foundation for the emergent design and data analysis, and narrativity provided a theoretical base for structuring interviews to find meaning through gathering the participants' stories. The purpose of this chapter was to lay a framework that informed the research design as well as the methods used to gather data, which is discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Research Design

Introduction

Because my goal in this study was to understand and illuminate (Higgs and Trede, 2010) recent graduates' experiences and perspectives of the post-university transition and thereby interpret and seek meaning from those experiences (Bodgan and Biklen, 2010) to better inform institutional practices, the design and analysis of this study have been shaped to meet those goals. I begin this chapter by explaining the practical steps that were taken to collect data, and how and why those decisions were made. These include: who would participate in the research, how they would be recruited, and what qualitative methods would be best to address the research questions. I then explain the pilot study, the process of data analysis, and ethical decisions. I conclude this chapter by discussing the strategies I have used to ensure rigour. Throughout this chapter, I highlight how the methodological framework has informed my research design and decisions.

Participant Selection

Because I aimed to explore the experiences and perspectives of 'young, recent' university graduates who were transitioning into a full-time, non-academic environment for the first time, individuals who had attended university immediately after high school (and were therefore approximately 22-24 years old) were invited to participate in the study. Although I intended to interview individuals who were entering non-academic environments, primarily for the sake of exploring workplace transitions, I did not decline participants who were also considering graduate school, as I believed they, too, had valuable perspectives on the post-

university (post-undergraduate) transition. In the end, three of the twenty participants were full-time graduate students, but each of these participants also sought (and/or gained) employment within this same time period. While I originally anticipated interviewing participants who were of various stages in their transition (for example: one year, two years, and/or three years after graduation), pragmatic decisions related to recruitment meant that I was better to invite participants who had most recently completed their degree. Therefore, each of the twenty participants was in their first year of having completed their undergraduate degree.

How many participants?

After deciding the desired age range of the participants, I then addressed how many individuals were needed to effectively explore the research questions. In qualitative research, this is a factor that is often determined by the type of collection methods being utilised and the time period available for data collection. Having reviewed similar qualitative studies (for example: Chickering and Schlossberg, 1995), as well as the literature on qualitative data collection (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998; Hatch, 2002; Yin, 2003), I determined that a reasonable number of participants would be 18 to 25. This quantity would allow me to explore the research questions from a range of perspectives (described below), while also managing the time limitations and practical implications of the data collection period. In the end, 20 graduates agreed to participate, of whom all participated for the duration of the study.

Where were the participants from?

The next decision I made was about research sites, whether the participants were to be graduates from a single university or different universities, and which institution(s) to select. Initially, when I was interested in assessing current transition programmes and related

outcomes, I was interested in involving participants who had graduated from different institutions. However, as my aim shifted to understanding and illuminating the subjectivity of each participant in this transition (focusing on individuals rather than institutions or programmes), I decided that the participants needed to be graduates of the same university. Additionally, I thought that involving multiple institutions may have allowed for the natural tendency to make comparisons across institutions, which did not blend well with the methodological approach that guided my study (as discussed in Chapter 3).

Choosing a university from which to recruit participants was then addressed. The most obvious choice was the University of Canterbury, where I was currently studying and living. Throughout my PhD proposal period, I quickly realised the differences in the higher education system of New Zealand and the United States. Although the systems share some similarities, they are distinctively different from one another. Students in the U.S. system seem to have a higher level of attachment to their university, thus possibly making their leaving transition more noticeable than those in the N.Z. system, which was a point of interest for me as a researcher. Additionally, being from the U.S. and having studied and worked at American institutions, I was familiar with this system and could more easily navigate it. Furthermore, considering my methodological approach based on interaction, co-constructing meanings, and interpretation, I thought having similar contextual understandings with the participants would be beneficial. Therefore, I decided to recruit research participants who were graduates of a U.S. institution; however, I did this with the hope that the research findings may also have relevance to other higher education institutions.

The university in the U.S. chosen as the site from which to draw participating graduates was selected primarily based on its accessibility, and the extent to which sustained engagement with the participants could be facilitated. This was an institution where I knew university

personnel and was able to approach them for cooperation in recruiting graduates as research participants. The university was a public, Master's-granting institution and had a population of 16,000 students. To protect the anonymity of the research participants, the university will not be named.

I wanted to ensure that the participants were broadly representative of the student population of the university from which they graduated in terms of ethnicity, gender, and subject of study (major). Although I did not aim to analyse the data specifically from these three categorisations, I wanted to elicit the perspectives of graduates from a range of backgrounds represented at the university. Being a qualitative study with a fairly small sample size, the criteria were set as a loose guideline, and the participants were broadly, but not exactly, representative of the university student population, as demonstrated in the Table 4.1 below. (Note: the descriptor words for ethnicity and other characteristics were extracted from the University's annual report, which included details of their graduating students).

Table 4.1 Research Participant Representation

(Numbers based on 20 Participants)			
Ethnicity:	University Percentage	Number of participants needed for representative sample	Number of participants in study
Caucasian	60.60%	12.12	16
African American	9.20%	1.84	2
American Indian	5.10%	1.02	2
Asian	3.20%	0.64	0
Hispanic	3.80%	0.76	0
International	5.70%	1.14	0
Decline to disclose ethnicity	12.00%	2.4	0
Gender:	University Percentage	Number of participants needed for representative sample	Number of participants in study
Female	60%	12	12
Male	40%	8	8
Degree/Major:	University Percentage	Number of participants needed for representative sample	Number of participants in study
College of Arts, Media, and Design	5.10%	1.02	1
College of Buisness	26.60%	5.32	2
College of Education and Professional Studies	33.60%	6.72	6
College of Liberal Arts	20.20%	4.04	7
College of Math and Science	14.20%	2.84	4

As demonstrated in Table 4.1, 12 per cent of students in the University's report either declined to share their ethnicity or did not identify with one of the options listed. In my study, every participant agreed to share information about their ethnicity. According to the University, 5.7 per cent of graduating students were international students, and none of the research participants fell within this category, primarily because no international students responded to my call for participants. With regard to gender, the research participants were exactly representative of the university's student population, and broad representation was met in area of study. It is important to note that my aim was to include voluntary participants with a variety of perspectives on the post-university transition. This aim was met without precise university representation.

How were the participants recruited?

I placed the 'Call for Participants' (see Appendix A) on the University's facebook page for alumni. I also sent the 'Call for Participants' in an email to university student organisation advisors, who worked with young alumni groups, asking them to forward it on to recent graduates. Shortly afterwards, I began receiving emails from graduates who were interested in learning more about participating in my study. When I received an email from a potential participant, I responded with a detailed message about the study and the time commitment expected (see Appendix B). After reading the project details, interested individuals were asked to provide answers to basic demographic questions. I also utilised a 'snowballing' technique for recruiting participants (Patton, 1980). Once an individual agreed to participate, I asked them to forward my personal contact details to any of their peers who might also be interested in participating. After a month of recruitment, twenty graduates had agreed to participate in my study. Scheduling the first round of individual interviews then commenced.

Data Collection

Having used symbolic interactionism and narrativity (narrative theory) to inform my research approach, I believe that individuals make sense of their lives through interactions and stories (Chase, 2001; Hatch, 2002; Bogdan and Biklen, 2010), and in-depth interviews are an effective way to elicit stories and gather information (Patton, 1980). For this reason, I decided to conducted monthly interviews to explore the experiences and perspectives of the participants. Although I originally hoped for each interview to be conducted face-to-face, due to the pragmatic reasons and the flexibility of emergent design (informed by naturalistic inquiry, Lincoln and Guba, 1985), some of the interviews were conducted over email. The face-to-face interviews were spoken and digitally voice recorded, and the email interviews were typed and recorded electronically.

I decided to organise the research interviews on a monthly basis, as I believed this frequency would allow time to meet with each participant regularly within the data collection period, as well as effectively explore the research questions. The first interview was face-to-face, in which I used semi-structured questions to direct the interview (see Appendix C). I had a list of topics I wanted to ask in the first interview to lay a foundation for the remaining interviews (for example: basic information about collegiate experience, graduation, and post-university transition up to that point).

I began each subsequent monthly interview by inviting the participants to share stories, experiences, and encounters they had had since our previous interview. Sometimes these stories were directly related to their post-university transition, and sometimes they were not. However, I welcomed all stories, as I believed these narratives provided an insight to the participants' world, and how they made sense of it (narrativity). I then asked specific, individualised questions, building from their previous interviews, about their post-university

experiences and perspectives. At the end of each interview, I reserved time for the participant to ask any questions. We then discussed the next steps in the research process and agreed on our next meeting time.

As the months progressed, I was able to ask more directed, specific questions about their lives and transition based on themes that were emerging from the interviews (Ezzy, 2002). In the months during which email interviews were conducted, I encouraged the participants to respond in an informal, conversational, and candid way. Throughout the interview period, a number of participants had intermittently mentioned what they had wished from their undergraduate studies in terms of being more prepared for this transition. I realised this would be useful question to ask directly about in the final interview. Therefore, in the sixth interview, which was conducted via email, I asked the participants if they had any advice or recommendations for institutions wishing to support their graduating students (research question 3) based on their experiences from the past year. In the final interview, I also asked questions regarding the research and the participants' reflections on the process. The interview schedule (including interview type and focus) is demonstrated below in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Research Interview Schedule

Interview	Interview Month	Time after University	Interview Type	Interview Focus
1	November, 2009	6 months post-graduation	Face-to-face	Establishing a Foundation
2	December, 2009	7 months post-graduation	Email	Exploring Experiences and Perspectives
3	January, 2010	8 months post-graduation	Face-to-face	Exploring Experiences and Perspectives
4	February, 2010	9 months post-graduation	Email	Exploring Experiences and Perspectives
5	March, 2010	10 months post-graduation	Email	Exploring Experiences and Perspectives; Advice for Upcoming Graduates
6	April, 2010	11 months post-graduation	Email	Exploring Experiences and Perspectives; Advice for Universities; Reflection on Research Experience

During each interview, the participants also filled out a number-chart (on a scale of one to ten) rating how they felt overall for that month (see Appendix D). I was not intending to quantify the participants' experiences, compare their experiences, or use the charts in data

analysis, as each person's number-chart was completely subjective, and thus could not be cross referenced. Rather, the aim of this chart was to provide a frame of reference for me on how each individual's feelings were changing throughout their transition. The use of this chart was inspired by Williams' (1999) *Transition Cycle* (see Chapter 2). This proved to be an effective tool for me while interpreting the data and attempting to understand how each individual made meaning of their experiences and feelings in the course of the transition.

I anticipated that the research design may evolve and change throughout the data collection period (Lincoln and Guba, 1985); however, I did not anticipate the role that the participants would take in guiding the design. Because I was facilitating research on such a personal aspect of the participants' lives, I wanted them to feel comfortable, and for the research process to be a collaboration. Therefore, at the end of the second interview, once they had time to fully understand the purpose of the research and the approach, I asked them for feedback on the data collection methods. I asked if they had any questions or suggestions on how I could improve their research experience, or ways in which to better explore the research questions. When the participants made suggestions, we discussed how I could implement their idea(s) in future interviews, and then I put those suggestions into action.

One of the suggestions was in relation to the number-chart. One research participant suggested that they rate themselves from one to ten on both a personal scale and a professional scale, rather than one overall monthly rating. When given this option in future interviews, some participants chose to continue to provide only one number, but some participants chose to provide two numbers. Although I did not intend to use the charts in the data presentation, this helpful suggestion allowed me to further interact, understand, and make meaning of the complex and subjective nature of each participant's transition.

Another suggestion was for me to share some of the preliminary research findings with the participants at the end of each interview. The participants understood that I had not fully analysed the data, but most of them expressed interest in hearing the types of patterns or themes I was finding. Therefore, in subsequent interviews, I provided the participants with a bullet-point list of recurring conversation topics from the interviews as a whole. I protected anonymity by only sharing general topics (not specifics or outliers) that the majority of the twenty participants had shared in the previous month's interviews. The participant who first suggested this said she was interested in seeing such a list as a way to gauge where she was in the transition according to other recent graduates. After the second month of interviews, I continued to ask the participants each month for their ideas and input. I felt that this helped establish rapport and collaboration with the participants.

Timing of Study

The data were collected over a six month period. Because the research aim was to explore the experiences and perspectives of graduates within their first year out of university, data collection began six months after the participants had graduated and concluded one year after graduation. This timing was because I wanted the participants to be fully immersed in their post-university transition when the interviews were facilitated. Sometimes, students take the months immediately following graduation as their 'last summer', and I wanted to conduct the interviews when summer was over and their younger peers had gone back to university. This time frame also blended well with the overall research progression and seemed to be a reasonable length of time in which to explore the research questions. The participants graduated in May 2009 and participated in the research from November 2009 to May 2010.

Location

For the first three months of data collection (November 2009, December 2009, and January 2010), I was in the United States and interviewed the research participants on a monthly basis. For the following three months (February 2010, March 2010, and April 2010), I was in New Zealand and facilitated the research interviews online via email. The participants were also available by phone and video calling (Skype) during this time if they or I had further questions or needed clarification on something we had discussed. However, email proved to be the best form of communication within this three month period.

According to the participants' feedback, most of them preferred the face-to-face interviews, but some also appreciated the convenience of the email interviews. Although they had to take time to type out their responses, they had the flexibility to do it whenever they wanted, as opposed to setting an interview time and meeting in person. I also noticed that the participants who were less verbose in our face-to-face interviews were able to more clearly articulate their responses when typing them. Ideally, I would have preferred to interchange the face-to-face interviews and the email interactions every other month, but given the logistical situation of time and distance, spending first three months in the U.S. and last three months in N.Z. worked well. Additionally, it was beneficial that the first three months were spent in the U.S. with the participants, as this helped us to establish our relationship, develop trust and rapport, and reach a better understanding of the research. By the time I was back in New Zealand, during month four of data collection, it appeared that the participants were comfortable with sharing information and being open about their transition.

Pilot Study

While recruiting participants and arranging the logistics for data collection, I facilitated a small pilot study. I did not use any of the data from my pilot study to inform the research

findings, as the demographic of the pilot study participants were not consistent with those I was researching. However, it was useful in helping me prepare for the interviews and future aspects of the research.

For the pilot study, I interviewed six friends and family members. The primary reason for doing this was to practice my interviewing skills, help decipher which topics needed to be addressed, and how to approach these topics in an interview setting while eliciting stories. This process helped me to determine the best ways to articulate the information I was seeking to understand while also noting how to do so without asking leading questions. These interviews were also a helpful way for me to learn which topics to spend more time questioning about and which topics to eliminate, as the answers usually came out in other parts of the interview. After the interviews, I also practiced transcribing and coding them. During this time, I had discussions with my supervisors about how to search for preliminary themes and take effective field notes. Overall, the pilot study helped me gain interview practice in a research setting, which I had not previously done, as well as allowed me to begin thinking about analysis. However, other than what is mentioned here, it did not greatly influence how I proceeded with the main study.

Data Analysis

Analysis was an on-going process throughout this project. From reading field notes and typing transcripts, to coding data and culminating the themes back to the literature, this has been an evolving process. In this section, I describe how the data were analysed, which included early analysis, micro analysis, mid-level analysis, and meta-analysis.

Early Analysis. During and after each interview, I made field notes. These consisted of ideas and follow up questions for future interviews, details of how I felt about the interview, and

descriptions of the different tones, demeanours, and attitudes of the participants. I felt it was important to document these initial thoughts and feelings, as they can sometimes be forgotten by the time transcribing and coding begins. These notes helped keep the feeling and tone of the interview fresh in my mind as each stage of analysis progressed. For an example of the field notes, see Appendix E.

After each interview round, I transcribed every interview verbatim. By listening and transcribing, I was able to start identifying certain patterns that were commonly occurring. I made sure to transcribe each participant's interview before conducting the next interview with them. This allowed me to provide the participants with a copy of their transcript before meeting again so that we could discuss any changes or edits they may have wanted to make. Additionally, transcribing helped me develop follow-up questions and discussion topics for subsequent interviews.

Micro Analysis. After an interview was transcribed and the participant had approved the transcript, I would begin coding the transcript (Tolich & Davidson, 1998; Denzin, 2000). I began by indenting the margins of the transcript two inches on both sides, and then I printed the transcript. In the left hand side margin, I wrote general notes about the interview to provide a way to skim through the transcript and quickly see the summary. In the right hand side margin, I wrote a word or phrase that represented topics discussed. Some words I only wrote a few times or only on a few of the participants' transcripts. Other times I would write a particular word or phrase multiple times and on many of the transcripts, as it represented a topic that was discussed repeatedly or by a number of the participants. I did this for the six interviews I conducted with each of the 20 participants, totalling 120 interviews. See Appendix F for an example of coding within a transcript.

Micro analysis continued as I cross-coded each interview transcript. I did this by creating an Excel spread sheet listing in bullet-point format the highlighted experiences and perspectives of each participant by month. The reasons for this spread sheet was first, to provide a quickly accessible way to retrieve each participant's highlighted experiences and perspectives within each of the six months, and second, to think about, organise, and analyse the data in a different way. For an excerpt of the spread sheet, see Appendix G.

Mid-level Analysis. After the data had been systematically coded and organised, I began to consider why certain statements stood out to me. I began to more deeply analyse the interactions I had with the participants, how I interpreted their experiences, and how meaning was constructed. I analysed the data in monthly intervals looking for themes and patterns across time, what Yin (2003) calls time-series analysis. I analysed the data from one participant to the next looking for consistencies and differences, what Yin (2003) calls cross-case synthesis. Then I took my interpretations back to the participants and invited them to offer additional feedback and confirm or clarify my interpretations. Through the participants' involvement, meanings of the emergent data were further constructed.

Meta-Analysis. This was an on-going aspect of analysis as I continued to reorganise, interpret, and make meaning of the data, even as I wrote the data presentation chapters. In this process, I began to have a clearer indication of the findings, and eventually organised the data into approximately thirty emergent themes. (Having initially been guided by narrativity, I thought I would present the findings in form of narratives or case studies. However, as I analysed the data, the findings emerged in the form of themes rather than stories). I then started analysing the themes for similarities and differences in which they could be clumped (Ezzy, 2002). I did this by printing a list of the themes in large font, cutting the themes into individual pieces, and matching them with one another (see Appendix H for image).

Essentially, I "disassembl[ed] and reassembl[ed]" (Ezzy, 2002, p. 94) the data, systematically.

Throughout analysis, I also used Schlossberg's Transition Model, Super's Career Theory, and Van Gennep's Rites of Passage (discussed in Chapter 2) to compare my findings by attempting to organise the emergent themes into those models and stages of transition. By continuing to analyse, group, and regroup the themes, I eventually identified key themes to help organise sub-themes into clusters. These findings are organised and presented in Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 of this thesis.

Ethics

This project was reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee prior to my recruiting participants or gathering data. Each participant was given an information sheet at the first interview which included details about the purpose of the research, the time commitment, and their rights to anonymity and confidentiality. I also provided the contact details of my PhD supervisors and myself. The participants then signed a separate consent form agreeing that they had read and understood the details outlined in the information sheet, that they could withdraw from the project at any time, and that the research had been approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee (see Appendices I, J, and K).

Although the risk of emotional distress was minimal, I set a plan in place as a precaution by preparing a list of contacts which included local counsellors, psychologists, and career centres that could be contacted if needed. Throughout the data collection period, this situation did not arise. After each interview was transcribed, the participants were given a copy of the transcript to verify and/or make necessary amendments. The participants were informed that

they could contact me if they had questions about the research or concerns about the data they had provided.

An issue of ethics that I feel is relevant to address is my relationship with the participants. Because the research participants were graduates of the university for which I worked prior to moving to New Zealand, I did know some of them. When the call for participants was placed, interested individuals then contacted me. Whether they responded to the call because they had previously known me as an employee of the university, or because they were specifically interested in the project, or both, I do not know. Of the twenty individuals who participated in my study, I had met and casually knew fifteen, primarily through my former role at the university in the student services department. Of the remaining five participants, I had no previous interactions with four of them, and knew one of them well, as I had a working relationship with him/her.

While knowing the participants in one's study can sometimes create an ethical dilemma, I took measures to ensure ethical standards were retained. One way I did this was by refraining from giving advice or offering my opinion about any of their situations. I did not refer to previous knowledge about them, unless they brought those topics up in the interviews. Furthermore, I did not disclose any information about my personal experiences with the post-university transition. Each of the participants seemed to feel comfortable with me as a researcher, regardless of our previous interactions. Also, these measures aligned with the methodological approach which guided this study (as discussed in Chapter 3).

Strategies to Address Rigour

Mishler (2010), among many other qualitative researchers, called for a reformulation of the standard approach to validity. Since the conventional procedures for assessing validity are

based on an experimental model, and qualitative studies are "designed explicitly as an alternative to that model," validation cannot be assessed through the same means in both approaches (Mishler, 2010, p. 288). Maxwell (2005) described validity in qualitative research as "…demonstrating that you will allow for the examination of competing explanations and discrepant data – that your research is not simply a self-fulfilling prophecy" (p. 26). Ritchie and Lewis (2003) addressed issues of validity with the question – "Am I accurately reflecting the phenomena under study as perceived by the study population?" (p. 273). Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify the word 'validity' in qualitative terms as 'trustworthiness'. They define trustworthiness through a question – "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 290). Here I address issues of validity (credibility, meaning-making, transferability, and confirmability discussed in Chapter 3) by describing the specific strategies I have taken to ensure rigour.

With regard to credibility, I began this research and thesis (Foreword and Chapter 1) by addressing my personal experiences and biases and recognising my role as the interpreter in the meaning-making process. Throughout data collection, I demonstrated transparency with the participants and welcomed their contribution to the research design. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify prolonged engagement as a way to strengthen credibility. Facilitating six months of in-depth interviews and developing trust and reflexivity with the participants was one way I demonstrated this. Lincoln and Guba (1985) also identify triangulation as a means to provide credibility. Denzin (2001) identified the four types of triangulation as: data source, investigators, theory, and methods. In this study, I used data source triangulation in the form of time (ongoing interactions) and persons (number of participants) to strengthen credibility.

In terms of meaning-making, I facilitated opportunities for participants to approve, alter, and/or confirm my interpretations. After each interview, I provided the participants with a copy of their transcript for checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Throughout the six months of data collection, I presented my preliminary findings to the participants, and they were invited to comment on and contribute to my interpretations. Six months after data collection was completed, I invited the participants to attend a gathering where I presented my interpretation of the findings. All research participants were welcome, but by attending, their participation in my research would be revealed to other participants in attendance. Some participants chose not to attend as they wanted to remain anonymous; some were interested in attending, but could not attend at the particular date and time. Of the 20 research participants, 12 attended the meeting. We discussed the research, and I invited them to offer additional feedback and confirm or clarify the research findings and my interpretations of them.

In considering transferability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) make it clear that "the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere," and that the original investigator can only provide a thick description to enable someone to make a transfer (p. 298). In Chapters 6-10, I have aimed to provide a thick description of my findings by providing interpretive comments to highlight the meanings ascribed to participants' words. I have also described the way in which I clustered their comments into themes. Furthermore, I have reviewed these themes alongside a thorough consideration of the literature. These procedures should help someone wishing to apply these findings to other contexts. These may include other students/graduates in transition, institutions wishing to support student in transition, or other parties interested in transferable research strategies.

With regard to confirmability, I have an audit trail including the raw data (recorded interviews), field notes, analysis spread sheets and mind maps, my personal research journal, and all official research documents (for example: coded transcripts, consent forms, ethics approval, and interview schedule).

Chapter Summary

In the first half of this chapter, I outlined the methods of data collection adopted in this research project and the rationale for each decision in the process. First, I discussed the process of participant selection – what age, how many, from which university, using what selection criteria, and how they were recruited. I then discussed the qualitative methods used in collecting the data, such as face-to-face interviews, email interviews, and the number-chart. I also discussed the specifics of the emergent design and how the participants contributed to the way the data were collected. Next I discussed the details of when the data were collected, at what point in the participants' lives the research was conducted, and why those times were decided upon. The details were then discussed on how the process of data collection was negotiated in the U.S. and N.Z., and the reasons for those decisions.

In the second half of the chapter, I discussed the brief pilot study that I conducted prior to collecting data that helped me practice and perfect my interview strategies. I then discussed the steps of data analysis, followed by a review of the ethical decisions and processes for this project. Finally, I addressed issues of rigour, and how it was upheld throughout this study.

It was my aim in this chapter to clearly communicate the decisions that were made throughout this research process, as well as explain why and how those decisions were methodologically informed while also negotiating the pragmatic limitations. As it was my goal to have transparent interactions and interpretations with the research participants in this

study, it has also been my goal for this chapter to articulate that transparency. In the remaining chapters of this thesis, I present the data findings. I start this in the following chapter by introducing each of the 20 research participants.

Chapter 5

Introducing the Participants

Introduction

> A transition is not so much a matter of change as of the individual's own
> perception of the change. For our definition, a transition is a transition only if
> it is so defined by the person experiencing it (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 28).

I begin this chapter with Schlossberg's quote, as her words inspired me to ask each of the research participants for their definition of transition, if their post-university experience is/was a transition for them, and if so, when they thought they would be/were through this transition. In this chapter, I briefly introduce each of the twenty participants. I present basic information about them, such as their degree of study, their career path after graduation, and other salient aspects of their transition. I do this in order to build a 'story' of their post-university experience, which has been informed by narrative theory (chapter 3); however, I have kept this information general in order to protect their anonymity. In the introductions, I also signpost the research themes that commonly emerged in conversations with each participant, which are presented in the subsequent chapters of this thesis. Following each participant's introduction, I include their definition of transition and when they thought they would through it, if so defined.

