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The Meaning of Work and Self-sufficiency for Rural Work- Eligible Adults

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Abstract

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by

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MSCE, University of West Alabama, 2004

BS, University of West Alabama, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Despite the implementation of government programs created to ensure access to job training and education assistance for rural residents, which encourage and support their efforts to change their life trajectory, many rural residents remain unemployed and unable to move beyond poverty. Most research on job training focuses on program effectiveness or epidemiological trends; however, the voices of rural residents' descriptions of their relationship to work and self-sufficiency are missing from the literature. This IPA study explored the meaning of work and self-sufficiency for rural, work-eligible adults using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (EST) as the theoretical framework. I used a combination of convenience and snowball sampling to locate and interview 7 unemployed residents of a small rural town in Alabama. Interview questions explored participants' personal ecology to illuminate experiences of finding work, working, not working, and how the meaning of work was expressed with the EST's nested levels. During data analysis, 6 themes emerged: out of work, work experience, unemployed, government subsidies, work meaning, and self-sufficiency. Work meaning was derived from the physical act of working that impacted the life trajectory. Self-sufficiency was viewed as being self-reliant. This study contributes by illustrating the obstacles faced by rural residents when choosing to work. Findings from the study may lead to an understanding of how the meaning of work and self-sufficiency are related to EST for rural, work-eligible adults resulting in positive social change. Local policymakers and stakeholders may reconsider how they design work initiative programs as a result of this study.

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Dedication

In memory of my mom, and aunt who passed away during this journey and my grandparents. I dedicate this dissertation to my loving family and supportive friends.

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge the faculty and staff of Walden University who helped me complete this lengthy process. Special thanks to Dr. Bell, Dr. Edman, Dr. Perry, Dr. Astin, Dr. Herndon, and Dr. Marcus.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Unemployment, job availability, underemployment, and government financial dependency are long-standing global social issues that impede individuals' work activity. In efforts to combat these social issues in the United States and other countries, federal and state initiatives have been implemented to encourage self-sufficiency and provide access to education and gainful employment (Hansen, Bourgois, & Drucker, 2014; Jeene, Oorschot, & Uunk, 2013; Nelson, 2014; Pizzolato & Olson, 2016; Thiede, Lichter, & Slack, 2016). Despite federal and state policy and program availability, Alabama and other states around the nation continue to struggle. In particular, Alabama has made efforts to assist residents by creating policies for workforce development programs, welfare reform guidelines, educational incentives, skills development training, and professional job fairs for its most vulnerable population, the rural poor ("Workforce Development," 2018). Despite the availability of programs that provide employment assistance, education and skills training, health care benefits, and living expenses, individuals in rural areas remain challenged to move out of poverty and into economically viable lifestyles that are self-sufficient (Ahn, 2015; Lansberry, Taylor, & Seale, 2017).

Moving into an economically viable, self-sufficient lifestyle is impeded by both socioeconomic (Autor, Levy, & Murname, 2003; Torraco, 2016) and social psychological barriers (McClain & Wallus, 2015; VanWinkle & Struffolino, 2018; Yiolong & Xinxin, 2013). The focus of the current study was twofold. First, I focused on the meaning of work, i.e., understanding work values, preferences and "the sense of importance of daily

work" (Rishi, Julianne & Lucian, 2015, p.1) for this target group (Allan, Autin, & Duffy, 2014; Cerasoli, Nicklin, & Ford, 2014; Devloo, Anseel, DeBeuckelaer, & Salonava, 2015). Second, the intent of the study was to explore the meaning of self-sufficiency, i.e., an asset of survival and success for the participants in the study. (Abrams, Curry, Lalayants, & Montero, 2016; Bozkurt & Yesilada, 2017; Hong, Stokar, & Choi, 2016; Judge, Hurst, Simon, & Kelley, 2014).

Understanding the meaning of work and self-sufficiency for rural work-eligible adults could enhance policymakers' understanding of how government and educational program managers can improve the effectiveness of existing programs. A better understanding by policy makers would enhance the quality and relevancy of services provided. In addition, the results of this study could inform educational program developers about how rural work eligible adults experience work and self-sufficiency.

In this chapter, I present the background of the study, describe the research problem and the purpose of the study, and provide the research questions used in the study. Information about Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory (EST) is discussed as the conceptual framework that guided the study. Key terminology used in the study, assumptions, delimitations, and limitations of the study are disclosed. A summary of proceeding chapters concludes this chapter.

Background

State and federal government programs and policies were enacted in the 1960s to combat poverty among marginalized individuals in the United States (Bailey & Duquette, 2014; Nelson, 2014; Torstensson, 2013). Community service block grants, social security

supplemental support income, and food and nutrition supplements were made available to eligible residents. Access to job training and education assistance programs have been made available to residents to support them in their efforts to change their life trajectory (Larcinese, Rizzo, & Testa, 2013; Trent, Strayer, Martin, Crable, & Ewbank, 1987). Despite these programs, many rural residents have not been able to move beyond poverty.

Alabama received many sources of federal support distributed through partnerships with state agencies (Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, 2017). The number of Alabama residents living at the poverty level in 2015 was almost one million according to the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Alabama (2015). In 2017, many recipients of disability benefits were between the ages of 18 and 64 years (Social Security Administration, 2015. Studies of the structural barriers (e.g., socioeconomic status, relocation of employers to other regions and/or countries, agricultural modernization, community resources) have shown that the decline of job availability is a factor of intractable poverty (Autor, Levy, & Murname, 2003; Mishel, Bivens, Gould, & Shierholz, 2012; Torraco, 2016).

Welfare-to-work programs were developed to provide skills training to move people into employment opportunities and improve self-sufficiency. Welfare-to-work programs “aim at alleviating recipients’ financial problems” (Ayala & Rodriguez, 2013, p. 104). Alabama has implemented welfare-to-work programs, but they have not worked as well (Alabama Department of Human Resources, 2018). Structural efforts to instill the value of self-sufficiency have not been successful.

Consequently, in recent studies, researchers have focused on individual differences associated with job-seeking and employment. These studies include examinations of meaning in life and work (Allan, Duffy, & Douglas, 2015; Burger, Crous, & Roodt, 2013; Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015; Hallford, Mellor, Cummins, & McCabe, 2018), social class and work meaning (Allan, Autin, & Duffy, 2014, 2016), educational attainment, and occupation choice (Lair, & Wieland, 2012; Thiede, Lichter, & Slack, 2016).

The meaning of work has been the subject of considerable study, particularly over the past 15 years. This body of literature generally represents the meaning of work as the "subjective experience that one's work (i.e., paid employment) has significance, facilitates personal growth, and contributes to the greater good" (Allan et al., 2014, p. 545). The meaning of work has achieved both research attention and social significance as an important social psychological construct implicit in the examination of its relationship to constructs such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Cerasoli et al., 2014; Devloo et al., 2015; Kooij, DeLange, Jansen, Kanfer, & Dikkers, 2010; Judge et al., 2014; Yiolong, & Xinxin, 2013), motivation to work in impoverished conditions (Lu, Wang, & Han, 2017; VanWinkle, & Struffolino, 2018), and the normalization of poverty (McClain & Wallus, 2015). According to Anuradha, Srinivas, Singhal, and Ramnarayan (2014), work meaning is either (a) social, i.e., it fulfills economic or social purposes; or (b) personal, i.e., it satisfies personal hopes and interests. In research on meaning of work, researchers identified associations between work and life meaning. Highhouse, Nye, and Matthews (2017) noted that future research on work meaning should focus on

work as a construct representing individual differences in which work holds significance and on the relationship of work and the quest for meaning in life.

The meaning of *self-sufficiency* has been described from several perspectives. From an institutional perspective, self-sufficiency is part of the discussion of welfare reform that emphasizes ceasing public assistance and finding regular, gainful employment (Cemalcilar, Secinti, & Sumer, 2018; Morgen, 2001). McClain and Wallus (2015) conducted a panel discussion of attendees at the 2014 Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) conference regarding what leads populations out of poverty and into self-sufficiency. The discussion revealed beliefs that self-sufficiency is promoted by government funding; however, such funding should include financial literacy and less segregated service programs. The social psychological literature shows studies of the meaning of self-sufficiency as a value related to work values, that is transmitted transgenerationally, i.e., parents' work values were significantly associated with children's early and adult values, which influence work behavior and economic self-sufficiency (Abrams et al., 2016; Cemalcilar et al., 2018), but these researchers emphasized that more empirical studies are needed to understand how developmental forces influence adult perceptions of self-sufficiency. In the psychological literature, self-sufficiency has been measured quantitatively in terms of two constructs: perceived employment barriers and employment hope (i.e., the possibility of finding employment) (Cemalcilar, Jensen, & Tousun, 2019; Hong, Choi, & Key, 2018; Hong, Lewis, & Choi, 2014; Hong, Hodge, & Choi, 2015; Hong, Stokar, & Choi, 2016). The psychological

literature has also pointed to the need for studies that look more intensively at how self-sufficiency is related to work, employment seeking, and economic well-being.

Work is important, but despite the efforts of U.S. federal and state government programs created to help individuals become self-sufficient, rural people are still struggling to overcome impoverished conditions. In this study, I explored the meaning of work and self-sufficiency for rural work-eligible adults. The results of this study can illuminate challenges rural residents face, have difficulty overcoming, or are unaware of that can influence their perspectives toward work and self-sufficiency. These results might be useful in making a difference in understanding how meaning is made of work and self-sufficiency for rural residents by filling the gap in the current literature with voices of rural residents' descriptions of their personal relationships to work and self-sufficiency. Social change may result in the areas of unemployment and work reform programs and policy.

Problem Statement

Previous researchers have acknowledged structural variables (e.g., job availability, community resources) and individual difference variables (e.g., motivation, social class, education, and life meaning) as constructs associated with individuals' motivation to seek work or job-training programs (Allan et al., 2014; Allan et al., 2015, 2016; Burger et al., 2012, 2013; Cerasoli et al., 2014; Devloo et al., 2015; Kooij et al., 2010; Yiolong & Xinxin, 2013; Duffy et al., 2016; Lair & Wieland, 2012; Thiede et al., 2016) and self-sufficiency (Hong, Choi, & Key, 2018; Hong, Lewis, & Choi, 2014; Hong, Hodge, & Choi, 2015; Hong, Stokar, & Choi, 2016) however, little research has

been done to explore the meaning of work and self-sufficiency for impoverished individuals living in structurally impaired rural communities (Allan et al., 2014; McClain & Wallus, 2015; VanWinkle & Struffolino, 2018).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was to understand the meaning of work and self-sufficiency for rural, work-eligible adults. Semistructured interviews were conducted with rural residents between the ages of 36 and 64 years to gain insights about their perspectives of the meaning of work and self-sufficiency. The study provided insight about what affects individuals' meaning toward work and self-sufficiency during the developmental stages in life at each nested level of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

RQ1: What is the meaning of *work* for rural, work-eligible adults?

RQ2: What is the meaning of *self-sufficiency* for rural, work-eligible adults?

Conceptual Framework

This dissertation focused on the phenomenon of the meaning of work, which was defined in terms of the importance of work to the participants and explored in the interview guide questions associated with RQ1 (Appendix C). The meaning of self-sufficiency was defined in terms of the importance of self-sufficiency to the participants and their personal conceptualization as explored in the interview guide questions associated with RQ2 (Appendix C).

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST served as an exploratory model for understanding how each of the nested levels of development influenced the meaning of work and self-sufficiency. The framework served as a contextual lens during to gain insight about participants' ecological environment at the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem levels. Socialization within these systemic levels reflects adopted values that influence participants' beliefs about work meaning and being self-sufficient. Bronfenbrenner (1977) summarized each of these levels as follows:

- The microsystem level consists of place, time, physical features, activities, the participant, and their role.
- The mesosystem is comprised of the interrelations among settings and contains the developing person.
- The exosystem does not contain the developing person but affects the setting in which they exist; and
- The macrosystem is the general prototype that exists in a person's culture or subculture; it is ideology manifested through the customs and practices of daily living.

The ecology of human development converges biology, psychology, and social science as they bear on how an individual evolves in society. Understanding the ecology of individuals helps illuminate the experiences of their personal environments where psychology, spirituality, and socialization connect. An understanding emerged about what is in their environment that holds them back (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1989,1994, 2000, 2005). This model was used to understand how participants see

themselves in relation to the different levels of their own ecology and to discover how the meanings of work and self-sufficiency are experienced at each of those levels. More detail about the ecology of individuals' environments will be provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

IPA was chosen to guide the study due to its connectedness with exploring how participants make sense of their world and their lived experiences. Meanings held by participants are the object of exploration in IPA inquiry and interpretation from both their personal and social world views (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In this study, I explored the social and personal views surrounding the meaning of work and self-sufficiency for participants. Reflecting on their everyday experiences and important past events provided insight into participants' attitudes, views, and understanding of how they make sense of their experiences from the experiential perspective (Smith, 2019; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). Smith et al. (2012) explained IPA as a combination of phenomenology, hermeneutics (interpretation rather than preconceptions), and idiography (particular details are carefully analyzed). Researchers using IPA attempt to make sense of meanings shared from participants' reflections, thoughts, and feelings with hermeneutics at various levels, and in this study, I focused on experiential meaning, i.e., the experiential significance of the current state of their work life (Smith, 2019).

Participants were purposively sampled using referral and snowball sampling (Patton, 2015) from a convenient location within a small rural community of less than 1,000 residents. There are currently no schools operating within the local community, but two empty, unkept facilities remain. Jobs are scarce with only the local post office, a

franchise general store, and a municipal building providing gainful employment opportunities. Recruitment flyers were posted in these locations. The sample size can range from six to 12 participants; however, the final sample size was determined by access to participants, availability to participate, and complexity of data from the interviews.

Each participant was interviewed using a semistructured format, so that all topics were covered but not necessarily in the same order. As IPA methods recognize that the researcher's world view is part of the data-gathering process, interview transcripts and my journal were transcribed verbatim for analyses. Bracketing techniques were used prior to and during the analysis process to attempt to distinguish researcher and participant perspectives (Guest et al., 2006; Shenton, 2004; Smith et al., 2012). Prior to data analysis, a summary of the transcript was sent to each participant for member checking to improve the accurate interpretation of participants' intending meaning. Data were analyzed by hand from transcript recordings of interviews and the journal using the IPA thematic analysis process.

Definitions

Meaning of work: The "subjective experience that one's work has significance, facilitates personal growth and contributes to the greater good" (Allan et al., 2015, p. 545).

Self-sufficiency: The "self-assessed level of economic and financial independence, basic needs met, and well-being" (Hong et al., 2014, p.322).

Socioeconomic status: An objective measure of social class with family income or wealth, occupational status, and educational level (Diemer, Mistry, Wadsworth, Lopez, & Reimers, 2013).

Structures: Social relationships that determine interaction within social systems. Examples of structures are economic, political, legal, religious, and cultural factor (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2016. p.1).

Work: Being engaged in productive activities beyond the personal home environment where individuals experience feelings of being engaged in life and that have tangible benefits whether paid or unpaid (Bambrick & Bonder, 2005). Work is viewed as a means to a financial end (Wrzesniewski, 2003). Dubin (2017) defined work as "continuous employment, in the production of goods and services, for remuneration" (p. 4).

Work ability: Having manual, intellectual, and social competence in combination with physical, mental, and social health to perform work-related tasks (Tengland, 2013).

Working age: Individuals between the age of 18 and 64 years (Social Security Administration, n.d.).

Work-eligible adults: Individuals being engaged with life (Bambrick & Bonder, 2005; Steger & Dik, 2009) having intellectual, physical, and social ability to perform work-related tasks (Tengland, 2013) and being of working age (Social Security Administration, n.d.).

Work orientation: An interplay between the person and the work they perform (Wrzesniewski, 2003).

Assumptions

The first assumption of this study was that participants would be willing and able to provide honest, clear, and detailed responses to the interview questions. The meaningfulness of the results is transferable. Second, I assumed that participants' meaning of work was based on generational traditions, cultural values, and societal norms that were passed down (Fossen & Vredenburgh, 2014). Third, I assumed that the sample of participants used in the study would provide enough information to create rich, meaningful interpretations that represented the shared meaning of the phenomena of interest. The final assumption was that the results would benefit policymakers and stakeholders regarding the meaning of work and self-sufficiency viewpoints held by rural, work-eligible residents.

Delimitations

The criteria for inclusion for the study were that participants must have resided in the local community for the past 5 consecutive years, were currently unemployed, and between 36 and 64 years of age. Persons with these characteristics were present in the community and the sampling efforts focused on this geographic locale only. I did not seek participants beyond those who resided in the local community. Another delimitation was my lack of experience in conducting research. My inexperience may have affected the transferability of the study. As a novice researcher, it is probable I missed respondents' social cues or comments that would have prompted a seasoned researcher to expound upon deeper responses. Rodham, Fox, and Doran (2015) cautioned that background and expertise of a researcher impact the approach to data collection and

analysis. Each participant was interviewed once for a period of approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Each semistructured interview took place at a mutually agreed upon location within the local community. Data were collected over a period of 4 to 6 weeks.

Limitations

The first potential limitation to this study was my ability to use empathy and responsiveness to participants' disclosures of their world in order to acquire rich, thick descriptions (Smith et al., 2012). Information that is rich and thick is the goal of qualitative research, but a novice researcher may not understand how to ask questions that will provoke detailed, thoughtful, and sincere responses. Smith et al. (2012) suggested constructing questions to encourage participants to speak without the need for much prompting. Smith et al. suggested that the researcher learn the interview schedule prior to beginning interviewing participants. Rodham et al. (2015) noted that the researcher should be sensitive to context of the disclosures by attempting to view the world from the participant's perspective, possess commitment and rigor toward the research issue, interpret what the participant says, maintain transparency and coherence throughout the research process, and understand that the interpretation may not be that of the participant.

The second limitation of the study was the choice to conduct a convenience sample from a local community. My personal opinions and expectations may have biased the data collection and analysis process; therefore, bracketing techniques were used to document preconceptions about the research. Maintaining a journal throughout the research process illuminated my preconceptions, beliefs, and opinions. Participants'

reviews of transcript summaries for accuracy and meaning enhanced the transferability of results. Frequent debriefing sessions with my dissertation chair provided opportunities to identify bias, discuss flaws in the study, and provide directives to take corrective action (Shenton, 2004).