My reason for introducing the research participants is to present each person as 'people' rather than 'research subjects'. While reflecting on her participation in this research project, Christine said, "*I loved that you were so open about your research. You totally treated us as human beings and not subjects, and that made me feel like my responses were more valued.*" As it was my intent to respect the participants and their feelings throughout the data

collection period, it is also my aim to do this in the data presentation. In subsequent chapters, the data are presented by themes, and excerpts of the participants' interviews are used to illustrate each theme, but each participant's story will not be told in full. Therefore, it is important to present characteristics of the participants before highlighting and drawing upon particular aspects of their experiences.

Amber

Amber majored in Elementary Education and graduated with Magna Cum Laude honours. She supported herself financially through university by working a number of part-time jobs. Amber accepted a position at a child care centre immediately after graduation while she applied for teaching jobs that started in the following school year (three months later). She was offered a position teaching fifth grade (approximately ages 10 and 11) a week after the school year started. She accepted the position, but often talked about how she felt behind in her work, because she was hired after the teacher orientation sessions had been held. Amber often talked about her career goals, but described her personal life as a 'circus balancing act'. In addition to teaching full-time, she was a caregiver for her two-year-old niece, who lived with her three days a week. Amber lived with three friends and worked two part-time jobs on the weekends. The themes that emerged most often in Amber's interviews were 'uncertainty' about her future, her 'desire to be in a relationship', and the stress of 'finances'.

When asked for her *definition of transition* and when she thought she may be *through the post-university transition*, Amber said:

> *The middle ground from one situation to the next. I think I'm in the middle overall, but there are little transitions along the way. I've transitioned into the workforce already, so that transition is over. I'm transitioning into the family life, but I'm just beginning my transition as an official adult…. that's just starting. So, I think there are lots of transitions in this transition.*
>
> *More established in my job… and have some grounds; probably married… not necessarily with kids, but at least married; completely taking care of myself and supporting myself with no other people; buying my own house; and being out of college debt… maybe not all my debt, but at least out of college debt.*

Ben

Ben majored in Biology with aspirations of going to medical school. He was involved on campus with his fraternity, leadership groups, and student organisations. During his final year at university, Ben passed the qualifying exam and applied to medical school. Initially, he was not fully accepted into a medical programme, but was chosen as an alternate. This meant he had a chance to fill a position if others who ranked higher than him did not accept their offer. He spent the summer after graduation hoping to be accepted into medical school, but in the meantime began applying for medical research jobs in case he was not. Four weeks before the programme started, he was notified of his acceptance and immediately moved across the State to live near the university. Ben talked about the difficulty of being a medical student in contrast to an undergraduate, but in terms of the post-university transition, he was not facing the issues that other participants were with regard to workplace transitions. The research themes that most commonly emerged in Ben's interviews were 'health and fitness', 'finances', and the importance of his 'groups and activities', 'support system', and 'faith'.

When asked for his *definition of transition* and when he thought he may be *through the post-university transition*, Ben said:

> *Going from one thing to another that could be similar or could be different, and then adjusting to the differences and putting in route the similarities.*

> *Because I have the next four years of my life planned out, the transition is easier for me because I know what I'm doing… whereas so many other people my age may not know what they're doing in six months from now.*

Brian

Brian majored in Music Theatre and felt strongly that he had a calling to be a performer. He seemed to understand the uncertainty of his future given the nature of the industry. Brian did not anticipate having a secure job after graduation, but rather living a life characterised by auditions and short-term job contracts. Brian's permanent residence was at his parents' house, where he lived between shows, but he spent a lot of time travelling to auditions and performing around the country. When in his home city, he did casual work with a promotional company and was a waiter at a restaurant. His long-term goal was to move to New York City and have consistent work performing on Broadway. Throughout our interviews, Brian talked about learning the ropes of his industry, the pitfalls of working in entertainment, and the struggle of trying to 'make it' as a performer. The research themes that commonly emerged in Brian's interviews were 'searching', 'lacking direction', the struggle of 'unmet expectations', and his 'desire for meaningful relationships'.

When asked for his *definition of transition* and when he thought he may be *through the post-university transition*, Brian said:

> *Going from one point to another… smoothly or not so smoothly.*
>
> *If I were to get a longer term job or if I had multiple jobs booked to where I was working a longer period of time…. Like for a year or six months, I feel like I would be through this transition.*

Carley

Carley majored in Photography. Upon graduation, she made plans to attend a more elite university than she had just graduated from to obtain another undergraduate degree in photography. Within a few weeks of starting the programme at the new university, she began questioning her decision and eventually withdrew from the programme. While she searched for employment, she worked at her mother's company as a receptionist and cleaned the office after hours. Eventually, she gained a part-time job in child care, which did not require a degree, while she also set up her own photography business from home. Throughout the period of data collection, she lived with her boyfriend while relying heavily on her mother financially. During this time, she also began visiting a psychologist weekly. The themes that most commonly emerged in Carley's interviews were 'uncertainty', 'lack of direction', 'searching for happiness and fulfilment', and 'unmet expectations'.

When asked for her *definition of transition* and when she thought she may be *through the post-university transition*, Carley said:

> *It's the process where you move from one place to another whether that be physically or emotionally, and it also ties in with learning, maturing, growing up, and experiencing different parts of life. I just feel like it is a change that I know is happening, but it's not like I can really control it. I feel like life is completely out of control… I don't know… I can't really explain what I mean. I just feel stuck in not knowing.*

> *I think it will be over when I've taken full financial responsibility over everything, and I don't even know when that will happen. I think the end of this transition is the beginning of another transition.*

Christine

Christine changed her major a number of times as an undergraduate, but eventually decided to study Organisational Communication. She was offered a full-time position at a university before she graduated; however, after graduation she declined the position, because she did not want to move out of State. A month later, she moved into an apartment with a friend and got a job unrelated to her degree. After three months, she left the job, as she felt it was beneath her qualifications. A few weeks later, she got a part-time job at a university which utilised the knowledge gained from her degree. She enjoyed this job, but struggled to manage on the part-time salary. Throughout the data collection period, she spent much of her time job searching for full-time employment. She said she applied for nearly 100 jobs within the first year of graduating from university. The themes that emerged most commonly in Christine's interviews were 'identity', 'unmet expectations of her degree', 'lack of direction', and the importance of her 'support system'.

When asked for her *definition of transition* and when she thought she may be *through the post-university transition,* Christine said:

> *Transition is going from one big event or one section of your life to another section of your life… kind of like moving on from one thing to another.*

> *I'm obviously going from having been in school all my life… from head start through my bachelor's degree, and now trying to move on to the real world. So, I think for me, I'll be through it not just when I find a full-time job, but having a stable job that I know I'm going to keep… something that I could do forever.*

Damon

Damon double-majored in Political Science and Economics. He explained that although he carried himself as someone who knew exactly what he wanted and where he was going, he hated change, and because of that had put off many decisions about his future. After graduation, he moved in with his parents and began job searching while he continued to work his previously acquired part-time job. He explained that he applied for fifty jobs that summer, and only had interviews for three of them. In August (3 months after graduation), he was offered a full-time position related to his degree. He kept busy during this time as he also enrolled in a graduate programme and bought a house to fix up. Throughout the six months of research interviews, Damon shared stories about his workplace transition, being a young professional, and his sense of entitlement in the workplace. Themes which emerged most often in Damon's interviews were 'identity', 'unmet expectations', and his 'desire for meaningful relationships'.

When asked for his *definition of transition* and when he thought he may be *through the post-university transition*, Damon said:

> *I think transition is a big thing where your life fundamentally changes from one thing to another thing. Your day-to-day operations change, how you think has to change, how you operate has to change… that's what I think it is, and that's why I don't like it.*

> *I know my life has already changed… a new place, a new job, new day-to-day activities, new communication, new peer groups, but I think I'm still at the hard part where I have to figure out what I'm going to do with this transition. After this… there's going to be – find a girl, get married, work some more, then the kid phase, then the new job phase.*

Jade

Jade majored in Biology and aspired to be a doctor. She applied to medical school during her final year at university and was selected as an alternate, which meant she was not initially selected to be in the programme, but had a chance to fill a position if others who ranked higher than her did not accept their offer. One month before graduation, she realised that she did not want to be a doctor and withdrew her medical school application. Because she was uncertain of what she wanted to do, she decided to take some time to explore her options and travel. A few years before, Jade's mother passed away, and she was left a large inheritance. Because of her financial security, Jade had the option of taking some time after graduation without working. Within the data collection period, she applied to a graduate programme in Health Administration and planned to start this programme the following year. Jade owned her own home where she lived with three friends, and she spent much of her time travelling or teaching belly dancing. The themes that commonly emerged in Jade's interviews were 'identity', 'uncertainty', 'searching for fulfilment and happiness', and the importance of her 'support system', 'groups', and 'relationships'.

When asked her *definition of transition* and when she thought she may be *through the post-university transition*, Jade said:

> To me, it is moving from your college self to the next step and trying to figure it out.

> Probably just figuring out what that next step is… do I get a job, or get on a plane to India, or decide to go to grad school.

Jerry

Jerry majored in Biology and aspired to go into the medical field as either a doctor or researcher. After graduation, he lived with his grandmother and continued his job as a part-time Student Assistant in a science laboratory at the university. One of the requirements for this job was that he remain a student. So, Jerry enrolled in two courses in order to keep his job during the summer and the following academic year, which also helped to raise his undergraduate grade point average. Eventually, his work hours increased, and he became the Lab Manager. He enjoyed his job and described it as an alternative to the 'real world'. During the research interviews, Jerry changed his mind frequently about what he wanted to do in his future and how exactly to pursue his options. He talked about going to medical school, but then decided his grades were not good enough to be accepted into a programme, and that he needed to take more classes. He aspired to move overseas, but then felt guilty about leaving his family and his financial obligations. The themes that most commonly emerged in Jerry's interviews were 'lack of direction', 'uncertainty', 'finances', and his 'desire for happiness and fulfilment'.

When asked for his *definition of transition* and when he thought he may be *through the post-university transition*, Jerry said:

> *Successfully going from one point in a person's life to the next.*

> *When I have happiness and peace. I'm not happy right now… but I'm not unhappy about it. I'm just sort of humbug… I'm just in a weird place.*

Jill

Jill majored in General Studies with an emphasis on education and speech pathology. She wanted to work with children and decided that enrolling in a graduate programme was the best way to pursue her career aspirations. Because her graduate programme started three months after she completed her undergraduate degree, she did not apply for any full-time, professional jobs. Her father passed away two months after graduation, which consumed most of her time that summer. While pursuing her Master's degree in Family Life Education, Jill worked part-time at the university library, lived with her fiancé, and spent much of her time studying and wedding planning. She said that her daily routine had not changed much from when she was an undergraduate, other than not living with friends and not being involved in her sorority. The themes that commonly emerged in Jill's interviews were 'searching for career direction', 'desire for happiness and fulfilment', and the value of her 'support system'.

When asked for her *definition of transition* and when she thought she may be *through the post-university transition*, Jill said:

> *A new stage in your life… some transitions are really small and others can be really big; some are smooth and some are not…. I think it involves change, growing up a little bit, and figuring life out.*

> *I guess after I graduate and get a job that I am happy with… and happy with all things in my life… then I won't really be in this transition anymore.*

Julie

Julie majored in Fashion Marketing and had aspirations of working in the fashion industry. The summer before her final year, she did a sales internship at a major department store in a different State. She had hoped that the internship would lead to further work for a major fashion brand. Throughout her final year and even after graduation, Julie applied for job after job. She had a number of interviews, but the specific position duties, job salary, or location did not meet her expectations. She felt qualified and entitled to certain jobs because of her degree and was not willing to accept a position that did not meet her standard. This led to her feeling uncertain and questioning what to do. Throughout the research period, she continued working as the assistant manager of a clothing boutique, which was the job she worked in while at university. She lived in a house with two friends and spent much of her spare time job searching or pursuing her hobbies (for example: professional baking, teaching dance lessons, sewing, and making crafts). The themes that emerged most commonly in Julie's interviews were 'uncertainty', 'lack of direction', 'unmet expectations of degree', 'identity', and the value of her 'support system'.

When asked for her *definition of transition* and when she thought she may be *through the post-university transition*, Julie said:

> *Moving from one thing to another.*

> *…Maybe when I have a job where I'm using my skills and getting paid what I want.*

Justin

Justin was a Political Science major who said he used to live by the motto – "It's not what you know, but who you know". As a student, Justin was involved with student government, his fraternity, and a number of student organisations. He said that he passed his courses based on his good relationships with instructors, not his academic skill. After graduation, Justin moved into a house with friends and expected that job offers would come his way based on his professional network. After two months of no work and having exhausted all his options, he got a job as a waiter at a restaurant. He continued applying for jobs and after two months was offered a full-time position. Having been used to being a student leader, he struggled to find his role in the workplace as an inexperienced, young professional without a lot of influence. The themes that most commonly emerged in Justin's interviews were 'identity', 'unmet expectations', 'comfort zone', 'faith', his 'desire for meaningful relationships', and 'searching for happiness and fulfilment'.

When asked for his *definition of transition* and when he thought he may be *through the post-university transition*, Justin said:

> *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.*
>
> *Buying a car… I know that's really materialistic… but that would represent the fact that I have been able to save money. And having a girlfriend who is in a similar stage who understands who I am and where I want to be.*

Lisa

Lisa majored in Special Education until her final year, when she switched to General Studies in order to graduate on time. She had an interest in working with children with disabilities, but was uncertain of the career path she wanted to take. After graduating and still not knowing what she wanted to do, she continued working in the part-time administrative job that she had worked as an undergraduate. Three months later, her position was upgraded to full-time. Although the job was not in her area of interest, it was easy and had good benefits. Lisa often talked about the lack of fulfilment she found in her job and sometimes discussed other job options, but rarely pursued them. During the last month of our research interviews, she got a new job working in debt collection. She said this new job was not something she anticipated doing long term, but was excited about the change. During the research interview period, Lisa moved from living with her father to living with two friends. She was in a long-term relationship and often talked about her desire to be married. The themes that commonly emerged in Lisa's interviews were 'uncertainty', 'searching for fulfilment and happiness' in her career, and the importance of her 'faith' and 'support system'.

When asked for her *definition of transition* and when she thought she may be *through the post-university transition*, Lisa said:

> *To me transition is any change… from location or emotional state… from one place to another. 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.*

> *I think getting married is the thing that will make me feel that this transition is coming to an end.*

Macey

Macey majored in Nursing. As undergraduates, students enrolled in the nursing programme were offered an opportunity to sign a contract to work for a local hospital after graduation. By signing a two-year work contract with the hospital, students were given an immediate $5,000 payment and were guaranteed a job after graduation. Macey signed this contract, and therefore started working as a nurse after she passed her board exams (two months after graduation). Macey said she loved her job and had a smooth transition into the workplace. Her boyfriend proposed to her three months after graduation, they were married four months later (in the middle of the interview period), and she also bought a home during this time. Macey explained that she was self-assured and emotionally stable. She was aware of her good fortune, as she often talked about how many of her friends were struggling through this transition. The only thing Macey said she had difficulty with was adjusting to some of the new, adult responsibilities in her life (for example: paying taxes, filing insurance claims, buying a home), but she was proactive in seeking support and training in this area. The themes that emerged most commonly in Macey's interviews were 'identity', 'expectations of others', and 'living for the present'.

When asked for her *definition of transition* and when she thought she may be *through the post-university transition*, Macey said:

> *A person's capability of going from one experience to the next… or one big thing to another big thing.*

> *I think I'm still in the transition where I'm doing everything on my own… I want to get a new car this year, so things like that that I've never done before that I'm going to have to do.*

Meggs

Meggs majored in Community Health and graduated with Magna Cum Laude honours. She aspired to be a health educator, and her energy and enthusiasm for this were obvious. As an undergraduate, she did two internships, which she hoped would lead to full time job opportunities when she graduated. She chose to travel during the summer after graduation, and by doing this, she was not considered for position openings from her internships. She lived with her parents until she was able to afford living on her own, which was seven months after graduation. Being jobless, she started a graduate programme in September (4 months after graduation). One of her professors offered her a research assistant position one month after her courses started, which led to her becoming the project manager two months later. The themes that most commonly emerged in Meggs' interviews were 'identity', adjusting to 'adult responsibilities', and issues related to 'health and fitness', 'finances', and 'relationships'.

When asked for her *definition of transition* and when she thought she may be *through the post-university transition*, Meggs said:

> *Transition is the development and preparation from one point to the next, and especially from undergrad to the real world. And even though I'm in grad school, I look at it as something I do on the side- like a hobby, because I still have a real job.*

> *My transition has been a major reality check, but I'm loving it… it's a good reality check. I finally understand why everybody talks about how the real world is not what you think it is. But it's fun, and it's a growing experience. I'm learning why I am who I am, and I'm bettering myself.*

Nick

Nick majored in Organisation Communication, which he selected after changing his major five times. He explained that changing his major so many times said something about him – that he never did anything for the destination or end goal, but always for the journey or process. Nick approached the post-university transition with this same attitude. In his final year at university, Nick decided that going to graduate school was his best option. After a highly competitive application and interview process, he was offered a position in a graduate programme that included a scholarship and a part-time graduate assistantship. Even though he had accepted the offer, Nick spent the summer questioning his decision about the programme and graduate school in general. In the end, he decided to go, but still remained hesitant about his decision. Nick quickly made friends, but struggled in the workplace with establishing his 'identity'. The themes that commonly emerged in Nick's interviews were 'unmet expectations in the workplace', 'searching for happiness and fulfilment', and his 'desire for meaningful relationships'.

When asked for his *definition of transition* and when he thought he may be *through the post-university transition,* Nick said:

> *Just the period between… the in-between… the limbo. So, it's messy, it's not clean, it's uncertain, but you can't get from where you are to where you're going without experiencing it.*

> *I'm still transitioning. It's not something that just happened after graduation or in my first semester of grad school. Whenever I feel like I'm moving a step forward, something can make me feel like I'm falling two steps back. That's all a part of the journey, though.*

Piper

Piper was a Political Science major who had aspirations of attending law school. Part way through her studies, she realised she was more interested in business and sales than in law, but stayed with her major so that she could graduate on time. As a student, Piper worked part-time as an independent skin care consultant, which she continued to do after her studies. For the first six months after graduation, Piper worked a series of temporary retail jobs. She struggled with the fact that she had a degree but was still working jobs that paid minimum wage. She spent much of her time job searching and following-up on any opportunity she could find. Piper was aware of her strengths and interests, but she was unsure of her desired career path and had a difficult time accepting the uncertainty in this process. She lived part-time with her mom and part-time with her boyfriend. In March, nearly a year after graduation, she was offered a full-time sales job that utilised her degree and met her salary expectations. The themes that commonly emerged in Piper's interviews were 'uncertainty', 'lack of career direction', 'unmet expectations of her degree', 'support system', 'finances', 'health', and 'faith'.

When asked for her *definition of transition* and when she thought she may *be through the post-university transition*, Piper said:

> *The jump between this place of security to that place of security. Sometimes it can be just a jump… like going from high school to college… it was easy, but now I'm independent and taking care of my own finances… it's not so much a jump now as it is treading through swampy water.*

> *This is by far the biggest, most soul-searching, life-changing, scary transition that I have encountered. This transition has no structure to it… it's really just a leap into wherever… who knows when it's going to end.*

Raymond

Raymond majored in Business Finance. As a student, he did three internships (two of them paid) and was focused on getting work experience. He hoped that after graduation the part-time, paid internship that he worked in during his final year would become a full-time position; unfortunately, it did not. Raymond spent six weeks unemployed until he accepted a temporary, full-time position in the business of a family friend. Because he knew the job was temporary, Raymond continued to search and apply for jobs. After working the temporary job for four months, he was offered a full-time job at a large finance/accounting firm, which called for a degree-level qualification. He talked a lot about his transition into the workforce and his 'new identity' as a young professional. Raymond lived with his parents throughout his studies and beyond. He often talked about his post-university career transition, but felt there were other aspects of transition that he had yet to experience (for example: moving out of his parents' house, being financially independent). Other themes that commonly emerged in Raymond's interviews were 'faith' and the importance of his 'support system'.

When asked for his *definition of transition* and when he thought he may be *through the post-university transition*, Raymond said:

> *A time period or phase in your life when lots of things change.*

> *I'm in part one of the transition… from college until now… with finding a job and everything that went into it. But my living situation would be second part of that transition... the act of moving out and being on my own… and the completion of transition.*

Samantha

Samantha majored in Broadcasting and originally wanted to be a news reporter, but started questioning her decision during her final year of university. During the summer after graduation, she did an internship at a local news station. Although she was still uncertain about working in the news industry, writing and producing news seemed more appealing than reporting. At the end of her summer internship, Samantha was offered a part-time news writer position at the station. She accepted the part-time job, but also continued to work at the retail shop where she had been employed as a student. Samantha moved in with her mother after graduation in order to save money while she tried to figure out what she wanted to do, professionally and personally. The themes that commonly emerged in Samantha's interviews were 'uncertainty', 'comfort zone', 'expectations of others', 'finances', and finding 'life direction'.

When asked for her *definition of transition* and when she thought she may be *through the post-university transition*, Samantha said:

> *Starting off somewhere small and working your way up… like new beginnings… a whole new environment than something you've done before.*

> *I don't feel as though I'm completely done transitioning. I've faced the real-world, but I haven't gotten through it just yet. I'll know I'm done when I'm back on my feet. And that doesn't necessarily mean that I have to have the perfect job, be in grad school, etc…. I just want to be stable and know that I'm headed in the right career path.*

Shannon

Shannon majored in Nutrition until her final year when she changed her major to General Studies. She did not know what career path she wanted to pursue, but she knew it was no longer nutrition. In the final semester of her final year, she moved to Florida for a six-month internship. She did not do any job searching during this time, because she had planned to start her Master's degree after graduation. When she returned home from Florida, she met a guy and quickly 'fell in love'. He lived two hours away from where she planned to attend graduate school, and so she decided to look for other graduate programmes at institutions closer to him. She found one, and after being successfully admitted, she moved in with her boyfriend. One week into the programme, she decided it was not suited for her, and withdrew from her courses. Her boyfriend, who became her fiancé within the interview period, had recently started an internet marketing business. They decided that she could work for him and help to expand the company. Shannon often talked about how much she enjoyed her job, but struggled to stay motivated while working from home and not having much interaction with others. The themes that commonly emerged in Shannon's interviews were searching for 'happiness and fulfilment' in her work, 'health and fitness', and 'faith'.

When asked for her *definition of transition* and when she thought she may be *through the post-university transition*, Shannon said:

> *Going from one place to another.*

> *I think I'm pretty much in real life and toward the end of this transition…*
> *because I have a really good job. But I'm still in transition because I'm going*
> *from a single person to engaged to married. I think you're always in*
> *transition… or you're not growing anymore.*

Talon

Talon majored in Political Science. Before graduating, he applied for a full-time job and felt confident that he would be offered the position. After graduation, Talon moved in with his parents and worked a job paying minimum wage while he waited to hear about the position for which he had applied. He did not apply for any other employment opportunities during this time. Three months later, he found out that he had not been selected for the position, and began immediately searching for other jobs. After being unsuccessful at obtaining a job which called for a degree qualification, he accepted a position in sales and moved into an apartment on his own. Talon felt the job he had accepted was below his qualification and skill level, but knew he needed full-time employment. He often talked about the gratification he felt from making the amount money he did, but struggled with the feeling that his work was not valuable or fulfilling. He therefore continued to search for jobs throughout the research interview period. The themes that most commonly emerged in Talon's interviews were 'unmet expectations of degree', finding 'fulfilment and happiness' in his career, his 'desire for a meaningful relationship', 'finances', and his 'support system'.

When asked for his *definition of transition* and when he thought he may be *through the post-university transition*, Talon said:

> *Going from comfortable to not comfortable… From old to new… from old experiences that you're good at to new experiences that are up in the air.*

> *I think I'm done with the initial transition of school to work. But I'll experience another transition when I go from this job to another job or when a significant other comes into play. If I don't have my little transitions within the big transition, then I look at the big transition, and find it overwhelming.*

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced each of the twenty research participants and provided some information to help the reader better understand them individually. My aim was to describe each person's background and demonstrate a context for their post-university transition. I also included the research themes that most commonly emerged from interviews with each participant. I concluded each introduction with the participant's definition of transition and when they believed this transition, if so defined as such, would be (or was) over for them. I intentionally did not include any analysis of their views on transition, as I want the reader to interpret that information in their own way, which may be different from mine. This is in accordance with Schlossberg's quote used to introduce this chapter, where the meaning of transition is held in the perception of the definer. In the following chapters, I present the emergent research themes and utilise excerpts from the participants' interviews to illustrate those themes.

Introduction to Research Findings Chapters

In the following four chapters, I present the research findings through the emergent themes and use excerpts of the participants' interviews to illustrate each theme. The data are organised into four main themes that seem to encapsulate the participants' experiences and perspectives: *Shifting Identities* (Chapter 6), *Searching* (Chapter 7), *Unmet Expectations* (Chapter 8), *and Stabilisers* (Chapter 9).

The *Shifting Identities* theme represents the idea expressed by participants that there is a shift when you graduate from university – that you stop being thought of by yourself and others as a particular identity (student), and you adopt new identities as a non-student. *Searching* results from and is linked to shifting identities, as participants talked about their experiences of uncertainty in their search for life beyond 'student'. This theme encompasses feelings of needing or lacking something in life and the search for and exploration of finding it. The theme of *Unmet Expectations* is associated with the general expectation that a degree leads not only to employment, but meaningful work and improved financial situations. Each of these three themes suggests a situation of confusion and difficulty in the post-university transition. Nevertheless, participants also talked about events, people, actions, and thoughts that helped them cope and get on with life; I call these *Stabilisers.*

Within each of the four chapters, I define the main theme in the introduction and then present the related sub-themes individually. I use excerpts from the participants' interviews to illustrate the sub-themes and then offer an interpretation. Finally, I link each sub-theme with the relevant literature. I have chosen to integrate the literature in this manner in order to provide a thorough interpretation and discussion of each sub-theme.

My data demonstrate that the post-university transition is complex, untidy, and has many overlapping elements. However, through the organisation and presentation of themes, I attempt to communicate my interpretation of this 'messy' experience in an understandable way. The presentation of research findings are my attempt to provide meaning the participants ascribe to their experiences and perspectives of the post-university transition. The data presented in the following four chapters demonstrate the research findings which address research questions 1 and 2:

- *What are the experiences of young, recent university graduates?*
- *What are the perspectives of young, recent university graduates?*

While my aim is to demonstrate these findings as transferable, particularly for the sake of informing higher education practitioners of what this transition may encompass for recent graduates, they are not prescriptive for all individuals facing the post-university transition, as my research is time and context bound.

Chapter 6

Shifting Identities

Since I didn't have an environment defining me, I had to start answering questions… and that's everything... My identity isn't student anymore.

Justin's statement is one of many made during the research interviews about an identity shift after graduation. In this theme, I will interpret Justin's and other participants' words expressing similar sentiments. I use the term 'shifting' to describe this theme as it denotes movement in the present tense. The participants in this study may not have changed (yet), but rather are in the process or movement of change. I also use the plural of the word 'identity' in recognition that identities are complex, multi-faceted, and may involve shifts in perspective, circumstances, and roles (Anderson et al., 2012). "Identity has two major parts: the *I* that is not related to others, and the *I* that is interdependent with friends, family, and work" (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 29). Using Schlossberg's definition, in this section I address *personal* identity (a set of characteristics by which we define ourselves), *relational* identity, and *public* identity (how others may define or label us). Troll (1982) defines a stable identity as having "strongly defined social roles, feels at home in work, family, affiliations, and sex roles" (p. 18). The crisis of identity is "reawakened whenever the individual experiences a major transition" (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 22), and if one fails to re-establish identity, it may result in *role diffusion* – "ill at ease and lost in groups and affiliations" (Troll, 1982, p. 18).

The emergent sub-themes within this cluster share the similarity that life is now different for the participants than it was before; that their routines, relationships, identities, and/or their perception of such identities have shifted (or are shifting). The sub-themes discussed within

Shifting Identities are: *personal identity: comfort zone, relational identity, public identity, identity flux: the in-between, and identity acceptance: life perspective*.

Personal Identity: Comfort Zone

Personal identity, in this context, is the way in which the participants characterised and defined themselves, personally. The participants often determined their level of comfort through a regular routine, and when that routine changed, so did the way in which they defined themselves. The participants repeatedly addressed the idea that they had left a place or group in which they were comfortable and familiar, and were in the process of trying to find a new place of comfort. A number of participants referred to this as their 'comfort zone'. The idea of comfort zone started emerging as a sub-theme within the first month of interviews. Most of the participants talked about how they made decisions based on their comfort zone. For example, some talked about moving out of State or country, but found it difficult to do so, as their current situation was comfortable due to friends, familiarity, or finances. The participants seemed to make sense of their present circumstances by framing them in relation to their previous ones. For example, the notion of comfort zone was typically communicated by the participants in one of two ways: either that their life at university was comfortable or familiar, but their current situation was not (*then* comfortable, *now* not); or that their transition period after graduation was not comfortable, but now a new comfort zone had been established (*then* not, but *now* comfortable). Below, I provide examples of both of these *then* and *now* sentiments.

> *Before graduating, my comfort zone was staying busy all the time, going to meetings and activities, planning programs, etc. Since I've been out of school I don't really know what my comfort zone is. It's funny because you'd think it would be easier for me being out of school- I never have to worry about homework or anything like that- I mean, I go to work, go home, watch TV, pay*

bills, and do it over again. However, to me, that's totally out of my comfort
zone and gives me way too much time to think.

Here Christine discussed aspects of her life that made her feel comfortable at university, and suggested that although she did not know what her new comfort zone was, she knew she was not in it based on how she spent her time. Similarly, Ben described his time at university as 'very comfortable', but his new situation as 'starting all over' with the unfamiliar.

> *I left a very comfortable situation. I was surrounded by lots of friends, being a*
> *leader, known to everyone on my college campus, and having opportunities to*
> *pursue. Now at medical school, it's like the first day of college all over again.*
> *According to everyone else you are just another guy; they have no idea about*
> *your previous life experiences, your passions, what you like, and what you're*
> *capable of. It's like you build up your personality and lifestyle just to be*
> *placed in a new situation and start all over.*

Piper's perception of comfort at university was similar; she described her transition as, "*going from having a nice little place that makes sense for you to be, to having no safety net.*" From a different perspective, Damon and Talon talked about having gone through an uncomfortable period after graduation, but having now found a new sense of familiarity. Damon discussed how finding balance helped him to feel more comfortable:

> *I don't much care for change, so it was uncomfortable changing life. But, I*
> *feel like I am starting to get comfortable again. I think I have realized that just*
> *because it's the next step does not mean I'm full-out grown up. I go out and*
> *have fun, and that's okay. I'm not married, and that's okay for now too. I have*
> *more responsibility and more stress, but I am learning to understand this new*
> *stage.*

Damon acknowledged that his life was different than before, but that he could still do some of the same activities (go out and have fun) to help him establish a new comfort zone.

Similarly, Talon had an 'uneasy' period, but was 'thankful' for his situation and that his job offered a way for him to feel comfortable again:

> *The first three months after college were a little uneasy, but I am so thankful for the job I found. Who cares that it isn't the job that I thought I would be doing or the fact that I don't want to do it the rest of my life. None of that really matters. I am 23 years old. I am so young. I am comfortable in my situation, and I am blessed that I can feel that way.*

Both Damon and Talon demonstrated that as they established a new comfort zone, they also re-established their personal identity. Although the majority of participants expressed their comfort zone in terms of these *then* and *now* sentiments, Jade discussed the idea of comfort differently, saying that she found comfort in the *midst* of transition – "*I do feel like this transition has an element of comfort to it, but it's more like trying to become comfortable with the person that you are instead of a comfort with what surrounds you.*" Unlike the other participants, her *then* and *now* surroundings did not determine her comfort zone, but rather she described a process becoming comfortable with herself.

Part of Schlossberg's (1995) definition of transition included "a change in routines" (p. 27). As demonstrated in the data, having routine was comforting for the participants, and when that routine changed, they began to question the aspects of their lives that defined what they did and 'who' they were personally. Similarly, in Schlossberg's (1981, 1984, 1995, 2006, 2012) model/theory, she addressed the 'change of environment' as an element of transition, which was also demonstrated here in the data. Furthermore, Van Gennep (1960, 2004) discussed the process of leaving an old group and establishing oneself in a new group as an aspect of transition and a 'rite of passage'. As demonstrated, an element of comfort for participants while at university was having friendships and a group to which they belonged, and leaving that was a significant event. One of Graham and McKensie's (1995) research

findings in their study of transition was the shift in comfort zone from university to the unknown workplace. My research findings support the relevant literature, but also demonstrate the connection between personal identity and a sense of comfort. As shown with Damon and Talon, once they established their new comfort zone (workplace), they had something new with which to personally identify (worker/professional).

Relational Identity

A topic that frequently emerged in discussion with the participants was that of relationships with family and friends. As the participants' living situations, daily routines, and personal identities shifted after graduation, so did their relationships. They often explained that they were at 'a different place' emotionally and geographically than they had been as a student, and that that affected their relationships. The data on the participants' physical and then emotional separation from others demonstrate this sub-theme.

Meggs' relationships with her family and friends shifted after graduation when she moved in with her parents and away from her friends.

> *My parents knew this* [living with them] *wasn't what I wanted, so they were just like – call us your roommates… don't call us your parents. Say you're living with adult roommates, and that you're getting rent for free as long as you take care of the dog and do the dishes. So, they tried to make it funny and make me feel okay about it. None of my friends are living at home, and I'm the only one with my parents and living away from everybody, which is also a big issue. It's a long drive everywhere… I don't want to drive to the town they live in… it's like a 45 minute drive, and I have to pay for gas. So my social life has been a little on the wreck side.*

By moving back in with her parents, Meggs had to negotiate her changed role in the family. She also lived further away from friends, which made it more difficult to meet with them.

Brian's relationships also shifted because of a geographical move. Working in musical theatre, he spent much of his time travelling and performing around the country and noted a sense of loss with his changed relational identity:

> *My friends and social life have taken quite the fall since I graduated. I miss them all very much. It is hard going through a lot of the stuff I've been through without them around to help guide and comfort me.*

Similarly, Christine worried that her shifting relationships, both physical and emotional, would involve a loss:

> *My friends still are wonderful and always will be. However, I've been thinking about how things are probably going to start to change soon. My roommate is moving in June, and she's one of my best friends, and a lot of my other friends are going to be graduating and moving on within the next year or so. I guess I'm a little afraid of being left behind and forgotten. That's happened to me a lot in the past, and now that I'm going through this significant stage of my life, the experience is magnified.*

Christine evaluated where she was in her own life by comparing herself to her friends. She also compared her current feelings to those she had felt in similar experiences in the past, which was something the participants did often when talking about their shifting relationships. Similarly, Amber compared her current friendships with those she had experienced while at university. She perceived both a physical and emotional shift:

> *I used to be a part of my degree program and a sorority, and always around a homecoming team or greek week team. Now I teach at my school, but the teachers and I don't hang out, and I don't have a church group of friends. I feel more and more alone. I wonder if that is a part of growing older – you don't have as many close friends that you see on a regular basis.*

Because she was not in close proximity to friends as much, she expressed her feelings of being alone and that she missed being a part of a group. It was interesting that Amber associated being alone as an aspect of getting older. When Lisa compared her current feelings to those she had felt in past, she pointed out that even though the high school to university transition involved a new learning environment and living situation, *"you were surrounded by friends who were going through the same things, and it was much more exciting."* She went on to compare that transition to the post-university transition:

> *In this* [post-university] *transition, you are often at a different place than your friends… even if it's happening at the same time for all of you. After college you stop being on track with other people. You are now moving at your own pace… whatever that may be. Even though I am moving through this stage with my two best friends, we are still very much in different places because of our perspectives, life experiences, and other friends.*

Even though Lisa lived with two friends, she explained the emotional distance of not being 'on track with other people'. The shift in relationships with friends and family is referred to in the definitions of transition. Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) definition included that transition often consists of a 'change in relationships'. George's (1993) definition included 'change in status' as an aspect of transition. My findings have demonstrated that when participants' status shifted, their relationships with others were also affected. The literature that focuses on the *importance* of relationships in transition, as opposed to the *shift* in relationships, is further discussed in the *Searching* and *Stabilisers* themes.

Public Identity

Public identity is "the *I* that is interdependent with friends, family, and work," as Schlossberg (1984, p. 29) defined it. It is how others may define or label us, or how we define ourselves publicly. Often this label is used in relation to a profession. This sub-theme illustrates how

the participants defined (or struggled to define) themselves publicly after graduation. Within the first two of months of interviews, a number of participants discussed how their non-student status had provoked them to think about how they publicly or professionally labelled themselves after graduation. Those who had jobs saw themselves according to their profession (for example: a teacher, nurse, or accountant). However, participants who were not yet in a professional job, often discussed their struggle to identify themselves publically. These conversations particularly occurred when the participants were reflecting on what their lives were like while at university in comparison to the present.

Talon pointed out that even though he now labelled himself as a 'salesman' professionally instead of a 'student', what he cared about and valued (his personal identity) had not changed. Ben said that although he was still labelled as a student, because he was studying to be a medical doctor, his life was different from what it had been as an undergraduate. Issues of shifting public identity primarily emerged in three ways: change in environment, shift in how time was spent, and increased level of responsibility. I illustrate the data in this order.

Justin reflected on a moment of realisation about his shifting identity early in the post-university transition:

> [I realised] *I don't really have a home… I don't have a place that defines me that says- this is where you're from, and this is what you're supposed to do, and this is the way things are supposed to go. And that often led me to morphing myself to the expectations that others had for me, because there wasn't a solid identity. Since I didn't have an environment defining me, I had to start answering questions… and that's been everything.*

Justin's feelings of a 'solid identity' were based on his relationship with the environment, and when he left that environment, he began questioning his identity. He continued by saying, "*My identity isn't student anymore… or student body president. I'm far from being done in*

this process, but I'm recognising it and trying different things to do something about it." In talking about shifting identity, he considered what he was 'not' and recognised that establishing a new public identity would take time. The notion of no longer being a student was also highlighted in Jade's comment:

> *There was a sad moment when I realized I wasn't going back to school…*
> *because I'd always been in school. Over the summer, I had gotten used to the*
> *fact that if my boyfriend and I were home together and awake – we'd always*
> *be hanging out. And then he went back to school… and I thought – this isn't*
> *fun… what am I supposed to do?*

In Jade's case, her boyfriend returning to university served as a trigger that brought her public identity into question. Wondering what one was supposed to do was expressed by other participants struggling with their identity. Christine, for example, talked about a moment of realisation about how she spent her time since not being a student:

> *I was in an interview the other day, and the guy was like– what other hobbies*
> *do you have? And I paused… and could not think of any hobbies! And that's*
> *the stupidest question not to have an answer to! I completely made something*
> *up and said that I like to take pictures, because I had no idea what to say. So, I*
> *realized that I need to get some hobbies, because in college being involved*
> *with student activities was my hobby.*

Because Christine had built her life around being a university student, she realised the need to establish new activities as a non-student. Damon talked about how his new 'adult' activities increased his level of responsibility, and how that 'freaked him out':

> *The first place I lived in college, the roof fell in every other month, and the*
> *second place the heater didn't work. So, now I have a house, it is painted, the*
> *heater works in the whole house, and it's really nice. But being an adult is still*
> *freaking me out. When something in my house broke the other day – that was*
> *really an adult moment, because the landlord wasn't there to just fix it. I have*

141

> *higher expectations placed on me, and it has been interesting to begin to*
> *realize that that is happening.*

Damon's comment captures the concern that a number of participants expressed when describing their shift to being a non-student.

The data illustrate how the participants' public identities shifted when they were no longer students, and how that was affected by their environment, how they spent their time, and their increased level of responsibility. This sub-theme of public identity is supported in the transition literature. For example, Schlossberg (1984) listed 'identity' as one of the recurring themes in adult transition. She explained that in the process of identity exploration "everything the person has done is put into question… aspirations are critically examined and more often then not, they are found wanting" (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 23). George (1993) argued that a component of transition is 'change in status', and as student and non-student are status positions promoted by the public, this relates to public identity. Chickering and Reisser (1993), in their study on student development, addressed 'establishing identity' as one of the seven vectors of development, which may also include personal, relational, and public identity. Chickering and Schlossberg's (1995) small-scale study on university graduates demonstrated that 'clarifying a new identity' (personal and/or public) after graduation is one of the key issues that graduates confront. My findings support the previous literature on identity, which further demonstrates the relevance of drawing from transition literature when attempting to build a foundation for informing educational practices.

Identity Flux: The In-between

As the participants described their shifting personal, relational, and public identities, a number of them spoke about feeling 'in-between' life roles and described conflicts between aspects of their fluctuating identities. For example, they talked about the financial benefits of

working full-time, but also the increased responsibility of being an 'adult'. They discussed their desire to be viewed as professionals and to progress in their careers, but also the desire to be young, care-free, and have fun. Their opposing feelings came up in conversation repeatedly and within each of the six months of interviews. Here, the data demonstrate the struggle the participants expressed.

> *Life has been keeping me in this box. I'm not here and I'm not there. I really love and hate the fact that I'm doing it alone. I see adulthood as it relates to stability as a suffocating move. I realize you can make your life what you want it, but the more I think of settling down in my job, the more I am afraid that I will be tied down.*

Justin used a range of words to describe his feelings: here-there, love-hate, stability-suffocating, settling-tied down, which indicates his struggle with his identity flux. Damon expressed a similar struggle with his desire to progress professionally but to keep other elements of his life stable.

> *I have progressed professionally and as far as living, and life, and a job, but I've paused all other progression. My relationships are staying on the same level; I'm keeping all the same friends level; communication level is the same… and I just don't want anything else to change, because I'm too freaked out.*

Damon reacted to all the change in his life by trying to limit that change he could control. His 'freaked out' feelings were similarly expressed by other participants. I asked Damon where he thought those feelings came from, and he said:

> *I liked what I was doing… I liked college… I had way too much fun… I regret not having enough fun. So, I think my freaked outed-ness is that if I keep going in the adult life progression, I'm getting farther away from what I like and what I love to do… which is to be young, not have concerns, not have worries,*

> *not have a mortgage. I have a very small window to keep doing what I'm*
> *doing, and I see that, and I'm not wanting to give that up yet.*

Damon believed that as he continued his transition into adulthood, he was further separating himself from the aspects in his life that made him feel young. His feelings of conflict were further demonstrated when he later said, *I'm fighting it… I'm fighting the serious adult thing… daily!"* Lisa also expressed hesitation about becoming an adult, specifically in terms of a 'forever job':

> *I know what kind of job I will need to be in someday, but right now I don't*
> *know that I am emotionally ready to be doing what I want as a career forever.*
> *I want more than I have now, but I don't feel ready for the forever job. I feel*
> *like I still need to experience new and different things before I will feel*
> *prepared for that "big job".*

She attributed feeling in-between to not being 'emotionally ready'. It was as if she viewed a 'career job' as a commitment that she could not change her mind about later. These expressions of indecision and identity flux were communicated by a number of the participants.

Hassler (2008) defined transition as "an in-between stage of life… putting you at unfamiliar crossroads" (p. 2), which is what the data also demonstrate. Additionally, as the participants gave their definition of transition (Chapter 5), they often described it in a similar way to Hassler's definition. Hogan's (1981), Arnett's (2004), and Farner and Brown's (2008) research findings indicated that feelings of in-between and conflicting identities are aspects of emerging adulthood. Furthermore, Schlossberg's transition model (Anderson et al., 2012) suggests that characteristics of an individual may change (flux) during transition. The data presented here not only demonstrate the changing feelings or experiences recent graduates may have, but they also begin to illuminate the complexity and struggle within those changes.

Identity Acceptance: Shifting Perspective

As the participants' situations, environments, and roles shifted, so did their perspectives on themselves and their world. The data presented in this sub-theme are from the final interviews with the participants; nearly one year after they had graduated. This demonstrates that over time, even if the participants' situations had not changed, they had begun to accept them and to accept themselves. For example, Meggs talked about learning about herself:

> *Living by myself has been great… and just evaluating what I'm all about. My*
> *TV isn't working, and so I've just been sitting and reading and evaluating*
> *myself. I think the transition is enlightening and interesting. I've had to learn*
> *a lot about myself.*

For the first time in our interviews, Meggs expressed her feelings about the post-university transition positively, indicating her shift in perspective. Jade also talked about learning more about herself:

> *I have been having such an eye opening experience and really getting to know*
> *myself so much better. I feel like the things I was so worried about have gone*
> *away or found a new way to come to fruition. I also enjoy that I am becoming*
> *a more global citizen and getting to learn about so many other perspectives,*
> *and that it is changing my life for the better.*

By being exposed to new people and new ways of thinking, Jade found herself 'changing for the better'. It seemed as though she worried less about her life when she put it in perspective with those of others'. Nick also talked about worrying, and how this spurred him on to shift his perspective:

> *I feel hopeful about next year, but still hesitant, anxious, and trying to not feel*
> *worried. I am determined to make the best of whatever situation I find myself.*
> *I'm going to try and not feel like things are out of my control, because at the*

very least how I respond to things is within my control. I control how I react,
and that's really all that life is about - reacting. So I choose to be positive,
optimistic, and proud! I'm very proud of what I have accomplished this year.
I'm learning, and I'm becoming a professional.

Nick's perspective shifted in that he took responsibility for himself and his own emotions. Instead of his feelings and reactions being dictated by his situation, he was making a conscious effort to 'choose' how he would react. Similarly, Julie decided that she would not let the uncertainty of her situation dictate how she felt:

I feel good most days. Some days I'm a little down, but I just keep trying to tell
myself it's okay to not know all about the future, because it's all in God's
plan, and it's going to work out. It's okay to not know what I want to do, or
what I am going to be doing two weeks from now. It's okay.

In our first interview, Julie was distressed and in tears as she described her feelings of uncertainty. Although she still had similar feelings in our last interview, her approach to handling that uncertainty had shifted. She also credited her faith to playing a role in this shift. Other participants echoed Julie's perspective of uncertainty, but over time they decided to approach it differently. For example, Justin said:

Many of the events of this past month have kicked my ass. Deciding to have a
life worth being excited about does not happen overnight, as we have seen in
the past few months. At low points I have doubted myself, frustrated with
lessons I thought I had learned, but still have work to do. However, things are
on an upswing, and I am starting to see some light at the end of this 1-year-
since-graduation tunnel. I am lonely some days and frustrated. But, I really
have nothing to be concerned about. Things will happen in due time. All in all,
I like not fighting the process. Everything really is a process.

Even though Justin was not exactly at the place in life he thought he would be a year after graduation, he had accepted that. In my early conversations with Justin, he talked about 'fighting' this transition, and his comment here demonstrates his shift in perspective.

Chickering and Schlossberg's (1995) research suggests that 'developing a life span perspective' is one of the primary aspects of leaving university. Schlossberg (1984) included 'change in perspective' as an aspect of identity shift. This sub-theme is also demonstrated in Adams et al.'s (1976) and Lewis and Parker's (1981) models of transition expressed as the stages of 'searching for meaning' and 'acceptance'. Providing participants with the opportunity to reflect on their shift in perspective over a year was an important aspect of my research. It allowed participants to acknowledge to themselves that they had learned to accept themselves and their situation.

Shifting Identities Summary

Each sub-theme presented in this chapter represents the ways that participants perceived their shifting identities within themselves, their relationship with others, and how they are labelled. These interview excerpts help demonstrate the emotional reaction participants experienced with their identity shifts. They also help to highlight that shifting identities are not discrete, rather they are interconnected and overlapping in the post-university transition. Some participants experienced more 'shifting' elements immediately after graduation, while others did not experience these aspects until months into their transition. Furthermore, a number of participants consistently experienced aspects of shifting identities throughout the entire first year after graduation. There were not specific or predetermined times when individuals experienced these shifts. Rather, individual characteristics, situations, and environments influenced when and how shifting identities occurred throughout the post-university transition.

In Chapter 2, I made the assertion that transition literature may be a foundation for higher education sectors to build upon, establish, and inform their practices with final-year students. Moreover, I also demonstrated that this transition had not previously been explored through the lens of higher education. In this chapter, I provided evidence that my findings of *shifting identities* support the previous research. Therefore, the relevance of transition literature is further established and possible connections between previous transition research and higher education can be more robustly explored.

Chapter 7

Searching

There are things I want to do, but it's almost like I don't even know where to begin to search and look.

Julie's sentiment about not knowing where to search exemplifies the comments participants made about their transition. The data in this theme illustrate how participants were searching for, in exploration of, or needing and lacking something within the post-university transition. The sub-themes presented here are *uncertainty, lack of direction, desire for fulfilment and happiness, desire for meaningful relationships,* and *the emotions of searching.* The data presented in this chapter primarily illustrate the participants' thoughts, feelings, and perspectives associated with the post-university transition.

Uncertainty

Aspects of uncertainty frequently emerged in the data, as participants talked about their feelings in daily encounters (for example: relationships, living situation, and finances) and also in relation to broader issues (for example: career, life goals, and the future). The participants often attributed their career uncertainty to factors such as having earned a generic degree, rather than a subject specific degree, or to not having planned their next steps after graduation, or simply to having not yet identified what they wanted to pursue. This sub-theme particularly emerged when participants talked about not knowing *what* to do and *how* to do it, and I use these terms to organise the presentation of data in this section (see underlining in interview excerpts). I begin with Carley who said that she did not know *what* to do and felt 'stuck in not knowing':

> *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 it's 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.*

Carley's idea of lack of control was commonly discussed by the participants. Her uncertainty is also demonstrated in her choice of words throughout her interviews – saying 'I don't know' and 'I can't explain' were common expressions. As Carley described feeling 'stuck', Brian explained he was 'spinning' – "*I would say that I'm very uncertain right now… I just have no clue what's going to happen. I'm just kind of spinning.*" Similarly, Christine discussed her uncertainty in terms of *what* to do:

> *I have no idea <u>what</u> I'm supposed to do with my life! I keep trying to tell myself that I'm still young and that's okay… a lot of people don't know, but it's hard to have that mindset after you've gone through four years of college. You feel like you go to high school, go to college, get a job, have a family, and live happily ever after. I guess I feel like I have no idea <u>what</u> I'm supposed to do with my life… and my degree is so broad that's it's hard to narrow it down to <u>what</u> I'm supposed to do.*

Christine attributed some of her uncertainty to having a general degree, but also said that she expected to have more certainty after having studied for four years. Jerry talked about his uncertainty with *what* to do and his struggle with knowing *how* to decide:

> *I feel like I'm supposed to be doing something different, but I still don't know <u>what</u> I'm supposed to do. I want to figure out <u>what</u> I want to do first, and then use my resources and network, so they matter. But I don't know <u>how</u> to figure it out… I have no idea.*

Other participants, who did not obtain a professional job soon after graduation, expressed a similar sense of struggle. Piper expressed similar feelings of uncertainty about *how* to get a job:

> *I've always thought- you go to college, get a scholarship, you make A's and B's, and that's the plan. Then after that, you go on to get a career. And that's where I kind of feel… not that it dead ends, but it's a branch without a leaf… you're just not sure. I mean, I know where I'm supposed to be going, but what do I do now? I don't know <u>how</u> to do this… I don't know <u>how</u> to job search.*

Piper talked about how she had had a plan in the past and that even though she knew where she was 'supposed to be going' now, she did not know *how* to get there. Similarly, Samantha talked about her desire to work in the entertainment industry, and the frustration of not knowing *how* to get where she wanted to be:

> *I'm still a bit unsure as to <u>what</u> I want to do. I know I want to work within the entertainment industry, I just don't know who, what, when, where, or <u>how</u> I should go about this. It's a bit frustrating because I really need to figure out <u>what</u> I want to do with the rest of my life. It's time for me to get refocused.*

Samantha's emphasis on 'the rest of her life' was an issue discussed by a number of participants. They expressed the need to figure it *all* out, as if they were making a decision that would last forever. Similar to Samantha expressing her desire to 'get refocused', Meggs talked about her desire to be 'on top of her game' like she used to be:

> *In August, I started evaluating and thinking that I needed to do something, but I didn't know <u>how</u>. I didn't know <u>how</u> I was going to get a job… the economy was crap… and I was living at my parents. I was seeing some of my friends be very successful, and was like – why are they so successful and have their life together? And I was like – why don't I have that? Why isn't my life together? I always like to be at the top of my game, but I wasn't, and I knew I wasn't.*

Meggs expressed her frustration at not knowing *how* to get a job. In this, she compared herself to her peers and cited the economy as a reason for not having a job.