The final limitation to the study was that the sample size or depth of interview content did not produce saturation of themes; however, homogeneity among participants and the ability to obtain rich, thick descriptions increased the opportunity for data saturation to occur (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Guest et al., 2006). This is discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

Significance

The stress of economic hardship may negatively influence how individuals value work, education, and aspirations for a better life. Work values impact individuals' work-related behaviors and perception of work outcomes (Anuradha et al., 2014; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Chen & Choi, 2008; Vijayakumar 2007). The results of this study may be shared with government and educational organizations to improve their understanding of the meaning of work and self-sufficiency from rural, work-eligible adults' perspectives and may help them implement programs and policies that target people with perceptions of work and self-sufficiency associated with a negative life trajectory. Participants' views and shared experiences of how meaning was made regarding conditions of work and choosing whether to overcome challenges of daily living in order to pursue gainful employment may enhance policy makers' efforts to implement programs and policies that may help participants eradicate negative beliefs. This study differs from previous

qualitative inquiries on this topic because it included both male and female participants' perspectives of work, goal pursuits, and other factors that may influence the pursuit of self-sufficiency. It also gave voice to how rural, work-eligible adults perceived the meaning of work and self-sufficiency. This study provided personal testimonials from rural residents describing their relationships to work and self-sufficiency.

This study can contribute to positive social change by improving the understanding of the meaning of work and self-sufficiency related to Bronfenbrenner's EST (1977, 1986, 2009) and how policies and programs are implemented. Understanding how experiences at each of Bronfenbrenner's nested levels of development impact rural individuals' perceptions of work and self-sufficiency may serve to influence how programs and policies that target rural residents are implemented or structured. Rural lifestyles are different from urban lifestyles, and the possibility for social change could be improved if programs and policies that impact the life trajectory of rural residents are developed and implemented to suit the target recipients. This model proposes that the social structure and substance of interactions among individuals at different levels shape the content and course of human development. Consideration of the wide range of developmental influencers that individuals experience may aid in the development and implementation of better strategies to assist marginalized individuals in finding and maintaining work and self-sufficiency beyond impoverished living conditions.

Conclusion and Summary

This chapter provided information about the background of the study, its purpose, and implications for social change. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST was the theoretical

guide for the research. Key terminology was defined, and the assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations of the study were discussed. Chapter 2 provides information about current literature on the meaning of work and self-sufficiency and the constructs that influence individuals' motivation to work. The literature findings are presented in correlation to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST. Chapter 3 provides details of the methodology, participant selection criteria, the researcher's role, and ethical procedures for the study. In Chapter 4, the results of the study are discussed. Chapter 5 will provide an interpretation of the results of the study along with limitations, recommendations, and implications for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Despite provisions made by government agencies for marginalized individuals (Bailey & Duquette, 2014; Nelson, 2014; Torstensson, 2013), such as the rural poor, to receive an opportunity to work and maintain self-sufficiency, there remains a chronic state of unemployment among this portion of the population (Dunn, Haugen, & Kang, 2018; Grigoryeva, 2012). Previous research has acknowledged structural barriers (e.g., socioeconomic status, job availability, relocation of employers to other countries and/or regions, agricultural modernization, community resources) and individual differences associated with job seeking and employment (e.g., meaning in life and work) as factors of intractable poverty (Allan et al., 2014, 2016, 2015; Autor et al., 2003; Burger et al., 2012; Duffy et al., 2015; Hallford et al., 2018; Larcinese et al., 2013; Mishel et al., 2012; Torraco, 2016). Current literature posits work meaning as either social or personal (Anuradha et al., 2014) and associates meaning of work with life meaning. There is no clear indication of the meaning attributed to work or self-sufficiency by individuals in rural settings. The purpose of this study was to understand the meaning of work and self-sufficiency from the perspective of rural, work-eligible adults.

This chapter will provide historical context of poverty in the United States and details of how federal and state governments have attempted to combat the problem. Social class will be examined for effect on work meaning and the relationship between age and life meaning, along with perceptions of internal and external motivation toward work meaning (Allan et al., 2014, 2016; Cerasoli et al., 2014; Devloo et al., 2015). Meaning of work and education were investigated for effect on educational and work

pursuits (Lair & Wieland, 2012; Thiede et al., 2016). Previous researchers have focused on social psychological constructs, such as background, hope, gender, age, spiritual beliefs, and family composition, as possible influential factors of motivation to work and meaning of work for individuals (Judge et al., 2014; Kooij et al., 2010; Lu et al., 2017; McClain & Wallus, 2015; VanWinkle & Struffolino, 2018; Yiolong & Xinxin, 2013). This chapter includes information about poverty in Alabama and opportunities to work for residents of the state. According to Research Starters (2018) Alabama ranks 36 of 50 for unemployment on a scale from 1 to 50 ranked lowest to highest. Motivation to work has been researched categorically as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, motivation to work in impoverished conditions, and normalization of poverty. The application of research on work motivation relative to Bronfenbrenner's EST model will also be discussed. This chapter concludes with a summary of the research findings and a preview of Chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted using the library databases of Walden University (2007–2017), the University of Alabama (2012–2017), the University of West Alabama, historical texts, government publications, and Google Scholar for the past 15 years. The specific databases used were Science Citation Index, Directory of Open Access Journals, Medline with Full text, EBSCO, PsycINFO, SOCindex, Emerald Insight Social Sciences Citation Index, Expanded Academic ASAP, ERIC, Education Source, Academic Search Complete, PsycARTICLES, Complementary Index, CINAHL, ScienceDirect, and ProQuest. Peer-reviewed articles, scholarly texts, statistical reports,

and journals were used. Keywords used to conduct the searches included *work motivation, work ethic, disabilities, human ecology, Bronfenbrenner, cognitive dissonance, work values, traditional meaning of work, work, employment, meaning of education, intrinsic motivation, attitudes, self-sufficiency, rural life, work, qualitative research,* and *education.* A search of Walden University dissertations was also conducted for keywords *motivation and self-sufficiency* within the last 10 years resulting in 713 published studies in the ProQuest database.

Review of the literature for *work meaning* in the Walden University library archives resulted in 19,364 published works; 11,207 were published works since 2010, and 7,888 were published 2013 to 2019. The articles on *work meaning* were quantitative (Allan et al., 2014, 2015; Bozkurt & Yesilada, 2017; Cemalcilar et al., 2019; Devloo et al., 2015; Highhouse et al., 2017; Hong et al., 2014; Hong et al., 2015; Hong et al., 2016; Hong et al., 2018; Judge et al., 2014; Kooij et al., 2010; Rishi, Julianne, & Lucian, 2015; Thiede et al., 2016 ; Yiolong & Xinxin, 2013); qualitative (Abrams et al., 2016; Anuradha et al., 2019; Lair & Wieland; Morse & Weiss, 1955; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003); and meta-analyses and summative literature reviews (Cemalcilar et al., 2018; Cerasoli et al., 2014; Burger et al., 2013; Kooij et al., 2010; Rosso et al., 2010).

Historical Context

President Lyndon Johnson's *War on Poverty* program in 1964 started the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), which was instrumental in developing community action agencies throughout the country. Community action agencies served marginalized, poor, and low-income citizens through targeted, antipoverty programs created to improve

their quality of life. Social agencies under the OEO umbrella coordinated services and resources by making them more accessible to individuals in need (Bailey & Duquette 2014; Hansen et al., 2014; Nelson, 2014). Many of the programs created under the OEO served rural communities. Collaborative efforts of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Transportation, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Environmental Protection Agency continue to aid rural communities today through improvements with housing, transportation access, healthy living environments, and quality of life ("Smart Growth in Small Towns," n.d.). Federal grant programs, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs, and Medicaid began under the OEO (Larcinese, Rizzo, & Testa, 2013). Lansberry, Taylor, and Seale (2017) noted that changes in requirements for federal programs caused controversy and altered participation rates. Many eligible participants do not seek assistance because of the lengthy application process and the uncertainty surrounding the amount of time between application and being awarded benefits. The result is that fewer people are receiving support than originally intended. The Office of Community Services lists state agencies that provide federally funded services to residents under the administration for children and families. In the state of Alabama, federally funded Community Services Block Grants are distributed by the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs. The Community Services Block Grant programs aid low-income residents with employment help, education, skills training, clean water, minority business ownership, and the elimination of health and safety hazards. Challenges that impede rural Americans' socioeconomic advancement are attributed to resource accessibility and job

availability despite federal, state, and community aid programs. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Services (2017) documented persistent poverty rates for rural counties at 300 to 50 for urban counties. Persistent poverty defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture is measured based on census data for 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2007–2011 American Community Survey data that indicated counties with 20% or more residents living in poverty (as defined by each census).

Poverty in Alabama

Many rural Alabama residents live at or below the poverty level despite provisions of the Alabama Department of Public Health and the Department of Human Resources for financial, childcare, medical, and food assistance for eligible residents. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (2016) documented 889,380 recipients of food assistance in Alabama. Monthly averages for total child care payments in Alabama were $6,488,090.45, and food aid was $97,570,523; 4, 308 residents were mandatorily enrolled in jobs training but only 2,322 were employed, 746 were involved in work-related activities, and 328 were noncompliant (Detailed Monthly Statistical Reporting for DHR Services, 2017). The Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Alabama (2015) reported 905,682 Alabama residents living at the poverty level. The number of Alabamians receiving disability benefits between ages 18–64 was 116,893 (Social Security Administration, 2017). Family poverty levels for the target population-individuals between the ages of 18 to 64 in Alabama were documented at 14.63% in comparison to state levels of family poverty .The three main contributors of economic

hardship (employment with low wages, unemployment, and low labor force participation) apply to Alabama residents (Dunn et al., 2018).

Opportunities for Employment

Alabama was once known as the cotton state because four million acres of the state's land were used for cotton production, but by 2015 only 1.5 million acres were used for agriculture according to the Agriculture in Alabama webpage. Projected jobs for Alabama were identified in aircraft systems assembly, microcomputer-controlled machinery, physical therapy, nursing, speech therapy, web developing, home health, and personal financial advising ("15 Fastest Growing Jobs in Alabama," 2017). Current job statistics for residents living in the target area for this study were reported by World Media Group in the following industries: agriculture 7.08%, construction 6.51%, manufacturing 16.58%, wholesale trade 2.61%, transportation/warehousing 3.78%, information 0.40%, finance/real estate 4.09%, professional management 5.95%, education/healthcare 28.08%, arts/food service 2.76%, public administration 5.22%, and other 1.96%.

State and Federal Programs to Assist the Rural Poor

Statistical data revealed attempts made by federal, state, and local level organizations to assist individuals with overcoming poverty (*"Alabama Department of Economic and Community Office,"* n.d.; Lansberry, Taylor, & Seale, 2017; Larcinese, Rizzo, & Testa, 2013; Nelson, 2014; *Poverty Estimates for Alabama Counties, All Ages in Poverty*, 2015*; "Social Security Administration Southeast information Office,"* 2017). Program and policies exist to enable residents to become self-sufficient, yet many are

finding it challenging to overcome impoverished living conditions. Despite available job training programs, educational assistance, and child- care subsidies, there are unemployed Alabama residents living at or below the poverty level.

Meaning of Work

Most of the research on work has focused on what motivates people to work and how intrinsic and extrinsic factors predict or change work environments that maximize employee productivity and organizational success, and these are discussed in detail in the section below. However, there have been a few qualitative studies that have explored the meaning and role of work in a variety of ways. Allan et al. (2014) two-phase mixed-methods study of employed individuals between the ages of 18 and 81 examined the relationship between social class, work volition, and work meaning. The qualitative part of the study revealed that prosocial impact was a significant source of work meaning. The researchers suggested future studies include members of lower social classes to understand people's experiences. Stone, Sabella, Lidz, Mc Kay, and Smith (2018) investigated the meaning of work in a 2-year qualitative study of young adults with diagnosed mental illness who were participating in vocational rehabilitation programs. The results revealed that the young adults felt it was not only important to gain financial independence from their parents, but also that the social aspects of their work and contribution to society was meaningful as well. They proposed that future studies of work meaning could include different age groups and cultural variations. In Lamothe and Guay's (2017) phenomenological study, 15 mental healthcare workers discussed the meaning of work after being victims of workplace violence. They found that remaining in

the workplace was attributed to relationships with others at work; and how they viewed themselves and the relationship of their work to their sense of autonomy, self - accomplishment, and contribution. It was suggested that future research identify aspects of psychological and organizational work meaning, and to document the experiences of workers who changed career paths after suffering workplace violence.

Motivation to Work

Social psychologists have intensively studied work from the perspective of motivation thus a strong case can be made for the view that motivation is based on "internal processes that guide, activate and maintain behavior (especially goal-directed behavior). Motivation is one of the most pivotal concerns of … research" (Baron, 1991, p. 1). The body of literature on work meaning/meaningfulness is vast and continues to innovate and unfold as the nature of work evolves (Allan et al., 2014, 2015; Anuradha et al., 2014; Duffy et al., 2015; Fossen & Vredenburgh, 2014). Both researchers and authors have noted how the emergence of technology has changed the nature of work and work motivation. Organizational hierarchies have flattened so that knowledge and problem solving is more distributed in organizations, rather than concentrated at the top (Steers, Mowday, & Shapiro, 2004; Thomas, 2009).

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Federal and state funded incentive programs that targeted job accessibility, education, and training were designed to put more people in jobs and elevate socio-economic status and quality of life among program participants (Nelson, 2014). Whether or not program participants benefited from those programs depended in part on their motivation. Intrinsic motivation increases effort, since it is a

positive and self-regulated state, based on purpose and enjoyment, where activity pursuits are inherently rewarding (Cerasoli et al., 2014; Judge, Hurst, Simon, & Kelley, 2014). Extrinsic motivation is governed by instrumental gain and loss; incentives are instrumental toward other things of value (Cerasoli et al., 2014). Meta-analysis of 86 samples from 66 articles published between 1970 and 2009 (surveys from 56% of studies in the United States, 27% in Europe, 3% in Asia, and 14% in other countries conducted in manufacturing plants, professional service companies, health care companies and government departments) was conducted for age and work-related needs, work motives, and personal values (Kooij et al., 2010). The studies included in the meta-analysis were empirical studies derived from a field sample of employees who worked either part or full time, and measured work motives in relation to preference for the protestant work ethic, intrinsic or internal motivation. Raw correlations were reported between age and work motive for respondents using the Survey of Work Values. Extrinsic motives (job features and outcomes) and intrinsic motives (accomplishment, challenge, personal development) were explored in different classes. Motivation was defined as an explicit expression, a non-conscious expression, or an expression based on needs. Previous researchers examined motives, needs and values interchangeably. In some studies, needs and values were assessed independently for personal, moral, or social meanings.

The meta-analytic results of the 86 samples linked three broad categories of motives: growth, security, and social. Age was not significantly related to work related growth or social motives, and it was negatively related to work related security motives. Age was positively related to intrinsic work motives. Participants among the samples

worked in one of five job categories: white collar, managers, sales, health care, and traditional blue collar. The results of the meta-analysis associated security motives with increased age among traditional and white collared workers. Intrinsic motivation appeared strongest between blue collar workers than others based on age. Age was positively correlational to growth among blue collar workers.

Intrinsic motivation was associated with increase in age according to Cerasoli et al. (2014) who conducted analysis of 154 sources from 950 publications. The articles, conference papers, and dissertations published between 1974 and 2014 sought to show the incompatibility of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and incentives. The perceived benefits of intrinsic motivation did not explain the role of incentive for future circumstance through prominence to perform. It was not determined whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivation mattered more; however, findings showed an association between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic incentives to perform. Directly salient incentives were associated with lower intrinsic motivation, but directly salient incentives appeared to have associations with lower intrinsic motivation. The authors noted that although their findings were instrumental in identifying an association between incentive and motivation, it is yet to be determined whether the person "is actually motivated" (p. 20) when there is no incentive.

Decades of study on motivation and incentives revealed associations between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; social class/status (Allan, et al., 2016; Anderson, Hildreth, & Howland, 2015; Blackwell & Pinder, 2014), autonomy (Devloo et al., 2015; Luginbuhl, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 2016), need satisfaction or work life balance

(Burger, Crous, & Roodt, 2013; Kooij, DeLange Jansen, Kanfer, & Dikkers, 2010; Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014; Hong, Lewis, & Choi, 2014) and leadership style (Yiolong & Xinxin, 2013) were variables referenced in the literature discussed herein. The intrinsic, extrinsic motivation debate remains inconclusive since associations were varied and it remains unclear whether quantity or quality resulted from performance in either study reviewed. It is uncertain whether incentives determined motivation to perform (although causal inferences can be made), but there were numerous associations discussed relative to intrinsic and extrinsic motives.

Motivation to work in impoverished conditions. Thiede, Lichter, and Slack (2016) examined the link between work and poverty rates among US workers in rural areas. The study was based on data from the March Supplement of the 2001-2014 *Current Population Survey* completed by 60,000 households. The population survey served to identify families that lacked resources for satisfying basic material needs. Data on the differences in working poverty between rural and urban areas revealed that poverty rates were based on the poverty income threshold and the concept of relative poverty (households experience social isolation due to their lack of the minimum income needed to maintain daily life which keeps them from participating in "mainstream society," p. 186). Results indicated 4 key associations: (a) the rates of working poverty were higher in rural areas, (b) rates were always higher when using a relative rather than absolute measure of poverty, (c) poverty rates were high among racial and ethnic minority workers in rural areas, and (d) many workers were employed in low-quality jobs that provided little stability and few benefits. Women of color, living in the South who

had low educational attainment, were identified as having the highest likelihood of living in poverty. Interestingly, subjective measures of quality of life (intrinsic motivation to work, family and friends, faith, seeking happiness, etc.) were not factored into the data analysis, according to their final discussion.

Lu, Wang, and Han (2017) collected longitudinal data from twenty years from the *Survey of Income and Program Participation* regarding employment patterns of women. Variations in data could not explain the effect of family-level or individual level constructs on employment; however, there were behavioral patterns noted. Limitations and scope to the applicability of the study included differences in the employment trajectories of mothers based on race/ethnicity and more. Several of the noted variations among working women were:

- Women living in poverty were more likely to curtail employment.
- Greater family income was associated with labor force withdrawal or status reduction.
- Family characteristics, job characteristics, and economic hardship were important in labor force decision making.
- Access to extended family led to labor force continuity.
- Women with higher education experienced public sector jobs.
- Women who live in poverty or economic abundance tended to leave the workforce voluntarily or by force.
- First time mothers were more likely to make employment adjustments than other mothers.