Most of the participants expressed concerns about their uncertainty; the only exception was for the participants who had completed a more subject specific degree programme (for example: nursing, education, accounting). Although they still expressed uncertainty within other aspects of their lives, these participants did not question 'what to do' or 'how to do it' as much as the participants with more generic degrees. For example, Macey expressed feeling nervous before she took her State Nursing Exam, but after she received her results, she immediately started work as a nurse. Similarly, Amber expressed uncertainty while job searching, but never questioned 'what to do' as she was confident in pursuing a career in education.

Golan (1981) defined transition as a period between one state of certainty and another with uncertainty in between. Levinson et al. (1978) said transition involves turning points between two stable periods, implying a period of instability between. Williams (1999) listed uncertainty as a stage in his transition model, identifying it as an 'inner-contradiction' in the transition process. Arnett (2004) identified 'instability' as an aspect of emerging adulthood. As demonstrated, my findings support the previous literature that has explored adult transitions. However, my study is the first to explore and demonstrate this perspective from individuals leaving university. Therefore, this data may inform higher education sectors of what their students may be feeling, which may inform practices for helping students discover *what* they want to do and *how* to do it. Furthermore, it may be important for institutions to note that students with less vocation-specific degrees may need more support in this area.

Lack of Direction

This sub-theme builds on the sub-theme of uncertainty, as it also demonstrates confusion, exploration, and feelings of being lost. However, this sub-theme emerged when participants went beyond feeling uncertain, and specifically addressed having felt unprepared for life after

study. Furthermore, if uncertainty represented feelings of *what* to do and *how* to do it, then lack of direction represents feelings of *where* to go and how to get from *here* to *there*. Some participants expressed these feelings with reference to graduation, leaving university, and having delayed making plans while at university. Other participants continued to express a sense of lack of direction throughout their first year after graduation.

While talking about his graduation experience, Damon described feeling confused about how to get from *where* he was to *where* he aspired to be:

> [After graduation] *it was confusing trying to figure out what was next. I knew my long term goals and was focused in that sense, but didn't know <u>how</u> to connect from <u>here</u> to <u>there</u>. It was like - good bye, you're graduated and done… go do your thing… and I was kind of like – ugh… okay.*

Damon talked about graduation as if it happened swiftly by using the words 'done' and 'good bye', which implies a lack of closure. Furthermore, he went on to express his sense of not being ready for his time at university to end. Amber expressed similar feelings about graduation, and explained that she was not mentally ready for it, as if it had sneaked up on her:

> *I had the feeling of – crap, life is moving on, but I don't know if mentally I've moved on. And now I kind of know what I want… I'm <u>not there</u> yet, but it's what I'm working toward… I'm just trying to figure out which path to take to get <u>there</u>.*

Amber knew what she wanted, but lacked direction. Macey had many friends struggling with direction in their lives, and she said she could understand how they felt:

> *Something needs to be done if we live in a society where the majority of parents/teachers plan out most kids' lives from kindergarten to their senior year of high school, and those same kids are supposed to magically figure*

everything out on their own when they become young adults. It just doesn't make sense. So I don't know how I figured it out early, but I just knew what I wanted to be, and never changed my mind.

Macey suggested that most students have had guidance through each step of their lives until now, and that this was the reason why so many of her peers struggled with life on their own. She attributed not having similar 'lost' feelings to having selected a career path early on and never changing her mind about it. In contrast, Christine changed her major many times and had previously addressed the issue of having a 'broad degree'. Eight months after graduation, Christine talked about still lacking direction:

I still feel like I need direction because I have no idea <u>where</u> I'm headed right now. I think that's why I can't pin-point it and can't explain it… because I have no idea <u>where</u> I'm headed. I have no idea if I'm going to stay in [this State] *or if I'm going to move. I really want to go to grad school, but that's not an option if I don't have a full-time job.*

Schlossberg (1984) identified generativity (renewal and achievement) as one of the themes in adult transitions. She described the crisis point in the process toward generativity as "the feeling that life is static, that one is in a rut…" (p. 33). Similar expressions could be found in this data. Williams' (1999) transition cycle lists 'confusion' and 'losing confidence' following uncertainty, which are also feelings expressed in the data. Fisher and Savage (1999) identified 'anxiety' as a stage in their transition model, which can also be discerned in the participants' perspectives. My data support the findings of previous research on adult transitions, which further demonstrates this field as a potential foundation in which to inform strategies for higher education practices.

Desire for Fulfilment and Happiness

Participants frequently expressed their desire to find fulfilment and happiness in their lives. Some discussed this desire in terms of work and wanting a job where they felt fulfilled; others addressed this in terms of their personal lives. Some told stories of how they had sought (or were in the process of seeking) to identify what fulfilled them most. For example, Amber was satisfied with her job and what she had accomplished so far in her career; however, she had yet to determine what truly made her happy:

> *I feel like I've accomplished college and what I wanted career wise… I'm teaching in a district that I wanted and the type of students that I wanted, but I still don't feel like I'm where I wanted to necessarily be. I really feel like I'm being prepared for a season of winter in my personal life, and I feel like it is a time for self-discovery.*

Amber hoped to find happiness and 'where she wanted to be' through a process of self-discovery. Carley, too, had yet to find what made her happy, but she had concluded that happiness was most important:

> *I don't know what my happy moments are… to be honest. I feel like they happen at different times. I still have an interest in travelling and having a successful career, but I think I've realized that happiness is the most important thing, and that if you're happy then you're successful.*

Carley recognised her interests in travelling and having a successful career, but defined success as finding happiness. Jade also recognised a couple of practical aspects of her life that made her happy:

> *I've just been thinking about what I am truly passionate about, and what in my life I can and can't give up… I absolutely don't ever want to give up dance…. It's one of the biggest stress relievers. And I absolutely have to travel… it's*

> *like freedom and flexibility, and before I didn't realize that I needed that*
> *freedom and flexibility. And that's been really nice in this process… just*
> *realizing the things that I need in my life that make me happy.*

Jade determined that happiness involved making time for the things that she was passionate about, and that those relieved stress and gave her a sense of freedom. Similarly, Justin talked about finding fulfilment by making particular aspects of his life important:

> *I just go to work every day and come home, and unless I purposefully make*
> *things outside of work a very important part of my life, I just get home and it's*
> *really lonely and boring… because there's nothing fulfilling about a job that*
> *you're doing for someone else. Even if you're passionate about your job, if*
> *that job is connected to a dollar sign, your fulfillment better be found in*
> *something else, because all it takes is that money to go away, and that thing*
> *that fulfills you can be emptied out immediately.*

He later gave the example of ballroom dancing as an activity that he had purposefully made time for because it gave him fulfilment. Justin determined that a job and money were not his source of fulfilment. Similarly, Talon talked about not being motivated by money:

> *I'm not miserable, but what I have a problem with is that I'm not motivated by*
> *money, and that's just about the only motivation in my business. I want to have*
> *an impact on people's lives, and that's why I'm not happy with that… so its*
> *not that the job is making me unhappy, it's the lack of gratification that's*
> *bothering me.*

Talon went beyond providing examples of activities that he found fulfilling, but rather defined fulfilment through having an 'impact on people's lives'.

Arnett (2004) addressed that finding fulfilment in work, or other activities, is a priority for emerging adults. Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors of development identified 'developing purpose' as a key contributor to identity formation for young adults. In

'developing purpose', they include 'making meaningful commitments to specific interests and activities'. The data demonstrate that participants were either in the process of doing this or had already done so. My findings support the conclusions of earlier literature on adult transitions by demonstrating that recent graduates are also searching for fulfilment and happiness in transition. Furthermore, my data findings cast light on what individuals in the post-university transition recognise as personally important and valuable, which also may be useful for educational sectors who wish to better understand their students/graduates.

Desire for Meaningful Relationships

Participants also expressed the view that an aspect of this transition was their increased desire for meaningful relationships. I use the word 'meaningful' as the participants described their desire for more depth, intimacy, and commitment, specifically in romantic relationships. They explained that as students their relationships were more wide than deep, and that they did not desire a marital-type commitment in their romantic relationships, but that this had now changed. Although the participants did mention their desire for camaraderie and the importance of friendships in this transition, this sub-theme particularly emerged in reference to romantic relationships. Here, Talon expressed his desires:

> *The only thing I would change about my life other than my job is that I wish I was in a romantic relationship. I was told that I was going to meet someone in college, but that didn't happen… and where do I look now?*

Throughout the interview period Talon repeatedly expressed his desire to be in a relationship. His question of 'where to look' and find a relationship (after leaving university) was a common one among the participants who were single. Damon talked about there being fewer opportunities to meet new people and find potential relationships than there had been at university. He also talked about his desire to be in a relationship with someone who was at a

similar point in their life. Nick talked about not necessarily wanting to get married soon, but his desire to attract someone with marriage potential:

> *I am now looking for something different in a relationship... partly because of my new year's resolution and partly because several friends have gotten engaged recently. It's reminding me not necessarily that I want to get married soon, but that I want to start acting like the kind of guy that would be attractive to the kind of girl I hope to marry.*

As Nick pointed out, the engagement of several friends contributed to his desire to start thinking about this. As all the data in this study were time and context bound, it may be important to note that in the State the participants were from, it is common for young people to be engaged and married within a few years of having finished university. (According to the U.S. Consensus Bureau (2007), this State has the second youngest median age for first-time marriages [22.7 years old women and 24.9 for men]). To further demonstrate this sub-theme, Lisa talked about her desire to be married:

> *A huge part of the stress is where I am in my relationship. My boyfriend and I have known each other since we were 11, and been dating almost 5½ years. Now I'm ready to get married… I want to be married… I'm ready to start a family soon… and all those things.*

In Chapter 5, Lisa identified that getting married would make her feel like the post-university transition was coming to an end. Other participants who were in romantic relationships over the course of data collection also talked about the companionship of those relationships and the importance of that in easing their transition.

Anderson et al. (2012) listed 'intimacy' as one of the six recurring themes in adult development. They explained that intimacy can include a variety of relationships, not only romantic, and that it holds elements of free interchange and disclosure, trust, empathy,

affection, and understanding. The participants addressed the importance of friendships and a support system in this transition, which is further addressed in Chapter 9 (Stabilisers), but most participants addressed intimacy in terms of romantic relationships and their increased desire for such in this transition. This sub-theme is also addressed in the literature on emerging adulthood. Hogan's (1981) study identified one of the three key transitions in early adulthood as marriage. The findings of my research, regarding the importance of relationships, support the findings of earlier transition studies. Although this particular finding may or may not directly inform higher education practices, it continues to build a deeper understanding of recent graduates' perspectives and possible issues that they may face after graduation.

Emotions of Searching

Each month I not only asked the participants about their life experiences, but I also asked them to identify how they felt about those experiences. Considering all the changes, Christine compared this transition to puberty saying she was constantly up and down. She also said, "*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!"* The emotions expressed by participants were primarily those of frustration and confusion, and usually in reference to job searching and lack of direction. Positive feelings were generally associated with having a job interview or being offered a professional position. Some participants expressed a range of positive and negative emotions at the same time, recognising their frustration in a situation but also the 'beauty of this transition experience', as one participant described it.

In his third interview (8 months after graduation), Jerry talked about his struggle to make decisions about his future. When I asked him how he felt about it, he said:

> *Oh god… frustration, anger, confusion, all of them… I have every emotion going every which way. It's very frustrating to try and figure it out. It's very nerve wrecking to know if you're making the right decision. I just have a lot of bad feelings and emotions… very negative things. I try to stay positive, but they're negative emotions… that's how I feel.*

Other participants searching for permanent work and stability expressed similar emotions. For example, Christine described her job searching process as "*agitating, frustrating, uneventful, and monotonous.*" Similarly, Brian expressed that he felt "*barraged, discombobulated, backwards, upside down, and dizzy*" from looking for work. Meggs talked about how she felt when she did not have a job, and how those feelings changed when she was offered a position six months after graduation:

> *I was really going through the thoughts of – I'm not good enough and not smart enough… and not doing what I need to do. I did so well in undergrad, and yet I feel like all that was nothing… I'm just another person who doesn't have a job… or a legit one. So, when I got the coordinator position in November, that was the point where I was like – okay, I'm being a little more successful and doing what I'm supposed to be doing.*

Meggs' idea of being successful after graduation and 'doing what she was supposed to do' was defined by having a job. Feelings of self-doubt filled her thoughts based on this perception. Christine expressed similar feelings of self-doubt in relation to finding full-time work:

> *I started to freak out, then I just went in my room and started bawling because I was like – I'm such a failure… and I can't find a full-time job… and I have a degree! You know when it feels like the world is just closing in on you, and you don't feel like you have options… but you do… but you don't… I don't know.*

Christine's expectation of her degree was connected to the idea of having a job, which was a common expression among the participants. As she described her job-search with feelings of 'the world was closing in on her', Brian similarly described his situation as 'stuck':

> *Ugh… stuck! I feel stuck! I think I am kind of worn down… definitely. And there's all this pulling and tugging… you're going to get this and you're going to get that. And of course you're like – please… whatever… you just want something.*

Previous literature identifies a range of emotions that often accompany transitions. Williams' (1999) transition cycle demonstrates a scale from feeling good to distress/despair depending on whether the transition was instigated by a positive event or a trauma/loss. Most of the research participants described graduating from university as a positive event, but still felt a range of both positive and negative emotions throughout the research period. Schlossberg (1984) described that the crisis point in the process of generativity (renewal) includes feelings of being "boxed in and frightened about the future" (p. 33), which the data presented here has demonstrated. Schlossberg et al. (1995) and Bridges (2004) emphasised the importance of recognising and understanding the stages of transition in order to be more emotionally prepared. By understanding the complexity and range of emotions that recent graduates feel in the post-university transition, higher education practitioners may be better informed on how to help prepare and support their students/graduates. Furthermore, since my research findings support previous transition literature, possible strategies used in the counselling sector may be relevant to inform higher education practices.

Searching Summary

Expressions of searching for and desiring certainty, direction, fulfilment and happiness, and meaningful relationships, were common among participants. Overall, the data demonstrate

the frustrations and emotions that recent graduates are feeling in this transition. Having research that explores the experiences of graduates not only contributes to better understanding of them and their post-university transition, but it may help to inform practices that aim to emotionally prepare and support them to confront these issues. Furthermore, as the findings related to searching support the literature on adult development and transitions, the relevance of this body of knowledge for higher education is reinforced. Theories of adult development and transitions may serve as a foundation and resource for higher education to build upon and draw from in informing potential strategies for students and graduates facing the post-university transition.

Chapter 8

Unmet Expectations

I think my expectations were a little high… like I would get a degree, graduate
in four years, send out my resume, and have a high paying job.

This quote from Samantha illustrates the expectations that many participants had about life

after university. There was a common expectation that a degree leads not only to

employment, but meaningful work and improved financial situations. However, participants'

expectations were not met – either because their expectations were too high, or they thought

other people had expectations for them. In many instances, the participants' unmet

expectations added difficulty or frustration to their post-university transition. The sub-themes

discussed in this chapter are: *expectations of degree, expectations of meaningful work,*

personal expectations and others' expectations, expectations of self in comparison to others,

unexpected role of finances, and unexpected role of the economy.

Expectations of Degree

Throughout the research interviews, participants discussed their reasons for having pursued a

degree and the expectations that came with gaining a degree. Their expectations were often

shaped by their parents, teachers, university marketing materials, society, and/or their own

experiences. This sub-theme emerged in the data as participants discussed how the

expectation of their degree was usually related to having full-time professional employment

after graduation. As the participants discussed their unmet expectations, they expressed their

feelings of entitlement and also questioned the value of their degree. Demonstrated below,

Julie and Christine explained that their expectation was to get a job. Julie said:

I thought a degree would mean a job [laugh], *but obviously that's not the case.*

Christine said:

> *I don't want to sound ungrateful, but no* [expectations not met]… *because I don't have a full time job. I thought I would get out of college and would be making about $60,000 a year.*

Neither Julie nor Christine had full-time employment when the research interviews began (6 months after graduation). They not only expected that gaining a degree would lead to a job, but a 'high paying job'. A number of the participants expressed a similar sense of entitlement. For example, Lisa said:

> *I'm struggling with the fact that I have a degree and I make $8-something an hour and work 40 hours a week. It's frustrating to know I'm not being paid for a degree… and yeah… it's a piece of paper…whatever…but at the same time, I spent those years of my life working towards that, and I feel like I should be rewarded for that in a way. And maybe that's selfish and rude, but it's frustrating.*

Even though she referred to her degree as 'a piece of paper', Lisa felt entitled to a certain wage as a 'reward' for her time and work as a student. Jade expressed a similar sense of entitlement saying, *"I don't want to work as a clerk somewhere, because I have a degree… and a good degree, and I want something that's equal to my degree."* She put a value on her degree, which increased the amount of pay she felt she was worth. Piper was not earning what she expected to as a graduate either:

> *I went to college for four years and now I make $8 an hour. And not that it seems unfair… it just feels like – that was 4 years of my life, and I could have been doing this the whole time… why did I have to do that?*

Because Piper was not earning any more than she did as a student, she questioned the time she had spent pursuing her education and the perceived value of a degree. Similarly, Talon questioned the value of his degree:

> *I really believed my leadership experience was what was going to make my*
> *career – what I did in college as far as organizations and things like that. And*
> *I don't feel like my expectations were met. If I would have gotten a job at a*
> *bank or something my freshman year, I know without question that I would be*
> *up into management and have a secure career plan set in place. But I feel like*
> *I bought into something that wasn't a reality.*

Talon recognised that what he believed would 'make his career' did not do so, and that he wished he had spent his free time as a student gaining professional work experience. A similar sentiment was expressed among the participants who described themselves as being highly involved with leadership or university activities. Talon expressed strong feelings about his situation, saying that he 'bought into something' that was not a reality. Justin talked about his experiences as a student leader and that his expectations after graduation were not met. He said he hit rock bottom when he got a job as a waiter at a restaurant – something he could have done without a degree. However, after nearly a year, his perspective shifted. He concluded that the value of his degree was the opportunity to learn about himself, rather than getting a job:

> *Your degree is a ticket to somewhere, but if you haven't figured out who you*
> *are, and you don't know where the hell you're going, then that ticket doesn't*
> *mean anything.*

He went on to explain that he learned this the 'hard way', and that he was still in the process of figuring out 'who he was'. While most participants described having unmet expectations when considering the outcome of having a degree, there were two exceptions. One was from Ben, who talked about his only expectation being that his degree would serve as a "*stepping*

stone toward medical school," and this expectations was met. Another opinion was from Macey, who went on to a professional job as a nurse soon after graduation. She explained that, as an undergraduate, she had signed a contract with a local hospital guaranteeing her a job after graduation – an offer made to all undergraduate nursing students in her programme. It was only when students had specific, vocational degrees that ensured job security that their expectations seemed more easily met.

Gedye et al.'s (2004) study of undergraduate students' career *expectations* and graduates' career *experiences* found that students' expectations of job searching and their perceived value of a degree were not met in their graduate experiences. Arnett's (2004) research on emerging adulthood found that young people often have the expectation of finding a job that is well-paid and fulfilling. Kaufman and Feldman (2004) found that for some students a degree constituted a symbolic entitlement for certain occupations and careers because they (students) were highly educated. As demonstrated, my data support these study findings. Moreover, because my study has been approached and viewed through the lens of higher education with the aim of informing educational practices, it is noteworthy to also discuss previous higher education literature that may illuminate why students' expectations are high.

As State funding for higher education has decreased each year and tuition costs have increased (The College Board Advocacy and Policy Center, 2011), education has come at a much higher personal cost to the student than ever before. According to Larocque (2003) and Scott (2006), these increased costs are accompanied by increased expectations of a degree. Furthermore, Canaan and Shumar (2008) noted that today's university "competes to sell their services to student 'customers' in the educational marketplace" (p. 5). This 'sell' often includes the use of university marketing materials and personnel who give the impression that their degree programmes will offer students a successful career. Therefore, it is

understandable that students who are recruited in this market have expectations of such upon completion of their degree. Provided that my research was designed to explore recent graduates' experiences and perspectives for the sake of better informing educational practices that prepare and support them for life after study, it appears that the first step for higher education may be to look internally at current practices, such as marketing and recruitment. This merits the assertion that if students are better informed of the value of their degree early on, their expectations may be more appropriately managed, and thereby they may be more prepared for and/or face less difficulty after graduation.

Expectations of Meaningful Employment

Building on the previous expectation that having a degree meant obtaining a high-paid job, the participants also had the expectation that their job would be meaningful (fulfilling; enjoyable; consisting of tasks they deemed as valuable). When their expectations of meaningful employment were not met, they identified that they were unhappy in the workplace. Because participants often struggled to find full-time employment after graduation, they worked in part-time jobs or continued the job they had as a student. This sub-theme emerged each month when I asked the participants for an update on their current work situation. Their workplace unhappiness usually stemmed from not feeling valued in terms of their earnings, duties and responsibilities, and/or the use of their skills.

Christine left her job after three months because she did not enjoy what the job entailed nor did it utilise her skills:

> *I actually did find a job with a company called Quick Print… and it was full-time and had benefits, but it wasn't the ideal job… or had anything to do with my degree. Local businesses would come and you'd do their copy work. So, I worked there for nearly 3 months… and I hated it… it was awful. And I would*

make jokes all the time to my roommate and friends like – I got a college

degree and making copies… this sucks! So, I ended up quitting, thinking I

could get another job.

Christine found it difficult to find meaning in her work because she felt over-qualified for the

tasks of the job. She also expected to quickly find another job, which was not the case.

Similarly, Lisa often talked about feeling that her job responsibilities were beneath her

qualifications. She explained that her salary expectations were not met because she was

earning the same as a colleague who did not have a degree. Because of this, she started

looking for a new job:

> *Work is still horribly frustrating! I have interviewed for a new job though. I*
> *am very excited about this opportunity not only because it will be a pay raise*
> *but also because it is something very different from anything I've done in the*
> *past. Also, there is room for growth in the company, unlike here.*

Lisa went on to explain that even though she was unhappy in her job, she did not want to

leave until she had something else lined up. Julie expressed a similar sentiment by saying she

did not want to be jobless:

> *I don't think I'm getting paid for what I do for her because she* [boss] *is never*
> *there. I pretty much run the place, which is sad because she's only been open*
> *a year and we're not doing very good, and she thinks we're doing good for*
> *some odd reason… I don't know… I don't want to leave… I just feel like I*
> *should stay there until I get something that I really like… because I don't want*
> *to be jobless.*

Julie felt that the value of her work was not being compensated for monetarily, nor that her

boss recognised the hard work she was doing. These findings demonstrate that pay and job

responsibilities may contribute to how meaningful employment is defined. Furthermore,

Samantha identified that she was not happy at work. *"I'm not happy at all, and on top of that*

I'm not making much money. I feel like if I like a job, I'm going to perform better at it.'' She recognised the importance of enjoying a job, and how that and the pay affected her performance. In contrast, Nick enjoyed his job duties and did not seem to have an issue with his pay. For him, the unmet expectation revolved around his concern that work colleagues and the work environment were not conducive to him feeling contented with his employment.

> *My work/boss situation is not great. The structure sucks, and although I love the work with students, the professional staff and office culture could not be more unstable or inconsistent.*

He went on to explain that his work environment affected all aspects of his life. This demonstrated the influence that others had to his perception of meaningful employment and that his expectations were not met.

Participants expected a job that offered financial stability and included tasks that they identified as meaningful, which were differently defined for each participant. When this expectation was unmet, they expressed frustration and despondence. Graham and McKensie's (1995) study on workplace retention and employee contribution found that new hires' workplace expectations were not being met. This is demonstrated in my data with the participants' unmet expectations of salary, job duties, and feeling valued. Transition elements such as expectations and preparation are also explored in the workplace transition literature (Arnett, 2004; Gedye et al., 2004), and my data contribute to this body of research by providing evidence of unmet expectations for another group (recent graduates).

Personal Expectations and Others' Expectations

Participants also had personal expectations about what they thought they would be doing after graduation. Participants often expressed the view that they had not met their personal expectations, and that that added to the difficulty of their transitions. Furthermore, the

participants discussed the expectations that other people had of them, and how these put pressure on them and complicated their transitions. Piper talked about her personal expectations:

> *My expectation was that it* [getting a job] *was going to be hard because I'm young, but I thought once people get to know me – who wouldn't hire me? And then I didn't have the job of my dreams right off, and I still don't have a job of my dreams.*

Although she expected finding a job to be hard, she also expected her experience to be different from other young people, which was not the case. Similarly, Justin's personal expectations were not met:

> *It's almost been a year since I graduated, and yet I don't feel as far along in the process that I thought I would be. I still feel like I need be able to proverbially run faster, climb higher, swim longer, but yet I'm still this work in progress.*

Justin recognised this transition as a process that takes time. Talon talked about not doing what he had hoped he would be doing at this point in his life:

> *I definitely had preconceived notions of what I was going to be doing, and so far, they're not true, which is a huge, huge bummer. So, my expectations have definitely not been met. I'm not an unhappy person by any means… I'm not satisfied with my life, but I still enjoy it.*

Each month Talon said something similar to the above statement. After expressing his feelings of unmet expectations, he made a point of emphasising that he was not unhappy. He was careful not to blame others, but took personal responsibility for his current circumstances, in contrast with other participants who tended to look for other sources of 'blame'.

The participants also had to confront expectations that others had of them, and they discussed how this influenced them. Carley explained that her reason for pursuing a degree had been to meet her mother's expectations. She went on to say that all she wanted from gaining her degree "*was the acceptance of my mother.*" A number of participants talked about how others' expectations had an influence on their lives. Samantha experienced similar pressure from her family in terms of her career:

> *Honestly, I think I'm trying to please everyone else and not myself...what I mean by that is, my family has set these unrealistic goals for me which is forcing me to try to achieve things that I'm not really interested in. I just don't want to let them down.*

Samantha felt her family's expectations were not only unrealistic, but that she was not interested in pursuing the goals they had for her. She faced a dilemma of wanting to please others and not 'let them down', but in endeavouring to do this was foregoing her own desires. Piper said that others had placed expectations on her, but that she eventually decided to ignore them:

> *I had to stop looking at other people's expectations, because at the end of the day, they're not paying my bills... and they're not 22 and trying to figure it all out. You're just never going to please everyone, so I just quit asking everybody's advice.*

Piper concluded that she was the only one in charge of her life and her future, and that she had to 'figure it out' on her own.

Arnett (2004) and Gedye et al.'s (2004) studies highlighted expectations in transition. My findings support these studies. As addressed in Chapter 1, the participants in this study fall within the 'Millennial Generation'. According to Newton's (2000) and DeBard's (2004) research, this generation is team-oriented with heavy reliance on peers and parents, which

was demonstrated in my data as the participants valued yet struggled with the opinions of others. This literature and data help build an understanding of the expectations and possible issues that recent graduates are confronting. This knowledge may help to inform practices that guide students/graduates in managing their own expectations in this transition, as well as inform the role of family, friends, and institutions who aim to support these individuals.

Expectations of Self in Comparison to Others

Participants often compared themselves to others as a way to judge their own progress and expectations in post-university life. In this process, participants often realised that they had not accomplished what they had expected at this point in their lives. Talon compared his job to those of his friends:

> *One of my best friends got an awesome job at a community college. He's doing very well… buying his first house, which straight out of college is awesome… which is essentially what I thought I'd be doing. And then my other friend is working a job that he hates, but it's getting him through grad school, because he didn't wait, he just went straight into grad school. So we joke about me being a car salesman quite a bit just because it was so out of left field… because we were top notch students. I feel like I've taken about 20 steps back… I feel like I've taken 4 years of my life back because I could have done this straight out of high school!*

Talon's expectations were demonstrated as he claimed his first friend was doing what he expected of himself (having a good job and owning a home). He made a connection between his job and being a 'top notch student', alluding to the belief that his expectation of a top student was to have a job that he could not have done after high school, which made him question the value of his degree. Christine expressed similar feelings when comparing her life to those of her friends':

> *A lot of my friends are starting to find their significant others, and it just reminds me more of the fact that they are all moving on, and I'm still in the same place kind of… and it definitely has an influence on the way I view where I am in my life right now.*

Christine alluded that her expectation of moving on, like her friends had, had not been met. She recognised that this situation influenced how she thought of herself. By comparing her life to others, she questioned her progress in this transition. Jade expressed similar feelings, which she related to her sister having children:

> *My sister had a son on St. Patty's day. She is only three months older than me so it freaks me out that she has two sons and a step son, and I am nowhere near heading in that direction. It makes me feel like I am behind, but at the same time, I am so grateful I get to do things that she can only dream of doing.*

Like other participants, Jade drew upon a comparison with others when describing how she felt about where she was in life. Even though she was 'grateful' for not having a child at the moment, she looked at her progress in comparison with someone else; as did Carley. When talking about her lack of direction in life and 'slowness in figuring things out' in this transition, Carley compared her feelings to what she thought others might be feeling:

> *And maybe that's how it is for a lot of people and maybe it isn't… I don't know… I think a lot of people may be good at hiding it… or maybe I'm just telling myself that because I'm slow at getting with the program.*

It was as if Carley needed a justification for where she was in life, and by telling herself that others felt this way too, her feelings were validated. This was a commonly expressed sentiment. For example, some participants highlighted how participating in the research and knowing that there were others facing this transition comforted them. Amber said, "*Knowing that this is puzzling enough to research is comforting.*" Furthermore, Julie said, "*I am very glad I decided to do this* [research] *with you. It really helps knowing that there are others that*

are in the same position." This demonstrated that even when the participants were not specifically comparing themselves to a particular person, just knowing there were others in transition helped them feel more 'normal'.

While comparing themselves to others, the participants often made sense of their own progression in this transition. Kaufman and Feldman's (2004) study on final-year students found that interaction with peers was an important part of building identity and an understanding of one's own self. Blumer (1969) identified that interaction with others can influence expectations and perceptions of oneself, and that it is through interaction with others that meaning is constructed. This is not only important to know when attempting to better understand individuals in transition, but this information may be useful to inform educational practices that prepare and support students in this transition (for example: peer education; group support).

Unexpected Role of Finances

The issue of finances was a topic that I never asked the participants about directly, but it was an issue that every participant discussed. All participants willingly offered information about their finances, whether they had graduated debt free or owed money from student loans. The participants talked about how they did not realise or expect their financial situation to affect their lives and transition the way it did. Some participants had more money than when they were students, because they were now working full-time; other participants repeatedly talked about how 'broke' they were as a result of not having a job. A common pattern connected to this sub-theme was moving in with parents. Ten of the twenty participants lived with their parents at some point after graduation. Their financial situation, whether positive or negative, played an influential role in their lives, and for most participants, it was an unexpected source of stress in their transition.

Jerry talked about his struggle to make a decision about the future because of his financial situation. I asked Jerry what his priorities were in making decisions:

> *Well, my number one issue is finances! I can't afford to just do anything because I don't come from a wealthy family. I'm already in debt and need to pay that off, and I don't want to pile on anymore.*

During the data collection period, Jerry lived with his grandmother and had aspirations to go to medical school. He discussed how the medical entry exam (MCAT) and admissions application fees influenced his decisions and subsequently his career path. Similarly, Samantha moved back in with her mother after graduation to save money. She also talked about her financial situation consuming her life and thoughts:

> *I have been struggling this month due to finances. It's just bills on top of bills–medical, loans, car, phone, etc. I have so many bills out there that I wasn't even aware of. I'm being kept back from a lot of things because my mind has been focused on my bills, causing me to stress out.*

Samantha described her financial situation as stressful, a struggle, and something that kept her back from doing what she wanted. This illustrates the complications that finances added to her transition. Piper talked about her financial situation and related emotions in a similar way. She told a story about a low point she experienced in the transition, and how it was rooted in money:

> *There was a loan payment that somehow I missed… I'm irresponsible with stuff like that, and that's really all it was, but I didn't have the money regardless… but it was only like $45. So, I'm like freaking out because somehow the email gets sent to my fiancé, who does have money, but I don't like asking money from anyone. So, he went online and paid it. And I was sobbing all over myself and was like – I'm a mooch… how can this be happening… you can't do this.*

Piper often talked about her desire to be independent and not to rely on others for financial support. Therefore, when her fiancé paid her loan, questions about her lack of financial independence emerged. She described this as her 'crisis point' in the post-university transition. Also dealing with loans, Meggs talked about her issues with finances:

> *I already had a bill in the mail for $3,000 for my first semester, and I was like*
> *– that's three grand that I don't have... that I'm getting some loan from a*
> *bank... and I'm going to have to pay this off someday, and I don't even know if*
> *I'm going to have a job to pay it off! ...and the economy is ridiculous.*

Meggs' financial situation combined with her struggle to find a job made her question if she would ever have a job in order to repay her loan.

Arnett (2004) demonstrated key factors of emerging adulthood as 'accepting responsibility for one's self', 'making independent decisions', and 'becoming financially independent'. From their study, Farner and Brown (2008) distinguished three categories in defining adulthood: 'maturity and acceptance of responsibility', 'financial independence', and 'living independently'. The data from my research support the literature in that the participants were aware of their financial situation and were working towards financial independence. The data also indicate that for many, the post-university transition delayed their development into adulthood. These graduates were not 'living independently', and they expressed confusion and frustration alongside their desires and plans to shift into independent living. The participants did not anticipate the issue of finances complicating their transition the way it did, as they expected to be independent, financially secure adults after graduation. Having an understanding of this data may inform educational practices that aim to help students prepare for the practicalities of this transition.

Unexpected Role of the Economy

As explained in Chapter 1 (context), the economy rapidly receded just as the participants were graduating university and entering the workforce. The U.S. unemployment rate started to increase in early 2009 and reached an all-time high of 10.1 per cent in October of 2009 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.). This unexpected situation added frustration to the participants' transition and specifically affected their job search. I did not directly ask about the role of the economy in the research interviews, but it emerged in the data as it seemed to provide participants with an explanation that helped them cope with setbacks in job searching.

For three months after graduation, Talon did not search for any jobs. He had applied for a position that he was confident he would get, and worked part-time while waiting to hear about the job. When he eventually heard how many people applied for the position, and that he was not selected for it, he attributed it to the economy:

> *I had honestly thought I was a complete shoe-in for job. I had talked to the staff… all of them… they had great things to say about me. So I thought it was just going to be graduation then start training for that – I really believed it. I put in my application and everything. 12 people applied of which 9 had Master's – which was the most they ever had… which is a true sign of the economy right now, and I didn't even get an interview.*

Talon went on to explain that the position did not require a Master's degree, but because of the economic recession, people whom he believed to be over-qualified for the position had applied for it. Ben felt similarly about the economy when he was applying for jobs:

> *I probably applied for about 20-30 jobs, and got responses from 4 of them. I thought my application was better than that, and that I'd hear back from*

more. But, with the economy and maybe the fact that I am fresh out of college,
maybe there were other applicants that had more experience.

Ben recognised that he might not have had as much experience as other potential candidates, but suggested that the economy was a part of the reason for not hearing back from more of the job postings. Similarly, Damon said he applied for fifty jobs before he was offered a position. During that time, he was only called back for three in-person interviews. He blamed this on the economy:

Coming out of school, none of my friends could get jobs, we would all call
each other and kind of laugh like – this is ridiculous… blame it on the
economy.

He found comfort in the fact that he was not the only one struggling to get a job. In Damon's case, the state of the economy helped him to explain and cope with his situation. Although he was able to laugh about it with his friends, he also added that he moved back in with his parents until he had a full-time job.

The only literature I found that addressed the economy in relation to transitions is in Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) definition of transition – "an event or nonevent that results in change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and/or roles within the setting of self, work, health, and/or economies" (p. 27). She listed economies as a setting in which roles may change, and explained that a "sense of disgrace may be suffered as a result of economic losses," which my data did not necessarily demonstrate. However, the data did demonstrate how the economic recession was an unexpected hurdle that complicated the participants' post-university transition. Although higher education initiatives cannot eliminate external factors that may influence the post-university transition, like an economic recession, this data may inform practitioners of the need for extra support or trainings during such times.

Unmet Expectations Summary

Data presented in this chapter provide evidence that, in part, the complication and frustration in this transition was due to participants' expectations not being met. Although some expectations (or unexpected factors) cannot be addressed through higher education practices alone (the economy, for example), other expectations may be directly correlated to information generated by institutions (value of a degree, for example). It is important to understand the struggles that individuals in transition are facing if practices to aid in this transition are to be designed. The data have indicated some specific strategies that may help prepare and support final-year students, which I address in Chapter 10, but from the data presented in this chapter, overarching strategies may be informed. If practices can be developed that help students manage their expectations of their degree, their future career, the workplace transition, themselves, and external factors outside of their control, a first step in preparing them for the future may be made.

Chapter 9

Stabilisers

I've continued to stay connected to family and friends. In terms of emotional stability, they've been a support, and my faith has naturally played a strong part in that as well.

Raymond's perspective was a commonly expressed sentiment by the participants. The data demonstrate that although many elements of this transition were shifting and often difficult, the participants found events, people, actions, and thoughts that helped them cope and get on with life; I call these *Stabilisers*. These resources served as anchors and provided participants with a sense of emotional stability, balance, and hope in an unstable period. The sub-themes discussed in this chapter are: *support system, groups and activities, faith, health and fitness,* and *living for the present*.

Support System

Throughout the research interviews, as the participants described their experiences and perspectives, they invariably talked about the important people in their lives. They would often discuss the supportive role their friends and family played, as they moved through this period of uncertainty. Participants credited these relationships as being what 'got them through' this time. For example, Christine said:

> *God, family, and my friends have literally gotten me through this year. You know when people are asked the most valuable things or people in their life, they always say God, family, and friends, and everyone cringes at how cliché that is? Well, I don't care if it's cliché or not, those have seriously been my absolute rocks this year.*

Christine described her support system as her 'rocks', implying the stability they provided. Similarly, Julie talked about the importance of her family and friends – "*I don't know what I would do without my friends and family being so supportive and helpful. If I was alone I would be losing my mind.*" She went on to describe a specific friendship that helped her feel less alone:

> I've really gotten close with a particular friend, which I'm so glad. I feel like we are in the same place in life, and we have so much in common. It's great to have her here, and have her understand what I feel all the time.

Julie's comment about having someone to share experiences with was echoed by Talon, who talked about the importance of his two best friends in this transition:

> I wouldn't be where I am today without them two. And every speed bump along the way… they not only could relate, but they cared to relate. I'm not trying to get mushy, but I wouldn't be who I am today without them, and I think they'd say the same.

Talon acknowledged that his friendships were a reciprocal process, and that together, he and his friends created a support system for one another. In addition to the support of family and friends, Nick talked about the value of his instructors and how doing particular activities helped him in the transition:

> This transition is all about challenge and support. The unknown and the uncomfortable are very challenging, but can absolutely produce growth and development if balanced with adequate support. For example, my office is not supportive right now so there is a lack of person-environment congruence, which leads to instability and dissatisfaction... and it has. However, my faculty, friends, and things like playing music all contribute to supportive elements and a more comfortable experience.

Nick suggested that challenges in this transition were often inevitable, but that he 'grew' as a result of tackling those challenges by balancing them with 'supportive elements'. He discussed his unhappiness at work, but by spending time with particular people or doing particular activities, he felt more comfortable.

These excerpts highlight the importance the participants placed on friends and family in coping with issues of transition. Their views are aligned with ideas promoted in the literature. Anderson et al. (2012) addressed 'mattering' as a recurring theme in adult transition, which includes "the need to be appreciated, noticed, and acknowledged" (p. 153). Another theme in transition literature is 'intimacy', which identifies interpersonal relationships as important in times of transition as they are a strong source of support, and also add depth and meaning (Anderson et al., 2012). Schlossberg et al. (1995) included 'social support' (intimate, family unit, friendship network, or institution) as a transition 'coping resource'. Chickering and Reisser's (1993) explained that 'establishing strong interpersonal commitments' is an aspect of student development. As demonstrated, my findings support the previous literature, which further illustrates the relevance of previous transition literature in building a foundation for higher education practices. Furthermore, by understanding the important role that support systems may play in helping students in transition, higher education strategies which foster such support may be useful.

Groups and Activities

Participants often talked about being a part of a team or involved in an association, and explained how that offered them a sense of emotional stability. This sub-theme was illustrated as the participants discussed the importance of a group or activity in which they could belong. When the participants discussed their current situations, they often reflected on their lives while at university. Some talked about how they were a part of a social group or

student club as an undergraduate and how that served as a 'past stabiliser' in their lives, which they now missed and desired. Other participants talked about how they had joined new groups post-graduation and how that had served as 'current stabiliser'. I present the data here in terms of 'past' and 'current' stabilisers.

Amber said that in the past she was involved in her sorority, served on student committees, and desired to find something like that again but did not know how: "*My best friend goes to couples game night with her boyfriend, but I am not a couple, so I can't do something like that. I just don't know where to begin to jump back in.*" Some of the participants discussed that they 'jumped back in' by volunteering and contributing to their wider community. For example, Ben discussed how volunteering at medical clinics provided an opportunity for him to help others, be a part of a team, and do something that brought meaning and value to his life. Similarly, Meggs talked about volunteering at an animal shelter, and how she had met new people while contributing to something she found valuable. Samantha explained that as a student she was involved in many groups and enjoyed it:

> *You know I haven't been as heavily involved with anything as I was when I was in college. Now all I do is work, work, work. I strongly feel as though being involved with some type of activity, social group, or whatever the case may be does help. It doesn't work for everybody, but it did work for me. When I was in college, I was involved with any and everything. Especially being in a sorority, all you do is lead and give back to the community. I loved it! I truly feel I should get more involved… Volunteer or do something besides work.*

Samantha went on to explain that she believed being involved in a group or volunteering would help her through this transition, but that her job consumed most of her time. Raymond explained that time commitment had been an issue for him as well, even though he felt strongly about the benefit of his past groups:

I miss terribly being a part of a leadership group at both schools I went to. The closeness and truly – the family that was made there was incredible. Those were some of the brightest and smartest young men and women I've encountered. Unfortunately, I've probably used the cliché of "I don't have enough time" too much in this regard, but hope to soon volunteer at least one or two times per month to give back to the community and to keep that "servant leadership" mentality.

As a student, Raymond found a sense of community by being involved with a leadership group. He even described this group as 'family'. Like other participants, he described volunteer work as something he would like to be more involved with as a graduate. Christine explained that this was the first time in her life that she was not associated with a specific team or group, and that she missed it:

Throughout my entire life, I've always been a part of something whether it was my competitive dance team throughout elementary and junior high, my basketball team in high school, or the President's Leadership Council in college. This is the first time in my life that I'm not a part of some organized group of people. I've been wanting to get involved in the community in some way. Hopefully once I live and work in the same place that will change.

Christine went on to explain that she desired to get involved in a civic group and used the example of Rotary Club. Damon also saw value in community clubs and councils, and talked about having pursued involvement with these new groups:

I got appointed to the City Park and Recreations Council, which is kind of like student government, but now it's real government… and real dollars… so that's kind of cool. I joined a civic group, which I'm the youngest one by about 15 years… so that's kind of weird. So, I've just tried to find other activities and organizations, but there's not really a 'young' thing… so if you want to be active, you either go hang out with your college friends or go do adult people stuff.

Damon compared his role in city government to his experience in student government and recognised the value of these groups in his life. Due to the lack of clubs organised specifically for young professionals, he felt that in order to be active he either had to be the youngest member in 'adult people' organisations or spend time with university friends.

One of Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) recurring themes of transition is 'belonging'. They explained that when roles and environments shift, people can often feel marginalised if they do not have a sense of belonging to others or to something. My findings support this, as the participants who had been a part of a group or activity in the past explained that it had helped them, and that they desired that 'sense of belonging' currently. My data also support Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) 'coping resources' through the importance of 'social support' in transition. Van Gennep's (1960, 2004) Rites of Passage explain *transition* as – an individual beginning new interactions with a new group, and *incorporation* as – the establishment of competent membership in the new group. This is demonstrated in the data as the participants emphasised the importance of a being associated and involved with a new group after university. This data and literature are relevant for better understanding what the post-university transition may include for young adults and may be used to inform support strategies in preparing final-year students.

Faith

This sub-theme was one of the most commonly discussed topics in the research interviews. Eighteen of the twenty participants discussed God, Christ, faith, or church without being prompted. Most of the comments were inserted following a "but" after explaining something difficult or uncertain. For example Christine said, "*I have no idea about this job, but we will see where God leads.*" Julie said, "*I'm a little down, but I just keep trying to tell myself it is okay to not know about the future, because it's all in God's plan and in the end He knows.*"

186

Their belief in a higher power seemed to offer them comfort, hope, and emotional stability when they were facing uncertainty. Even though the participants felt worried or doubtful, their faith offered them a way of coping, as they placed their trust in an entity other than themselves. When Nick was discussing his faith, I asked him to explain it further and mentioned that it had been a frequently discussed topic:

> *What's true for me and probably many others, who might seek spirituality now, is that it can be comforting to know there is something that might be able to help you in a time when there is so much instability and transition. Praying is a great experience, I think. I understand the value of reflecting because it helps you better understand your circumstances and how you are developing. Prayer can be the same sort of reflective experience, but even better with the added element of hope that the entity you are reflecting to is listening and maybe helping. Participating in a church can help you connect with others and build a stronger faith, and faith is really needed during this new period of independence and uncertainty.*

Like other participants, Nick said how comforting it was to believe that 'something else' might be able to help you. Nick often talked about the importance of reflection in his life, and here he explained prayer as a time for self-reflection. He described this transition as a time of 'instability' and 'uncertainty', and similarly, Piper explained it as a time of 'insanity' and 'insecurity':

> *Knowing that God has it all under control, and that I am just a pawn, is the only way to make it through times of uncertainty. He's the one thing that's been constant in a time of insanity and insecurity.*

Piper's trust in God provided her with consistency in an 'insane' time. She coped with her uncertainty by accepting that God was in control. Like Piper, other participants described God in similar ways by saying, *"he guides you," "takes care of you," "is constant and*

always there," "is in control," "comforting," and *"has the ultimate plan."* Ben talked about

his reliance on God in all parts of his life:

> *Faith plays a role in every single aspect of my life. And it makes it easier*
> *knowing that you have a force on your side that is going to take care of you…*
> *and that you can just find comfort in that and know that whatever happens, it*
> *is okay because there's a reason or it's going to end up being right in the end.*

Ben went on to explain that when he was waiting to hear about the status of his medical

school application, his faith played a role. He trusted that no matter the result, God had a plan

for his career. Similarly, Raymond attributed his career situation to God:

> *Honestly the only explanation I have for the circumstances and the situations I*
> *have encountered throughout this transition is God and Him alone. Some*
> *might say "I was at the right place at the right time and met the right people,"*
> *but I disagree. There are too many variables for my story to be pure chance.*
> *God's guidance was the only thing that kept me where I needed to be in order*
> *to connect to and network with the right people so that I would end up where*
> *I'm at today. The emotions have been varied – anxious and nervous not*
> *knowing what the next turn in life would bring. But I'm always telling myself*
> *and having others encourage me that God knows what He's doing.*

Raymond's statement illustrated that his faith not only played a role when he was uncertain,

but that even when times were good, he attributed his successes to God. Although the

participants discussed their faith in God, and how that faith created continuity in this

transition, some of them talked about needing to 'work on' their relationship with God and

'devote more time' and effort to that element of their life. A number of the participants talked

about transition being an important time in their life to have faith, but that it was not always

easy to 'trust in God'. For example, Christine and Amber jokingly talked about how they

wished God would inform them of his plan for their lives. Christine said, *"Okay, God…*

appear to me now… tell me what to do… because I don't know." Amber said, *"I would like God to just email the schedule for my life, so that I could know."*

Anderson et al. (2012) included 'spirituality' as a recurring theme in adult transition. They suggest it may provide people with meaning and purpose and assist with one's ability to cope with transition. Schlossberg's (1984) 'coping resources' list 'commitments and values' as a psychological resource for individuals in transition. As the data demonstrate, the participants' personal values and commitments (their faith) served as a coping resource to their transition experience. Chickering and Reisser (1993) list 'developing purpose' as an aspect of student development, and as demonstrated, the participants identified how their faith gave them a sense of purpose. Previous research that has explored spirituality in transitions emphasises it as a theme particularly in midlife transitions, whereas my data casts light on this as an aspect of post-university transition.

Health and Fitness

The topics of healthy lifestyle, being physically fit, exercising, and eating well were common among the participants. They often talked about their health and fitness being a higher priority than it was when they were students. This sub-theme emerged when I asked the participants about how they spent their time, what they enjoyed, what their priorities were, and when they felt happy and fulfilled. Their focus on health seemed to provide them with a sense of balance, as it gave them something to focus on other than work or job-searching. Their fitness was something that they could be in control of, when many other aspects of their lives were out of their personal control. Some of the participants talked about health and fitness as a source of accomplishment. When I asked Shannon what she enjoyed the most in her life, she said:

> *I have a goal to work out every day, but at times that doesn't happen. I do notice that when I get up in the mornings and start my day out with physical activity, I am more aligned spiritually and emotionally, making me able to take on life's challenges better.*

Shannon valued the balance that fitness provided within other aspects of her life. Similarly, Julie talked about how health, weight loss, and exercise had become an important priority for her in this transition:

> *I have been on this big health kick. So far I've lost 23 pounds. Monday begins the skinny mission! I am doing an 8-week, 4-days-a-week boot camp. I have been doing the class for the past month, but now it is four days a week... I can't wait! I am so excited to push myself and see what I can do… cutting back and eating healthy, just really trying to make it a lifestyle.*

Julie talked about the excitement she had to 'push herself' in this challenge. She went on to compare her fitness to her job search, and explain how exercise was something that she could control in this transition. She also discussed how seeing her weight loss results gave her a sense of accomplishment. Justin described physical activity in a similar way:

> *I love learning ballroom dancing. I work hard, I have fun, and have an infrastructure to provide a sense of achievement. I've also been losing weight dancing and working out a little here and there. It feels good.*

Justin went on to describe ballroom dancing as a 'glorious distraction' from work and other stressful elements in his life. Lisa also associated physical activity with 'feeling better':

> *My roommate and I have begun walking the dogs each night on a 2.5 mile walk around the neighborhood and are beginning to feel better about our health, but we still have a long way to go.*

Lisa went on to explain that making time for physical activity was important as she got older, because she was less active than she was as a student. She also discussed how these walks gave her and her roommate time to talk about their lives and listen to each other.

Schlossberg listed 'health' as a setting for which transitions and role changes may occur. Although this transition was not necessarily in a health setting, because of the participants' roles changes, their health and fitness emerged as a greater priority than it had been previously. I have not found much literature which approaches issues of health and fitness in relation to transition; however, Goodman et al. (2006) talk extensively about control and how feeling in control is important for individuals in transition. This also relates to Anderson et al.'s (2012) recurring themes of 'self-efficacy' and 'autonomy' and how individuals who have more control of their lives can often cope more effectively with new problems. This data and literature may inform possible practices that foster opportunities for students to establish self-efficacy and understand the importance and practicalities of life balance.