Women demonstrated more labor market continuity when they worked prior to childbirth; however, minority women remained in the labor market more than white women -who were likely to drop out or become part-time employees. This substantiated Cerasoli et al.'s (2014) position that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors motivated work performance but were only relevant when found in contexts when both structural and social realities aligned to promote productivity and economic benefit. However, in contexts where structural and social barriers were not aligned with productivity and economic benefit, conventional social psychological factors became less relevant. Additional constructs associated with motivation to work were socioeconomic status, access to resources, job availability, family and social systems, self-sufficiency, motivation to work in impoverished conditions, and poverty normalization (Hsieh & Huang, 2014; Lair & Wieland, 2012; McClain & Wallus, 2015; Van Winkle & Struffolino, 2018).

Family and social system related constructs included negative peer relation, work family conflict, family composition and relationships (Beutelle, 2013; Gerdenitsch, Kubicek, & Korunka, 2015; Kosek, Ruderman, Braddy, & Hannum, 2012). Work-family conflict was examined in boundary management using person and variable centered approaches by Kosek et al. (2012). The cross-role interruption (differences in behaviors exhibited by individuals based on their role in either the work or non-work setting, for example, attitudes and mannerisms exhibited in both settings) behaviors between work and non-work that people experienced differed according to perceptions of their role and the amount of psychological control held over boundaries. Boundary management

clusters were based on cross role interruption, centrality of work and family identities, and boundary control. The clusters revealed associations with work-family outcomes, but differently. Positive family-work outcomes were relative to a person's ability to control boundaries that fit with highly salient identities. Nonwork behaviors were positively linked to work family conflict and work family integration. Overall, work family interruption, work family identity and low boundary control were associated with negative work and family outcomes.

Intrinsic motivation, interpersonal conflict, work ability, and receipt of disability were constructs associated with self-sufficiency (Abrams et al., 2016; Bozkurt & Yesilada, 2017; Hong et al., 2016; Judge et al., 2014). Interestingly, Abrams et al. (2016) conducted 4 focus groups with young adults between the ages of 18 and 22 years who were aging out of foster care. The focus groups were held in Los Angeles and New York with youth in extended foster care or were aging out of foster care regarding their perspectives of self-sufficiency. Participants in both states equated self-sufficiency with economic and logistic independence (a blend of work and education leading to a career) necessary for a successful future. Participants expressed views that making a living and paying bills was paramount for self-sufficiency.

Normalization of Poverty

Poverty has been identified as a structural variable that results from economic, political, legal, religious, and cultural social systems. The normalization of poverty, and the relationship between work and poverty, were identified as factors toward work motivation (Lu et al., 2017; McClain & Wallus, 2015; Luginbuhl, McWhirter, &

McWhirter, 2016; Pizzolato & Olson, 2016; Stapleton, O'Day, Livermore, Imparatc, 2006); however, poverty normalization was studied among a specific population-which inhibited generalizability. Hong et al. (2014), and Hong et al., (2016) conducted two survey research studies with a convenience sample of 391 clients of which a subsample of 154 ex-offenders were selected to (a) explore self-sufficiency among individuals receiving government aid for disability and who experienced a lack of economic and logistic resources, and (b) explore the relationship between employment barrier, employment hope, and self-sufficiency among low income job seekers with a physical disability as they participated in a vocational training program in Chicago. Participants' perceptions of the relationships between employment barriers, hope, and self-sufficiency were the areas examined. Survey results indicated that work was ranked an important means of provision, but variables such as internal fear, doubt, and feelings of hopelessness kept study participants from moving forward in work. Hope was identified as a mediator between psychological strength and self-sufficiency. Employment barriers positively affected employment hope which contributed to employment support services.

A panel discussion by McClain and Wallus (2015) explored (a) the normalization of poverty among individuals with a physical disability and others receiving government financial assistance, and (b) whether a lack of financial literacy training programs and services promoted self-sufficiency. Job seekers' work attitudes, expectations, and culture were perceived as barriers that embraced the normalization of poverty (Gerdenitsch, Kubicek, & Korunka, 2015) because there were no established programs available that promoted financial literacy or integrated services that led to self-sufficiency. Individuals

faced with making the decision about receiving public assistance or attain gainful employment may find it difficult. The period between application and approval of government aid is prolonged and may be problematic for some individuals (Hansen, Bourgois, & Drucker, 2014) making it difficult to walk away from benefits that were not easily attainable.

In sum, intrinsic and extrinsic constructs associated with motivation to work are numerous, yet causal conclusions are undetermined. Previous research linked age to internal drive and levels of motivation. A link was shown between work and poverty rates in the United States, with ethnic and minority workers categorized as individuals working in poverty. The relationship was associated with the low quality, unstable, jobs that provided these individuals minimal benefits. Low educational attainment was associated with working in low quality jobs. Family relations were associated with problems of boundary management between work and family interruptions.

Theoretical Foundation

An exploratory study requires a contextual lens from which the research process is guided. In the present research study to understand how work eligible adults ascribe meaning to work and self-sufficiency, Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST was used. Because the ecology of human development is a combination of biology, psychology, and social science it would be beneficial to use EST to understand how individuals evolve in society by illuminating the structural contexts in which they feel stuck -relative to their ascribed meaning of work and self-sufficiency. This model was used to understand how participants see themselves in relation to their personal environments. The interpretative

phenomenological analysis focused on understanding the essence of participants' lived experiences from philosophical, psychological, and educational perspectives (Creswell, 2009). Bronfenbrenner's (1977) theory examined how mutual influences between growing individuals and their environments impact various aspects of life. This theory informed how rural residents made meaning of work based on prior negative and positive work experiences and views of self-sufficiency.

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977) asserted that traditional developmental research models were the result of brief experiments with children in unfamiliar situations that were not generalizable since the observation of human behavior was guided by a research model developed for studying animals. Bronfenbrenner proposed new directions of thought and activity in developmental research between a growing human organism and the changing immediate environments in which it lives and progresses. EST was based on the premise that the human developmental process was affected by relations experienced within and between multiple, immediate settings of interaction in formal and informal social contexts, either directly or indirectly, in a topological and nested arrangement (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986, 1994). Dimensions of the nested arrangements as he proposed were the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem-called ecological systems.

Ecological Systems

Neal and Neal (2013) expounded on Bronfenbrenner's descriptions and gave practical descriptions of the EST according to each systemic level.

Microsystem. Interaction at this level referred to complex relations and social exchange between the developing person and their immediate environment which was determined by the role of the developing individual in the environment. Social interaction at the microsystemic level consisted of time, place, physical features, activities, participants, and their role. A common example of the microsystem environment is that of the immediate family.

Mesosystem. The interrelations among two or more settings having the developing person at any point in life described interaction at the mesosystemic level. Consistency or divergence of behavioral patterns between environmental settings were distinguishable. An example of the mesosystem environment would be the school or work setting.

Exosystem. Described as an extension of the mesosystem that embraced other specific social structures that impinged upon or encompassed the immediate settings in which the developing person was found. Despite the developing individual's absence from the environment, events of the exosystemic level environment determined or influenced what happened in the setting where the developing individual existed. The parents' job environment would fit into the exosystem.

Macrosystem. This described the economic, social, educational, legal, and political systems of which the previous systems were interconnected. This system exemplified the general prototype which existed in the developing person's sub-culture or culture; ideology manifested along with the customs and practices of daily living. The

rural environment and its culture where the developing individual was reared exemplifies the macrosystemic level.

Chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1986) proposed an additional level to his EST model which examined the influences of the developing individual's living environment that affected social interaction, mental changes, and continuities over time, since normative and nonnormative life transitions affected family processes. The chronosystemic level proposed examining the nature of variation and behavior patterns of persons of identical genetic constitution in different contexts to discover generational trends associated with socio-economic status of family, social role demands, feelings of loyalty or obligation to family and community. The chronosystem level served the purpose of research that dealt with unraveling social class and discovering which elements of social structure shaped the course and content of human development. Successive transitions between environmental settings in relation to extrafamilial settings and how the process of transition affected development exemplified the chronosystem level (Bronfenbrenner, 2000; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The families political and spiritual affiliation along with their socioeconomic status would be relevant at this level.

EST continued to evolve overtime as Bronfenbrenner explored multiple perspectives of the process of human growth and development and research practices. The ecology of human development converged among the disciplines of biology, psychology, and social science as they bared on the evolution of the individual in society and their proximal relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1989, 1994, 2000, 2005).

Evolution of the theory from the EST to the bio-ecological systems theory highlights continuity and change in intellectual, emotional, social, and moral development in individuals that need participation in complex activities regularly over time (Bronfenbrenner 2005). Rosa and Tudge (2013) studied the evolution of EST from its conception and argued that the concept of the macrosystem was redefined when Bronfenbrenner created the chronosystem. They suggested that researchers specify the version of Bronfenbrenner's theory guiding their research in efforts to avoid theoretical incoherence.

Microsystemic Level of Work Motivation

The microsystem encompasses elements of family and school as independent environments that included the developing individual. Within each element were specific factors that affected individuals' growth and development. Researchers named work family conflict, level within the social hierarchy, education level, access to resources, and family identity as influential factors in the growth and development of individuals (Beutelle, 2013; Vasile, 2015; Wiley, Deaux, & Hagelskamp, 2012).

Work–family conflict. Quantitative and qualitative studies discussed relationships between individual's family identity, family composition, living environment, and work-life balance when seeking to discover motivation to work (Covarrubias, Romero, & Trivelli, 2015; Kosek et al., 2012; Tengland, 2013). Work-family balance was associated with feelings of control, work autonomy, and efficiency, but linked with negative consequences when the boundary between home and work overlapped (Gerdenitsch, Kubicek & Korunka, 2015). Family obligation had the potential

for being ignored when 24- hour long work hours were necessary for career advancement and feelings of worth (Kenar, Kose, & Demir, 2016) except for members of generation Y, who felt that flexibility and freedom to enjoy life were important for being motivated to work (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2014).

Beutelle (2013) investigated the variations of work family conflict and cooperation between generational cohorts (generation X age 29-43; boomers age 44-62; matures age 63-83; generation Y below age 29 in 2008). Participants in the study were 3,502 respondents of the interactive 2008 national survey. Scales used in the survey were measures of work-family conflict and synergy (work interfering with family (WIF), family interfering with work (FIW), work synergy (WS)), Index of Mental Health, Self-Rated Health, Supervisory and Coworker Support, Learning Opportunities, Autonomy, and Work Pressure, Marital Satisfaction, Life Satisfaction, and Job satisfaction. The following differences were found between generational cohorts:

- Differences in work family conflict and synergy were strong for WIF and FIW.
- WIF for Boomers, Matures, Y's and X'ers were strong.
- Mental health predicted WIF and FIW strongest for each generational cohort.
- Self-rated health was insignificant in relation to WIF or FIW.
- Physical and psychological job pressure increased WIF for each generational cohort.
- Supervisor support predicted WIF for each cohort but generation Y. It predicted synergy for generation X and Boomers, learning opportunities for generation Y and Boomers, and autonomy for generations Y and X.

- FIW was not significant for either generational cohort.

In sum, these studies suggest affiliations at the microsystem level between age and connection to family; however, causality was not determined, only an association between extrinsic and intrinsic work motivation was indicated. Whether working people were externally motivated by family demands, internally motivated to balance work and family, or if their motivation varied by age group was unspecified.

Social hierarchy and education. In the United States and other countries, social hierarchy was historically based on the perceived status of a person's minority group. To that end education was viewed as a method for changing social position and overcome family histories and poverty (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Deuchar, 2014; Wiley et al., 2012). Theoretical models of family and economic stress associated socioeconomic hardship with risk factors (educational achievement and family obligation) in child and adolescent development (Kiang, Andrews, Stein, Supple, & Gonzalez, 2013). An association between families who experienced stress when faced with challenges of acquiring, or dealing with deficiency or inadequacy of food, housing, education, healthcare, and the condition of their neighborhood (Kjellstrand, 2016) was mentioned. An association was mentioned between high socioeconomic stress and poor academic performance. Covarrubias et al. (2015) referenced the negative aspect of educational achievement as achievement guilt; college students who expressed uncomfortable feelings of having more education than other family members experienced depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem despite ethnicity. The results of the study indicated that

students who reported their parents never attended college indicated more depressive symptoms on the survey than students whose parents had attended college.

Access to resources. Parents' educational level was linked with child well-being because the parents' educational level indirectly affected access to resources (Rees, Tonon, Mikkelsen, & Rodriguez de la Vega, 2017) like libraries, recreation centers, churches, and social organizations. Blustein, Kozan, and Connors-Kellgren (2013) conducted a narrative analysis with unemployed individuals to understand their reasons for being unemployed. Participants blamed their experiences on macrolevel factors like the economy, or microlevel factors that were personal (i.e. education, lack of training). Participants shared comments about the relationship between money and accessibility. Lack of money was a determinant of resource accessibility.

Mesosystemic Level of Work Motivation

Within the mesosystemic level the developing individual's behaviors are either distinguishable as consistent or divergent across two or more environmental settings. It was uncertain from the literature how people understood and applied their interactions to work meaning. Current literature noted intrinsic motivation, interpersonal conflict, self-determination, work ability, and work volition as relational to individuals' motivation to work and desire for self-sufficiency (Allan, Autin, & Duffy, 2014, 2016; Bozkurt & Yesilada, 2017; Duffy et al., 2015; Pizzolata & Olson, 2016). Since the growing and developing individual's identity and behavior at the mesosystemic level is either consistent or divergent across environmental settings (e.g. home and school behavioral patterns) feelings of ambivalence, optimism, unfairness, illegitimacy, guilt or stress were

reported by individuals who looked to change the life trajectory (Deuchar, 2014; Sengupta, Osborne, & Sibley, 2015) or forego change. The nested arrangement of factors that were prevalent within the microsystem (Family identity, family composition, living environment, and work-life balance) were also significant, prevalent factors at the mesosystem level.

Intrinsic motivation and interpersonal conflict. Aspects of intrinsic motivation were examined on work behavior, goal setting and commitment (Devloo et al., 2015; Fishbach, Steinmetz, & Tu, 2016; Liang, White, DeSilva, Hasse, Knight, Berado, & Lund, 2016). Judge et al. (2014) associated stress with fear and conflict reprisal; however, no causal conclusions were reported. Baumann, Hamin, and Yang (2016) administered the World Values Survey Questionnaire to 5,342 participants in ten countries to find the link between pedagogy and work ethic among working and middle-class individuals. The results revealed cultural patterns of associations with the pedagogical approach that potentially guided work ethic: (a) for Asian cultures work ethic was decided by strict discipline and academic performance, impact on the workforce, respect, and performance orientation. (b) for Western cultures, no association was found between strict discipline and academic performance with work ethic. (c) character building and passing along skill and knowledge was important in Asian culture-unlike Western culture. In rural communities, recreation included religious affiliation (Bozkurt & Yesilada, 2017). It is important to note that pre-industrial views of religion paralleled with demanding work, thriftiness, and possessing a strong work ethic (VanCapellen, Fredrickson, Saroglou, & Corneille, 2017).

The results of Devloo et al., (2015) 6-day longitudinal field study with 76 European university, industrial boot camp students revealed that autonomy, competence, and relatedness were factors in intrinsic motivation. The students attended theoretical sessions during the mornings to acquire knowledge that could be applied in the afternoon workshops. Surveys and peer evaluations were completed at the end of each training day. Individuals with a keen sense of self-efficacy developed deeper interest in their goals and activities that satisfied their need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Associations were indicated between innovative work behavior and basic need satisfaction. Due in part to a reported decrease in feeling hindered by participants when they received a lack of support, or had inadequate resources, or when the behaviors of coworkers were considered unyielding. In the literature stress was associated with work ability, job performance, interpersonal conflict, and intrinsic motivation (Anderson, Hildreth, & Howland, 2015; Judge et al., 2014). When family obligation was linked with higher education expectation, underprivileged youth were concerned about taking care of their families' needs when dealing with the negative effects of socioeconomic stress (Kiang et al., 2013; Liang et al., 2016). The collective results of these studies revealed associations with intrinsic motivation and individuals' perspectives of meaningful work.

Work ability and volition. The possibility of problems that interfered with a person's work ability were not related to the person's work but rather reported as associated with influence on their work performance (Tengland, 2013). Associations existed between work ability, need for intellectual and social competence, and getting and maintaining a job.

Allan, Autin, and Duffy (2016) discussed associations between internal regulation, work motivation and work volition. In a cross- sectional study to understand how self-determination and psychology of work predicted meaningful work 339 participants between the ages of 18-71 were surveyed on-line with M-Turk (Mechanical Turk) to find if social class and work volition predicted internal regulation and meaningfulness of work. The results showed internal motivation as the largest predictor of meaningful work and being internally motivated at work. Social class predicted external motivation and amotivation, but internal motivation was predicted by work volition. Motivation at work was important to having meaningful work. Individuals who perceived higher levels of choice in making career decisions were happier at work and their jobs fit their personal preferences and work meaning (Duffy et al., 2015). Self-efficacy, and level of interest with goals, and activities that satisfied the individuals' need of autonomy, competence, and relatedness were associated according to Liang et al. (2016).

In sum, causal conclusions were not possible within these studies reviewed, but there were suggested associations and relationships between individuals' work motivation and influence -either intrinsically or extrinsically. The dissonance that may result across environmental settings was associated with work volition, meaningfulness, and ability.

Results

Exosystem Level of Work Motivation

Bronfenbrenner (1977) declared the exosystem an extension of the mesosystem and the influential structural factors category. The developing individual was indirectly affected by the occurrences within the exosystemic level. The family's socioeconomic status, job availability, access to social amenities and resources were associations revealed at this level also. Work type, wage potential, geography, and culture were named by researchers as being involved in motivation to work (Anderson et al., 2015; Cobb, 2016; Hsieh & Huang, 2014; McClay, 2016; Wuthnow, 2013).