Living for the Present

Each month I not only asked the participants about their life experiences, but I also asked them to identify how they felt about those experiences. After months of expressing feelings of frustration and trying to determine a life path, toward the end of the data collection period a number of the participants began making comments about 'living for the present'. This sentiment seemed to be a way of coping with and accepting life's uncertainties. Although some aspects of their lives remained uncertain, they explained that they had begun to find emotional stability by living for the moment and taking each day at a time, rather than worrying about the future. Nine months after graduation, when I asked Julie how she felt about job searching, she said:

> *I have just gotten to this point where I can try as hard as I can, and hope it*
> *will work out. That's all I can do. There is no need to stress about things when*
> *there is nothing I can do about it. Take it day by day, and hope for a better*
> *tomorrow.*

Over time and by gaining a better understanding of her situation, Julie had found a sense of clarity. Although she was still job searching, she had accepted this as a process and that she only had control of her own actions and attitudes. Piper expressed her feelings about the post-university transition in a similar way:

> *I'm feeling less lost than I felt before, like I'm sort of accepting this whole*
> *place of uncertainty as just part of my journey. It's a lot easier to just accept*
> *that I need to take it day by day than to have a whole big plan. I'm hoping that*
> *I don't look back and feel that this time of my life was a waste, but right now,*
> *I'm just doing all that I can, being all I can be, and taking everything in stride.*

Piper discussed how, throughout her life, she had emphasised the importance of making a plan and following it through. Even though she did not have a 'big plan' and all the answers she was searching for, her acceptance of the situation and decision to 'take everything in stride' acted as a stabiliser in her transition. Similarly, after a period of emotional changes and challenges – withdrawing from graduate school, moving to a new city, starting a new relationship, and pursuing a new career path, Shannon found the value in where she was at the moment:

> *Overall I am feeling really good about life in general and am happy where I*
> *am. I feel like I have been challenging myself physically, and it has helped in*
> *such big ways emotionally. Life is so exciting, and I have been trying to take it*
> *all in. This time in my life should be one of the best. I feel like I am truly happy*
> *and so lucky to be where I am right now.*

Shannon made this comment soon after becoming engaged. Her relationship and the start of a new role in her life allowed her to feel reflective and appreciative of her past, present, and future. The participants often talked about their plans for the future, both professionally and personally. When I asked Talon about his aspirations, he said:

> *I don't want to plan my life for next year. I truly believe that if I'm doing the right things today, tomorrow, and the next day… my year is going to take care of itself. I'm not where I want to be, but I'm not stressing about it… it will come… and right now, I'm just having a good time.*

Talon did not see the future as a fixed destination. Instead, he saw it as being shaped by the choices he was currently making. He had goals, but believed that more important than the actual goal was the ability to be adaptable in this transition. In other words, Talon found consistency through his flexibility.

By accepting their current circumstances and worrying less about the future, participants decided to live for the present. Williams (1999) identified 'accepting' as an aspect of re-construction and recovery in his transition model, which can result in 'new found confidence'. Similarly, Adams et al. (1976) and Lewis and Parker (1981) listed 'acceptance of reality' as aspects of their transition models. Research suggests that it is important for final-year students to understand and accept the impending change they will face upon graduation (Chickering and Schlossberg, 1995; Gardner and Van der Veer, 1998; Bridges, 2004). My data support these findings and may be used to inform practices that help prepare and support students for this transition.

Stabilisers Summary

Although the participants addressed many difficult aspects of the post-university transition throughout the research interviews, there were also important elements of their lives that

acted as stabilisers and offered support, hope, and balance in their transitions. Chickering and Reisser (1993) include 'personal stability and integration' as aspects of a positive identity. As the participants accepted this transition and their shifting identity, as well as sought support through relationships, group affiliations, faith, health and fitness, and living for the present, they established more stability in their lives. Reviewing the previous transition literature in conjunction with these data findings may gleam important lessons about this transition that may inform possible strategies for helping students feel supported and prepared for the post-university transition.

Summary of Research Findings Chapters

If I say it in one word, it would be complicated… all the way around.

Piper's one-word explanation of the post-university transition is representative of what I heard from each participant in this study. Understanding the complexity of this phenomenon was not one that I did (or could have done) alone. As explained in Chapters 3 and 4, I believe meaning is constructed through interaction with others and can be found through interpreting people's expressions of their understanding and perspectives on the world. Through my interactions with the participants, they were able to guide me through interpreting, understanding, and making meaning of their experiences and perspectives. Although there were patterns and consistencies in the data, organising those patterns into themes and identifying the similarities in which they could be clustered together was not a simple task. Indeed, one of my biggest struggles with presenting these findings has been accepting that not all the data could be shared, as each of the twenty participants had such rich experiences and perspectives. Therefore, for the sake of the task at hand, I was only able to cast light on the brightest, most robust pieces, which I have attempted to demonstrate in the last four chapters.

Through the presentation of data, it has been demonstrated that recent graduates are confronting a complicated transition from multiple angles – personally, relationally, publicly, professionally, and environmentally, and on many levels – emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual. Their entire lives are shifting, and through the shift they are searching for certainty and stability. This articulates the namesake of this thesis – 'treading through swampy water'. Metaphorically speaking, although the water was swampy and the participants were not able to swim, they managed to tread as opposed to drown. Their heads remained above water predominantly because of the 'stabilisers' in their lives.

For institutions wishing to help their students prepare for this transition, the data has implied a fundamental role, which can be summed up in one sentence: There is need to guide students in managing their own expectations (about transition and life after university) by helping them understand their shifting identities and the uncertainty that often accompanies the post-university transition. Based on my interpretation of the data, any strategy, programme, or initiative that fosters the opportunity for such is going to help prepare and support students in this transition. Nevertheless, through the participants' post-university experiences, they did cast light on a range of specific strategies that institutions might use. This data, along with the recommendations, are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 10

Recommendations for Institutions

Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore and attempt to better understand the experiences and perspectives of individuals who had graduated from university and were entering life-after-study. Throughout the interviews, participants intermittently suggested possible roles for institutional action regarding this transition. That data seemed to particularly emerge when participants expressed difficulty in finding professional work after graduation and were confronting their unmet expectations and emotions about the changes occurring in their lives. In addition to the unsolicited data which illuminated potential support initiatives, in the final interview I directly asked the participants if they had any advice for institutions wishing to support their graduating students. The data presented in this chapter are a combination of both – excerpts of unsolicited advice for institutions and responses to my question in the final interview.

It is important to note that some of the data is from the final interview (one year after the participants had graduated); the data therefore contains participants' reflective opinions based on based on what they 'now knew'. While this reflective perspective is important, as it allowed the participants to offer advice based on what they had experienced thus far in the post-university transition, I am also mindful that when looking in retrospect, perceptions and attitudes may be different from those that would be provided had I asked the question earlier in their transition.

The data and recommendations presented in this chapter are based on the participants' perspectives and my interpretation of those perspectives. Each of these strategies may not be applicable for all institutions, nor may they see particular recommendations as part of their institutional role. However, I presume that institutions that value and desire to use students' voices to inform their practices will be interested in this data. For example, Nick believed that institutions should be concerned with the post-university transition:

> *Graduating seniors are about to begin a life totally different than anything they've ever known. If we believe it's important to have first year services to help students adjust in the change from high school to college, then it is ridiculous to not think that we don't also need something for graduating students.*

Similarly, Piper commented on the lack of university support for graduating students in contrast to the support offered to incoming students:

> *In high school people tell you how to transition into college… you see a list of things that you need and you can call your RA* [resident advisor] *to ask questions. But there's no RA after you graduate! …it's just you, and you better get your crap figured out, or you're going to get left behind. So, I don't know what the solution is, but there's got to be something better than – okay, here's your degree… have a good life …give us money when you make some.*

Piper's sentiment on the university rushing her out of the door, telling her to 'have a good life', and asking for more money suggests disappointment about the lack of support. This was a common perspective expressed by the participants. I have organised the participants' comments that illuminate potential institutional practices into three main categories: *career preparation, emotional support,* and *practical life skills training*. Here, I present the data for each of the three areas and offer *recommendations for action* based on my analysis and

interpretation. These recommendations are specifically aimed at higher education practitioners, administrators, and faculty.

Career Preparation

Professional Work Experience, Internships, and Networking

One of the most obvious aspects of the post-university transition is the career transition. Most participants mentioned their need and desire for professional work experience, internships, and networking before having graduated. Talon indicated that not having professional work experience hindered him from being selected for many jobs:

> *I should have gotten a real job my junior year and built up my work experience. I feel that if I would have done at least that, I would be working in a job that truly uses all of my talents. At the end of the day, an inexperienced worker is still a risk, and most companies are not willing to take it* [risk] *on their new hires.*

Every month Talon mentioned something about his lack of work experience. During our final interview when I gave each participant the opportunity to offer advice to their university, Talon said, *"The one thing I wish the university would have stressed is the importance of work experience. I still believe that's the one thing that killed me when I was interviewing for positions."*

Participants who were more involved in student clubs, leadership organisations, or university activities had less work experience than those students who had spent their time working. These participants explained that they thought their student involvement was gaining them transferable work experience, but found that this was not the case when they sought employment after graduation. For example, Talon said:

> *I thought I was doing the right thing until about two months before I graduated. I then really started questioning whether or not I wasted four years being a leader on campus as opposed to a working student who already had steps in his career plan.*

Talon knew his leadership involvement was his choice, but questioned why his advisors had not emphasised the importance of work experience. He answered his own question by saying, "*I don't think my advisors at the university thought it was a detriment to do all the campus activities.*" Like Talon, other participants asked for more assistance in identifying and prioritising opportunities to gain professional experiences that would help them cultivate the skills desired by employers. Justin believed the role of the institution was to prepare students for their careers, and that internships were a way of testing possible careers.

> *Your professors are supposed prepare you for a career, if you've found it. But make sure you find it… do an internship about something you care about, or at least find out it is something you don't care about.*

Others, like Shannon, expressed the view that mandatory internships would help students prepare for their careers:

> *I believe that internships should be much more in-depth and more hands-on. It would be great to make it mandatory for students to job shadow a person in their career field. Also to help the student narrow it down to the exact career that they would like to explore.*

Samantha expressed the opinion that internships were important for one's career, but that she was disappointed by the lack of requirements she had for her internship:

> *I think there should be more requirements for interns. Believe it or not I didn't have to do much with mine, not to mention my supervisor and professor never communicated. Supervisors couldn't care less….you're working for free! And the professors don't seem to really care as much either. Seriously, an*

> *internship to me is the most important class of your entire college career. It's preparing you for your future!*

Other participants, who had not completed an internship, expressed that they wished they would have. Piper believed that through an internship she would have built a network of professionals which could have helped her make contacts and gain jobs post-graduation:

> *What I am learning is that it really does not matter what you know or how great you can make yourself look on paper, you need to network. And that's something that you wonder why they don't talk more about in college. Every degree should have an internship program… no matter what your degree field is going to be, because at the very least you're going to be making contacts through that. I never did an internship.*

Similarly, Raymond saw value in professional networking:

> *I want to communicate the extreme importance of relationships and networking. One of my favorite phrases is 'Life is all about one thing – Relationships.' Meeting, connecting, and networking with people are the top ways to connect and get interviews for jobs.*

Hanneman and Gardner (2010) identified that building and sustaining professional relationships was one of the most important success strategies for new graduates. Building social capital and a professional network is not only a skill that will help students in their future careers, but it is one that will help them find and obtain a job initially after graduation (Farner and Brown, 2008). Candy and Crebert (1991) discuss that exposing students to workplace environments, specifically because they are different than classroom environments, may be helpful for their future workplace transition. My findings support this research, as the participants expressed their opinions on professional work experience, internships, and networking. Furthermore, this data indicate potential roles for institution in providing such opportunities.

Recommendations for Action involving professional work experience, internships, and professional networking:

- *Improved internship programmes for undergraduates:*

  As participants believe internships provide students with professional work experience and foster opportunities to build a professional network, consideration should be given to making these mandatory. These programmes may include clear requirements and accountability for students, better communication between university staff/faculty and employers, and more assistance with matching students and organisations.

- *Networking events/services for students with alumni and professionals:*

  Events and services could allow students to meet and interact with professionals in a social setting. This may provide opportunities for students to build professional relationships, get advice about different professions, and gain opportunities for internships, job shadowing, mentoring, and future employment. These services could be university-wide or organised for specific degree programmes or student groups (may also be tied to career fairs).

Job Searching and Workplace Transition

Whether participants casually mentioned how many jobs they had applied for, or they expressed frustrations of not having found a job, the topic of job searching was frequently discussed. Damon talked about the amount of time he spent every day searching and applying for jobs:

> *About a month after graduation, I really started looking for jobs hard because bills suddenly started piling up different than they had before. So, I job*

> *searched… I applied for probably 50 jobs… literally. I spent about 2 hours a*
> *day on the computer just looking for jobs, and I got nothing.*

Similarly, Piper talked about the amount of time she spent searching for jobs, and that she had yet to find full-time work:

> *I've probably spent about 100 hours since our first interview* [2 months ago]
> *online at night… searching for jobs, applying for jobs. I could rattle off my*
> *resume to you in like two minutes, because I've typed it so many times. And*
> *none of it worked! I never got a call, I never got a bite from it, and I've got a*
> *brilliant personality. So I'm like – I'm qualified for everything that I'm*
> *applying for… and it's not working.*

Damon, Piper, and other participants tried to find reasons for their situation – some blamed it on their lack of work experience or lack of professional contacts, and others blamed it on the economic recession. However, Justin attributed his situation to the lack of education about how to job search:

> *In all my classes, it was never taught to me the reality of finding a job. I was*
> *under the assumption that I had a magic piece of paper and that magic paper*
> *talks to people all over the world who hear the voice from this magic piece of*
> *paper saying – he's got a degree! It's going to be fine, right? Not so much!*

Justin's comment demonstrated the view that a degree should lead to a job and that the university should help undergraduates gain job seeking skills. Similarly, Jill believed that institutions should educate and advise their students about the work force. She also emphasised the importance of managing students' expectations about job searching and their futures:

> *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.

These excerpts demonstrate that the participants believe there is a role for institutions to play in providing students with relevant information about potential careers, preparing them for the workplace transition, and equipping them with skills to effectively job search. These findings support the research of Crebert et al. (2004), who suggest that it is unrealistic for universities to guarantee that their graduates will possess all the skills needed in future occupations, but that "universities should guarantee that their students will all have the opportunity to learn and develop generic skills and abilities during their undergraduate study" (p. 148). Furthermore, Woods (2004) emphasised the importance of higher education to assist students in keeping up with current job trends and employer expectations.

Recommendations for Action involving job searching and preparing students for the workplace transition:

- *Provide trainings and resources on career-related skills:*
  Trainings and resources may equip students with knowledge, skills, and support for job searching and the workplace transition. These may include courses, seminars, staff/instructor-to-student counselling, or printed materials. Topics for such may include information about the job market, best locations (nationally and locally) for specific jobs, professional associations and conferences, resources and places to find specific job postings, practical career skills (resume/curriculum vitae writing and interviewing), awareness about workplace transition and employer expectations, and accountability and support.

Career Services

The data indicated that in some cases, career centres provide some of the services mentioned in the previous section; however, the data also indicated that often students are either unaware that these services exist, or they did not understand the importance of accessing these services as students. For example, Raymond said:

> *I think colleges need to do more to "beef up" their career services and expand the focus and scope. Also promote, notify and raise student awareness both on and off campus that these services even exist and most are free. Many times I came across students that had no idea about the career department or what they did.*

Jade thought these services needed to be expanded:

> *I would like to see career services easier to use and more expanded. I tried to go once, and maybe it was just an off day for the office, but I didn't even get anything done because it was such a headache. It would be nice if they even expanded to have things geared toward students in each college to get resume help specific for my field.*

Nick was also aware of the career services available to him as a student, but he never accessed these services:

> *Most seniors are already aware of services they "should" be taking advantage of, such as career services. However, I was super involved and personally knew people in every office on campus... you would think that would make me more likely to use those services, but it didn't. Not once did I go to the career center for help with internships, resumes, grad school applications, or job placement. Why? Who knows... but I didn't. If someone would have said, I really think you should go to the career center and here's why… oh and I know someone real well - I can connect you with them… that may be the "nudge" that seniors need.*

Nick also talked about his idea of a senior-year experience centre with staff to help guide students throughout their final year and beyond. Many participants expressed the view that career services should be more convenient and made available to graduates. Christine said:

> *The university I attended had a career services office. However, I never once utilized it. I think making those kinds of services more convenient and available to students would be super beneficial... maybe allowing access to alumni members at a super low rate- like almost the student rate. I mean, when I was out of a job, I couldn't afford to go pay $20 a month to possibly have my resume reviewed by career services.*

Recommendations for Action involving university career services:

- *Develop strategies to promote convenient career services:*
  Universities wishing to increase student services may explore new strategies to help students develop early awareness of the importance of career services. Strategies might include print marketing, making announcements in classes, and having other faculty/staff advocate these services to their students.

- *Continue to offer free career services to alumni for a period of time after graduation:*
  Students often do not realise the importance and need for these services until after they graduate. Making the services available for free to recent graduates may help them transition more smoothly and feel supported by the university.

Emotional Support

As demonstrated in Chapters 6-9, the post-university transition was not only about careers and the workplace transition, but it was also an emotionally charged transition. As the participants searched, felt uncertain, had unmet expectations, and felt confused about their

identities, they expressed their desire for emotional support from the university both before and after graduation. This support, they said, could come from university personnel or from peers and young alumni organised by the university. Christine, for example, noted how beneficial it was to have had professors facilitate group discussions before graduation, which helped her prepare to leave university:

> *Something that my professors did that was super beneficial and helped me a lot was just offering closure. I know that not every major is like that, but I totally think they should be.*

Most participants, however, talked more about their need for emotional support after graduation, and they expressed their wish for the university to facilitate this. For example, Ben suggested student support groups:

> *Maybe schools could also have post-graduation programs for helping with the transition. Meeting in small groups for instance... just for support and maybe knowledge of what other people are doing that might be working.*

Similarly, Piper talked about the value of peer support in this transition. She wished that someone would have warned her about the hardships of the life after graduation:

> *I wish there was just someone to say – this is going to be hard. And you think that because everything has worked out before and you haven't had to stress before, that it's going to be fine. So, maybe a mentor program with someone that you look up to and think – oh, if it was hard for them, then what's this going to be like for me. Maybe just having stories from people. So, maybe if there was something like that – like here's my transition, but I made it out… that could be both encouraging and give you a warning.*

Meggs also talked about an idea for a mentor programme with older peers. However, she put emphasis on the support they could offer in identifying new groups for social and service purposes:

> *One way I see potential is a mentor program or networking opportunities for people who are graduating with former graduates in the communities they are going to be moving to. Examples being – getting involved in city planning or arts festivals, community events, finding the cool hangout places. This could help other young alumni still feel involved, but also help graduating students.*

While these views suggest that participants thought the role of the university was to provide conditions for peer support beyond graduation, other participants expressed their view that the university might make student counselling services freely available after graduation. Christine, for example, said:

> *Thinking about the very lowest points of my life this year, it would've been beneficial if the university would've allowed alumni to use the Counselling Services for free. Even though I graduated in May, there were times in June and July that I totally could've used those services and benefited from them tremendously.*

Carley talked about her idea and expressed the view that mental health is as important as physical health:

> *Maybe universities could create post-graduation counselling and require a 1-hour class that is designed to create almost a group therapy type of setting. We are required to do physical education classes, so why not require one class like this? I mean, I think it would be extremely helpful.*

Because my research involved talking with graduates, this prompted several participants to comment on how helpful such conversations would be for other graduates. Piper, for example, expressed her support for a staff mentor scheme:

> *I really think that universities could develop a mentorship program. For instance, if someone did what you are doing right now in your research and would find the weekly or monthly time to help a student analyse their life and how they feel and why they feel that way.*

Participants who described themselves as being heavily involved in and engaged with student and university activities claimed to also have felt a strong emotional connection to their university and undergraduate experience. Subsequently, those participants expressed more emotional difficulty around leaving university. One participant compared this to 'breaking-up' with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Her opinion was that the more emotionally engaged one is in their relationship, the harder it is when the relationship ends.

The participants' comments suggest that because they found it difficult to leave university, they would have liked the university to provide them with ways to stay more connected for longer. While some university personnel may not consider this to be the role of the university, those that wish to maintain good relationships with alumni might consider the views of my participants and possible strategies to meet their expressed needs. These findings support the literature on the emotional aspects of transition discussed in Chapter 2 (Feiter-Karchin and Wallace-Schutzman, 1982; Weinstein and Meyer, 1991; Chickering and Reisser, 1993; Holton, 1993; Chickering and Schlossberg, 1995; Schlossberg et al., 1995; Gardner and Van der Veer, 1998; Bridges, 2004).

Recommendations for Action involving emotional support and preparation:

- *Facilitate opportunities for final-year students to learn about the possible emotional aspects of the post-university transition:*
  This may include providing students with information about their impending life change (awareness), guiding students in activities that will help them emotionally

prepare for leaving university, fostering opportunities for reflection and closure, and making students aware of other support services available. This could be in the form of courses, seminars, events, or counselling sessions, and facilitated in classroom settings or on an individual basis.

- *Organise support groups for final-year students:*
  These groups could be formal or informal, organised by majors, hobbies, or service-interests, and may help students find comfort from peers who are facing similar experiences. Young alumni could be invited to share advice, offer support, and help students better manage their expectations. These small groups could continue after graduation for interested individuals and also serve as an opportunity for students to network with one another and learn about potential employment opportunities.

- *Continue university staff mentorship and/or counselling services post-graduation:*
  Allow counselling services to be available cost free to alumni for one year after graduation. This may also include providing services for students who wish to have follow-up contact or mentoring with staff after graduation.

Practical Life Skills Training

The participants raised concerns around their need for practical life skills as part of their transition. Skills they needed help with included budgeting, loans, taxes, insurance, and other 'adult responsibilities', as one participant called it. Again, participants expressed the wish that these skills had been taught through their university education. For example, Meggs said:

> *I think there should be some sort of transition class on paying insurance and the run around… like about cell phones. I'm having to learn a lot about paying my own stuff… and it is hard being a grown up.*

Similarly, Macey expressed her opinion that the university provide such a programme:

> *How about the university offering continuing support… Somehow create a*
> *program or class that is solely based on the transition after college that you*
> *can take the last semester before you enter the real world, and call it 'Things*
> *no one really teaches you but that you will need to know in order to succeed.'*
> *We can work on the name* [laughing]. *It can teach topics from filing taxes,*
> *investing and starting a 401K, to future marriage and family counseling.*

Christine thought trainings for these skills could be included in a careers class:

> *Maybe that class could even stretch beyond the realm of careers and include*
> *other aspects like budgeting, financial advice, how to mortgage a house, and*
> *the benefits of insurance. Those things would all be beneficial. After I*
> *graduated, I had no clue how valuable medical insurance was, and I think a*
> *lot of students are probably that way.*

Damon was one of the participants who expressed the importance of preparing students for all three aspects of transition, including career ('transition into new jobs'), emotional ('making connections'), and practical skills ('loans, banking, credit'):

> *I think the best thing a university can do is prepare them* [students] *for the fall.*
> *They can inform students of the process of being a big kid – loans, banking,*
> *credit, leases, transition into new jobs, balancing time in different ways, and*
> *how to make connections differently. I guess I'm saying just give them the non-*
> *academic tools that will be helpful for the transition.*

Damon provided examples for training topics, but also emphasised the importance of preparing students for 'the fall'. Preparation consists not only of practical skills, but also the knowledge and awareness of the upcoming transition. Furthermore, Samantha noted that universities can help students prepare for the reality of the transition. She suggested a post-graduation workshop. *"The session should hit us graduates hard and the title should be, 'The*

only way to follow your dreams is to wake up!' Sounds crazy, but it's so true. Prepare us for what it's really going to be like." Samantha's suggestion illustrated an important perspective. Rather than listing the specific skills that she felt needed to be taught, she emphasised the overarching need to help students understand the reality of difficulty that often accompanies life-after-study, and thereby equip them to manage their expectations accordingly.

Recommendations for Action involving practical skills and overall preparation for life-after-university:

- *Facilitate trainings for practical life skills:*
  This could be done through seminars, events, resources, or in the form of a general education course. It may include information about personal budgeting, student loans, home mortgages, taxes, and insurance. It may also involve guest lectures from professionals, such as bankers and insurance agents. University staff could also serve as a resource or direct students to additional support services.

- *Seminar or course for final-year students that facilitates all three areas of desired support:*
  - Career preparation (job searching, resume writing, and interview skills; opportunities for internships, mentorship, and networking; guest lectures from human relations personnel and recruiters).
  - Emotional support (providing awareness of transition; helping students manage expectations; fostering opportunities for reflection and closure; student support groups; guest lectures from young alumni about transition; resources and information about community groups).

  o Practical life skills training (personal budgeting, health care, loans and mortgages; guest lectures from bankers, insurance agents, credit and tax agencies, and mortgage lenders).

Potential Challenges of Recommendations for Action

The recommended support initiatives do not come without challenges. First, the data have demonstrated that final-year students often do not realise their need for support or training until after they have graduated. Nick said, *"The challenge, I think, is that seniors don't think they need the services that universities could potentially provide."* This means that students are often unaware of the challenges or magnitude of their impending transition, and they may not use services available to them during their studies.

> *The major obstacles to consider are getting seniors to utilize the services, and getting seniors to start utilizing them at the beginning of the year and not just right before graduation. And make a holistic centre... because seniors will need assistance in all aspects of life: academic, job prep, mental health, spiritual, etc.*

Second, there may be tension between views of what is the responsibility of the university and what is the responsibility of the student. Raymond indicated that individuals are ultimately responsible for themselves and their future, but that university support is needed and wanted. He compared the university role with that of a parent:

> *I would charge universities to make sure they focus almost as much time, energy and money on graduates and their post-collegiate endeavours as they do their undergrad students on campus. In a sense I think it is part of the university's responsibility (kind of like a parent) to see their students off and assist them in practically any way possible in career opportunities and council and advice. Naturally, it's not their sole responsibility to get the graduate a*

job – that falls on the young man or woman themselves to take that personal
responsibility because it's their life, but I think colleges need to do more.

Third, depending on resources available and institutional priorities, universities may or may not be able to address the needs expressed by my participants. However, as addressed by Johnson and Eckel (1998), developing initiatives for final-year students may cultivate relationships with students who are more likely to become alumni that are willing to give back (through finances, volunteering, mentoring, and serving as board members, for example) to their institution.

Chapter Summary

From the research findings I aimed to make recommendations for institutions wishing to support their graduating students in the post-university transition. The data have indicated that although there are challenging aspects of this transition, students perceive that institutions can play a role in offsetting aspects of difficulty and making the transition smoother. Based on my interpretation of comments made by participants, I have provided recommendations for action regarding *career preparation, emotional support,* and *practical life skills training.*

Building on the metaphor that one participant used to describe the post-university transition that I have used in the title of this thesis – 'treading through swampy water', I conceptualise the support practices that institutions may put in place as a 'bridge' to help young adults get across the swampy water. The analogy of a bridge was inspired by a research participant, who described how he felt in the post-university transition by saying, *"I want to be a random and free 20-something, but* [getting to where I want to be] *requires a responsible and dedicated 20-something… and I am looking for a bridge."* Through my analysis of participant comments, I explored what 'treading through swampy water' entailed for twenty

recent graduates, and I simultaneously explored if a proverbial bridge needed to be built. My findings demonstrate that recent graduates felt they would benefit from a bridge and expressed a desire for institutions to play a role in building that bridge.

In linking together transition literature, student development research, and my study findings, a foundation for a bridge has been established, and the specific support strategies may be the 'walking planks' along the bridge. My findings have identified some strategies that may be useful, but further exploration and evaluation may identify additional or different 'planks'. Nevertheless, my research has provided a foundation that (a) supports and justifies some of the current transition practices, and (b) serves as a departure point in exploring additional practices.

My findings have suggested that this transition can be difficult for recent graduates, and there are practices that institutions can put in place that may help prepare students to confront this transition and support them if and when they need it. Life after university can feel like the 'unknown'; Nick said, "*The unknown and the uncomfortable are very challenging, but can absolutely produce growth and development if balanced with adequate support.*" Although institutions cannot (nor should they want to) remove the process of transition, by making it more 'known', students may be more equipped to approach it.

Chapter 11

Synopsis, Strengths and Limitations, and Future Research

Introduction

I began this thesis (Chapter 1) by saying that my perspective on the role of higher education, students' transition, and how they interact had shifted throughout this study. It has shifted *from* higher education institutions 'are obligated to', 'must', and 'should' develop practices that better prepare and support students for life after university, *to* it may benefit students (and subsequently institutions) if universities explore their students' needs to inform potential practices regarding this transition. Although some participants' transition experiences were similar to the one I had, there were also individuals with different perspectives than the one I had after graduation. Ultimately, through this research I have learned that this transition is complex, multi-faceted, and although it may contain elements of difficulty for most, it is different for everyone. I have also learned that in order for this transition to be known and understood, it must be explored through the perspectives of those experiencing it. Then, with that understanding, institutional practices can be better informed, designed, and implemented. Through this study, I have aimed to do just that – better understand individuals in the post-university transition.

In this final chapter, I begin by providing a synopsis of the research approach, design, and findings. Then I discuss the strengths and limitations of this study and present ideas for future research.

Synopsis

This qualitative study, based on an interpretive paradigm of research informed by symbolic interactionism, naturalistic inquiry, and narrativity, was guided by three research questions:

- *What are the experiences of young, recent university graduates?*
- *What are the perspectives of young, recent university graduates?*
- *What are the recommendations for institutions wishing to support their graduating students?*

Young graduates were defined as those who attended university immediately after high school and were transitioning into a full-time, non-academic environment for the first time. *Recent graduates* were defined as those within the first year after their degree completion. Twenty graduates participated in six months of research by engaging in monthly interviews. All of the participants were graduates of the same university and were broadly representative of their university's student population in terms of degree, ethnicity, and gender.

The data indicated four main themes as aspects of the post-university transition – *shifting identities, searching*, *unmet expectations, and stabilisers*. The sub-themes within *shifting identities* illustrated that life (comfort zone, relationships, interests, routines, and living situation) was different for the participants than it was before they graduated, and that their perceptions had subsequently shifted (or were shifting). In *searching*, the sub-themes represented emotional elements of transition; aspects of life that the participants did not have (certainty and direction), but were searching to find (fulfilment, happiness, and meaningful relationships). The sub-themes discussed in *unmet expectations* exemplified the participants' expectations of themselves, their degree (entitlement), job searching, the workplace transition, earning potential, finances, the economy, and other challenges in the post-

university transition. Although these findings illustrated that graduates were experiencing difficulties in their post-university transition, the data also indicated that the participants used *stabilisers* that helped them find support and balance in the transition. These included support system, groups and activities, faith, health and fitness, and accepting uncertainties by 'living for the present'.

Based on an interpretation of these findings, there was a fundamental role that emerged for institutions who wish to support their graduating students – provide services that prepare students practically and professionally for their futures, as well as guide students in managing their own expectations (about transition and life after university) by helping them understand their shifting identities and the uncertainty that often accompanies the post-university transition. The data also indicated that students understand that they, too, have a responsibility in this transition, and that their successes and failures are ultimately on them.

From these findings and other comments made by participants about ways the university might have helped them, specific recommendations for institutional support regarding the post-university transition were made. The recommendations provided practical ideas for *career preparation, emotional support,* and *practical life skills training*. Some of these included: more rigorous internship programmes, networking opportunities with professionals, career skills trainings, on-going career services and counselling services for recent graduates, student support groups, transition awareness education, life skills trainings, and final-year seminars/courses.

To encapsulate my research findings, I used a metaphor that was informed by the participants' descriptions of transition. I have found that recent graduates' experiences of leaving university and entering life after study are like 'treading through swampy water'. Although it may be difficult (shifting identities, searching, unmet expectations), graduates

keep from 'drowning' by using personal stabilisers. My findings indicate that recent graduates need and desire for institutions to build a 'bridge' to help prepare and support them in crossing the swampy water. A potential foundation for this bridge is to link transition research with student development theory and my research findings. I conceptualise the specific strategies that may be useful in preparing and supporting these students as the 'walking planks' on the bridge. These planks may vary and need to be specifically informed and evaluated within each institution.

Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this research lies in the originality. I explored a phenomenon (the post-university transition) that had not been previously researched using qualitative methods within a higher education context. My findings have provided a qualitative data set for better understanding this phenomenon (transition) from the perspectives of individuals experiencing it (recent graduates). I have provided a research foundation for both institutions that currently offer transition services and those that do not but are interested in doing so. Furthermore, my findings have supported the literature from transition research, and I have identified this as a field for which higher education practices might build upon.

While I have produced a piece of original research that contributes to the greater knowledge of higher education and related practices, there have also been limitations throughout this process that I have confronted. First, there are criticisms of the interpretive approach. In Chapter 3, I discussed how an interpretive researcher addresses issues of validity, credibility, and transferability. In Chapter 4, I explained the specific steps I took in the research design and data collection to ensure rigour, such as addressing researcher bias, conducting a pilot study, facilitating in-depth interviews, allowing participants to check transcripts, getting

participant feedback on preliminary findings, and facilitating a group discussion to allow participants the opportunity to offer feedback on my analysis.

Second, I also had to confront my personal limitations. Because there are policies restricting thesis word limits, I experienced difficulty in accepting that I could not present all the data. The participants graciously shared their experiences, thoughts, and feelings with me, and I struggled with how to succinctly and cogently present the depth and complexity of their lives. Although the findings emerged more as themes, rather than cases or narratives, I aimed to provide thick descriptions of the participants' experiences in the presentation of data to allow for transferability.

Third, a possible limitation was the timing of the research in relation to the economic recession. Although it proved to be an interesting time to explore recent graduates' transition into the workforce, I understand that because the findings are time and context bound, the situation of the economy may have added to the participants' difficulty in transition.

Opportunities for Future Research

Some of the research findings have indicated potential opportunities for future research. Here I list and briefly describe these indications and opportunities:

1.) *Assessment of post-university transition support initiatives:*

This could be in the form of assessing institutional support initiatives that are already in place, or assessing the outcomes of any recommendations for action presented in this thesis.

a.) Are these initiatives perceived as beneficial to students as they prepare to leave university? If so, are they still perceived as beneficial even after graduation?

b.) Do these initiatives aid in donor cultivation? Furthermore, are students who felt more supported by their university in their post-university transition more likely to make financial contributions to the university later?

c.) Do these initiatives have outcomes that link to the university mission and/or overall learning outcomes? (as explored by Henscheid, 2008b).

2.) *Longitudinal and/or follow-up study with graduates:*

Clearly, a follow-up study of graduates three years, five years, and/or ten years after graduation would provide additional depth to the research findings and further the understanding of this transition. (This may also explore the long term outcomes of support initiatives, donor cultivation, and career patterns of graduates).

3.) *Further exploration of specific patterns found in this study:*

a.) My research indicated that participants with a profession-specific degree engaged in more professional work experience as an undergraduate than those participants with a generic degree. Furthermore, participants with a more general degree expressed more uncertainty and lack of direction about their career transition than those with a profession-specific degree. A research project that explored this topic in more detail may be useful to better inform practices involving students in transition.

b.) My research indicated that students who were highly involved or engaged with university-affiliated activities had less professional work experience as students. Furthermore, these participants indicated more emotional difficulty in detaching from their university lifestyle than participants who were less involved. A research project that explored this indication in more detail may be useful for practitioners interested in student engagement and related outcomes.

4.) Further exploration of 'research as therapy' in the post-university transition:

The participants in my study often referred to the research interviews as a therapeutic mechanism for helping them cope with their transition. There is a small body of literature on research as therapy, and using my research findings to further explore this topic may be useful.

5.) Exploration of possible roles for the business sector in this transition:

I aimed to explore and understand this transition in order to better inform potential higher education practices. A research project that explored this transition in order to better inform potential employer, business, and hiring sector practices may be useful.

Conclusion

As a researcher comes back to an experience and interprets it, his or her prior interpretations and understanding shape what he or she now sees and interprets. This does not mean that interpretation is inconclusive, for conclusions are always drawn. It only means that interpretation is never finished (Denzin, 2002, p. 363-364).

I end the final chapter of this thesis by using Denzin's quote as it illuminates the complexity of interpretation and the research process as a whole. Throughout this project, interpretation and analysis were on-going. I came into this study with a set of experiences and knowledge that permeated how I approached the research. I began interpretation during the research interviews, and continued that process through transcribing, coding, and analysing the data. Even as I wrote the data findings chapters, I was still interpreting the data as I toyed with a variety of ways to present, articulate, and organise the emergent themes. This is why Denzin's statement resonates with me, as it describes how I have felt about the interpretive process, and how I still feel about it. Although I have sought the experiences and perspectives of recent university graduations, drawn conclusions about their post-university transition, and

subsequently made recommendations for institutions regarding this transition, I conclude this thesis with the understanding that interpretation is never finished.

My hope is that I have given participants the opportunity to voice their experiences, expectations, hopes, and desires, and that their voices will inform both other students experiencing the post-university transition and institutions searching for ways to help their students and graduates manage this transition.

References

Adams, J., Hayes, J., and Hopkins, B. (1976). *Transition: Understanding and managing personal change*. London: Martin Robertson.

Akens, C. (2002). Building community out of diversity: The FIU FYRST program. *College Student Affairs Journal, 22*(1), 45-59.

Anderson, M. L. (2005). *Spirituality and coping with work transition* (unpublished doctoral dissertation). Oakland University, Rochester, MI.

Anderson, M. L., Goodman, J., and Schlossberg, N. K. (2012). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking Schlossberg's theory practice in a diverse world* (4th ed.). New York: Springer.

Arnett, J. J. (2004). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Arnett, J. J. (2006). Emerging adulthood in Europe: A response to Bynner. *Journal of Youth Studies, 9*, 111-123.

Arthur, M. B., Hall, D. T., and Lawrence, B. S. (Eds.) (1989). *Handbook of career theory*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Astin, A. W. (1996). Involvement in learning revisited: Lessons we have learned. *Journal of College Student Development, 37*(2), 123-133.

Becker, H. S. (1964). Personal change in adult life. *Sociometry, 27*(1), 40-53.

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Bogdan, R. C., and Biklen, S. K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Bogdan, R. C., and Biklen, S. K. (2010). Foundations of qualitative research in education. In W. Luttrell (Ed.), *Qualitative educational research* (pp. 21-44). New York: Routledge.

Bordin, E. S. (1990). Psychodynamic model of career choice and satisfaction. In D. Brown, and L. Brooks (Eds.), *Career choice and development: Applying contemporary theories to practice* (2nd ed., pp. 102-144). San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bridges, W. (2004). *Transitions: Making sense of life's changes* (2nd ed.). USA: Da Capo Press.

Brown, D. (1996). Brown's values-based, holistic model of career and life-role choices and satisfaction. In D. Brown, and L. Brooks (Eds.), *Career choice and development: Applying contemporary theories to practice* (3rd ed., pp. 337-372). San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brown, D., and Brooks, L. (Eds.) (1990). *Career choice and development: Applying contemporary theories to practice* (2nd ed.). San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.

Canaan, J. E., and Shumar, W. (2008). *Structure and agency in the neoliberal university*. New York: Routledge.

Candy, P. C., and Crebert, R. G. (1991). Ivory tower to concrete jungle: The difficult

   transition from the academy to the workplace as learning environments. *The Journal*

   of Higher Education, 62(5), 570-592.

Chase, S. E. (2001). Taking narrative seriously: Consequences for method and theory in

   interview studies. In C. F. Conrad, J. G. Haworth, and L. R. Lattuca (Eds.),

   Qualitative research in higher education: Expanding perspectives (2nd ed., pp. 229-

   242). Boston: Pearson.

Chickering, A. W. (1969). *Education and identity.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Chickering, A. W., and Reisser, L. (1993). *Education and identity* (2nd ed.). San Francisco:

   Jossey-Bass.

Chickering, A. W., and Schlossberg, N. K. (1995). *Getting the most out of college.*

   Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Chickering, A. W., and Schlossberg, N. K. (1998). Moving on: Seniors as people in

   transition. In J. N. Gardner, G. Van der Veer, and Associates, *The senior year*

   experience: Facilitating integration, reflection, closure, and transition (pp. 37-50).

   San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Chin, L. (2009). Negotiating identity between career and family roles: A study of

   international graduate students' wives in the US. *International Journal of Lifelong*

   Education, 28, 211-226.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., and Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6th ed.).

   Oxon: Routledge.

Coomes, M. D., and DeBard, R. (2004). A generational approach to understanding students. *New Directions for Student Services, 106*, 5-16.

Crebert, G., Bates, M., Bell, B., Patrick, C., and Cragnolini, V. (2004). Developing generic skills at university, during work placement and in employment: Graduates' perceptions. *Higher Education Research and Development*, *23*(2), 147-165.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Currie, M. (1998). *Postmodern narrative theory*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Dahlgren, M. A., Hult, H., Dahlgren, L. O., Segerstad, H. H., and Johansson, K. (2006). From senior student to novice worker: Learning trajectories in political science, psychology, and mechanical engineering. *Studies in Higher Education, 31*(5), 569-586.

Dawis, R. V., and Lofquist, L. H. (1976). Personality style and the process of work adjustment. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 23*, 55-59.

Denzin, N. K. (1992). *Symbolic interactionism and cultural studies.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Denzin, N. K. (2000). The practices and politics of interpretation. In N. K. Denzin, and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K. (2001). Strategies of multiple triangulation. In C. F. Conrad, J. G. Haworth, and L. R. Lattuca (Eds.), *Qualitative research in higher education: Expanding perspectives* (2nd ed., pp. 317-327). Boston: Pearson.

Denzin, N. K. (2002). The interpretive process. In A. M. Huberman, and M. B. Miles (Eds.),

    Qualitative Researcher's Companion (pp. 349-366). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K., and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.) (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.).

    Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Logic, the theory of inquiry.* New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Dominick, J. (2009, January 30). Personal email correspondence.

Eastmond, D. V. (1991). Since Levinson. *Journal of Adult Education, 19*(2), 3-10.

Engberg, M. E., and Mayhew, M. J. (2007). The influence of first-year "success" courses

    on student learning and democratic outcomes. *Journal of College Student*

    Development, 48(3), 241-258.

Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and society.* New York: Norton.

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity, youth, and crisis.* New York: Norton.

Evans, N. J. (2003). Psychosocial, cognitive, and typological perspectives on student

    development. In S. R. Komives, D. B. Woodward, and Associates, *Student services: A*

    handbook for the profession (4th ed., pp. 179-202). New Jersey: Jossey-Bass.

Ezzy, D. (2002). *Qualitative analysis: Practice and innovation*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and

    Unwin.

Farner, S. M., and Brown, E. E. (2008). College student and the work world. *Journal of*

    Employment Counseling, 45(3), 108-114.

Feiter-Karchin, B., and Wallace-Schutzman, F. (1982). Campus to career: Bridging the gap. *Journal of College Placement, 43*(1), 59-91.

Fidler, P. P., and Moore, P. S. (1996). A comparison of effect of campus residence and freshman seminar attendance on freshman dropout rates. *Journal of the Freshman Year Experience and Students in Transition, 8*(2), 7-16.

Fisher, J. M., and Savage, D. J. (1999). Beyond experimentation into meaning. *Papers from the 1998 EPCA Conference*. Lostock Hall: EPCA Publications.

Fowler, J. W. (1991). Stages in faith consciousness. *New Directions in Child Development, 52,* 27-54.

Friedman, D. (2008). Assessing first-year seminars. *Presentation from First-Year Assessment Conference*: San Antonio, TX on October 13, 2008. Retrieved February 2, 2009 from http://www.sc.edu/fye/events/presentation/national_assessment/2008/2008 Handouts.html.

Gardner, J. N., Van der Veer, G., and Associates (1998). *The senior year experience: Facilitating integration, reflection, closure, and transition.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Gardner, P. D. (1998). Are college seniors prepared to work? In J. N. Gardner, G. Van der Veer, and Associates, *The senior year experience: Facilitating integration, reflection, closure, and transition* (pp. 60-78). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Gardner, P. D., and Perry, A. L. (2011). The role of cooperative and work-integrated education in graduate transition into the workplace. In R. K. Coll, and K. E. Zegwaard (Eds.), *International handbook for cooperative and work-integrated education: International perspectives of theory, research and practice* (pp. 313-320). Lowell, MA: World Association for Cooperative Education.

Gedye, S., Fender, E., and Chalkley, B. (2004). Students' undergraduate expectations and post-graduation experiences of the value of a degree. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, *28*(3), 381-396.

George, L. K. (1993). Sociological perspectives on life transitions. *Annual Review of Sociology 19*, 353-373.

Gerzon, M. (1996). *Listening to midlife*. Boston: Shambhala.

Ginzberg, E., Ginsburg, S. W., Axelrad, S., and Herma, L. J. (1951). *Occupational choice: An approach to general theory.* New York: Colombia University Press.

Golan, N. (1981). *Passing through transitions: A guide for practitioners.* New York: The Free Press.

Goodman, J., Schlossberg, N. K., and Anderson, M. L. (2006). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory* (3rd ed.). New York: Springer.

Gordon, V. N. (1991). The evolution of a freshman seminar: A case study. *Journal of the Freshman Year Experience, 3*(2), 107-116.

Graham, C., and McKensie, A. (1995). Delivering the promise: the transition from higher education to work. *Education + Training, 37*(1), 4-11.

Graham, S., Furr, S., Flowers, C, and Burke, M. T. (2001). Religion and spirituality in coping
with stress. *Counseling and Values, 46*, 2-13.

Greene, J. C. (2010). Knowledge accumulation: Three views on the nature and role of
knowledge in social science. In W. Luttrell (Ed.), *Qualitative educational research*
(pp. 63-77). New York: Routledge.

Guba, E., and Lincoln, Y. (2001). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In C. F.
Conrad, J. G. Haworth, and L. R. Lattuca (Eds.), *Qualitative research in higher
education: Expanding perspectives* (2nd ed., pp. 57-72) Boston: Pearson.

Gurin, P., Dey, E. L., Hurtado, S. and Gurin, G. (2002). Diversity and higher education:
Theory and impact on educational outcomes. *Harvard Educational Review*, *72*,
330-367.

Hanneman, L., and Gardner, P. (2010). Under the economic turmoil a skill gap simmers.
CERI Research Brief 1-2010. East Lansing, Michigan: Collegiate Employment
Research Institute.

Hart, P. (2008). *How should colleges assess and improve student learning?*. Washing D.C.:
Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Harvey, L. (2001). Defining and measuring employability. *Quality in Higher Education, 7*(2),
97-109.

Hassler, C. (2008). *20 something manifesto*. Canada: New World Library.

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. New York: State
University of New York Press.

Helms, J. E. (1995). An update of Helm's White and People of Color racial identity models.
In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, and C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook
of multicultural counseling* (pp. 181-198). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Henscheid, J. M. (2008a). Institutional efforts to move seniors through and beyond college.
New Directions for Higher Education, 144, 79-87.

Henscheid, J. M. (2008b). Preparing seniors for life after college. *About Campus,* November-
December, 20-25.

Higgs, J., and Trede, F. (2010). Philosophical frameworks and research communities. In J.
Higgs, N. Cherry, R. Macklin, and R. Ajjawi (Eds.), *Research Practice: A discourse
on qualitative methodologies* (pp. 31-36). The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

Hogan, D. P. (1981). *Transitions and social change: The early lives of American men.* New
York: Academic.

Holden, R., and Harte, V. (2004). New graduate engagement with professional development:
A pilot study. *Journal of European Industrial Training, 28*(2-4), 272-282.

Holland, J. L. (1966). *The psychology of vocational choice.* Waltham, MA: Blaisdell.

Holton, E. F. (1993). *Managing the transition to work: Twelve essential steps for a fast start
to your career.* Bethlehem, PA: College Placement Council.

Howe, N., and Strauss, W. (2003). *Millennials go to college: Strategies for a new generation
on campus.* Washington D. C.: American Association of Collegiate Registrars.

Howell, L. (2001). Spirituality and women's midlife development. *Adultspan, 3,* 51-60.

Hudson, F. M. (1991). *The adult years: Mastering the art of self renewal* (Rev. ed.) San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Johnson, J. W., and Eckel, P. D. (1998). Preparing seniors for roles as active alumni. In J. N. Gardner, G. Van der Veer, and Associates, *The senior year experience: Facilitating integration, reflection, closure, and transition* (pp. 171-184). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Jones, S. R., and McEwen, M. K. (2000). A conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity. *Journal of Student Development, 41*, 405-414.

Josselson, R. (1987). *Finding herself: Pathways to identity development in women*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Jung, C. J. (1933). *Modern man in search of a soul*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

Kaufman, P., and Feldman, K. A. (2004). Forming identities in college: A sociological approach. *Research in Higher Education, 45*(5), 463-496.

Keagan, R. (1994). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kerka, S. (1991). *Adults in career transition.* Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Career and Vocational Education. (ERIC Digest No. 115).

Kerr, C. (1991). *The great transformation in higher education, 1960-1980*. New York: SUNY Press.

Knefelkamp, L. L., Widick, C., and Parker, C. A. (1978). Editors' notes: Why bother with theory? In L. L. Knefelkamp, C. Widick, and C. A. Parker (Eds.), *Applying new developmental findings* (New Directions for Student Services No. 4, pp. vii-xvi). San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.

Krumboltz, J. D. (1979). A social learning theory of career decision making. In A. M. Mitchell, G. B. Jones, and J. D. Krumboltz (Eds.), *Social learning and career decision making* (pp. 19-49). Cranston, RI: Carroll Press.

Kuh, G. D. (1996). Guiding principles for creating seamless learning environments for undergraduates. *Journal of College Student Development, 37*(2), 135-148.

LaRocque, N. (2003). *Who should pay? Tuition fees and tertiary education financing in New Zealand.* Wellington: The Education Forum.

LeCompte, M., and Preissle, J. (2001). The role of theory in the research process. In C. F. Conrad, J. G. Haworth, and L. R. Lattuca (Eds.), *Qualitative research in higher education: Expanding perspectives* (2nd ed., pp. 39-56). Boston: Pearson.

Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., and Hackett, G. (1994). Toward and unifying sociocognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 45*, 79-122.

Levin, J. (2009). How faith heals: A theoretical model. *Explore, 5*(2), 77-96.

Levinson, D. J., Darrow, C. N., Klein, E. B., Levison M. H., and McCee, B. (1978). *The seasons of a man's life.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Lewis, R., and Parker, C. (1981). Beyond the Peter principle: Managing successful
transitions. *Journal of European Industrial Training, 5*(6), 17-21.

Lincoln, Y., and Guba E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lowery, J. W. (2004). Student affairs for a new generation. *New Directions for Student
Services, 106*, 87-99.

Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand
Oaks, CA: Sage.

McCarn, S. R., and Fassinger, R. E. (1991). Revisioning sexual minority identity formation:
A new model of lesbian identity and its implications for couseling and research. *The
Counseling Psychologist, 24*(3), 508-534.

McCrae, R. R., and John, O. P. (1992). An introduction to five factor model and its
applications. *Journal of Personality, 60*, 175-215.