Work type and wages. In a compilation of qualitative interviews with rural residents. Wuthnow (2013) shared participants' views and his findings about employment opportunities within the rural community. Primary employment opportunities in rural communities were in manufacturing, construction, transportation, and clerical positions. 15% of the civilian labor was documented in manufacturing, 8% in construction, 6% in transportation, and wage workers included clerks and office assistants. Elderly individuals made up 20% of the population with conservative values (attributed to job availability). The general belief among rural residents was that globalization in the 80's and 90's led to automation technology and cheap labor (Cobb, 2016) which adversely affected the successful American dream to earn a high salary. Lower socio-economic class members faced challenges like menial work for low wages due to geographical location (McClay, 2016).

Work culture. Individuals living below the poverty line due to family socioeconomic status experienced adverse neighborhood conditions (Singh & Ghandour, 2012) and community inequality were unlikely to challenge the power of the wealthy or take initiative and effort to seize opportunities to improve upon their current situation (Scott, Hu, Hudson, Song, & Yo, 2016). It was questioned whether the desire for status affected goal directed behavior and shaped social well-being, if individuals pursued jobs that provided status, good work life balance, opportunity for advancement, or money (Anderson et al., 2015).

The developing individual has no control over factors to which he is predisposed (socioeconomic status of family, culture, access to resources, job market). It is unclear how individuals apply these influential factors at the exosystemic level to work meaning. Dissonance revealed at the mesosystemic level would influence behavior exhibited at the exosystemic level of work motivation (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Macrosystem Level of Work Motivation

Low pay wage earnings fostered rural residents' reliance on help from family members and the social security administration (Wuthnow, 2013). The disability benefits process and the financial assistance programs available to Americans were created to provide needed resources to program participants (Nelson, 2014). Dependency on federal and state government aid programs and political affiliation were associated with motivation to work at the macrosystemic level. State and federal program benefit guidelines are strict and eligibility determination is an arduous and lengthy process (Stapleton, Livermore, & Imparatac, 2006; Thiede et al., 2016; McDonnall & O'Mally,

2012). Individuals faced difficult choices when they chose dependency upon public assistance programs, because the waiting period between application and approval was prolonged and sometimes problematic (Hansen, Bourgois, & Drucker, 2014).

Aid programs. Stapleton, O'Day, Livermore, and Imparatac (2006) expressed concerns that since conception, the components of the benefit programs created to help participants with readjustment to independent living became a trap. They highlighted 4 components of the disability program that hindered independent living:

1. a lengthy determination period for social security and SSDI benefits eligibility
2. loss of benefits results when work related income increase
3. poor coordination of support programs (medical, food, housing, education, TANF, AFDC, etc.…) at the federal and state level
4. expectation that disabled individuals cannot become self-sufficient.

An investigation of the effects of welfare reform programs (Ahn, 2015) suggested that welfare reform forced mothers into the workforce without the proper support to obtain self-sufficiency. Based on data obtained from the United States Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation data, low-income, working, single mothers between 16 and 54 years of age, experienced economic hardship after the 1996 welfare reform. Welfare to work participants were constrained by poverty which affected their quest for knowledge and ability to challenge decisions made about their future by persons in authority (Pizzolata, 2016).

SSI recipients were less likely to engage in employment for fear of losing benefits (Hansen et al., 2014; McDonnall & O'Mally, 2012). These and other studies have

detailed how medicalized poverty became a survival strategy for individuals to overcome violence, reduce street drug consumption, and acquire a stable home. Individuals used their disability and illness to gain government and state benefits as a harm reduction strategy in a post-welfare state with few solutions to unemployment, particularly if illness was covered by insurance. The survival strategy resulted in an increased threshold for SSI applicants, and an industry of disability lawyers to discourage malingers.

For example, Hansen et al. (2014) published detailed stories of patients with psychiatric diagnosis, chemical dependency, medical issues, and the process they went through when applying for and receiving social security disability benefits. For example, the story of Lennie revealed how confronting illness and limited choices for viable income, turned him towards disability rather than employment. He was a dishonorably discharged veteran with an addiction to Xanax and methadone diagnosed with HIV, inflammation of the liver, and a mental illness for which he was taking antipsychotic medication. Lennie's prescribed anti-psychotic medication caused sudden onset diabetes. He was aware of the harmfulness of the medication but opted not to taper off since he was facing an upcoming review for his disability compensation claim. He lived with his sister and feared losing the benefits that an attorney helped him receive at the cost of 25% of the backlog payments awarded.

Esperanza sought disability benefits to sustain herself and her family members. Esperanza was an immigrant victim of domestic violence from her youth. Her boyfriend encouraged her to apply for disability benefits due to her violent behavior-she injured him. She was diagnosed with PTSD and other mental disorders which qualified her for

disability benefits. After receiving SSI benefits, Esperanza referred several family members to Social Security to deter them from gang affiliation and illicit drug use.

These stories demonstrate the power of qualitative investigations to humanize the macrosystemic challenges of seeking work when ill (physically or mentally). Further the detailed narratives provided insight into the family situations of both Lennie and Esperanza (Hansen et al., 2014) at the nested levels (Neal & Neal, 2013) of the other systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem) which led to their pursuit of government aid. The motivation to provide for themselves or significant others was strong, but their narratives suggested that macrosystemic level challenges influenced both their choice and motivation to work.

Global comparison of aid programs. International comparisons of government assistance programs revealed similarities between the United Kingdom and United States systems (Dwyer, 2014; Patrick, 2014; Shutes & Taylor, 2014) about the strict program requirements. The Universal Credit Program in the United Kingdom was found as being equivalent to the welfare reform program in the United States (Dwyer, 2014). The Universal Credit Program was created to combat welfare dependency linked to non-employment and out of work benefits. It replaced the former social security system with a single means tested payment program that gave benefits to individuals looking for work or already in low wage employment. Benefit claimants described their experiences positively despite reporting views of the welfare reform program false and misleading nature that implied sanctions were necessary to activate benefit claimants into employment-which was not the case. Empirical data found participants who willingly

looked for and were able to work, receiving out of work benefits. The work-related conditionality, entitlement to welfare program created a United States style market system (Shutes & Taylor, 2014) whereby contracted providers were payed to place and keep benefit claimants in work but limited the types of providers that could meet the needs of everyone. Diversity of services and specialist assistance was discouraged due to funding requirements- which suggested the avoidance of services that did not guarantee an employment outcome.

Political affiliation. Individuals' political affiliation and having a strong work ethic was associated with their perspective on government assistance (Jeene, Oorschot & Uunk, 2013). Study results suggested that individuals supported broader welfare participation because of (a) self-interest, (b) a perspective of a person's deservingness, and (c) empathy for welfare beneficiaries. A relationship existed between political ideation and attitudes toward government aid programs, work motivation, cultural norms, and self-sufficiency regardless of one's socioeconomic status.

Legislative behavior of 430 members (190 Democrats and 240 Republicans who served an average term of 11.85 years in congress) of the US House of Representatives were examined to decide if high status politicians were more likely to support economic inequality in society in their legislative behavior compared to low status politicians (Kraus & Callaghan, 2014). The Representatives' economic legislative behaviors were examined by analyzing 13 pieces of legislation that was sponsored but not voted on by Congress during 2010-2012. Social status of the Representatives was based on wealth, race, and gender; average wealth predicted sponsoring behavior. It appeared that

wealthier politicians were more likely to support legislation that supported economic inequality. Data analysis revealed that political party affiliation and average wealth were significant for three reasons:

1. Republicans sponsored legislation that supported economic inequality regardless of their personal wealth.
2. Wealth predicted legislation sponsoring for Democrats; however, wealthier Democrats supported fewer pieces of legislation to reduce economic inequality than other Democrats.
3. The role of social status (average wealth, race, and gender) was linked to legislative support for economic inequality by Democrats of high status but not Republicans.

The researchers concluded that social status in the U.S. predicted support for economic inequality among members of Congress, but one's social position in society (lower status) was experienced among individuals with direct access to create and implement policy that shaped the entire country.

Aid programs and self-sufficiency. McClain and Wallus (2015) noted that participants who received government funded support believed that government funding promoted self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency was viewed as an expectation of social justice and normalization. Many of the government programs geared toward transitioning into independence were hard to understand by the program participants. The Plan for Achieving Self-Support, Impairment Related Work Expense, Subsidy, and Ticket to Work were programs created to support transition to work prior to the Workforce

Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2015. The purpose of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act was (p.239):

- Help state residents with development disabilities obtain typical jobs in the community that pay at least the minimum wage and offer the maximum number of hours consistent with the employee's abilities and preferences.
- Provide support for non-work activities in the mainstream, including community centers, libraries, and recreational and educational facilities.
- Prepare high school-age students with developmental disabilities for competitive jobs in the community through internships and mentoring programs, among other efforts; Public funds that are used to support segregated settings shifted to services in integrated settings.

The macrosystem level of work motivation consisted of factors that may or may not have contributed to dependency behaviors rather than promote independence and self-sufficiency. The relationship between government aid, work, poverty, and political affiliation were explored along with the challenges for overcoming poverty. Individual and group interests drove sociopolitical behavior at the national and international levels as discussed above. The collective study results revealed associations between social status and support for economic inequality among members of Congress. Despite the associations, one's social position in society (about lower status) was linked to both negative and positive experiences among individuals with direct access to create and implement policy that shaped the entire country. Individual and group interests drove sociopolitical behavior (Sengupta, Osborne, & Sibley, 2015).

The collective results of studies revealed here demonstrated associations with politics (Jeene et al., 2013; Kraus & Callaghan, 2014; McClain & Wallus, 2015) public assistance program regulations (Dwyer, 2014; Patrick, 2014; Shutes & Taylor, 2014) and the decision to pursue government financial aid (Hansen et al., 2014; Stapleton et al., 2006; Thiede et al., 2016) and individuals' motivation to work. Were individuals faced with tough decisions when choosing between health issues, desire to work, and overcoming environmental obstacles viewed as impediments of working?

Rationale for Theory in Current Study

The application of motivation to work in relation to EST theoretical level differed but somehow intertwined within each nested level. The original model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1977) provided the best framework from which to understand how participants see themselves in relation to the various levels of their own "ecology" and to discover how the meaning of work and self-sufficiency is experienced at each level of ecological transition. The social and cultural environments of participants for the present study were best understood from the original version (Neal & Neal, 2013). The theory served as an explanatory model for understanding how individuals perceive the meaning of work and self-sufficiency because of developmental impact experienced within their ecological systems. Participants' experiences at the microsystemic level (work family conflict, social hierarchical level, educational level, family identity), mesosystemic level (work ability, intrinsic motivation, interpersonal conflict, stress, and work volition), exosystem level (socioeconomic status, job availability, and access to social amenities), and macrosystemic level (views of dependency on government financial aid and political

affiliation) provided insight for how their perceptions of work meaning and self-sufficiency were influenced.

Summary and Conclusions

The primary focus of the proposed study was to discover the meaning of work and self-sufficiency for rural work eligible adults. Previous research findings revealed substantive relationships between work, self-sufficiency, and EST factors and socioeconomic mobility (Collard, 2010; Distelberg & Taylor, 2013; Johnson, Honnold, & Threlfall, 2011; Keene & Geronimus, 2011; Meschede, 2010; Noone & Patterson, 2010; Tester, Ruel, Anderson, Reitzes, & Oakley, 2011; Theodos, Popkin, Guernsey, & Getsinger, 2010). However, most of the studies mentioned in this section identified correlational associations not causal relationships. According to Schnell, Hoege, and Pollet (2013) work meaning is subjective, and it requires consideration of individuals' experiences and what they perceive as meaningful. No concrete conclusions may be drawn about factors that directly influence individuals' motivation to work at either the intrinsic or extrinsic level

Bronfenbrenner's EST (1977) was discussed at each of the nested levels. In each of the levels no causal relationships were posited, however, associations with individuals' motivation to work, receive public assistance, and willingness to adopt the values of mainstream culture were discussed. Multiple examples of influences by family, social systems, impediments of self-sufficiency, and other structural factors revealed in the literature showcased peoples' actions, views, and behaviors within and across the intricate network of EST systems. An in-depth exploration of the literature on influencers

of motivation to work, desire for self-sufficiency, and how meaning was derived from work were discussed according to the EST's systemic levels (Allan et al., 2016; Devloo et al., 2015; Liang et al., 2016). Rural and urban differences were visible in the literature within society, at state, national, and global levels. Disadvantages and disparities were presented on ethnicity, social class, education, and political affiliation (Kenar et al., 2016; Thiede et al., 2016; Pinquart & Kauser, 2017). Socio-economic status and government financial assistance programs were presented for their associations or links as impediments or fostering agents of change in individuals' motivation to work (McClay, 2016; Singh & Ghandour, 2012; Wiley et al., 2012).

Previous research did not give clear indication of the meaning that was attributed to work or self-sufficiency by individuals in rural settings in each age category. It is hoped that the results of this study can be used to make a difference in understanding how meaning is made of work and self-sufficiency for rural residents. Social change may result in the areas of unemployment and work reform programs and policy. Chapter 3 provides the details of the methods and procedures for the proposed study. Participant selection criteria, researcher's role, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis plan, limitations, assumptions, delimitations, and ethical procedures are discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this IPA study was to understand the meaning of work and self-sufficiency for rural, work-eligible adults. In this chapter, an in-depth discussion of the qualitative methodology and the rationale for its use will be provided. Information about the research questions, researcher's role, participant selection, the plan for data collection and analysis, issues of trustworthiness, ethical procedures, limitations, assumptions, and delimitations will be discussed in this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1: What is the meaning of work for rural, work-eligible adults?

RQ2: What is the meaning of self-sufficiency for rural, work-eligible adults?

The key phenomena of interest are work, self-sufficiency, and personal and social ecology. Work can be simply defined as "continuous employment, in the production of goods and services, for remuneration" (Dubin, 2017, p. 4). As described in detail in Chapter 2, the meaning of work is also influenced by structural constructs (Hsieh & Huang, 2014; Kiang et al., 2013; Scott et al., 2012) and family and social system experiences (Cobb, 2016; Gundemir et al., 2017; Kenar et al., 2016). Work meaning has been studied considerably among working populations as well as college students, but there's an absence of understanding in the 36–64-year-old rural, work-eligible adult population. Self-sufficiency has been described as an economic and financial outcome or, more specifically, independence from government support and being employed with financial security (Hong, Hodge, & Choi, 2015). Self-sufficiency also incorporates work

ability, intrinsic motivation, political affiliation, meritocracy, and Protestant work effort. Bronfenbrenner's EST model (1977) serves as an explanatory model for understanding how individuals' development at each nested level impacts work meaning and self-sufficiency. EST will be used as a lens to understand the participants' ecological environments and the influence on their experiences and perceptions of work meaning and self-sufficiency. Key elements around work meaning include participants' shared experiences and points of view of the relevance of why people work, going to work, being successful at work, their motivation to work, or their lack of motivation to work. Highhouse et al. (2017) declared that work importance measures were interchangeable for most purposes, but the act of working and the meaning in the act of working differed for individuals.

IPA was used as the qualitative approach in this study (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). IPA is used to explore how people ascribe meaning to experiences (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith & Osborn 2003). Rodham, Fox, and Doran (2015) noted that IPA recognizes the researcher's experiences, values, and understanding influence on how participants life experiences are understood. IPA is connected to exploring how participants are making sense of their personal and social world by examining the meanings participants hold (Smith & Osborne, 2008). Participants' reflections, feelings, and thoughts are engaged while they work through meanings in IPA research (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2012). The nature of the IPA inquiry is constructivist because it focuses on how participants have built their own personal understanding of the phenomena under study. IPA encompasses phenomenology, attitude, reflection, relationships with others,

and hermeneutics; the primary concern is where everyday experience becomes significant due to reflecting on significant past events and trying to make sense of the details (Smith et al., 2012). Smith (2019) pointed out the multiple levels of meaning that can be explored; this study focuses on the experiential meaning of the present circumstance, the lack of work.

IPA was chosen instead of an ethnography because the primary interest for the study was not the work culture in the South but rather how rural, work-eligible residents make meaning of work and self-sufficiency. Grounded theory was not chosen because the primary focus of the study was not on developing a theoretical account of the phenomenon of work but rather an exploration of how the process of meaning making is made. Bronfenbrenner's EST guided the current research. Narrative inquiry was not chosen because participants' chronology (Patterson, 2011) of their work experiences, stories of work or attainment of self-sufficiency, nor the constraints and opportunities of their work experiences (Smith et al., 2012) were the focus of the study. IPA was the approach chosen because the purpose of this study was to explore how individuals make sense of their experiences, events, and states of being within the context of work and self-sufficiency (Smith & Osborne, 2003).

The Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in an IPA is to employ critical listening skills, observe participants' expressions and mannerisms without objectivity, while exploring how they make sense of their social world (Smith & Osborne, 2003). IPA also incorporates the researcher as an empathic co-creator to understanding the phenomenon of interest.

As a child born to unmarried teenage parents, my grandparents, aunts, and uncles were instrumental in my development. Kamberellis and Dimitriadis (2006) noted that researchers who choose to study marginalized people do it because they come from the margins. Communities struggle daily, and researchers who study marginalized people attempt to account for behaviors, attitudes, and values of those being studied (Denzin & Giardina, 2006, p. 154). My personal interest in the phenomenon of work meaning and self-sufficiency began with my family history being born to teenage parents and observing how work and self-sufficiency differed for both. My mother was gainfully employed for short terms throughout her life cycle with recurring episodes of public assistance (child support and nutrition assistance), whereas my father worked various occupations prior to establishing a career in law enforcement. Noticing how some family members worked hard to become self-sufficient while others relied on the government or other individuals for aid sparked my curiosity regarding the meaning of work and self-sufficiency among individuals. The practice of seeking public assistance exists in families throughout society, but the focus of this study was the meaning of work for individuals in rural settings who are work eligible. My prior work experience in community mental health, nonprofit organizations, and substance abuse counseling provided opportunities to witness countless numbers of individuals who relied on government assistance or sought financial assistance despite being capable of working. It is my hope to gain an understanding of how individuals ascribe meaning to work and whether they believe that self-sufficiency is possible.

I attempted to minimize bias and enhance objectivity in this study by closely monitoring the integrity of the research and adhering to strategies recommended in the qualitative research design literature (Creswell 2003, 2009; Patton, 1990, 2015; Smith et al., 2012; Smith & Osborne, 2008).Viewing the world from the participants' perspectives, being committed to the research process, and understanding that my interpretation of the participants' meaning of work may not be the same were ways to minimize bias (Rodham et al., 2015). In addition, making sure the interview questions were thoughtful and solicited honest responses from participants was another way to minimize bias. Bias is difficult to eliminate because it can occur at any stage in the research process, and when coupled with limits of agreement estimates parameters in the population choice (Shenton, 2004; Smith & Noble, 2014; van Manen, 2014). I attempted to minimize bias by staying curious through reflexivity and being aware of the influence of personal beliefs (Rodham et al., 2015). Maintaining a journal throughout the research process functioned as an audit trail of my considerations and decisions throughout the research process. Given that the community where the research was conducted is small, with strong family ties and high religious involvement, it is likely that I did not recognize, but I strove to compartmentalize relationships and maintain professionalism throughout the research process (Helbok, Marinelli, & Walls, 2006; Schank & Skovholt, 1997). I detailed the procedures and strategies to reduce the risk of bias and increase trustworthiness in the sections below.

Methodology

Participant Selection

Target group. The target group for the research consisted of participants who were currently unemployed, eligible to work, resided in the small rural community with a population of less than 1,000 residents (United States Census, 2010) of Alabama for the past five consecutive years, and were between the ages of 36 and 64.

Participant selection criteria. The criteria for selection was based on participants current unemployment status, work eligibility, and residency in the rural community to ensure equitable representation of participants despite the varied age range. Participants were seeking employment during the research process. The 36-64 age category have experience and an ability to share in-depth descriptions of work and self-sufficiency. Participants were not selected based on race, gender, or religion.

Referral and snowball sampling (Patton, 2015) was used to recruit participants for the proposed study from convenient locations within the community. I attempted to create a homogenous sample because the goal of the research was to understand rural, work-eligible adults. Invitational flyers (See Appendix A) were posted in various locations as described in the Procedures section below.

A proposed sample size of 6 to 12 respondents was anticipated for the research; however, the final sample size was determined by the richness of the data collected from participants (Smith et al., 2012). The sample size of phenomenological studies varies according to the phenomena and scope of exploration (Patton, 2015; Smith et al., 2009). Based on methodological guidelines I planned to recruit and interview up to 12

participants. Saturation was attempted by interviewing as many participants as possible, asking all the participants the same questions, asking some questions multiple ways to get coverage of concepts, and if necessary, setting up a follow-up interview if some questions were incompletely addressed (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon public location. General open-ended questions, probes and prompts were used to develop dialogue with participants and elicit deeper meaning of responses (Ramsey, 2017). Patton (2015) described the importance of asking questions that respondents understand clearly and that they may answer in their own words. Janesick (2011) stressed the significance of asking one main question and several probing questions when conducting an interview.

The content of the interview guide was developed from Wuthnow's (2013) Small Town Resident Interview Guide: Version A and B, and through a collaborative effort with the dissertation committee chairperson. Wuthnow's guide served as a template from which the interview guide was created. Shenton (2004) recommended using well established methods in line of questioning; therefore, the questions in the study are variations of the questions listed in Wuthnow (2013). I asked participants what a great job would look like, what has been the biggest obstacle for them finding work, and how long it has been since their last job.

The content validity of the interview questions is supported using Wuthnow's original research (2013) as well as Bronfrenbrenner's EST (1999). The key concepts of Wuthnow's research focused on how individuals make meaning of their lives in terms of

social circles, work environment, and community relations. The key concepts of Bronfrenbrenner's approach was to examine how the nested levels of a person's life affect their choices and perceptions. The interview guide is included in Appendix C.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation and Data Collection

Flyers were posted in key areas within the community: local post office, town hall, and Dollar General (See Appendix A). Participants opted in by emailing or calling me if they were interested in participating. Upon completion of the interview, participants were asked to share the flyer with others they knew who fit the criteria for participation but not discuss the study.

Participation. The primary requirements for participation in the proposed study were residency within the local rural community for minimum of the past five consecutive years, between the ages of 36 and 64, unemployed, and work eligible. The participants who opted into the study contacted the researcher by phone or email. After reviewing the requirements for participation, if the person agreed, then an Informed Consent form (see Appendix B) was delivered via email or in person (based on participants' preference) and reviewed. Once the person consented an interview time and place were set (email respondents replied by emailing "I consent," phone respondents signed the Informed Consent form prior to the scheduled interview session).

Data collection. After IRB approval was granted, data was collected over a period of 4 to 6 weeks. Participants were reminded of the informed consent agreement and their ability to withdraw at any time. I conducted semistructured interview sessions with participants that were audiotaped for a period of 30-45 minutes on average, with some

exceptions based on the participants' need to expound upon a comment at the interviewer's prompt.

At the end of the interview, participants were debriefed about their participation, about receiving a summative copy of the interview transcript, the possibility of being called upon for a follow up interview if needed, and a review of the Informed Consent process. Details were provided to participants regarding how the data are to be used and they were informed about the provision of the summarized transcript of their interview session for their review and comment. Participants were also informed that they would receive a summary of results at the conclusion of the study. Participants were asked to distribute flyers to those who may fit the study criteria but not discuss the study.

Interview sessions were transcribed by hand. Participants received a numeric code prior to the interview session to enhance confidentiality. The code was utilized during follow up interview sessions if needed, in researcher's journals and field notes, and on the transcripts. Transcripts and a list of code assignments were stored on separate flash drives and locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's home. Computers used during the research process required a password for accessibility. All data from the proposed study will be kept for a period of five years then destroyed by fire.

Data Analysis Plan

The interview transcripts and researcher's journal were transcribed verbatim (Smith et al., 2012) for transparency. I hand coded and categorized the data to determine themes. Hand coding data made it easier to recognize commonalities in responses. Smith and Osborn (2008) suggested that IPA researchers use an idiographic and iterative

approach to analysis. The idiographic approach involves reading and re-reading each transcript, treating the entire transcript as data. As the transcript was read I looked for themes and expressions that allowed theoretical connections within and across connections. The iterative approach involved using clustered themes to represent superordinate themes in additional analysis of the data. Interpretative resources were used to make sense of what the person said while checking my sense making against what the person said. Themes were translated narratively distinguishing between convergences and divergencies among coherent themes. Participants received a summative copy of their individual transcript to ensure accuracy of information. Fusch and Ness (2015) noted that researchers should be able to recognize their personal views of the world and discern the presence of personal lens. It was important that data saturation represent participants' views and not mine; therefore, bracketing techniques were used (Guest et al., 2006; Shenton, 2004; Smith et al., 2012). Bracketing involved being consciously aware of and documenting preconceptions about the research, personal feelings and beliefs that hindered or interfered with my ability to conduct the interviews and performed data analysis in an unbiased manner. Careful, accurate, and honest analysis of the data for themes determined saturation of data (Guest et al., 2006; Rodham et al., 2015). Member checks allowed participants to review their interview transcripts to enhance accuracy and validity-ensured that what was interpreted by the researcher was what they intended to express.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The terms reliability and validity were terms used by positivist researchers that were replaced with trustworthiness (Rodham et al., 2015). To enhance the trustworthiness of the study I used several standard qualitative methodological procedures. The use of more than one interview question for each research question and the incorporation of experiences of participants from different backgrounds (i.e., individuals who have never worked, have worked previously but are currently unemployed, individuals currently seeking to return to work, and individuals who are not seeking work, individuals who are currently unemployed and are receiving government subsidies, individuals who are currently unemployed but are not receiving government subsidies, and individuals who are non-reliant upon government subsidies because they are seeking gainful employment) is considered a form of triangulation of time, space and persons (Patton, 2015; Shenton, 2004).

Trustworthiness was also addressed by demonstrating honesty, carefulness, and accuracy throughout the research process. Documenting preconceptions in my research journal and in audit notes of the data collection process and analysis improved trustworthiness during the research process. Rodham et al. (2015) suggested that researchers listen to audio recordings of interviews to become aware of preconceptions and biases that should be acknowledged. Journaling, being curious, monitoring personal biases and beliefs, and being conscious of how personal biases potentially influence participants are important to maintaining trustworthiness in the proposed study (Shenton, 2004).

Frequent debriefing sessions with the dissertation committee chairperson to discuss flaws in the proposed course of actions was necessary in the research study. This clarified that researcher biases, and that ideas and interpretations were accurate. The investigator's assumptions may become impaired due to the proximal relationship to the project (Shenton, 2004). Participants review of the written summary of their interview sessions for accuracy of responses with what they intended to say enhanced trustworthiness measures also. By disclosing the details of the participants in the proposed research, the restrictions of participants (unemployed status, age range, length of residency), the duration and number of interviews conducted, and providing rich data enhanced transferability of the proposed research. Transferability enhanced the reader's understanding of the entire research process used in the study. It was understood that a greater number of participants may increase dependability in the proposed study, but saturation of data was considered in establishing the final sample size. Guest et al. (2006) reported that data saturation occurred at about 12 interviews (e.g., 92% of the codes were developed by interview 12 of 60), and the estimate 6 to 12 as sufficient has been reported elsewhere (Smith et al., 2012).

Participants in the study consisted of local residents from the researcher's community- a rural township with a population of less than 1, 000 residents. All participants were not seeking gainful employment at the time of the interview. Patton (1990, 2015) noted that when generalization is the purpose, representativeness is necessary to achieve an acceptable confidence level in the findings.

Data analysis requires time, reflection, and dialogue; data should be categorized chronologically then thematically (Smith & Osborne, 2008; Smith et al., 2012). Reviewing the data thoroughly and carefully reflecting on each participants' experience throughout the research process enhanced commitment and rigor, sensitivity, and an in-depth analysis of the data (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016; Cope, 2014; Darawsheh, 2014). Timely transcription within 1 to 2 days of interview transcripts ensured that my perceptions of participants (including non-verbal behaviors) were clearly and accurately documented. By carefully documenting, maintaining transparency, being open, and reflective without bias throughout the process of journaling interpretations of the participants' lived experiences established dependability. Documenting my personal thoughts and feelings of participants experiences established authenticity. Sharing step by step decisions of the procedures used in the proposed research study satisfied the audit trail requirements in the study. Audit trail information was data oriented, accurate depiction of the entire study (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability was established through accurate reports of personal beliefs and assumptions about the study, and by minimizing potential bias through honesty and adherence to protocols for data collection and analysis.

Ethical Procedures

There are multiple approaches to managing bias (Laureate Education 2010) including documenting on comfort, considering life experience, using audiotapes, videotaping focus groups, avoiding assumptions, taking time and documenting everything that participants say word for word, and building in a peer review. The present

research study employed all these methods except videotaping focus groups. This research study focused on three principles: (a) Informed consent: respect for persons (b) Beneficence: confidentiality (c) right to privacy of participants: justice (Bradburn, Sudman, & Wansink, 2004; Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer, & Tourangeau, 2009). All these principles served a specific purpose, but together they provided a basic framework of guidance for the researcher. Informed consent: respect for persons, ensured that all potential respondents were knowledgeable about the research and that their participation was voluntary. Information was disclosed about the nature of the study, the responsibilities of the respondents, benefits of the research, and responsibilities of the researcher during the initial contact with participants. It was imperative that participants clearly understood what was being asked and how their responses would be utilized. Bradburn et al. (2004) suggested that the information disclosed to participants of a study should equal the amount of risk that will be encountered, since there are no definitive rules for disclosure. I ensured that participants did not feel pressured or coerced to participate in the study. Informed consent forms were provided to all participants stating that the purpose of the study was for dissertation approved by the IRB of Walden University. Confidentiality measures were maintained according to 42 CFR which states that no information about a respondent may be disclosed without their consent. Confidentiality was addressed with the use of a numeric code that replaced participants' names in the study. Data will be kept on separate flash drives in a locked file cabinet in my home for 5. After the 5 requirement for storage of collected data it will be burned. Participants were made aware of the voluntary nature of the study and their ability to

withdraw at any time. No compensation was awarded for participation in the proposed study. A journal was maintained throughout the course of the research detailing daily number of participants and other key points of information to ensure that confidentiality and informed consent were properly addressed (Kelley, Clark, Brown, & Sitzia, 2003).

Summary

The information provided in this chapter detailed the proposed method for conducting the study. An overview of the research design, research questions, and methodology for data collection about the phenomenon of interest were discussed. The researcher's history, interest in the topic, and a step by step guide that facilitated the proposed study were included. Participant selection, instrumentation, recruitment, data collection and analyses, issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures were thoroughly discussed in this section.

Chapter 4 will provide information about the research study approved by Walden University's IRB along with the approval number. The researcher will also provide detailed information about the interviews conducted. Information will be disclosed regarding any data relevant to the researcher's attempts to eliminate biases and personal viewpoints.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this IPA research was to understand the meaning of work and self-sufficiency from the perspective of rural, work-eligible adults. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST was used as a contextual lens to explore how rural, work-eligible adults ascribed meaning to work and self-sufficiency. Rural residents shared their prior work experiences, their perspectives toward the meaning of work and self-sufficiency, and their difficulties for overcoming both. The research questions used were:

RQ1: What is the meaning of work for rural, work-eligible adults?

RQ2: What is the meaning of self-sufficiency for rural, work-eligible adults?

In this chapter, I provide the setting, demographics, and data collection techniques used in the study. A thorough analysis of the transcribed data from semistructured interviews with individual participants is included in this section. Thematic relationships of the data relevant to EST are also discussed.

Setting

Interviews were conducted in the community room of the local municipal building between midmorning and early afternoon. Time allotted for each interview was 30–45 minutes; however, the average interview was 10–20 minutes with only one interview lasting an hour. Weather conditions were cold and sometimes rainy on the days of interviews. The building was unoccupied before arrival at each interview. I turned on the heat once the participant and I entered the building. The facility was cool but not unpleasant.

Demographics

A total of seven participants were included in the study. They were between the ages of 36 and 64 years and had lived in the community for the last 5 years. Each participant identified as being unemployed during the screening process; however, three participants reported actively engaging in work activities for cash. All participants resided within the local rural Alabama community. Both male and female subjects were included in the study. The length of time being unemployed for the participants ranged from 0 months to 20 years. The number of years in the workforce for all participants ranged from 2 to 40 years. The discrepant cases will be discussed fully in Chapter 5.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

	Gender	Age	Length of unemployment	Last type of employment
Participant 1	Female	61	7years	Medical warehouse
Participant 2	Male	63	0	Self-employed painter
Participant 3	Female	60	17	Medical warehouse
Participant 4	Female	64	0	Textile plant
Participant 5	Female	49	20	Textile plant
Participant 6	Male	62	0	Public works
Participant 7	Male	50	8	Truck Driver

Data Collection

Seven individuals were identified for participation using snowball and referral sampling. All were interviewed using a semistructured format. The interviews took place in the community room of the local municipal building. Interview times were allotted 30–

45 minutes but ranged in time from 10 to 60 minutes. Audio recordings were made for each interview session with participants' consent. I encountered a problem during one of the interview sessions. The interview was almost complete when I noticed that the tape recorder was not on. With the participant's consent we restarted the interview.

The interviews were planned for a 4– to 6-week collection period but took place in only 3 weeks (January 3–January 21, 2020). I transcribed the audio transcripts by hand. The original plan was to transcribe each interview within 2 days of conducting the interview but that was not the case for all seven of the interviews. It proved an impossible task because of the amount of content on each recording, the amount of time between interviews, and whether the content was easily audible. Some of the interviews were conducted 1 day apart or on the same day.

After each interview was transcribed, I contacted participants by phone to meet me at the local municipal building to receive a copy of the transcript for review. I decided to provide participants a copy of the transcript in a sealed envelope to lessen the amount of time spent at the interview location and increase privacy and confidentiality measures. I felt the need to add the extra measure after being approached by an individual before leaving the municipal building. The participant and I had just completed the interview and were preparing to exit the building. The person opened the door to the community room and informed us that he would be in the back working if we heard some banging noises.

I discussed the consent form over the phone with six of the participants at initial contact. One individual accompanied a scheduled participant to the interview

appointment and requested inclusion in the study. I explained the informed consent process to both participants at the same time and asked one of them to leave the room. Signatures were obtained from all participants on the day of the scheduled interview after reviewing the informed consent form again. Each participant was provided a copy of the informed consent form prior to conducting the interview. A summative copy of the interview transcript was provided to each participant after transcription and they were instructed to phone me to verify whether content was accurate and permissible to use in the study. All participants phoned me to say, "It's okay to use my interview."

Data Analysis

Analysis Process

The first step in the analysis process of this IPA was to organize the data. After transcribing each interview, I organized the data according to the questions asked. I used the ideographic approach of reading and rereading the individual transcripts before categorizing the data. Participants' responses were then handwritten in charts to allow patterns to become easier to recognize. Similarities in responses were noted in my journal and in the margins of the documents I worked from.

A multicycle approach was used to analyze the data. In the first cycle, I used Saldana's (2011) approach of (a) inductively looking at participants' responses to accumulate knowledge, then (b) abductively exploring the responses for plausible explanations of meanings of work and self-sufficiency, and (c) deductively drawing conclusions from the evidence provided. Structural journaling was the process used to distinguish my interpretation from the participants' responses to each question. I created

diagrams and charts to reflect thematic categories by organizing, pulling out, and labeling chunks of texts and themes.

I employed Smith et al.'s (2012) hermeneutic circle to interpret each participant's response with the collective responses of the other participants. The final emergent themes (with associated categories) were identified. These are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Final Emergent Themes with Associated Categories

Theme	Category
Out of work	Time Reason Meaningfulness
Work experience	Daily work activities Education Previous jobs worked Chances of returning to work
Government subsidies	Reasons to terminate Feelings and emotions Caring for self and family Friends and neighbors
Work meaning	Ideal job/motive Meaning for self Meaning for family Meaning for friends Meaning for community
Self-sufficiency	Behaviors Feelings Importance

The second cycle of coding was based on the framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST. The themes were categorized according to each of the nested levels of the framework. This is shown and discussed in the Results section.

Researcher Reflections

While interviewing subsequent participants, I could easily recall information from previous participants' responses that illustrated commonality in work experience and work locations. For example, Participant 1 and Participant 3 both worked at the same facility prior to experiencing similar traumatic accidents that prevented both of them from returning to work. Participant 2, Participant 4, and Participant 6 shared a commonality in their interpretation of the meaning of unemployment. All three participants maintained that they were unemployed, but each of them reported working in some capacity for pay. Participant 2 identified as self-employed, Participant 4 reported working part-time for an individual, and Participant 6 said that he works whenever he is needed at the water department or if his friend has work for him. All three participants were adamant about the necessity of their government subsidies, as I will explain further in the results section. By the end of data collection and transcription, I recognized patterns among participants' responses that were key to understanding their views of the meaning of self-sufficiency. Subsequently, responses about self-sufficiency were seemingly representative of individuals' personal experiences of needing help from others due to an unfortunate event or illness.

Discrepant Cases

The discrepancies identified were a function of how participants "self-defined" as unemployed and opted into the study. Three of the participants on disability selected themselves into the study by identifying as unemployed residents. Participants 2, 4, and 6 shared information of being employed by either individuals or agencies without payroll

accountability measures. These three participants also reported dropping out of high school. These discrepancies from the selection criteria emerged during the interview process, but their interviews shared so many common elements that I decided to retain them in the sample.

Trustworthiness

Issues of trustworthiness were addressed as stated in Chapter 3. I used honesty, care, and accuracy in all of the steps and procedures employed during the data collection and analysis process. Journaling and being conscious of my personal biases that would potentially influence participants was a form of trustworthiness used in the study (Smith et al., 2012). I maintained frequent debriefing sessions with my committee chairperson to discuss the course of action in the study. Credibility was exhibited through review of the data for accuracy when transcribing the transcripts and analyzing the data. Member checking by participants was an additional credibility technique employed. I provided participants with summaries of the interview transcripts to review for accuracy and to ensure that what was documented was what they intended to say. Participants were told to contact me after reading the transcript to verify accuracy and approval for use in the study. To attempt some triangulation, I used more than one interview question for each research question. I sought to incorporate the experiences of rural work eligible adult participants to determine their perceptions of the meaning of work and self-sufficiency. Data from the interview sessions were analyzed, and thematically coded.

In my effort to prevent my assumptions from becoming impaired I held frequent debriefing sessions with the dissertation committee chairperson. We discussed flaws in

the course of action being taken and clarified the accuracy of my ideas and interpretations (Shenton, 2004). Transferability strategies included the disclosure of demographic information about participants unemployed stats, their age range, length of residency, and the number and duration of interviews conducted. Information provided by participants was documented in a "transparent and contextualized" (Smith et al., 2012, p.51) manner. Dependability strategies incorporated detailed accounts of each participant's lived experience of work and self-sufficiency; however, data saturation was not reached due to time constraints and the number of willing participants in the study. Only seven participants were included in the study, and concerns about thematic saturation will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Results

The purpose of the study was to explore the meaning of work and self-sufficiency from the perspective of rural work eligible adults between 36 and 64 years of age. Participants shared responses to questions relevant to their own ecology and how they experienced the meaning of work and self-sufficiency. The 7 participants in the study were asked:

RQ1: What is the meaning of work for rural, work-eligible adults?

RQ2: What is the meaning of self-sufficiency for rural, work-eligible adults?

The interpretation of the data focused on how participants tried to make sense of the world, and how I tried to make sense of them making sense of their world (Smith & Osborne, 2003). Six (6) superordinate themes were discovered during the first cycle of data analysis (out of work, work experience, unemployed, government subsidies, work

meaning, and self-sufficiency). See Appendix F: Table 2. The second cycle of coding was guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST to understand the context of participants' personal ecology. Both sets of results are discussed in detail below.

First Cycle: Superordinate Themes

Out of work. What it means to be out of work differed for participants, including being unable to work, being unemployed, or having an unreported, alternative method of earning income. Dimensions of time, occurrence of events, and meaningfulness of the last work activity were discussed by participants as they shared their experience of being out of work. The amount of time that participants reported being out of work ranged from 0 to 17 years. Interestingly, three participants identified themselves as being out of work, yet throughout their individualized interview session they shared information with me about working for people or organizations for pay. For example, when asked about most recent work experience Participant 2 responded that he had "been painting for 40 years."

The reasons revealed for being out of work were traumatic accident, medical reasons, plant closure, or some form of undocumented work. The average time spent in the workforce ranged from 3 to 40 years among participants. All 7 of the participants worked in blue collar positions prior to unemployment. Two participants were experienced in the textile industry, two in a warehouse (shipping and inventory), two in services/utilities, and one in trucking.

The meaning ascribed to work by all 7 participants was more positive than negative. Responses ranged from "I really enjoyed it" to "I loved it." Participant 3 stated that she "had to learn a lot" and she found the work "challenging." Participant 4

expressed her like for the job but dislike for the pay when she stated that it was “a good job but didn’t pay good.”

Work experience. Work experience included daily work activities, education level, previous jobs worked, and chances of returning to the work. Participants were asked to share their daily work activities, the most enjoyed, and least enjoyed at the most recent job worked. Each participant shared work behaviors consistent with traditional jobs, e.g., they reported to work, engaged in meetings, received instruction, took a lunch break, went home. When asked what they enjoyed doing most about their job, responses were indicative of feelings or emotions associated beyond the job. Participant 7 stated that “It was the best thing I ever had,” and “I loved the new sights.” Similar to his response was Participant 1’s declaration, “I enjoyed my job.” Participant 2 liked to “see people happy…” when he finished a job. In a similar manner, responses to the thing least liked about the job were related to the job. Responses like “sanding walls” by Participant 2, the “hours” by Participant 3, “dealing with people that didn’t understand” by Participant 1, and “working overtime” by Participant 4 indicated dislikes that were job-specific.

Education. The education level required for the jobs held by 57% of participants was a high school education. The actual education level among participants varied. Two participants completed high school but did not venture beyond, two participants attended college but did not graduate, two participants dropped out of high school after the eleventh grade, and one participant dropped out after the tenth grade. Most of the participants indicated that they learned their respective duties while working on the job.

Participant 2 credited his knowledge to natural talent and skills described with colloquial dialect as “mother with” a term that I was unfamiliar with but understood to mean inherited from his mother.

Previous jobs worked. Work history among most participants seemed to coincide with the skillset of the job that they reported working last with two exceptions. Coincidentally, Participant 1, and Participant 3 worked at the same drug warehouse in different departments, but their prior work experiences were varied. Participant 1shared that she had worked as a “nursing assistant and patient sitter.” Participant 3 shared field experience that she engaged in while enrolled in community college and working in a juvenile facility. Both participants worked in human services prior to working in the warehouse. It was ironic that both participants shared being unable to return to work after being injured in a traumatic auto accident.

Chances of returning to work. The chances that participants would have returned to the kind of work that they performed last was circumstantial. Participant 1stated that she “would have gone back, but as of now the warehouse is closed down and [she] is no longer able to do the work that was required…” She stated that the job ended as a result of an “accident… car accident, but other than that everything was going well until then.” Participant 3 shared her experience of having to leave work after “…a real bad accident and [she] was no longer able to work.” Participants 4 and 6 shared responses that indicated that it was unlikely they would return to the work. Participant 4 indicated his age and physical limitations prevented him “you know when I was younger it was easy…

I could go out there and paint and stay up longer;" and Participant 6 stated that "I'd rather just continue doing like I'm doing now."

Unemployed. When asked about their current job status participants reported "not working," "caring for family members," and being "disabled." I expected Participant 2 to share information on how he spends his time working as an independent worker, but what he shared was more insightful. Participant 2 shared that sometimes he will work for a company:

> Not 90% of the time, because with a company if I worked 8 hours with a company - I made the company two or three thousand dollars, but I ain't made me nothing but a hundred and something-if I hired-if you hire me to come in and paint this for $10 hour it may take me 8 hours to paint it, ain't made but $80. Well if I go contract it myself, I say well I charge you a thousand and doing it eight hours then I made some money.

I then asked him how many jobs he takes in a week. He replied, "as less I can…age take a hold on it now." Surprisingly, Participant 4 revealed that she also works. She stated that she sits with an individual 3 days a week.

***Daily activities*.** Participants were asked to share what a typical day was like. Their responses were best categorized as household chores (cooking, cleaning, yardwork), self-care (meditation, thanking the Lord, pain management, exercise), leisure activities (watching tv, sitting at home, gardening), and advising others. The most enjoyed daily activities among participants were in the leisure time activities category (watching tv, relaxing, listening to music, and playing video games) followed by

spending time with the Lord and checking on family. Participant 6's response was indifferent, he stated that he "would like to be working." The least enjoyable daily activities among participants were similar to the things most enjoyed. Participant 1 was an exception, she expressed having "a different state of mind" as the result of "knowing that I'm unable to help family members." She was referring to finances and the limitations of her monthly income. Participant 6 expressed "being around friends and family," as the least enjoyed daily activity.

***Time with family*.** I concluded that 2 participants lived alone, 4 lived with a relative or spouse, and I was uncertain about the seventh participant. I did not ask participants a direct question about living arrangements, but when I asked about time spent with family members responses were similar. Responses were "I don't see them often as I would like," "I visit them," "I live with my sister," or an example of how quality time spent was shared (ex. Going out to eat, talk).

Ideal work. When participants were asked about their ideal work and the skills/education required or desired to do that kind of work, most of their responses differed from their work experience. The categories of ideal work were caregiver, counselor, ministry, carpentry, and "anything beats setting home every day." Participant 7 expressed his desire to return to the work he left. Skills/education was grouped according to required, desired, or possessed. Participants' responses indicated that they possessed the skill/education to do the job desired because of their "natural skill" or those "learned on the job." The desire to learn a skill was based on becoming a nurse's aide for Participant 4 and becoming a counselor for Participant 3. Participant 5 expressed views

that although there is an educational requirement for ministry, “If God calls you, education is not required.” During the interview she stated:

> As for me - I wouldn’t-because-I’m not going back to school-cause you know-it’s a lot with going back to school. You know you gotta be prepared. And if you not into that-being prepared the way they want to-it’s, it’s no good any, you git what um saying’- Because you got to be financial-you gotta have the finances, you gotta have the transportation, and all of that gotta be in place, foe you-you know, prepare to go out you know. So -and right now I’m not financially stable.

Obstacles for working. The categories for obstacles that prevented participants from working were transportation/travel, family obligation, health, job availability, low wages, and age. When asked, what has been the greatest obstacle for you finding work? Participant 1 responded,

> Now it’s kinda hard because you have to go a distance and stuff to try to find jobs because it’s really not anything around here, you know that we can just go to and have so it’s hard trying to go from place to place-but then trying to stay around because my father is ill and stuff too-so just in case, he need me.

Participant 7 shared his experience of losing his leg due to diabetes. He explained the process in detail, “when I became a diabetic and this here happened with my leg and stuff, I been having surgery on this leg since 2011, all the way until 2017and 15 surgeries on this one leg.” Participant 6 was the only person to admit having no obstacles for working. He still worked for friends or for the city, but did not want a regular job: “I can

go help [my friend] sometime, and help the city sometime, you know when they need me-like I said but-talking bout a everyday job, I wouldn't want it."

Government subsidies. Government subsidies were explored from participants' perspectives of choosing between having benefits or returning to work. The superordinate themes revealed in this section were reasons to terminate disability benefits, feelings, and emotions about disability benefits, caring for self and family, and friends and neighbors.

Reasons to terminate. I asked participants under which conditions would they consider getting off government subsidies -if they could go back to work. Most of the responses were representative of the participants' lived experiences and the current economic condition of the town. The categorical themes derived from the responses provided were: (a) license restored, (b) finances increased, (c) health improved, (d) job availability and (e) I would not. Participant 2 said that he would "throw away the paintbrush" rather than get off the subsidy because he depends on his monthly benefits. His words were

> No kinda way, I'll throw the paintbrush away you know at-at my age now, I ain't no baby no more so you know, I know I got that coming every month so I wouldn't throw that away to try to start back painting , then I could fall-hurt my leg then I'm through-then I ain't got no income coming in.

Participant 4 said, "I wouldn't cause of my health and stuff." Participant 6 responded by saying "ain't no work round here to do you have to go to [neighboring urban town] every day and the little money you make up there every day coming back down here it gone."

Participant 3 expressed a financial need, “I need more finances or something like that- those kinds of circumstances would bring me off disability.”

Feelings and emotions. Feelings about receiving government subsidies were varied among participants. They ranged from being (a) important, (b) depend on it, (c) pay not enough, and (d) wish I didn’t have it. Participant 7 expressed mixed emotions when talking about his feelings of what the benefits mean to him. He said,

> At least I have, have things, I mean it’s something I’m depending on, and it is something wishing you don’t have it because with my wife she get paid every two-weeks, and I know my check go direct deposit to our bank- and she working so many hours and stuff, she still working at the nursing home, when they asked her if she cared, and I sit there and I look at it you know me I’m only doing this once a month. She’s doing this here twice a month and you know everything is sometimes I feel that everything is just about kinda just about depending on her.

Caring for self and family. All 7 participants described a reliance on government subsidies for caring for themselves and their families. When I asked participants how their bills got paid, their responses were categorized as (a) my check, (b) reliance on others, (c) food subsidy, or (d) make income last month to month. Married Participants (5, 6, and 7) acknowledged receiving help from their spouses with regards to paying bills. Participant 4 explained that her expenses were shared with her sister. She stated, “I give my sister a set amount every month.” Participant 3 summed up what it was like to live on a government subsidy as a primary income. She stated,

> You know they not gone give you over abundance, you know they not gone give you really what you deserve so whatever you get you just have to make it work, so I just -I'm not gone say it's enough, not gone say it's too less so whatever you get you just have to make it enough-and live within those means.

Friends and neighbors. An inquiry of participants' friends and neighbors' getting by revealed neighbors who (a) were employed, (b) receiving disability benefits too, or (c) borrowed. Participant 3 spoke of elderly neighbors that she assumed were receiving social security benefits. Her response was, "well.....…most of the ones that live around me……. I think they're older…they are on maybe social security or whatever." Similar responses were provided by Participants 1, 2, 5, and 6 when they noted that friends and neighbors were in the same economic state. Participant 1 stated,

> Friends and neighbors, I think most of the people now that are around me are also on a monthly check, most of the love ones are they're not in work on they own they're only receiving monthly checks as well.

Participant 2 shared how his friends and neighbors spend time together before stating their economic status. He laughingly said,

> Yeh-all us get by good we just ain't but a 2 or 3 us in [our town]- You know just like now me and [my friends] by the way what- now [this town] ain't no more than 5 or 6 people so we get along real good-you know everybody stay in touch, you know we go watch some football drank a few beers and then go on back home-all of em' disabled- all us disabled, waiting on the gov'ment.

Participant 5 stated, “My friends in the same predicament they’re unemployed, disability.” Participant 6 said,

> Well I guess they get by like-know like we-like me and [my friend]and them do, like I said you get that lil check don’t last no time and time you get it it’s gone they get help like we do I mean get they disable like we is.

Meaning of work. To assess participants’ meaning of work, I asked a series of questions regarding the ideal kind of work for them. I questioned them about the necessary skills and education that would be required in order to possess the ideal job. Most of the responses were the same as when I asked what kind of work they would do if they had the chance. The only exception was Participant 2 who said, “unh…unh…ain’t no different kind ….ain’t work nowhere…I’ll go fishing, get me a reel and rod… ain’t no more skills.” Further inquiry and analysis of responses to interview questions resulted in insight into the dimensions of work meaning by participants. The subordinate themes were meaning for self, meaning for family, meaning for friends, and meaning for community.

Meaning for self. There was consistency in participants’ responses regarding their job preferences if they had the chance and the ideal job. The job choices were explored for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Interestingly, none of the respondents acknowledged extrinsic motivation as paramount. Two of the 7 participants discussed having both internal and external motives for their job choices. Participants 4 and 5 acknowledged external motives for money as essential: “I want to be in ministry, but I need finances,” and “It’s in me about helping somebody [but] the pay would be good

too." Participant 1 expounded on the limitations to her desired job choice. She said, "there's only so much I can do on an average job…[I] don't want to deal with the public [because I have] been away from the public a long time." Participant 6's statements indicated uncertainty on his part. He answered, "really not one" but admitted that "it'd give me something to do, but I'd rather continue doing like I'm doing."

Meaning for family. The categories found under meaning of work for the family were (a) no affect or (b) would understand. Most of the participants stated that their kids were "grown" and working would not affect the family. Participant 7 responded by saying, "my wife would love that" which led me to conclude that she would understand.

Meaning for friends. The overall consensus among participants was that there would be no effect on the relationships with friends. Only one participant believed that his friends would be affected by him working. Participant 7 explained how the relationship with friends might change in value. His statement that "driving trucks is higher than a disability," exemplified how he thinks his friends value him. He talked about his friends visiting him periodically and asking him if he would consider driving again.

Meaning for community. The participants were asked if they could have any job desired -what it would mean for their relationships within the community. Their responses were based on views of the usefulness that their desired jobs would have for the community. The thematic categories were grouped as either beneficial or not beneficial. In the beneficial category, participants expressed how the specific job choice

would prove useful to the community. Participant 1 shared how an elderly care service would prove beneficial to families in the community,

> It would mean a lot because it would give the family members chance to go to their jobs to have someone they know would be there to take care their loved ones, I think it would mean a lot because it's something that we all really need, because we never know what situations that might come up or someone might have to have just going to grocery stores and stuff to leave your love one with someone that you can depend on.

Meaning of self-sufficiency. I discovered 4 dimensions of self-sufficiency among the participants in this study; meaning, behavior, feelings about using government subsidies, and the importance of using government subsidies. The meaning of self-sufficiency was not easily understood by some of the participants. I explained the meaning of self-sufficiency as being able to fix things and not having to ask for help unless it was really needed. Participant 4 pretended to understand the questions asked about the meaning of self-sufficiency. She replied, "Yeah, it sounds good-Yeah I would enjoy it." As the interview continued, she admitted not understanding what self-sufficiency meant. Her exact words were, "well I really don't know what that-I mean, what that mean."

Participants 3 and 5 shared reasons why individuals should not be self-sufficient, but Participant 3 explained it as an individual's strength. She said, "[it] shows your strength, shows you can do things for yourself." Her justification of why individuals should not be self-sufficient was similar to the justification provided by Participant 5.

Participant 3 said, “we weren’t put here to do things all by our self… everyone needs help…it feels good to do things by yourself, but there’s a feeling you get when involving others.” Participant 5 said, “we all need help, none of us made to be so self-sufficient because everybody need somebody in a point in their life.”

“Doing things for myself is most important [I’m] not gone be defeated if I can’t do it that day [I’ll] come back until the job is done,” was the response provided by Participant 1. She explained how being tenacious provided her a sense of independence. Participant 2 equated self-sufficiency with age. He stated, “You know when I was , when I was younger it was easy selfsufficient-you know what I’m talking bout, it was more self-sufficient for me cause I, you know I had a good income during then.”

Self-sufficient behavior. Being able to take care of daily self-care routines and behaviors was paramount for participants. Participant 2 shared his daily routine, “[I] get up at 5, drink coffee, smoke a cigarette, put food in crockpot, come home around 7 ain’t got to argue or nothing.” Participant 6 explained why he prefers to do things himself, “Really though see-the one you get see, they gone mess up-mess the whole job up, they ain’t experienced like I got -I like to do it myself.”

Participant 5 expounded on her reasons for advocating that individuals not being self-sufficient.

> For as that, the daily things you know the routine that you do daily-bathing, brushing your teeth, cleaning you know I don’t [need] assistance with that but others might do, but as at the same time you know if it came to it you know like when I had the cancer -I did need assistance. My family came in and they helped

> me that's why I'm trying to relate to, getting that-you can't be so sufficient cause you don't know what tomorrow gonna bring for none of us.

Feelings about self-sufficiency and using government subsidies. Participants were asked to share their feelings of using government assistance to take care of themselves and their families. Responses indicated feelings of insufficiency with regards to the dollar amounts received and entitlement. Participant 7 said, "The only government assistance I get is my check, I don't get food stamps, I don't get the food commodity boxes, the disability could be a little bit more and stuff." A similar sentiment was shared by Participant 1,

> The feeling from government assistance stuff is I never been the type to go for assistance if I was able take care of myself and like I say the only thing that I'm on now is my disability check so that's the only income I have in on getting assistance from umm-anything. I had thought about food stamp once, and I tried it one time but they only allow you to get so much a month, you know with the income that you was on and it was a small amount, but it was something that was coming in- but after my disability went up at the first part of the year I didn't try you know I stopped. I didn't try anymore because I you know it just I try to go by the rules on stuff I'm not going to push it- you know they say you got too much coming in for what they're asking for I just leave it alone. I know the rules are what they are looking at and I don't because I would not have applied for it if I didn't need it.

Participant 6 said he would "be in bad shape without it," because there are "no jobs round here."

Participants 2 and 5 shared sentiments of entitlement to government subsidies being received. Participant 2 stated,

> I'm good. I paid my debt. I learn how to base myself, how much I can spend or can't spend you know, whether it's enough or not I gotta learn how to base myself so I don't have no problem with that. I just base myself on how much, then if I do a little outside job I see I can get a little further, but after that-it's not no whole lot but here in [this town], rural area like this, I can make it. I could. I ain't saying I could do it in [neighboring urban town] up there paying like 6, 4, 5 hundred dollars a month I couldn't do it, but right here in [this town] yeh I could maintain a while.

Participant 5 shared her views of being entitled to the subsidies she receives,

> I believe that with all of that work experience that I put into being experienced with work that when I get on disability and things happen in my life I think that social security and government should be there for me cause I have earned that right.

She went further in her discussion expounding on the necessity of government subsidies for others. She proclaimed,

> I feel that - that you know you don't know people's situation. In their life, as for you don't know what a person been through that caused them to be in that predicament that they're in some people mind just ain't regulated to work, and

> they can't hold jobs. People like that you don't need on your job, cause you're gonna be held responsible for them, so in that assistance I think you should know that if a person's not able to work that you should tell them that you need to go get some assistance, because you cannot hold a job so you need to go to whatever means that to help you out.

Importance of selfsufficiency. Two of the 7 participants did not view self-sufficiency as important. Participant 7 was indecisive. He acknowledged experiencing a "little depression" when talking about receiving benefits, in addition to having a "50/50" outlook toward self-sufficiency. His response was "I say 50/50. I got my wife at home, sometimes I can't do it well she kick in- that ends up putting her in a burden." In a similar manner, Participant 3said that self-sufficiency was "important in certain ways." She expressed the belief that "we should be independent if able, you should work as long as you're able, if bodily able and your mind is regulated and there are no physical or emotional ailments you should hold a job."

The participants who believed that selfsufficiency was important shared similar thoughts. Participant 1 stated, "it is very important to me, as a child [I was] taught to be independent and look out for others." Participant 2 acknowledged self-sufficiency as being "important a long way." "If you have yourself together then you can help others," was Participant 3's perspective. Participant 4 simply stated that she liked "being able to help myself."

Ecological Systems Theory

Participants' responses were analyzed for meaning of work and self-sufficiency in accordance with their social ecology. Interrelationships were examined to verify whether consistent or divergent across environmental settings. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST was used to gauge individuals' responses to research questions. The microsystem level consisted of place, time, physical features, activities, the participant, and their role. Analysis of responses at the microsystem level revealed being out of work, previous jobs held, time with family as themes. Participants' responses surrounding age, home relationship, connection to family, motivation, and work aspirations are included at this level of interpretation. Participants were asked their respective ages at initial contact as a part of the inclusion criteria. See Appendix D for participant age.

Information provided by Participant 5 exemplified her ecology at the microsystem level. She shared that the last job worked was twenty years ago. She worked as a presser until the job was permanently closed. Her experience as a presser was "15 years" collectively, having worked two other jobs in a similar capacity. She shared that she worked since graduating from high school until she lost the job due to plant closure and becoming ill.

> I graduated in 88, I left here in 88 of that summer and I started working in Michigan at Hardees the restaurant -and I came back. I been working ever since I got out of high school until I got sick and I lost the first job [plant closure] and from there [moving back from Michigan after father's death] I came back, I worked at the nursing home for about a month or so, I worked at {food processing

> plant}, I work at the cleaners for them years then I worked at [plant closure] and I worked at the cleaners in [neighboring rural town] at the cleaners too…so between all of them years I have put in a lot of work.

The amount of time that she spent with family varied but included a lot of communication,

> we talk and we eat and we share, we share a lot-me and my boys and my husband, we talk you know, and that- we talk about the Lord. I talk to the Lord about, to my family they know that. Me and my boys, they take me out-like we go they take me over my mom and you know to the mall or whatever I need to do you know-take care of me you know.

Her motivation to work an ideal job in women's ministry was based on both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. "I would want to be a [minister] out into the world where I can meet the needs of others but I would need those financial needs for my needs and other people's needs."

The mesosystemic level analysis consisted of interrelations among settings that contained the participant. Responses that indicated participants' relationships with work, educational attainment, daily work activities, daily unemployment activities, and the applied understanding of work meaning. Participant 3 shared ecological development at the mesosystem level. During the interview, she expressed a desire for "challenging work." She shared about the experience of having attended community college to study "mental health technology" and participating in "field" work. She worked in an educational setting and in juvenile facilities where she cared for individuals that were

"mentally and physically challenged." Her desire to partake in that type of work was based on her "like" for "talking to young people" and helping them. She disliked "that a lot of them talked about coming from homes they didn't have a mom and a dad." She said that the work was "what [she] really wanted to do." Since being unemployed she partakes in "talking on the phone, talking to people…[I] talk on the phone a lot to people. I find myself counseling people before I know it." She stated that she would "rather be out among people, cause I love to talk, talk to people." She desired a "counseling job or something like that."

The exosystem level affected the setting in which the participant existed but factors were beyond her/his control. Analysis of responses revealed at this level was job availability, travel distance, earning potential, relationship with friends, and relationship with the community. All of the participants shared work experiences that were engaged in outside of the community. Comments like "you have to go a distance and stuff to try to find jobs because it's really nothing around here," "transportation," and "where we stay at going to a job-the gas, they paying us, we paying for gas just going up the road" reflect participants' views of travel associated with working outside of the community. Several participants reported having good rapport with friends and the community, and similarities in economic condition.

Analysis of data at the macrosystem level consisted of cultural and ideological customs and practices of daily life within the participants' culture or subculture. Caring for self and family, relationships with family, friends, and community, feelings toward government subsidies, the importance of government subsidies, returning to work, and

getting off government subsidies. Many of the neighbors and family members of the participants were reportedly receiving government subsidies. According to Participant 4, “all that [he] stay round get disability.” Participant 2 stated that there were only a few people in the community and “all of [them] disabled and waiting on the gov’ment.” Participant 1 said that her “loved ones” and others were receiving subsidies. She stated that the subsidy “check means a lot because that’s all [she has] it’s very important to have that because that’s what [she] depend[s] on every month.”

Only one participant in the study expressed a desire to return to work. Participant 7 stated that if he “could get back to driving trucks [he] would drop [his] disability.” He and Participant 3 were the only two participants that would consider getting off government subsidies but under certain conditions. Participant 3 stated that if her “finances increased” and Participant 7 stated that if his license was restored. Participants 6 stated that he would “rather stay like [he was].” Participants 4 and 2 stated that their ages were factors in their work activities. The participants living arrangements varied from living alone to living with relatives.

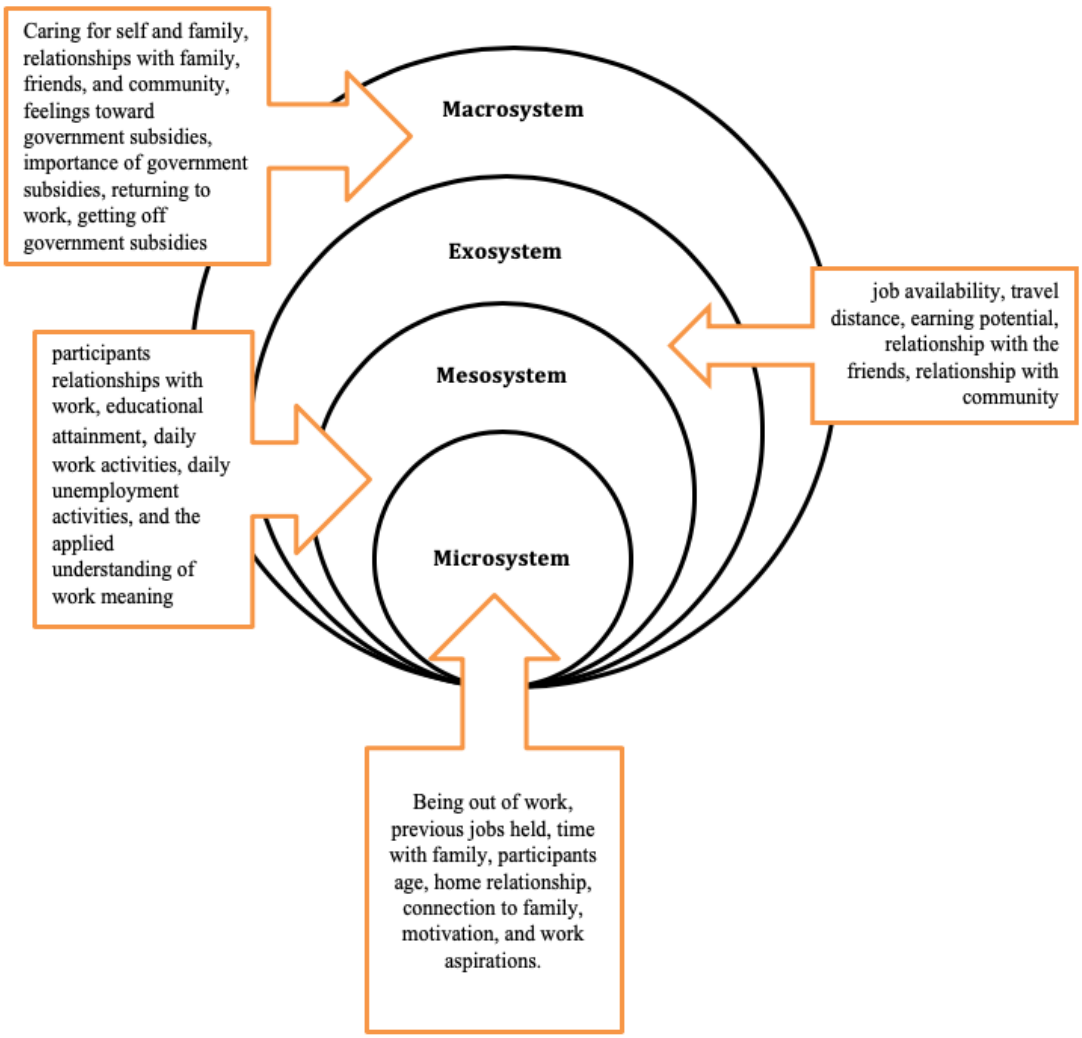

Figure 1. Ecological systems theory.

Summary

This chapter included the setting, demographics, data collection, and analysis procedures employed in the study. Issues of trustworthiness were discussed including transferability, dependability, credibility, triangulation, and confirmability. Themes revealed during cycle one of data analysis were, out of work, work experience, unemployed, government subsidies, the meaning of work, and meaning of self-

sufficiency. Cycle two of data analysis revealed themes in accordance with Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST. Themes were categorized according to the nested levels of the EST and participants' social ecology.

The results of these analyses provided insight into the first research question about the meaning of work for rural, work-eligible adults. I found that the meaning of work was specific to the individual and based on the significance of past work experience. The experience of work was the result of both controllable and uncontrollable factors that the individual faced. Uncontrollable factors included the distance traveled from home to the worksite, transportation costs, inability to work (due to traumatic accident or adverse medical conditions), jobsite closure, shift availability, wages, relationships with coworkers, physical condition, family obligation, and age. Controllable factors were willingness of being unemployed, attitude toward work, feelings and emotions about the job performed, individuals' desire to work, willingness to obtain the education required for desired jobs, and desire to remain in a familiar work environment.

Participants in this study expressed that their ideal work settings were similar to the jobs or skills that they were accustomed to. For example, Participant 4 expressed her ideal job as nursing but never attempted to earn the required education. She dropped out of school but works as an in-home sitter 3 days a week. Participants 2 and 6 shared ideal jobs that reflected their work experience as a painter and utility employer. Participant 1 expressed her ideal job as caring for the elderly which reflected her family obligation (caring for her elderly father). Participants 3 and 5 desired jobs that permitted them to spend time with others in a capacity that reflected their desires to counsel and minister.

Participant 7 expressed a desire to drive trucks as his statements indicated disapproval of being denied driving due to becoming a diabetic.

The meaning of work for participants was more intrinsic than extrinsic. The extrinsic motivation was financial for the participants who expressed an extrinsic motive. There was an overall consensus among study participants that indicated a lack of concern for the meaning of work for family or friends. The meaning of work for the community was based on the benefits of their work to the community. In essence, the meaning of work for the community was based on the participants' contribution to the community.

For RQ 2, exploring the meaning of self-sufficiency for rural, work-eligible adults, the results were diverse and somewhat surprising. The analyses revealed a reliance on government subsidies. All seven of the participants received disability benefits. Only 1 participant (Participant 2) indicated receiving food stamps, and only 1 participant (Participant 1) indicated an unfavorable attempt at receiving food stamps.

The term self-sufficiency was foreign to some participants as indicated by their comments (Participants 3 and 6); however, the concept of being self-sufficient was not. Self-sufficiency was equated with income and personal feelings of being able to do things independently. The importance of self-sufficiency was taught or instilled in participants at a young age and included having the ability to "help others," as explained by Participant 3. She explained that "self-sufficient [is] when you have yourself together you can help others…" Participant 1 expressed "always taking care of the elders that was walking around when [she] was smaller." Participant 2 shared that he plants collards in

his garden so “people [who] want ’em they come by and get ’em.” He said he “ain’t gone sale nothing [because he] wasn’t raised like that.”

Participant 5 did not view self-sufficiency as important. She reflected on her experience with cancer and needing help from family members. Participant 3 and Participant 7 were unsure of the importance of being self-sufficient. Participant 7 talked about reliance on his wife and feeling burdensome. As a result, he felt indecisive about the importance of being self-sufficient. His response was “I say that’s 50-50.” Participant 3 shared that “it shows you can do things for yourself, but we weren’t put here to do things all by our self, that’s why one person wasn’t put here.”

Most of the participants shared that their neighbors and friends were in similar economic conditions. Participant 7 shared that his neighbors worked, and Participant 1 stated that her neighbors, family, and friends received government subsidies if they were “not in work on they own.” Participants’ views of government subsidies relative to being self-sufficient included having a willingness or ability to adapt to living with a pre-determined monthly income limit. Participants shared their experiences of having to “make it enough,” “live within those means,” or “do a little outside job” to deal with the limits of having a set monthly income.

The meaning of work for Chapter 5 will include an interpretation of the findings. A comparison of those findings with the literature discussed in Chapter 2 will either confirm, disconfirm, or extend the knowledge base on work meaning and self-sufficiency for rural residents.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this IPA was to understand the meaning of work and self-sufficiency for rural, work-eligible adults. I chose IPA to guide the study because I wanted to focus on exploring how participants make sense of their world and their lived experience (Smith, 2019; Smith et al., 2012). Participants' social, family, and personal views surrounding the meaning of work and self-sufficiency were explored.

As indicated in Chapter 2, the poverty rate in rural Alabama is high, and many residents receive government assistance. Participants in this study shared their personal experience of receiving or applying for that assistance. According to participants, there were no job opportunities available for them in the rural area of this study. The meaning of work, motivation to work, motivation to work in impoverished conditions, and the normalization of poverty were the constructs explored in this study. Bronfenbrenner's EST (1977) was used to examine how mutual influences between the individual and environment inform rural residents' meaning of work and self-sufficiency based on prior work experience.

Seven participants living in a small rural town in Alabama volunteered to participate in this study. All self-identified as unemployed, although I found out during the interview that 2 participants were working (self-employed) while on disability and 1 participant was working but not through a formal employer. I transcribed the interviews and submitted summaries for member checking. I used Saldana's (2016) three-stage process to identify 6 superordinate themes during the first cycle of data analysis. The

second cycle was guided by Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST to help me understand the context of participants' ecology.

In this study, I found that the meaning of work and self-sufficiency were specific to the individual and based on the significance of their personal work experience. Both controllable and uncontrollable factors contributed to how each participant made sense of the meaning of work and self-sufficiency. Work meaning was derived from being out of work, work experience, being unemployed, availability of work, wages, and family obligations. The key finding was that rural, work-eligible residents expressed positive views of work but were faced with challenges and obstacles relevant to rural living that impacted their desire and ability to work. The meaning of self-sufficiency was based on personal experience and needing assistance from others, a willingness to accept or adapt to lifestyle changes associated with monthly income limits and upbringing.

Interpretation of Findings

Results of the Thematic Analysis

Being out of work. This theme summarized the characteristics of unemployment (time worked, the amount of time out of work, reasons working ceased, and the meaning attributed to work). The range of time worked and time out of work was fairly diverse—2 to 40 years, and 0 to 20 years, respectively. Reasons reported for being out of work varied but included an auto accident, poor health, and job closure. Two participants indicated continuously working despite classifying themselves as unemployed. All participants indicated an appreciation for their past jobs. Their occupations were in accordance with Wuthnow's (2013) comments on primary employment opportunities in

rural communities being in transportation, manufacturing, warehousing, construction, and clerical wage-related work.

Work experience. Hong et al. (2014) and Hong et al. (2016) indicated that work is an important means of provision, but participants were kept from moving forward in work due to internal fear, doubt, and feelings of hopelessness. This study disconfirmed those findings. Participants in this study discussed positive feelings associated with their past work experiences. Although the types of work performed by the participants in this study varied in the type of daily work activities, level of education, work history, and chances of returning to work, none of the participants expressed feelings of hopelessness, fear, or doubt. The chances of returning to the previous work were negative among participants, except Participant 7 who expressed a desire to return to truck driving throughout the interview.

Unemployed. There was an inconsistency of unemployment meaning discovered in this study; apparently, an individual can consider themselves as unemployed without actually being unemployed. Three participants self-identified as unemployed when they opted into the study but shared information of being employed (actively engaging in work activities for cash) by either individuals or agencies without traditional payroll accountability measures.

Hansen et al. (2014) and McDonnall and O'Mally (2012) stated that social security income recipients were less likely to engage in employment for fear of losing benefits. None of the participants expressed a fear of losing benefits as their reason for being out of work as evidenced by the three discrepant cases previously discussed. The

participants in this study disconfirmed Hansen et al.'s (2014) and McDonnall and O'Mally's (2012) positions. Fear of losing benefits was not expressed as an obstacle to engaging in employment. In contrast, most participants indicated perceived obstacles for working were health, transportation, job availability, age, and family obligation.

Government subsidies. The government subsidies category included reasons why participants would terminate their disability benefits, their feelings, and emotions toward receiving those benefits and using the benefits to care for themselves and their families, and if their friends and neighbors rely on government subsidies also. Among the reasons shared for considering terminating disability benefits were a financial increase, job availability, and improved health. Current work meaning literature did not include reasons for individuals willingly terminating government subsidies. Rural residents' perspectives about reasons to possibly consider terminating their government benefits extend the knowledge of current literature on work meaning. The views expressed by participants neither proved nor disproved Hansen et al.'s (2014) position that it is difficult to walk away from benefits that were not easily attainable.

Meaning of work. According to Anuradha et al. (2014) work meaning was either (a) social, i.e., it fulfills economic or social purposes; or (b) personal, i.e., it satisfies personal hopes and interests. The voices of the participants were consistent with that position. Interestingly, participants' ideal jobs were similar to their previous work experience or daily activities engaged while unemployed. Educational requirements were discussed in relation to the identified ideal job but none of the participants shared a desire

to obtain the required education. The consensus among participants was that it was seemingly too late in life to pursue their ideal job choice.

The motivation to work in the ideal job chosen was discussed from either an intrinsic or extrinsic position. Motivation expressed was derived from upbringing (Participant 1), experience (Participants 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7) or inherent desire (Participant 2). Current research indicated that intrinsic motivation increased effort since it was a positive and self-regulated state, based on purpose and enjoyment where activity pursuits are inherently rewarding (Cerasoli et al., 2014; Judge, et al., 2014). That was not confirmed in this study.

Cerasoli et al. (2014) noted that intrinsic motivation appeared strongest between blue-collar workers than others based on age; intrinsic motivation was associated with an increase in age. Participants' responses were more aligned with these authors. Five participants discussed the intrinsic motivation for their ideal job choices while 2 participants acknowledged both intrinsic and extrinsic motives.

Meaning of self-sufficiency. The meaning of self-sufficiency included the significance of being self-sufficient, engaging in self-sufficient behavior, feelings, and the importance of government subsidies. The meaning of self-sufficiency for study participants was "based on money," or independence, confirming Abrams et al. (2016) finding that self-sufficiency was equated with economic and logistic independence. I concluded that study participants understood the concept of self-sufficiency but were complacent with their current economic state. Comments provided by participants

indicated an overall understanding of independence and self-reliance but a willingness to adapt to a lifestyle of limited monthly income and government dependence.

Ecological Systems Theory

The second cycle of coding was based on the framework of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) EST. The themes were categorized according to each of the nested levels of the framework. In this study, the microsystem included the participant being out of work, the previous jobs worked, and the time spent with family. Blustein, Kozan, and Connors-Kellegren (2013) conducted a study with unemployed individuals to understand their reasons for being unemployed. They found that participants blamed the economy or education. The current study did not confirm those results. Participants did not indicate their educational level as a factor of unemployment.

The Mesosystem level included the participants' relationship with work, his/her level of educational attainment, and daily work activities. Previous research indicated education as a method for changing social position and overcoming family histories and poverty (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014; Deuchar, 2014; Wiley et al., 2012). Theoretical models of family and economic stress associated socioeconomic hardship with risk factors like educational achievement and family obligation (Kiang et al., 2013). This study did not confirm either position; however, some of the comments indicated participants' understanding of educational attainment with better-paying jobs.

Exosystem themes discovered were job availability, travel distance, and potential earnings. McClay (2016) found that lower socioeconomic class members faced challenges like menial work for low wages due to geographical location. The present

study confirmed those results. Participants in the current study shared their concerns about job availability, wage earnings, and travel distance as obstacles for employment.

At the Macrosystem level participants behaviors of caring for self and family, the relationships held with family, friends, and community, and feelings toward receiving government subsidies were relevant. Previous research found low pay wage earnings fostered rural residents' reliance on help from family members and the social security administration (Wuthnow, 2013). The current study confirmed those results. Participants in the present study unanimously declared a dependency on the social security administration for disability income.

Limitations of the Study

First, the current study focused on the meaning of work and self-sufficiency for rural, work-eligible adults. The key finding was that rural residents expressed positive views of working but were faced with challenges and obstacles relevant to rural living (i.e., job availability, transportation, wage-earning potential). The significance of self-sufficiency was viewed with the previous experience of being dependent upon others for assistance. This is consistent with other studies of rural work life (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Lansberry et al., 2017; McClay, 2016; Rees et al., 2017; Thiede et al., 2016; Wuthnow, 2013), and therefore the methods and results of this study are likely to be transferable for the reader (Shenton, 2004).

Second, choosing to conduct a convenience sample from my local community increased the likelihood that participants did not attempt to join in the study because they were reluctant of sharing personal experiences and behaviors with a member of their

community. This may have had an influence on the dependability of the results, although being interviewed by a stranger may not have further limited the participants' willingness to divulge work life experience.

Regarding credibility, there is some concern about the sample size and sampling process affecting the richness of data, and data saturation, as I was the only researcher and I coded the data according to my interpretation. My lack of experience interviewing participants and my ability to use responsiveness to acquire rich data from participants affected the depth of interview content and did not produce saturation of themes. I missed opportunities for participants to expound upon statements that would have provided a clearer understanding of why they left work. For example, Participant 4 stated that she became ill and was unable to continue working. I missed the opportunity for her to further discuss the type and severity of the illness (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Guest et al., 2006). I had no assistance with verification of coding the data and no documents to compare interview transcripts to which limited triangulation.

Recommendations for Future Research

Given that rural adults have a unique ecological system compared to urban centers, future research can explore the differences in the meaning of work and the meaning of self-sufficiency between rural and urban work-eligible adults. Similarities and differences among rural and urban residents could reveal insights about job choice, willingness to work for menial pay, and other factors that cannot be explored in a homogenous study like this current investigation. A quantitative study would be

recommended to examine the differences between rural and urban work-eligible adults' perceptions of work meaning and life.

Second, participants opted into the study and declared themselves unemployed but later revealed that they held part-time jobs or found work opportunities whenever they chose. There was confusion about participants' definition and the researcher's definition of unemployment. Future research could further explore the meaning of work for people who challenge the conventional belief that unemployed people do not work. It would be interesting to explore the meaning of unemployment for people who work to understand how participants distinguish the differences between unemployment and employment.

This framework served as a contextual lens from which I could gain insight into participants' socialization, beliefs, and values, within each systemic level that influenced their perception of work meaning and self-sufficiency. The model helped me understand and categorize participants' experiences of work and how they made sense of work meaning across each level, but it did not help me to gain a clear understanding of how they viewed themselves at each level. Two recommendations would serve this research area well. First, it may be helpful to explore participants' views of work meaning at each level from a longitudinal perspective. I used EST as the framework to qualitatively study the meaning of work and self-sufficiency for rural work-eligible residents at one point in time. It would be interesting to view the meaning of work for consistency or divergence across the life span.

Second, future researchers should consider a case study approach to exploring the meaning of work and employment. Interviewing participants, their family members, others who are unemployed, documentation from unemployment agencies, and work reform programs may provide insight from multiple perspectives. Talking to creators of workforce development programs and understanding project designs for work initiative programs may provide insight on how work and employment are conceptualized. A case study could provide a context for better understanding the interrelated aspects of work meaning and employment as it affects individuals, their families, and the communities they reside in.

Implications for Social Change

I plan to present the results of this study to the local workforce development board and industrial planning commission. Informing potential business developers of how residents positively viewed previous work experiences and highlighting the obstacles they faced which prevented or deterred them from working might impact the views held about rural residents' lack of desire to work. It would help policymakers understand how economic hardship negatively impacted individuals work behavior and aspirations for self-sufficiency. The results of this study may be shared with local policymakers and stakeholders of work initiative programs. Positive social change may result in the improvement of understanding of how the meaning of work and self-sufficiency is related to EST. Social change may result in the areas of unemployment and work reform programs and policies that specifically target rural work-eligible adults. Rural lifestyles are different from urban lifestyles and the possibility for social change could be improved

if programs and policies that impact the life trajectory of rural residents were developed and implemented to suit the target recipients.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand the meaning of work and self-sufficiency for rural work-eligible adults as it relates to Bronfenbrenner's EST (1977). Seven themes emerged in the final 2 cycles of coding the data that explained how rural residents derived meaning for work and self-sufficiency. The meaning of work was based on blue-collar work experiences among participants, although their work activities differed -even when participants worked in the same facility. The meaning of work was derived from the feeling associated with engaging in the work activity. Work was associated with positive views on making a societal impact. Self-sufficiency was viewed in accordance with being self-reliant or financially independent; however, the participants in this study did not provide a conclusive position of the significance of self-sufficiency. Ideal job situations were seemingly based on personal experience. The meaning of work from the perspective of rural residents was complex. Work meaning was derived from the physical act of working combined with other factors that impacted the life trajectory. Geographic location, transportation ownership, access to dependable transportation, family obligations, medical well-being, and low pay wages were factors that effected work behavior. Despite shared testimonials of participants enjoying the physical aspects of work, like for the job, and loving the feelings associated with working work meaning was associated with the ability to mitigate rural living. The harsh reality of having no employment options in the local community, the travel distance required to access viable

job opportunities, transportation costs, and potential wage earnings seemed to exacerbate the issue of unemployment for rural residents. I concluded that participants chose unemployment over menial low paying jobs.

The rural, work-eligible, residents expressed positive views of work but were faced with challenges and obstacles relevant to rural living which impacted their work behavior. The meaning of self-sufficiency was based on participants' personal experience of needing assistance from others, and their willingness to accept or adapt to lifestyle changes associated with monthly income limits. It was apparent that upbringing affected participants views of assisting others in need.

Because of circumstances, the participants in this study were unable to or unwilling to remain in the workforce. The option of getting a traditional 9 to 5 job was not plausible. This study illustrated the obstacles faced by rural residents when choosing whether to work or not. This study also revealed the need to address an underlying issue that exacerbates the issue of unemployment and employment sufficient to not require financial assistance. How can rural individual's work capabilities be maximized when micro- and mesosystem limitations (no car, no public transportation) get in the way? Is it fair to ascribe meaning and directives in work reform programs that are all-inclusive when there are clear differences among individuals and across communities? Perhaps it would be more beneficial to challenge how workforce initiative programs are designed. An individual approach assessed on a community basis could improve how individuals enter into and remain in the local workforce to improve their lives and the quality of life in their communities.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

WANTED

Unemployed Residents of Hale County to participate in a study examining the meaning of work and self-sufficiency for rural residents

Participants must have resided in the community for the past 5 consecutive years, be between 36 to 64 years old, and work eligible.

If interested in participating in this study, by taking a short one on one interview

Appendix B: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study about the meaning of work and self-sufficiency for rural work-eligible adults. I am inviting you to participate in the study because you are a resident of the local community, you have lived here for the last five consecutive years, and you are currently unemployed. This form is a part of the "informed consent" process which allows you to understand the nature of this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by Janneice Mitcheam-Eatmon, a researcher who is a doctoral student at Walden University, an accredited institution of higher learning.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The purpose of this study is to explore the meaning of work and self-sufficiency among rural work-eligible adults between the ages of 36 and 64 years.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study:

- You will be asked to complete a 15-20-minute audio- taped interview with the researcher, Janneice Mitcheam-Eatmon, at a mutually agreed upon location at a time that is convenient for you.
- You will be asked to review a summative copy of the researcher's interpretation of your responses and clarify any discrepancies in translation.

Here are some sample questions:

1. Tell me about what you did at your last job. What was it like? Tell me about a typical day at work.

2. What does it mean to be self-sufficient (fix things, don't ask for help unless you really need it) or solve your own problems?
3. Can you give me an example of how you take care of yourself?

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:

This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. No one at Walden University, the researcher, or anyone in your community will treat you differently if you decide not to participate in this study.

If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

RISKS AND BENEFITS OF BEING IN THE STUDY

Being in the study involves some risk of the minor discomfort that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue, stress, or becoming distressed by reliving past experiences with family and work environments. Being in the study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. There are no direct benefits to participants. Instead, the benefits are to the larger community by providing insight and understanding of fears and challenges associated with the meaning of work and self-sufficiency.

PAYMENT

There will be no payment for participating in the study.

PRIVACY

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. Numeric codes will be used to protect participants' names in interview transcripts, the researcher's journals, and field notes. Transcripts and a list of code assignments will be

stored on separate flash drives locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's home. Computers used during the research process will need password for accessibility. Details that might identify participants, such as the location of the study, also will not be shared. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purpose outside of this research project. Data will be kept secure for a period of five years, as required by the university, then burned.

MANDATORY REPORTING

The researcher is required to report certain cases with the potential of serious harm to you or others, such as suicidality or child/elderly abuse to the appropriate authorities.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

You may ask questions about your rights as a participant now, or if you have questions later, you may contact Janneice Mitcheam-Eatmon by email at xxxxxxxx@waldenu.edu or phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research participant advocate at Walden University at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is IRB 12-13-19-0473984and will expire on _12 December 2020. In the event you experience feelings and/or emotions that require the assistance of a mental health professional, you may contact xxx Alabama Mental Health at 1-800-000-0000.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

OBTAINING YOUR CONSENT

If you feel that you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by signing below. If you are responding by email, reply by typing "I consent."

_____	_____
Printed name of Participant	Date of Consent

_____

Signature of Participant

_____

Signature of Researcher

Appendix C: Interview Guide

AT FIRST CONTACT ASK:

Age, time since last job.

Topic Meaning of work and self-sufficiency for rural work eligible adults

Criterion for inclusion (determined at first contact)

1. *Age*
2. *How long have you lived here in this community? (5 years or more)*
3. *Are you currently not working?*
4. *Are you eligible to work in this Country?*

Background Questions:

1. Let's start with your most recent work experience.

    a. About how long ago was that?

    b. How long did it last?

    c. What else can you tell me about how this job ended?

2. Tell me about what you did at this job?

    a. What was it like?

    b. Tell me about a typical day at work?

    c. What did you enjoy doing the most? What did you enjoy doing the least?

    d. What kind of education or training did this work require?

    e. Under what circumstances would you return to that work if you had the chance?

3. Is this work typical of what you've been doing for the last year? 5 years? Longer than that?

4. What are you doing now?

a. What is your typical day like?

b. What do you enjoy doing the most?

c. What do you enjoy doing the least?

d. Tell me about how you spend time with your family?

5. Since you are not working right now:

a. What kind of work would you do if you had the chance?

b. Tell me about the skills you have, or you would need to have to do this kind of work?

c. What kind of education or training would you need?

d. What has been the greatest obstacle for you finding work?

6. Under what circumstances would you consider getting off government subsidy if you had the chance to go back to work?

a. Probe for experience/feelings about government subsidies-what does that mean to you?

7. How do you take care of you and your family at home?

a. How do your monthly bills get paid (electricity, water, groceries)?

8. Tell me about your friends and neighbors-tell me about how they get by?

a. What kind of work do they do?

b. Probe for specific examples.

9. Since you are not working right now:

a. What kind of work would you do if you had the chance?

b. Tell me about the skills you have, or you would need to do this kind of work?

c. What kind of education or training would you need?

RQ1: What is the meaning of work for rural, work-eligible adults?

1. If you could have any job you wanted, what would it be?

a. Probe for details about intrinsic and extrinsic motives.

b. What would this mean for your family?

c. What would this mean for your relationship with your friends?

d. What would this mean for your relationships with community?

e. How would this job impact or change your everyday life?

2. If you could have work that you really wanted, what would that mean to you? (probe)

RQ2: What is the meaning of self-sufficiency for rural, work-eligible adults?

1. What does it mean to be self-sufficient (fix things, not ask for help unless you really need it)?

a. Can you give me an example of how you take care of yourself?

b. Can you give me an example of how you take care of your family?

c. How do you feel about using government assistance to take care of yourself and your family? (probe)

2. How is being self-sufficient important to you?