McEwen, M. K. (2003). New perspectives on identity development. In S. R. Komives, D.
Woodward, and Associates, *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (4th ed.,
pp. 203-233). New Jersey: Jossey-Bass.

Mead, G. H. (1909). Social psychology as a counterpart to physiological psychology.
Psychological Bulletin, 6(12), December, 401-408.

Mishler, E. G. (2010). Validation in inquiry-guided research: The role of exemplars in
narrative studies. In W. Luttrell (Ed.), *Qualitative educational research* (pp. 288-312).
New York: Routledge.

Mordi, B. (2005). Advancing womanist identity development: Where we are and where we need to go. *The Counseling Psychologist, 33,* 225-253.

Myers, J. E., and Williard, K. (2003). Integrating spirituality into counselor preparation: A developmental, wellness approach. *Counseling and Values, 47,* 142-153.

National Resource Center for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition (2009, February 10). Personal email correspondence.

National Survey of First-Year Seminars (2000/2003/2006/2009). Research results. *National Resource Center.* Retrieved May 3, 2011 from http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/surveys/survey_instruments/index.html.

National Survey of Senior Seminars and Capstone Courses (n.d.). Research results. *National Resource Center.* Retrieved February 2, 2009, from http://www.sc.edu/fye/research/surveyfindings/surveys/surveyer.html.

Neugarten, B. L. (1979). Time, age, and the life cycle. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 136*(7), 887-894.

Newton, F. B. (2000). The new student. *About Campus*, November-December, 8-15.

Nicholson, N., and West, M. (1989). Transitions, work histories, and careers. In Arthur, M. B., Hall, D. T., and Lawrence, B. S. (Eds.), *Handbook of career theory* (pp. 181-201). Australia: Cambridge University Press.

Parkes, C. M. (1971). Psychosocial transitions: A field study. *Social Science and Medicine.* London: Pergamon Press.

Parsons, F. (1909). *Choosing a vocation.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Patton, M. (1980). *Qualitative evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Patton, W., and McMahon, M. (1999*). Career development and systems theory: A new relationship.* Canada: Brooks/Cole.

Pearlin, L. I., and Leiberman, M. A. (1979). Social sources of emotional distress. In Simmons, R. (Ed.), *Research in community and mental health* (Vol. 1). Greenwich, Connecticut: JAI Press.

Peterson, G. W., Sampson, J. P., and Reardon, R. C. (1991). *Career development and services: A cognitive approach.* Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Phinney, J. S. (2000). Identity formation across cultures: The interaction of personal, societal, and historic change. *Human Development, 43,* 27-31.

Pryor, R. G. L. (1985). Toward a composite theory of career development and choice. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 13*, 225-237.

Pryor, R. G. L. (1993). Returning from the wilderness: Personality in career decision making. *Australian Journal of Career Development, 2,* 13-17.

Reis, H. T. (1996). Social support. In A. Manstead, and M. Hewstone (Eds.), *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Social Psychology* (pp. 608-609). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Riegel, K. F. (1973). Developmental psychology and society: Some historical and ethical considerations. In J. R. Nesselroade, and H. R. Reese, *Life-span developmental psychology: Methodological issues* (pp. 1-23). New York: Academic Press.

Ritchie, J., and Lewis, J. (2003). *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rotter, J. B. (1966). Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. *Psychological Monographs, 80*(1), 1-28.

Sax, L. J., and Astin A. W. (1998). Developing "civic virtue" among college students. In J. N. Gardner, G. Van der Veer, and Associates, *The senior year experience: Facilitating integration, reflection, closure, and transition* (pp. 133-151). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation. *The Counseling Psychologist, 9*(2), 2-18.

Schlossberg, N. K. (1984). *Counseling adults in transitions: Linking practice with theory*. New York: Springer.

Schlossberg, N. K., and Leibowitz, Z. (1980). Organizational support systems as buffers to job loss. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 17*, 204-217.

Schlossberg, N. K., Waters, E. B., and Goodman, J. (1995). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory* (2nd ed.). New York: Springer.

Scott, S. (2006). The academic as service provider: Is the customer 'always right?'. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 21*(2), 193-202.

Sears, S. (1982). A definition of career guidance terms: A national Vocational Guidance Association perspective. *Vocational Guidance Quarterly, 31*, 137-143.

Slaughter, S., and Rhoades, G. (2004). *Academic capitalism and the new economy: Markets, state, and higher education.* Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press.

Smith, D. D., and Gast, L. K. (1998). Comprehensive career services for seniors. In J. N. Gardner, G. Van der Veer, and Associates, *The senior year experience: Facilitating integration, reflection, closure, and transition* (pp. 187-209). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Spierer, H. (1977). Life cycle. In A. C. Eurich (Ed.), *Major transitions in the human life cycle* (pp. 1-59). New York: Academy for Education Development.

Sprague, J. (2010). Seeing through science: Epistemologies. In W. Luttrell (Ed.), *Qualitative educational research* (pp. 78-94). New York: Routledge.

Stage, F. K. (1989). College outcomes and student development: Filling the gaps. *Review of Higher Education, 30*(20), 293-304.

Strange, C. C. (2004). Constructions of student development across the generations. *New Directions for Student Services, 106*, 47-57.

Summers, S. (2002). *A summary and critique of Nancy K. Schlossberg's transition theory*. University of Iowa faculty papers. Retrieved on May 3, 2012 from http://www.uiowa.edu/~epls/faculty/pascarel/papers/summers.pdf.

Super, D. E. (1957). *The psychology of careers*. New York: Harper and Row.

Super, D. E. (1990). A life-span, life-space approach to career development. In D. Brown, L. Brooks, and Associates, *Career choice and development: Applying contemporary theories to development* (2nd ed., pp.197-261). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Super, D. E., Savickas, M. L., and Super, C. M. (1996). The life-span, life-space approach to

    careers. In D. Brown, and L. Brooks (Eds.), *Career choice and development:*

    Applying contemporary theories to practice (3rd ed., pp. 121-178). San Francisco:

    Jossey-Bass.

The College Board Advocacy and Policy Center (2011). *Trends in college pricing*. Retrieved

    March 14, 2012, from

    http://trends.collegeboard.org/downloads/College_Pricing_2011.pdf.

Tinto, V. (1988). Stages of student departure: Reflections on the longitudinal character of

    student leaving. *Journal of Higher Education, 59*(4), 438-455.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and curses of student attrition*

    (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tolich, M., and Davidson, C. (1998). *Starting fieldwork: An introduction to qualitative*

    research in New Zealand. Auckland: Oxford University Press.

Troll, L. (1982). *Continuations: Adult development and aging*. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (n.d.). *Unemployment Rate.* Retrieved June 7,

    2011, from http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14000000.

United States Census Bureau (2007). *Statistical abstract of the United States.* Retrieved

    February 15, 2012, from

    http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0077.pdf.

Van Gennep, A. (1960). *Rites of passage.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Van Gennep, A. (2004). *Rites of passage*. London: Routledge.

Vickio, C. J. (1990). The good-bye brochure: Helping students to cope with transition and loss. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 68*(5), 575-577.

Vondracek, F. W., Lerner, R. M., and Schulenberg, J. E. (1986). *Career development: A life-span developmental approach.* Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Wadsworth, B. J. (1979). *Piaget's theory of cognitive development* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.

Weinstein, C. E., and Meyer, D. K. (1991). Cognitive learning strategies and college teaching. In R. J. Menges, and M. C. Svinicki, (Eds.), *College teaching: From theory to practice* (New Directions for Teaching and Learning 45, pp. 15-26). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Wheeler-Scruggs, K. S. (2008). Do lesbians differ from heterosexual men and women in levinsonian phases of adult development? *Journal of Counseling and Development, 86*(1), 39-46.

Williams, D. (1999). Human responses to change. *Futures, 31*(6), 609-616.

Winston, R. B. Jr. (2003). Counseling and helping skills. In S. R. Komives, D. Woodward, and Associates, *Student services: A handbook for the profession* (4th ed., pp. 484-506). New Jersey: Jossey-Bass.

Wolfe, D. M., and Kolb, D. A. (1980). Career development, personal growth, and experiential learning. In J. W. Spinger (Ed.), *Issues in career and human resource development* (pp. 1-11). Madison, WI: Society for Training and Development.

Wood, F. (2004). Preventing post-parchment depression: A model of career counseling for seniors. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 41*(2), 71-79.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Young, R. A, Marshall, S. K., Valach, L., Domene, J. F., Graham, M. D., and Zaidman-Zait, A. (2011). *Transition to adulthood: Action, projects, and counseling*. New York: Springer.

Young, R. A., Valach, L., and Collin, A. (1996). A contextual explanation of career. In D. Brown, and L. Brooks (Eds.), *Career choice and development: Applying contemporary theories to practice* (3rd ed., pp. 477-512). San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.

List of Appendices

A: Call for participants

B: Email correspondence with potential participants

C: List of topics for semi-structured interviews

D: Number-chart for participants

E: Excerpt of researcher field notes

F: Data analysis: Excerpt of interview transcript with margin coding

G: Data analysis: Excerpt of experiences-perspectives spreadsheet

H: Data analysis: Organising emergent themes

I: University of Canterbury ethics approval

J: Participant information sheet

K: Participant consent form

Appendix A

Call for Participants

Call for Research Participants: How is your transition from college-to-life going?

Alumnae April Perry (B.A. '05, M.Ed. '07) is studying abroad in New Zealand for her Ph.D. and needs your help! She is researching the college-to-life transition of *recent* graduates and is looking for 18-25 individuals to participate in her study. The research begins in November 2009, will last 6 months, and will take approximately one hour each month.

If you or someone you know graduated in May 2009 and would like more information about being a research participant, please contact April Perry at aprilperry2@gmail.com.

Appendix B

Email Correspondence with Potential Participants

Hello _____,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research project!

Brief Explanation…
I am facilitating research on the college-to-life transition. I am interested in illuminating this transition by exploring the experiences and perspectives of recent graduates like yourself. Based on the research findings, I aim to explore ways in which institutions might help prepare and/or support their graduating students.

Doing what? When?
In order to do this, I plan to facilitate one-on-one interviews and have regular email correspondence with 18-25 recent college graduates just like you. The time commitment is dependent on each participant, but will approximately take one hour per month from November 2009 – April 2010 (6 months). This is an opportunity to be a part of a study that may also other college graduates in the future.

I need some info from you…
Although I need 18-25 participants, I also need to have a broadly representative sample of your university's student population in terms of gender, ethnicity, and major. Please fill in the answers to the following items below, and I will get back with you as soon as possible to let you know if you fit the criteria for participating in this research.
Again, thank you for your interest in this project. I look forward to hearing back from you.
First and last name:
Age:
Gender:
Ethnicity:
Year of high school graduation:
Year of college graduation:
Degree/major:
Best email address to reach you:

Thank you kindly,
April Perry
PhD Candidate
University of Canterbury
Christchurch, New Zealand
aprilperry2@gmail.com

Appendix C

List of Topics for Semi-Structured Interview

The first interview was semi-structured and covered topics such as:

- Experiences and feelings around graduation
- Post-university planning, if any, before graduation
- Did participants seek employment, and if so, how they went about searching for and finding a job.
- If participants got a job, how was their career transition (experiences and emotions related).
- How the participants feel they have developed (professionally and personally) since graduation.
- Overall experiences and perspectives throughout the post-university transition.

Appendix D

Number-Chart for Participants

Each month of data collection I asked the participants to rate how they felt overall on a scale of one to ten (one being the lowest; ten being the highest). This is a blank example of the chart.

	6 months	7 months	8 months	9 months	10 months	11 months
10						
9						
8						
7						
6						
5						
4						
3						
2						
1						
0						
	November	December	January	February	March	April

Appendix E

Excerpt of Researcher Field Notes

Seemed liked hes made drastic steps in this process through the last 2-3 interviews

Great overall demeanor.

Easy to talk to

Very descriptive & articulate

I never struggled for questions

Felt like I asked some questions that really made him think... that he didn't already have answers to... which indicative of his growth/change as person - b/c he always "has the right answer."

I felt like he was finally being real w/ me... it was a gut check & he was telling it to me straight... and not all "put together" or how he is "supposed to answer"

Mentioned that he loves this process... doing this (int) is a stress-free part of his day and he looks forward to & likes (therapy-thing).

Appendix F

Data Analysis: Excerpt of Interview Transcript with Margin Coding

left part-time jobs

changey
Managed exp. of others
support system

Since the last interview, I have left RSC. It was kind of difficult to leave because I really loved the people that I worked with. However, I was keeping my immediate supervisor in the loop as far as the job hunt so she wasn't surprised at all when I turned in my resignation. She was sad to see me go, but she was excited for me. The reason that I left is that I found a different full time position! I'm working at the new North OKC (practically Edmond) campus of Mid America Christian University as an Administrative Assistant in the College of Adult and Graduate Studies. The people I work with are some of the most amazing people I've ever met- they're all so nice. It's also super great because I work in a Christian environment. I get to pray at work and go to chapel once a week, so that makes it seem a little less like work, ya know? I have no idea if this will be a long term or short term job, but we will see where God leads. Whenever they hired me, I had actually interviewed for an Enrollment Counselor position and didn't get that, but they said that there's a huge chance within a year I would be moved up to Enrollment Counselor so it's fantastic to work where there's potential for growth! The pay isn't nearly what I'd like for it to be, but I've learned that being happy in your job is just as important and this is a job that I don't dread, that I actually look forward to, and that's so valuable!

got a Full-time job.

Applied & didnt get any position offered a diff job... but w/ the potential to move up.

faith

faith

salary/job expectations
- extrinsic value

the "value" of a job
- intrinsic value

- extra activities/hobbies

no extra-curr act.

TV
crafts

I feel like such a lazy bum every month when you ask me this one! haha. I definitely haven't been proactive about finding hobbies. I would really love to join a group like Kiwanis or Young Professionals, but the memberships for those organizations cost more than I can handle right now. I still watch excessive amounts of TV! haha. I also like scrapbooking a lot and collaging...does that count? I sound like such an old woman! I'm also thinking about getting an alumni membership at the UCO Wellness Center, so I have a feeling working out is going to become a hobby or an obsession! :)

- community
lack of activity / hobbies
- being a part of someth.

health / body image

- relationships

no rel. rom.

Romantic relationships? NADA! haha. I'm totally okay with that though- I am at the stage in my life where I realize I'm in my early twenties and have plenty of life left in me. I enjoy being by myself for now, and if that were to change tomorrow, I could learn to enjoy that too.

relationship / friendship / companionship

- family (little brother getting ready to graduate, brother/dad leaving - still happening?)

Ah, my family! I love love love my family- seriously, throughout this past year I've come to appreciate them so much

support system

Appendix G

Data Analysis: Excerpt of Experiences-Perspectives Spreadsheet

	Participants: E=Experiences; P=Perspectives					
Notes/month:	**Amber** E	Amber P	**Ben** E	Ben P	**Brian** E	Brian P
November	• Elem. Ed major... never changed. Always wanted to teach 2nd grade, but opened up to 4th or 5th grade later in college. • Was involved in sorority last 2 years • Moved a lot in college	• Relies heavily on faith • Seems highly responsible and over achiever (self-sufficient)... planner. • Chart: was higher at graduation, got quite low mid-summer, picked up when got job	• In college was leader, into service, good student, biology major, in fraternity and student orgs, etc • Learned time management quickly • Expectations of a degree were more a	• He seems solid and stable. Has an overall good attitude. • Seems to have found a deeper meaning in his life that keeps him going • He knows where he's going to be for the next	• Music theatre major... very full-on. • Not involved in anything else as an undergrad other than theatre...just didn't have the time • Worked at restaurants and promos jobs as	• Felt like a loser for changing his mind about moving to nyc • Seems hopeful about near future and jobs • Excited about life in general... expectations exceeded at this point
December	• Work... normal, but questioning lifelong teaching (when she used to be so certain about this) • Getting niece less (only 1-2 times a week) • Has romantic feelings for her best friend of 5 years	• In a limbo stage of life... just ready/wanting to move forward • Worried about job security for next year • Been very lonely later... time of self-discovery • Chart: 4... brother gone for holidays,	• Semester ended very stressfully with finals • One of his classmates committed suicide during finals week • His aunt died during this time • Went on a ski trip with his cohort • He and girlfriend are	• Although he's been broken the last month, he's feeling a need to aid others... that he can do more. • Excited and satisfied with semester... rejuvenating self over holidays. • Had a hard time	• A lot of things happened after our November interview with jobs... "seeing" the industry for the first time... expectations vs. reality • Declined a job because of his personal comfort (priorities)	• Feeling owned and possessed by who he's working for • Feeling backwards and upside down (used great descriptive words) • Feeling lots of uncertainty and lack of direction • End of November-3,
January	• Unhappy with job... may apply for another grade in March • Got a third job (other than teaching and helping elderly woman on Saturdays)... at a tax agency... needed more money. • Still in 'season of winter'... thinks she's	• Worries a lot about finances, life skills, but also trying to manage her expectations accordingly. • She has friends and "support system" but still feels very alone • Wants a plan, guidance, etc • Not much support	• Really enjoyed the holiday time off • Shared details of deaths and last week of semester • Talked about burden for service and his passion about this • Discussed how his transition is different than others because	• Explains that his life can be stressful and depressing at times... always doing the same routine of studying, etc (repretition)... but finds excitement in things to keep him going... work-life balance • ((See my personal interview reflection))...	• Lots of stories of "biz" drama • Been working here and there, but looking for upcoming things • Says he's moving to NYC in May with his friend • Working promo jobs while auditioning • Still living with parents	• Realising his expectations of working in the 'biz' are very different than his reality • Says he's feeling very stuck (uncertainty) • Feels like he's spinning, but doesn't know where he's going (but not at a crisis point)

Appendix H

Data Analysis: Organising Emergent Themes
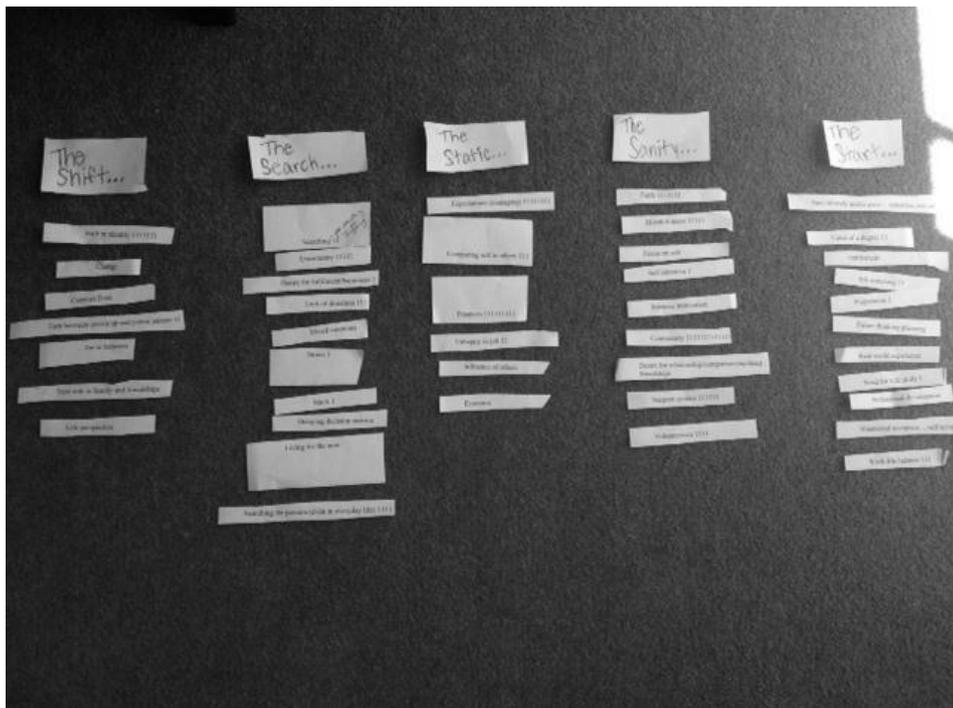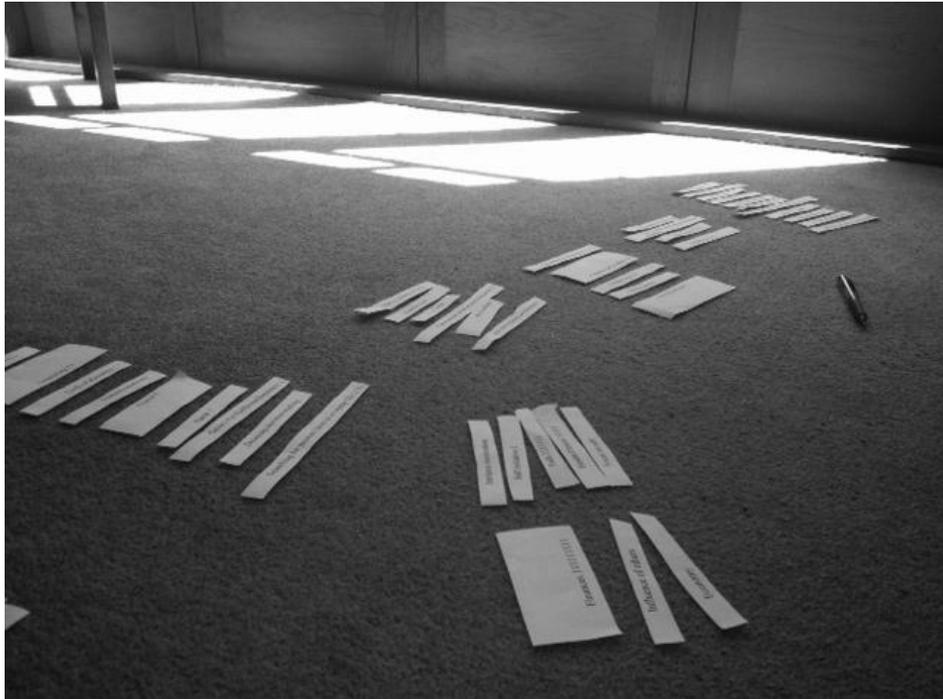
Appendix I

University of Canterbury Ethics Approval

Ref: HEC 2009/110

31 August 2009

April Atkinson
School of Educational and Human Development Studies
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear April

The Human Ethics Committee advises that your research proposal "The post-university transition: Experiences, perspectives and needs of university graduates" has been considered and approved.

Thank you for your feedback. Your application is approved **in principle** subject to the provision of a copy of email correspondence with [*University XYZ*] Research Office in which you inform them of this project and advise that it has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury's Human Ethics Committee. Please also forward to the HEC Secretary a copy of the acknowledgement you have received from [*University XYZ*] to the aforementioned information.

Therefore approval is given conditional on receipt of the above documentation.

Please note that this approval is also subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 18 August 2009.

Best wishes for your project.

Yours sincerely

Dr Michael Grimshaw
Chair, Human Ethics Committee

Ref: HEC 2009/110

16 September 2009

April Atkinson
School of Educational and Human Development Studies
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear April

Thank you for providing copies of the email correspondence with the [*University XYZ*]
Research Office as requested in our letter of 31 August 2009. I am pleased to confirm that
your application has now been fully approved.

Best wishes for your project.

Yours sincerely

Dr Michael Grimshaw
Chair, Human Ethics Committee

Participant Information Sheet

College of Education
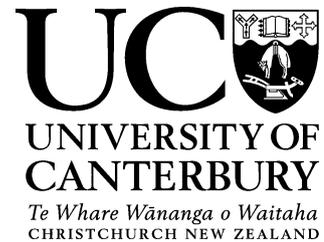
Participant Information Sheet

You are invited to participate in the research project:
The post-university transition: Experiences, perspectives, and needs of recent graduates.
The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of recent graduates and their perspectives on the transition from college to post-university life.

Your involvement in this project will be:
Participation in a series of in-depth individual interviews facilitated in person and via email over a 6-month period. Each personal interview will be digitally recorded and will last approximately 1 hour. There will be 2 personal interviews in total. Email interviews will be facilitated on the months that a personal interview is not conducted. The amount of time spent on the email interview will be up to you – the participant, but this will most likely involve no more than 1 hour per month throughout the 6 months. Through the interviews, you will be asked questions on topics such as: graduation, post-university planning, life skills, job searching process, career transition, and overall experiences and perspectives throughout the transition.

As the data are transcribed and analyzed, you will have the opportunity to verify the information you have provided and comment on how I have interpreted the data. You also have the right to withdraw from the project at any time, including withdrawal of any information provided.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: your identity as a participant will not be made public without your consent. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, in presentation or publication each participant will be assigned a pseudonym and any identifying information may be altered. During the transcription and analysis of data, all information will be securely stored on my personal computer with password protection, and will be stored in a lockable drawer when it is not on me.

All participants are graduates of one university, and this research is being used for a Ph.D. degree at the University of Canterbury by April Perry, under the supervision of Associate Professor Judi Miller and Dr. Marion Bowl, who can be contacted at:

April Perry: 405.752.9501 or aprilperry2@gmail.com

Judi Miller: judi.miller@canterbury.ac.nz

Marion Bowl: marion.bowl@canterbury.ac.nz

We will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

The project has been reviewed *and approved* by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

Appendix K

Participant Consent Form

College of Education
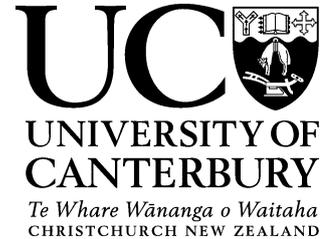
November 2009

Researcher: April Perry

Contact Information:
Email: aprilperry2@gmail.com
Phone 1: 405.752.9501 (in the U.S.)
Phone 2: +64.03.355.8743 (in New Zealand)

Participant Consent Form

The post-university transition: Experiences, perspectives, and needs of recent graduates.

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis, I agree to be involved as a participant in the project, and I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved.

I understand also that I may withdraw from the project at any time, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

I note that the project has been reviewed *and approved* by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

NAME (please print): …………………………………………………………….

Signature:

Date: