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Meaningfulness of Work as Perceived by Women from Diverse Social Classes: A Grounded Theory Exploration

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Despite research connecting the meaningfulness of work with positive organizational outcomes, such as increased employee well-being, job satisfaction, engagement, and retention, there remains a lack of adequate, inclusive research explaining differences in women's perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was to address this gap in the literature by developing a theory about the formation of perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and about the impact of those perceptions. Research questions explored perceptions that women from diverse social classes have of the meaningfulness of work, what influenced those perceptions, the impact of those perceptions on their career choices, and the influence of those perceptions on workplace experiences and behaviors. Data for this study were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 25 women from different social classes. Transcribed interviews, results from a demographic screening survey, and researcher memos were analyzed using constant comparison in open, axial, and selective coding phases. Results indicated that perceptions of the meaningfulness of work are primarily defined by the potential impact of meaningful work and that the type, scope, and target of that impact are influenced by contextual and experiential factors, filtered through personal identity. The analogy of a stream was used to demonstrate the theory that blockages caused by negative workplace experiences and behaviors may prevent work from having a meaningful impact, but that channels can be created to bypass these blockages. Positive social change occurs when these channels allow employees' goals for impact to be realized, leading them to experience their work as meaningful and to engage in organizational citizenship behavior.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated first of all to God, who inspired me to seek meaningfulness in my work and in my life, equipped me with the skills and abilities I needed, and empowered me to overcome obstacles in order to complete this educational journey. I also dedicate it to to my husband Louis and sons Andrew, Benjamin, and Jonathan to whom I am forever indebted for the loving support, encouragement, and sacrifices that kept me going when I was discouraged and enabled me to dedicate the time necessary to complete this endeavor. Finally, I dedicate it to my parents, Bill and Sue Keim, who, in addition to providing hours of listening to me and critiquing my dissertation, raised me to think deeply, seek purpose, and embrace creativity.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

There is an increased emphasis on the meaningfulness of work, believed by some to be an inherent human need, in organizational and vocational psychology (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). Rather than viewing work as a source of income or a way to utilize particular skills, current studies in work-related fields such as human resources, organizational psychology, and vocational counseling consider work to be something more significant, something that matters for the psychological health and well-being of employees (Grant, Fried, & Juillerat, 2011). Whether approaching meaningfulness from a psychological, spiritual, sociological, vocational, or organizational perspective, scholars studying the meaningfulness of work and practitioners applying the results of those studies have consistently associated the meaningfulness of work with important positive outcomes (Fairlie, 2011; Kerns, 2013; Steyn, 2011).

According to Dik and Duffy (2009), there is a positive correlation between meaningfulness and "a variety of indices of healthy psychological functioning" (p. 432). In 2008, job meaningfulness was listed as one of the top 10 contributors to employee job satisfaction (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). When employees consider their work to be meaningful, they are more likely to remain longer at their company, perform at a higher level, and experience decreased job stress (Dik & Duffy, 2009). In addition to being a growing source of interest on its own, the meaningfulness of work has also been brought to the forefront by researchers in other domains because of its key role within other prominent organizational, vocational, and managerial areas of study, such as transformational leadership (Aryee, Walumbwa, Zhou, & Hartnell, 2012), employee engagement (Fairlie, 2011), intrinsic motivation (Welschen, Todorova, & Mills, 2012),

employee well-being (Steyn, 2011), workplace spirituality (M. L. Lynn, Naughton, & VanderVeen, 2011), work as a calling (Chawla & Guda, 2010), and job crafting (Vuori, San, & Kira, 2012). This increase of interest in the meaningfulness of work, both as a primary and secondary focus, has led to a rapidly expanding body of research in a wide range of fields. However, most of the research exploring individual perceptions of work meaningfulness has focused on an overall understanding of what meaningful work is to people, rather than exploring specific factors that might explain differences in individuals' perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. In particular, little research has been done on the potential implications of gender and social class on perceptions of meaningfulness (Zorn & Townsley, 2008).

In this study, I took into account the intersection of gender and social class as I explored the factors that influence perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and considered the impact that those perceptions have on career choice and workplace behavior. A grounded theory approach led me to develop a theory which explained the way individual differences influence and are impacted by women's perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. This theory has the potential to affect positive social change by providing information that organizational leaders can use to decrease barriers to meaningful work and to increase channels to bypass these barriers. When these channels allow employees' goals for impact to be realized, they may experience their work as meaningful. Viewing their work as meaningful may, in turn, help increase their sense of well-being and encourage them to engage in organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). This theory will also provide a tool for vocational counselors and career development

practitioners to use in order to more effectively guide people to find work based on what they perceive to be meaningful. Exploration of the interaction of gender and social class in this study may also provide organizational leaders and career development practitioners with information that they can use to help remove barriers to meaningful work that are experienced by women and by the socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Before offering a more in-depth exploration of current literature in Chapter 2, I will use this chapter to introduce the issue and background, describe the problem and purpose of the study, and outline the research questions. In the process, I will discuss the nature of the study and its conceptual framework, define relevant terminology, and explain the study's assumptions, scope, delimitations, and potential limitations. I conclude Chapter 1 with an exploration of my study's significance, including its implications for social change.

Background

Over the past two decades, there has been a growing concern among researchers and practitioners about the need to better understand the meaningfulness of work and find ways to effectively incorporate this into vocational guidance and employee development programs (Dimitrov, 2012; Kerns, 2013). Increased emphasis on the meaningfulness of work is due largely to research linking employees who are engaged and intrinsically motivated in work they find meaningful with higher levels of job satisfaction, commitment, retention, performance, and productivity (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). Therefore, vocational counselors (Hirschi, 2012), organizational psychologists (Van Zyl, Deacon, & Rothmann, 2010), and management scholars (Barrick, Mount, & Li, 2013) have increasingly sought to gain a better understanding of the perceptions individuals

have of the meaningfulness of work, how they believe those perceptions were formed, and how their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work shaped their career choices and workplace behavior.

Many scholars have noted specifically that they have, in the process of their research, encountered considerable difficulties with consistently defining the meaningfulness of work and differentiating between similar terms such as the meaning of work (Gold & Shuman, 2009), meaning at work (Cohen-Meitar, Carmeli, & Waldman, 2009), and meaningful work (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). While some scholars specifically define the terms that they are using, others use them as if they were interchangeable. This lack of cohesion in defining meaningfulness of work has created problems when trying to compare studies in which the same terms may be understood in very different ways (Harrison, 2009; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010).

In addition to differing in the ways that they define the meaningfulness of work and related terms, scholars have also approached the topic from a variety of perspectives. Though not always the case, often the perspective from which the subject is studied influences the way that the meaningfulness of work and related terms are defined. For example, researchers working from a psychological perspective often focus on the way the meaningfulness of work impacts the individual and how that individual forms perceptions of what is meaningful and what is not (M. Coetzee, 2009). While still usually focusing on the individual, vocational researchers tend to be more concerned with how to apply perceptions of the meaningfulness of work towards helping with career guidance (Hirschi & Herrmann, 2012). On the other hand, researchers working from a spiritual perspective are more likely to emphasize the nature of the work itself, with meaningful

work linked closely to a sense of calling (Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010). Researchers working from a sociological perspective may emphasize the meaning of work itself, such as the impact that working or not working may have on a societal level (Austin & Cilliers, 2011). Organizational researchers often emphasize how perceptions of the meaningfulness of work impact employees and the organization as a whole (Cardador & Rupp, 2011).

Some of the scholarship has focused on factors that helped to shape the perceptions people have about the meaningfulness of work. Examples of those influences include personality and other aspects of an internal sense of identity (Barrick et al., 2013); previous experiences in educational or work settings (M. Coetzee, 2009); and the impact of family of origin, cultural, or community expectations (Schnell, 2011). In addition, organizational factors may include organizational culture (Joo & Shim, 2010), job characteristics (Juhdi, Hamid, & bin Siddiq, 2010), and programs designed for employee development (Fairlie, 2011). Other studies have emphasized the impact or role of organizational leaders in shaping meaningfulness of work perspectives, particularly those with transformational (Aryee et al., 2012), authentic (Algera & Lips-Wiersma, 2012; Ménard & Brunet, 2011), or servant leadership styles (Pinnington, 2011).

Many studies have examined the impact of the meaningfulness of work on outcomes for individual employees and for the organizations that employ them. Some of these studies have focused on the meaningfulness of work as the primary factor being studied (Vuori et al., 2012), while others have included it as a mediating or moderating variable, or as a part of the definition of the primary topic they were investigating (Hirschi, 2012; Ménard & Brunet, 2011). Examples of positive outcomes for employees

described in current research include greater job satisfaction (Khanin, Turel, & Mahto, 2012), improved sense of employee well-being (Steyn, 2011), and a reduction in workplace stress levels (Flores, Miranda, Muñoz, & Sanhueza, 2012). On an organizational level, outcomes included employee engagement and motivation (Fairlie, 2011), improved workplace behavior (Rurkkhum & Bartlett, 2012), and increased rates of retention (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2013). There have also been studies that explored the meaningfulness of work in terms of career choice and vocational guidance, often with the goal of helping practitioners improve the way they guide their clients' career decisions (Domene, 2012).

Though most studies have concluded that focusing on the meaningfulness of work had a positive impact on individuals and organizations, some have disagreed. For example, Kuchinke, Cornachione, Oh, and Kang (2010) expressed a concern that so much emphasis on meaningfulness connected to the workplace could create a greater imbalance between work and home life, leading to increased work stress. The work role identification and sacrifice that often accompany a strong sense of work as a calling may negatively influence the balance between work and family life and create problems in relationships with those outside of the workplace (Cardador & Caza, 2012).

Another concern has been that employees would become stagnant when too embedded in their jobs. According to Ng and Feldman (2010), employee embeddedness may cause problems for personal growth, career advancement, and social relationships. Finally, some scholars have noted that emphasizing the meaningfulness of work could lead to social class disparities (Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012), as the flexibility to shape jobs or the opportunity to select jobs that are considered meaningful may not be available

as often to workers with a lower level of education and socioeconomic status (Berg, Wrzesniewski, & Dutton, 2010).

Both gender and social class impact the influence that perceptions of the meaningfulness of work have on occupational aspirations, career choice, and career development (Collin & Guichard, 2011). Calls for increased attention to the impact of social class (e.g., Blustein, Coutinho, Murphy, Backus, & Catraio, 2011; Fouad et al., 2012) and of gender (e.g., Heppner & Fu, 2011; Ku, 2011), stress the importance of keeping both issues at the forefront in work-related studies. Rather than approaching them as two separate issues, some scholars (e.g., Angelique, 2012; Hebson, 2009; Warner, 2008) have noted that there are unique ways that these two areas, both frequently impacted by oppression, interact with one another.

While some studies have primarily explored the impact of gender on perceptions of the meaningfulness of work (Eldridge, 2010; Heppner & Fu, 2011) and others have investigated the role that social class plays (Hu, Kaplan, & Dalal, 2010), very few have explored the interacting impact of both gender and social class on perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and on the way that those perceptions impact career choices and workplace behavior. This presents a gap in the literature that needs to be addressed in order to ensure that policies and practices related to perceptions of the meaningfulness of work are based on an informed understanding of the way gender and social class interact.

Problem Statement

Positive organizational outcomes, such as increased employee motivation, engagement, organizational citizenship behavior, and retention have been associated with incorporating a focus on the meaningfulness of work into policies and programs for

employee development and career guidance (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). At the level of the individual, the meaningfulness of work has been related to an improved sense of well-being (Steyn, 2011), job satisfaction (Wood, Van Veldhoven, Croon, & de Menezes, 2012), and lower levels of workplace stress (C. L. Park, 2010). However, despite the call from both scholars and practitioners for a greater understanding of the meaningfulness of work (e.g., Conklin, 2012; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Rosso et al., 2010), there remains a lack of adequate, inclusive research, particularly of women, explaining differences in meaningfulness perceptions (Zorn & Townsley, 2008). This is especially evident when considering divergent definitions of the meaningfulness of work, differences in the level of importance assigned to the meaningfulness of work and on the impact those differences have for career choices, and differences in the way that a sense of meaningfulness influences (or does not influence) workplace behavior.

This gap in the literature presents a problem with adequately understanding (a) the differences in perception women from diverse social classes have of the meaningfulness of work, and (b) the impact meaningfulness has on their career choices and workplace behavior. Although there are theories and measurements that do explore various aspects of the meaningfulness of work (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012), there is no comprehensive theory that explains the formation and impact of perceptions of the meaningfulness of work that takes into account the interaction of gender and social class. Without a full understanding of the factors that influence perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and the potential impact of those perceptions on career choice and workplace behavior, career counselors and employee development

practitioners may not be able to effectively meet the needs of women representing various social classes.

Purpose of the Study

The immediate purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a substantive theory to help explain differences in perceptions that women from diverse social classes have of the meaningfulness of work, how important it is to their choice of careers, and how their perception of it influences their workplace experiences and behavior. The larger purpose for the study was to provide information that can help improve the ability of vocational counselors and organizational career practitioners to make a positive difference in the lives and careers of those that they seek to help.

Research Questions

Based on the lack of a comprehensive theory to explain differences in perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, I designed one of the central research questions (CRQ) for this grounded theory study to explore contributory factors to perceptions women from diverse social classes have of the meaningfulness of their work. Because developing or discovering a theory rooted in the data is a crucial, defining element of grounded theory studies (Joannidès & Berland, 2008), my other central question focused on finding or developing a theory to help explain the process by which those factors influence or are influenced by the perceptions individuals have of the meaningfulness of work and of the impact their perceptions have on them. Sub-questions contributed to the central research questions by exploring related motives, outcomes, facilitators, and challenges (Berg, Wrzesniewski, et al., 2010).

For this study, research questions that contributed to the CRQs examined what perceptions participants have of the meaningfulness of work, what influenced their perceptions, and the consequences that their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work have had on their career choice and workplace behavior. The specific research questions for this study, combining both the central research questions and the sub-questions, included:

RQ 1: What perceptions do women from diverse social classes have of the meaningfulness of work?

RQ 2: What influenced their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work?

RQ 3: What impact do they believe their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work have had on their career choices?

RQ 4: How do they believe that their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work influence their workplace experiences and behaviors?

RQ 5: What substantive theory can help explain differences in the perceptions that women have of the meaningfulness of work, its impact on their career choices, and the influence of these perceptions on their workplace experiences and behaviors?

Conceptual Framework

The primary concept explored through this study is the meaningfulness of work, which is the subjective perception of work as something that has existential importance beyond the job-related tasks themselves. Symbolic interactionism (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and feminist critical theory (Plummer & Young, 2010) provided the contextual lens that underlies this study's design, and informed selection of research questions,

context, and participants. While the very nature of grounded theory research as an emergent process precludes the verification or disproving of an existing theory as a basis for the study (Urquhart, Lehmann, & Myers, 2010), I used theoretical sensitivity during analysis and interpretation to locate the data within the body of previous research and to provide guidance for the discovery and formation of an original theory (Fendt & Sachs, 2008).

Relevant conceptual frameworks that influenced my selection of research topic and contributed to my overall theoretical sensitivity include: identity and sensemaking (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008), workplace spirituality (Sheep, 2006), positive psychology (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006), employee well-being and engagement (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008), and vocational calling (Dik & Duffy, 2009). My thinking has also been informed by theories such as transformational leadership (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009), job design (Wood et al., 2012), job characteristics (Barrick et al., 2013), person-environment fit (Genaidy, Salem, Karwowski, Paez, & Tuncel, 2007), self-efficacy (Hirschi, 2012), and intrinsic motivation (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009).

Symbolic Interactionism

In this study, I addressed the process by which various factors may influence or are influenced by the perceptions individuals have of the meaningfulness of work using the grounded theory method espoused by Corbin and Strauss (2008), which is rooted in symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism posits that (a) the way we relate with the world is based on our subjective interpretation of symbolic meaning; (b) our understanding of the world is formed through social interactions; and (c) meaning is internalized and continuously adapted based on our experiences, interactions, and the

way that we interpret them (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Licqurish & Seibold, 2011; Plummer & Young, 2010).

Symbolic interactionism connects to the meaningfulness of work through a high value placed on meaning, a focus on the way that individuals make sense of their experiences, and an interest in the way that the interpretations of experiences (such as the experience of work as meaningful or not meaningful) can shape the way that people interact with the world around them. In this study, symbolic interactionism provided the basis for looking not only at the sense that women from different social classes make of the meaningfulness of their work, but also the way that their interpretation influenced their career choices and workplace behavior.

Feminist Critical Theory

For this study, feminist critical theory provided a definite lens through which I viewed the purpose of the research, selected the participants, and formed the questions. Key aspects of feminist critical theory include an emphasis on subjective lived experiences from the perspective of women (Angelique, 2012); awareness of issues related to power differences, marginalization, and social justice (Olesen, 2010); and inclusive consideration of the complex contexts in which they are situated (Krumer-Nevo, 2009). I provide a more detailed explanation of feminist critical theory and its connection to the meaningfulness of work in Chapter 2.

The combination of grounded theory with feminist critical theory can be of concern because some grounded theory scholars believe that the introduction of an additional theoretical framework has the potential to threaten the grounded theory's organic emergence from the research itself by imposing presuppositions (Plummer &

Young, 2010). However, according to Kushner and Morrow (2003), the combination of the two theories can help to address weaknesses inherent to either one in isolation, as long as the feminist lens is clearly established from the beginning. Kempster and Parry (2011) have suggested that approaching grounded theory from a critical perspective is not a problem as long as that perspective functions only as a lens through which the data are viewed and does not add to or influence the data. Both grounded theory and feminist research share: (a) centrality of reflexivity; (b) recognition that subjective meaning given to lived experience plays a central role in the generation of knowledge through social interaction; and (c) value placed on effecting social change (Plummer & Young, 2010).

Nature of the Study

In this study, I investigated the process by which women from different social classes acquire their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and how those perceptions influence their career choices and workplace behavior. Because the purpose of this study was exploratory, viewed through a feminist critical theory lens, and aimed at developing a new theory to explain these differences in perceptions and their impact, a grounded theory qualitative study provided the most effective tool to help advance understanding of the unique perspectives of individual women. Although I discuss the methodology for this study in greater depth in Chapter 3, I provide a brief summary here, followed by an explanation of my rationale for using a qualitative grounded theory research method.

Methodology

For this study I used in-depth, semistructured interviews with a general interview guide approach (Turner, 2010) as the primary research method. One benefit of using

semistructured interviews as a data collection method is that they provide a much richer understanding of the phenomenon or process being studied. The structure provided by the interview guide helps focus in on important issues, while the interview format allows researchers the opportunity to ask participants to provide in-depth information, to clarify what interviewees have shared, and to get answers to additional questions brought up in previous responses (Ehigie & Ehigie, 2005).

Because reflexivity is an important component of grounded theory studies, I used researcher memoing to help explore my reactions and thoughts in the process of designing the study, interviewing participants, collecting all of the data, and conducting data analysis and interpretation (Montgomery & Bailey, 2007). Memos based on meaningful reflection throughout the grounded theory process are used to immerse the researcher more deeply into the data, guiding the research direction, and ultimately leading to theory development (O'Reilly, Paper, & Marx, 2012).

I obtained additional data using surveys to collect demographic information which consisted of the participants' age, race, gender, educational level, career, social class, and family of origin. The purpose of the survey was to provide important background information about the participants, as well as to help me identify which participants from among those who filled out the survey would be selected to move on to the interview stage. Following standard procedures for grounded theory methodology proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), I used purposive theoretical sampling to select participants based on their potential contribution to theory development. I determined the final number of participants by the amount necessary to reach saturation of the data, and I

analyzed the data using an emergent, dynamic process of line by line coding and constant comparison (Wasserman, Clair, & Wilson, 2009).

Rationale for Use of Qualitative Research Design and Methods

One of the keys to selecting the appropriate research design depends on what the researcher is attempting to do or to discover through their particular research questions (Cox, Karanika, Griffiths, & Houdmont, 2007). Quantitative research can be useful if the research goal is to better understand a potential significant relationship between variables, to generalize those findings to a particular population, or to quantify an amount or extent (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007). However, quantitative methods are not as effective for research questions that address "not only whether but why a given connection occurs and under what circumstances" (Groves & Vance, 2009, p. 362). Because my goal was not hypothesis confirmation of a singular objective reality through distant, deductive, controlled quantitative methods, qualitative research allowed me to explore multiple subjective perspectives on the meanings ascribed to issues or problems using reflexive, personal, inductive analysis of data (Creswell, 2007). I used qualitative grounded theory research for this study because it was the most appropriate choice for generating or discovering a theory for explaining a process, action, or interaction based on the expressed experiences of individuals regarding a particular phenomenon or process (Creswell, 2007; Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007).

My choice to use a qualitative study was also influenced by the problem brought up by many scholars concerning a lack of consistency in defining the meaningfulness of work (e.g., Harrison, 2009; Overell, 2009; Rosso et al., 2010). This issue does not only impact those studying this topic, but may also influence the way that participants respond

to questions regarding their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. In addition to the issue of consistency or accuracy in definition, my feminist critical theoretical approach allowed me to place a high value on the subjective interpretation that participants brought to their understanding of this concept which was reflected in the language they used to define it. In order to be consistent with both grounded theory and feminist critical theory and avoid imposing theory or presumed definitions on the interview responses, I encouraged participants to discuss their understanding of the meaningfulness of work and factors that they noticed impacting their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work without restricting them to a set list of optional factors. Because I was seeking to understand the complex, dynamic, and contextual factors involved in the unique, subjective perceptions women have of the meaningfulness of work, a qualitative study was best able to answer my exploratory and explanatory research questions.

Definitions

Meaningfulness of work: Although there are many different definitions for meaningfulness, specifically as it refers to work, in this study it is primarily defined as "individual subjective experience of the existential significance or purpose of work" (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012, p. 657) in which people "transform themselves…and the world around them…while making progress toward important end states" (Fairlie, 2011, p. 509). Because of the potential differences in ways that the term meaningfulness is perceived, I asked participants to discuss their own definitions and understanding of what is meant by meaningfulness of work.

Calling: Originally connected with a spiritual vocational directive from God or a higher power, but now includes a secular sense of fulfilling work related to life purpose (Steger et al., 2010). In both the spiritual and secular sense, a calling is "a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation" (Dik & Duffy, 2012a, p. 11).

Social class: Not limited solely to socioeconomic status (SES), which is typically based on objective measurement of "educational/occupational attainment, income, and/or occupational prestige" (Diemer & Ali, 2009, p. 250), the Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM) I have used is a more subjective approach that takes into account a person's perception and experience of social class within the context of their economic culture (Liu, Soleck, Hopps, Dunston, & Pickett, 2004). Examples of characteristics associated with particular social classes include "values, beliefs, preferences, manners, language spoken, social exclusion and attitudes" (Diemer, Mistry, Wadsworth, López, & Reimers, 2013).

Employee engagement: This refers to both an energetic state of passionate, directed expression of self "physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances…in which the employee is dedicated to excellent performance at work and is confident of his or her effectiveness" (Kumar & Sia, 2012, p. 32) and to the process of helping employees become engaged in their work.

Intrinsic motivation: In contrast to extrinsic motivation, in which employees are motivated to work for external rewards or recognition, intrinsically motivated employees

are motivated by the work itself, particularly the "enjoyment, interest, satisfaction of curiosity, self-expression, or personal challenge" that the work provides (Cho & Perry, 2012, p. 384).

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB): The actions taken by employees who are willing to go beyond their prescribed work responsibilities; contribute to the success of their organization without necessarily expecting compensation beyond their usual salary; and help, support, and encourage their fellow workers as good team players (Sadati, 2012).

Transformational leadership: A style of leadership in which the positive transformation of individuals, groups, and organizations is brought about through "inspiration, vision, and the ability to motivate followers to transcend their self-interests for a collective purpose" (Warrick, 2011, p. 12). Tools used to generate this transformation include "idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration" (Aryee et al., 2012, p. 5).

Vocational guidance or career counseling: Vocational guidance, vocational counseling, and career counseling are used interchangeably in this study to describe any situation in which an individual or organization helps provide guidance or information to people to help them select a job, figure out and make steps towards a career pathway, or change career directions (Hartung & Subich, 2011). Many different types of service professionals, such as psychologists, high school guidance counselors, career or life coaches, HRD departments, or vocational rehabilitation counselors may play this advisory or guiding role.

Assumptions

In this study, I assumed that interviewees would provide honest responses (assisted by assurances of confidentiality) and that they could recall the reasoning behind their career choices. I also assumed that there was both a willingness and ability on the part of the participants to reflect on and discuss their history, choices, behaviors, and motivations. In addition, I assumed that there are multiple influences on perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, that there is value in exploring the impact of social class and gender, and that qualitative grounded theory research was the most effective approach to meet the goals of this study.

Scope and Delimitations

This study specifically addressed the perceptions that women from different social classes have of the meaningfulness of work, the influence their perceptions have had on their career choices, and how their perceptions of the meaningfulness of their work affect their behavior in the workplace. Though work can include volunteer activities and unpaid labor, for the purposes of this study it was initially limited to paid employment and to work outside of the home. The reason for eliminating those working from their homes was to select participants who had the necessary experience to be able to discuss their interactions with other people within their workplaces. This concern ultimately did not become an issue because all of the participants had worked in jobs outside the home at some point, even though several were stay-at-home mothers, retirees, or volunteers at the time of the interview.

Because the perceptions of my study participants were my main focus, I intentionally made no attempt to verify that what the interviewees described about their

family of origin, career history, or workplace behavior was accurate. Future research can be conducted to check the perceptions that individuals have against that of family members, co-workers, supervisors, or other people in their lives. Another issue I did not cover, but which may make an interesting follow-up study, is the way that organizations are currently implementing perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. While Chapter 2 introduces information on what the literature says about organizational implementation, I did not go to organizations or their human resource departments directly to get this data.

This study was initially limited to women who are currently in careers or are in the process of seeking new employment, but who have had previous career experience to draw on, as the ability to answer questions regarding workplace behavior relies on this. The addition of three retired participants based on ongoing theoretical sampling did mean that some participants were not employed and not seeking future employment. Males were excluded from my sample because my study specifically focuses on the meaningfulness of work from a female perspective. From among those women who submitted the demographic survey, I used theoretical sampling to select those who would advance to the interview stage. For example, the premise of my study required participants from different social classes, so the interviewees needed to represent a variety of social classes as suggested by demographic variables of educational level, income, and occupation.

In order to take part in the interviews, participants needed to have at least some reflective thinking ability, memory of personal history and past career choices, and the ability to understand the questions and to answer coherently. They also must have been able to fill out the demographic survey and have access to and the ability to use the

telephone for interviews. These requirements may have excluded those who do not have the capability to do these things for any reason, such as having an intellectual, physical, or psychiatric disability.

Limitations

There are limitations inherent in qualitative studies that also impacted this study, though many of these are also the positive characteristics that make qualitative research valuable. For example, the small sample size used in this study means it is not generalizable in the same way that a quantitative study may be, but it also has the advantage of providing a richer, more in-depth understanding of the data. The subjectivity and self-reporting in the study could be viewed as rendering it less reliable or accurate, but my intention is to allow the voice of the individual to be heard, which means that for the purposes of this study the accuracy of their statements is less important than their perception of them.

Issues related to interviewing protocol can also create limitations, such as the potential for the open-endedness of the interview questions to let the conversation get too far off-topic. This, however, can be addressed by using an interview guide and practicing asking questions before the interview. It may also be the case that what appears to be off-topic discussion ends up providing a key piece of information that would not have been achieved using the set answers in a quantitative tool. There is also the potential for the interpersonal dynamic with the interviewer to influence the quality and quantity of responses. However, in qualitative studies the personal interaction and collaboration with the participants plays an important role. Awkwardness or discomfort can be eased with attention to open communication, a secure and comfortable environment for the

interview, and time spent getting acquainted before launching into the main body of the interview itself.

An important aspect that grounded theory research shares with feminist critical theory is reflexivity on the part of the researcher (Plummer & Young, 2010). Unlike in positivistic quantitative studies, the qualitative researcher is not supposed to be completely removed, impartial, or detached. Instead, potential areas of bias can be dealt with by getting them out into the open through transparent, thorough, self-disclosure (O'Reilly et al., 2012). For example, being up front about my perceptions of my own social class and that of others that I have interacted with helped to ensure that my personal perspective did not overly impact my evaluation of the data.

While some areas of bias emerged later in the research process, there were several biases that I was aware of as I went into the project: (a) As a Christian, I believe that each person was created to live a meaningful, purpose-filled life; (b) I lean towards seeing a focus on meaningfulness as primarily positive, though there has been some research showing negative aspects; and (c) I think that reflecting on past choices, on motivations, and on how these are influencing current behavior is a helpful tool for improving one's life. Knowing these areas of bias helped me be more careful not to lead the direction of the interview in a way that supported my own biases, but to allow the perspective and opinions of the participant to emerge.

Significance

Advancing Knowledge

A greater understanding of the unique ways that the meaningfulness of work is defined, the individual influences on perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, and the

implications for related areas of study, such as employee engagement and intrinsic motivation, will positively impact the field of organizational psychology. This study also may provide greater insight into the interaction of gender and social class, as well as the interface between grounded theory research and feminist critical theory.

Improving Practice and Policy

The current way that the meaningfulness of work is used to influence practices and policies in vocational counseling and employee development does not adequately take into account individual differences in perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, particularly from the perspective of women from different social classes. A greater insight into the process by which perceptions of the meaningfulness of work develop, influence workplace behavior, and impact organizational outcomes can help inform practices and policies so that vocational counselors can more effectively meet the needs of those they seek to help.

Social Change Implications

According to Chalofsky and Krishna (2009), meaningful work provides a deeper level of intrinsic motivation, leading to increased organizational commitment and retention as employees engage their whole selves in their work, find alignment between life purposes and work purposes, and feel that they are able to make a positive difference in the lives of others. Improving the ability of vocational counselors and career development practitioners to understand differences in perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and to apply that knowledge toward creating or improving their policies, programs, and practices can help create positive social change for both individuals and organizations. From a larger social justice perspective, a greater understanding of the

factors involved in perceptions of the meaningfulness of work of women from a variety of social classes could help organizations in the "removal of barriers to meaningful work experienced by marginalized members of society" (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 443).

Summary

While the meaningfulness of work has been increasingly associated with positive implications on both the individual and organizational levels, a lack of knowledge remains about how perceptions of the meaningfulness of work are developed, how those perceptions impact career choices and workplace behavior, and about the potential impact that the combination of gender and social class may have on them. Current research addresses some of these issues, but either the content or format of existing studies fails to fully give voice to the unique perspectives of women from various social classes. Before discussing the perceptions women have of the influences and impact of the meaningfulness of work on their lives, I will, in Chapter 2, address more fully the way that differences in how the meaningfulness of work is defined and perceived influence the outcomes of relevant research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to examine previous research on the meaningfulness of work and related topics in order to identify a gap in existing research, establish a basis for the research and interview questions, and provide a more in-depth understanding of the meaningfulness of work in the context of women from differing social classes. This literature review demonstrates the importance of studying the meaningfulness of work because of its potentially positive impact on organizational success and its usefulness for career counseling and development. I highlight the lack of adequate representation of female employees from various social classes in previous meaningfulness-of-work studies, and emphasize the need for further research to bring about positive social change. Before launching into the review of relevant literature itself, I offer a brief explanation of how the review is organized, the strategies I used to search for relevant literature, and the unique nature of the use of literature within grounded theory studies.

Organization of Literature Review

After defining the meaningfulness of work and distinguishing it from related concepts, I examine the conditions and context under which perceptions of the meaningfulness of work are developed, moving from the micro level (individual) through to the macro level (organizational), including in the process the influences of family, community, and culture, as well as previous educational and work experiences. I next explore literature related to potential consequences of the meaningfulness of work,

particularly focusing on the impact that different perceptions of the meaningfulness of work may have both on individuals and organizations, as well as the implications for career choice and vocational guidance. After discussing these content areas of the literature review, I present literature related to my qualitative research method and underlying philosophical perspectives, along with literature supporting the use of grounded theory to appropriately address the research questions for this study.

Literature Search Strategy

Interdisciplinary research "offers a way of dealing with complex real-life problems that are not coterminous with disciplinary boundaries" (Collin, 2009, p. 105), helps unite theory with practice (Reardon, Lenz, Sampson, & Peterson, 2011), and allows for a more in-depth understanding of psychological phenomena as they occur within the context of other fields (Tams & Marshall, 2011). In response to scholars calling for more emphasis on interdisciplinary research in vocational and organizational psychology (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011; Reardon et al., 2011), I extended my search beyond the field of organizational psychology and found research related to meaningfulness emerging from fields as diverse as counseling (Schulenberg, Hutzell, Nassif, & Rogina, 2008), health psychology (Hyvönen, 2011), nursing (Koslander, da Silva, & Roxberg, 2009), religion and theology (Duffy, 2010), education (Billett, Newton, & Ockerby, 2010), sociology (Sayer, 2009), economics (Etebarian, Salehizadeh, Abzari, & Abdolmanafi, 2010), business management (Michaelson, 2005), social work (Socorro & Fernando, 2010), and vocational rehabilitation (Phillips et al., 2009). The varied perspectives on the meaningfulness of work gained from such a wide array of fields provided a more comprehensive understanding of the meaningfulness of work, factors

influencing the formation of different perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, and the impact of a focus on the meaningfulness of work within different contexts.

I found the majority of peer-reviewed journal articles and dissertations reviewed in this study through comprehensive searches using the following databases: Academic Search Premier, SocINDEX, BNA Human Resources Library, Business Source Premier, Communication & Mass Media Complete, Education Research Complete, ERIC, ProQuest Central, PsycARTICLES, PubMed, and SAGE. I also sought articles and books online through eBooks and located hard copies in local libraries using WorldCat. In addition, I purchased and read books that appeared to be relevant either to the main topic of the meaningfulness of work or to other topics that emerged in the process of my research.

Initial key words I used to search for relevant literature included *meaningfulness*, *meaningful*, *meaning*, *purpose*, *work*, *career*, *job*, *social class*, *gender*, *female*, and *women*, as well as different combinations of those terms. As I delved into the literature more deeply, terms and phrases encountered repeatedly were incorporated into my search, such as *engagement*, *intrinsic motivation*, *workplace spirituality*, *calling*, and *work-life balance*. References listed in articles and discussed in other literature reviews also helped to expand the search. When classic or seminal works were mentioned in current articles, I read the original works and investigated those researchers and authors that played a vital role in furthering understanding of the meaningfulness of work.

Literature Use in Grounded Theory

In grounded theory studies, previous literature is not used to construct a theoretical framework through which the researcher views and interprets the particular

topic, process, or issue being studied (Gurd, 2008). Doing so would contradict the premise for grounded theory research, which is to generate or discover a theory emerging directly from the data (Fendt & Sachs, 2008). The issue of how much of a literature review to do before conducting the study itself has been a matter of concern among scholars, particularly as "any concept in the analysis should be supported from the data rather than from preconceived models, theories, or hypotheses" (Bringer et al., 2006, p. 249). As noted by Heath (2006), relevant theories in previous literature are typically incorporated into grounded theory studies in the interpretation stage, rather than prior to beginning data collection (as is more typical for both quantitative and other types of qualitative studies).

However, grounded theory studies often do use preliminary literature reviews to provide general background information on the topic area, to help justify the need for the study, to aid in the formation of research questions, and to inform choices made in the study design (Pearse & Kanyangale, 2009). Areas of previous research helpful for the design and justification of my study included (a) research about how the meaningfulness of work has been defined and studied; (b) contextual factors that may play a role in shaping perceptions of the meaningfulness of work; (c) the potential impact of perceptions of the meaningfulness of work on important organizational outcomes, such as motivation, engagement, organizational citizenship behaviors, and retention; and (d) implications of perceptions of the meaningfulness of work for career choice and for vocational guidance.

Introduction to Meaningfulness of Work Studies

In response to the increased demand by employees and job seekers for work that they perceive as meaningful (Fairlie, 2011; Thomas, 2009b), researchers have conducted studies on the meaningfulness of work from a variety of perspectives, such as human resources (Biron & Bamberger, 2010; Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009), leadership (Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010a), organizational communication (Broadfoot et al., 2008), selection and assessment (Bipp, 2010), business ethics (Pajo & Lee, 2011), and employee development (Y. Park, 2010). Harrison (2009) pointed out an increased interest in the meaningfulness of work in the popular press of both the management and psychology fields, as well as in communities of scholars looking at meaning as a part of the potentially positive impact of work on employee well-being and organizational success.

Approaching this topic from so many different perspectives has made a comprehensive understanding of the meaningfulness of work more difficult for scholars. Because a further layer of complexity has been created by divergent definitions (Rosso et al., 2010), much of the literature exploring the meaningfulness of work begins with an attempt to clarify what is meant by meaningfulness of work and how it is distinguished from other related concepts such as the meaning of work or meaningful work.

Terminology Clarification

There remains a significant amount of confusion among scholars about how to distinguish between the meaningfulness of work and other related terms, such as the meaning of work (Gold & Shuman, 2009), meaningful work (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009), or meaning at work (Cohen-Meitar et al., 2009; Overell, 2009). Some scholars have used these terms interchangeably (Broadfoot et al., 2008), implying or stating that

there is no distinction between what they signify. Others, such as Overell (2009) and Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010), have made a point of specifying a preferred definition for each and have noted that the confusion about all of the potential ways to think about, discuss, and study the meaningfulness of work necessitates an explanation of the researchers' understanding of these terms, what they are trying to ascertain through their research, and their particular approach to the study of the meaning of work.

As Rosso et al. (2010) pointed out, the inability to establish the differences between these terms and the concepts that they represent has contributed to a lack of cohesion in research on this topic. They presented a plea for future scholars to make more explicit how they were defining and operationalizing meaningfulness, meaning of work, or meaningful work because failure to do so can confound accurate analyses of research results. This concern about the lack of cohesion in meaningfulness of work research was shared by Harrison (2009), who noted that "there are nearly as many definitions of meaning as there are researchers studying the construct" (p. 5). She suggested that confusion concerning definitions of meaningfulness and related terms could prevent scholars from arriving at "a coherent theory of meaningful work" (p. 5). This ambiguity may also compromise comparisons between studies in which the variables may appear to be the same but actually may be very different in the minds of the researchers.

The meaning of work. According to Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010), the meaning of work focuses on the role that work plays in the lives of those who are employed or unemployed, rather than focusing on the characteristics of the work itself. This definition often relates to investigations about what work is and why people work, particularly looking at what work means from the perspectives of the workers (Overell,

2009). Research on the meaning of work has often been conducted from a sociological or anthropological perspective, looking at the "norms, values, and traditions of work in the day-to-day life of people" (Chalofsky, 2010, p. 11).

An emphasis on the meaning of work tends to lead to both positive perceptions of the way that working influences people's lives, such as studies on the normalizing influence that working has for those with psychiatric illnesses (Leufstadius, Eklund, & Erlandsson, 2009), and to the negative implications that working can have for maintaining a healthy work-life or work-family balance (Reindl, Kaiser, & Stolz, 2011). In some studies, both the psychological benefits of work and the potential negative consequences of work-based stressors were explored (Gold & Shuman, 2009). Rather than focusing on the meaning of work as being positive or negative, other scholars have made a more neutral, objective examination of the meaning of work as applied to a specific segment of society, such as people from different races, social classes, genders, ages, religions, or other cultural identifiers (Zorn & Townsley, 2008).

Meaningful work. One way that "meaningful work" differs from "the meaning of work" is that the emphasis is on the characteristics of the work itself, rather than on the impact that working has on the worker. Meaningful work implies an interpretation of the value of the work, with meaningful work considered to be work that has substance to it, that contributes positively to one's experience of life, and "in which people seek to have an impact on societal challenges such as environmental sustainability and social justice" (Tams & Marshall, 2011, p. 110). What is classified as meaningful work may be determined by the individual worker, but often is established through societal norms and cultural values (Dempsey & Sanders, 2010). Because of the potential for meaningful

work to be defined by the individual (van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Schaufeli, & Bakker, 2010) or by the organization that he or she works for (Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010a), there has been some debate among scholars whether the primary responsibility for meaningful work rests on individual employees or on their employers (Michaelson, 2011). Meaningful work is often contrasted with meaningless work, or work that serves no greater purpose and fails to address the needs that mankind has for harmony between work and personal values (Overell, 2009).

According to Tams and Marshall (2011), a focus on meaningful work from an organizational perspective has often been associated with research on corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability, and organizational accountability. However, within these contexts meaningful work is still defined primarily by the type of work it is or by the way it is conducted rather than being based on the company in which the work is being done.

Meaning at work. Although related to the concept of the meaning of work, Cohen-Meitar, Carmeli, and Waldman (2009) pointed out that there is a subtle difference between the role that work plays in the lives of the workers, including the identity that they form based on the particular work that they do (meaning in working), and the significance that individuals experience within the work environment (meaning at work), such as through their identification as a member of an organization (p. 361). An emphasis on the workplace as an environment in which employees can search for and experience meaning in their lives has also paved the way for research on how leaders can help to create a workplace conducive for fulfilling this quest for meaning (Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010a).

Meaningfulness of Work Defined

Although some researchers have chosen to use one or more of the previous terms as the focus of their studies, others have provided a definition or explanation specifically for their understanding of what was meant by "meaningfulness of work" (e.g., Dik & Duffy, 2009; Shuck, 2011; Van Zyl et al., 2010). The meaningfulness of work encompasses a more complex interaction of both the characterization of a particular type of work as meaningful and the amount of significance that doing meaningful work has for individual workers.

Meaningfulness of work was defined in Kahn's (1990) seminal article addressing issues of engagement and meaningfulness in the workplace as "a feeling that one is receiving a return on investments of one's self in a currency of physical, cognitive, or emotional energy" (pp. 703-704). This definition highlighted the subjective nature of meaningfulness, as it is presented in terms of the feeling that an individual has in response to their work, rather than an objective categorization of a type of work. Harrison (2009) also emphasized the subjectivity of meaningfulness, defining meaningfulness of work as a dynamic, subjective, experientially-based "psychological state concerned with the value and significance of specific experiences within a work context" (p. 5).

A sense of pursuing a worthy, valuable purpose was the key factor in the definition provided by Thomas (2009b) in his brief on the Work Engagement Profile, which included meaningfulness as one of the primary intrinsic factors leading to employee engagement. By consistently pairing the word "sense" with meaningfulness, Thomas also included an implicit requirement of sensemaking by the individual for whom meaningfulness of work would be determined. Dik and Duffy (2009) made it more

explicit that this personal sensemaking process is an integral part of the meaningfulness of work when they adapted a definition for the meaning of life as "the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one's being and existence" (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006, p. 81) and applied it specifically to their understanding of the meaningfulness of work.

The importance of this subjective sensemaking process influenced the way that I have defined the meaningfulness of work for this study as "individual subjective experience of the existential significance or purpose of work" (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012, p. 657). The meaningfulness of work is often experienced when people "transform themselves…and the world around them…while making progress toward important end states" (Fairlie, 2011, p. 509). Rather than defining the meaningfulness of work for them, I asked participants in my study to provide their own definitions of the meaningfulness of work. Eliciting their unique perspectives was consistent with the subjective nature of this sensemaking process and their responses helped to increase understanding of differences in how the meaningfulness of work has been perceived.

Approaches to Studying the Meaningfulness of Work

The emergence of meaningfulness of work studies from a wide variety of fields beyond organizational psychology, such as nursing (Koslander et al., 2009), religion and theology (Duffy, 2010), education (Billett et al., 2010), sociology (Sayer, 2009), economics (Etebarian et al., 2010), social work (Socorro & Fernando, 2010), and vocational rehabilitation (Phillips et al., 2009), has contributed to many different approaches to scholarship on the meaningfulness of work. As scholars look at different

facets of the meaningfulness of work, each approach may also influence or be influenced by the way that they define the meaningfulness of work and related terms.

Psychological. Scholars approaching from a psychological perspective have focused more on the perceptions that individual workers have of the meaningfulness of work (Biron & Bamberger, 2010) and on how those perceptions of what is or is not meaningful were developed (M. Coetzee, 2009). For example, some researchers from this perspective looked at how people thought about or sensed meaningfulness (Kosine, Steger, & Duncan, 2008; C. L. Park, 2010) or how the need for meaning influenced individuals to act or interact in specific ways at work (Cohen-Meitar et al., 2009; Li & Hung, 2009). Other studies have explored ways that different career orientations, personal factors, and work factors might interact to influence employees' sense of meaningfulness (M. Coetzee, Bergh, & Schreuder, 2010). Kahn (1990) pointed out that individuals experience meaningfulness of work when they feel "worthwhile, useful, and valuable—as though they made a difference and were not taken for granted" (p. 704).

From a positive or health psychology perspective, scholars also examined the meaningfulness of work in terms of its impact on employee well-being (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009) and its contribution to psychological health (Blustein, 2008). Positive psychology, a growing movement originally introduced by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), focuses on the ways that humans flourish, seeking to increase levels of well-being, contentment, satisfaction, hope, optimism, flow, and happiness (Donaldson & Ko, 2010). Living a life that is meaningful, including in the realm of work, is a critical component of positive psychology and is considered the basis for the quest

for a life of well-being, purpose, creativity, strength of character, and engagement (Jacobsen, 2010; Peterson & Park, 2012).

According to Overell (2009), work has been considered a psychological need for centuries, particularly because of its ability to bring larger visions and higher callings to fruition, to help develop a sense of individual identity, and as a potential source of self-esteem. Much of the literature on the importance of meaningfulness to the psychological health of individuals harkens back to "Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy" (Frankl, 1959). This seminal work, based on the belief in a universal, innate need for humans to seek meaning in life, was validated by Viktor Frankl's experiences surviving internment in a concentration camp during WWII. Echoing Frankl, Wong (2010) pointed out that individuals have an innate need for finding meaning and he suggested that by helping people find or make meaning psychologists can help their clients overcome difficult circumstances, be motivated and empowered to grow, and have a sense of purpose and hope. The application of Frankl's philosophy specifically towards seeking meaningfulness in work was explained in more detail by Pattakos (2010). He pointed out that while outward success in the workplace may appear to be a good goal, ultimate fulfillment comes to people through finding meaning in their work, regardless of the specific jobs they do or the particular organizations for which they are working.

Spiritual. A spiritual approach to the meaningfulness of work has been taken by scholars interested in an existential or transcendent experience of work (MacMillan, 2009), the impact of spiritual or religious beliefs on meaningfulness perspectives (Chamiec-Case, 2007), career choice as a sense of calling or vocation (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010), and the connection between meaningfulness perspectives and workplace

spirituality (Duchon & Plowman, 2005). From a spiritual perspective, scholars view the meaningfulness of work as originating from its relationship to a higher calling (Steger et al., 2010), with meaningfulness as not only a byproduct of heeding that calling, but also as a defining factor in what constitutes a sense of calling and what differentiates a vocation from a regular job (Dik & Duffy, 2009). In addition to being linked to an increased sense of employee well-being and engagement in the workplace (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010), work based on a calling orientation has been related to pro-active workplace behavior because the work itself is considered to be a fulfillment of a moral duty (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009).

While research connecting the meaningfulness of work with a sense of calling or vocation has tended to focus on individuals or on the families and cultures in which their views of work were developed (Dik, Duffy, & Eldridge, 2009), research on workplace spirituality has taken more of an organizational perspective. For example, some of the workplace spirituality literature focused more on the ways that leaders could help their followers achieve a sense of meaning, purpose, and self-actualization through their work (Rego, Pina E Cunha, & Oliveira, 2008). Others from this perspective emphasized the importance of developing and maintaining an organizational culture that fosters spirituality through a greater sense of interconnectedness and community, shared organizational values, attention to the inner life of employees, and meaningfulness of work (Badrinarayanan & Madhavaram, 2008; C. F. Johnson, 2012).

Within the context of the workplace, spirituality is not necessarily associated with any one religious or denominational affiliation (although it can be for organizations that are religious in nature). Instead, it represents an overall approach to human interactions,

attitudes, and practices in which each person is respected as a unique, valuable individual and an emphasis is placed on enhancing personal creativity, expression, and growth (Brooke & Parker, 2009). For example, workplace spirituality may involve a company mission benefiting society and a commitment to a shared set of moral and ethical values. According to Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2008), workplace spirituality is reflected in "an organizational culture that is guided by mission statements, leadership, and business practices that are socially responsible and value-driven; that recognizes the contributions that employees make to the organization; and that promotes personal spiritual development and well-being" (p. 320).

Research on spirituality in the workplace has repeatedly confirmed its benefits to both the employees and the organization as a whole. For example, scholars have linked workplace spirituality to increased job satisfaction (Aamodt, 2007) and satisfaction with life in general (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010). Greater levels of affective commitment, increased retention rates, and reductions in absenteeism have been associated with employees' belief that their job has meaning beyond themselves and that the organization that they work for is ultimately serving a higher purpose (A. G. Walker, Jones, Wuensch, Aziz, & Cope, 2008). A sense of common purpose can also be a unifying factor in the workplace that increases employee satisfaction and organizational commitment, and that provides a sense of social support that can mitigate difficulties faced in both work and personal lives (Khanifar, Jandaghi, & Shojaie, 2010). Strength and wisdom that can help support employees can also come from drawing on spiritual resources, such as a sense of connection with a higher power (Duffy, 2006). Leaders in a spiritually focused workplace will seek to pursue justice, to treat employees with respect, and to listen to what

employees have to say...all of which have the potential to contribute to a sense of satisfaction (Jue, 2007). Finally, spirituality in the workplace directly relates to the idea of self-actualization and the ability for work to be a meaningful source of personal growth, as workplaces that value spirituality may also value helping employees use their gifts and abilities, express their creativity, and grow as individuals (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008).

Sociological. Some researchers have approached meaningfulness of work studies from a sociological perspective, examining the meaning of work in relationship to other sociological constructs, such as "gender, class, race, religion, community, family, globalization and identity" (Halford & Strangleman, 2009). In a plea for an interdisciplinary approach drawing from both internal psychological theories and external sociological theories, Chudzikowski and Mayrhofer (2011) emphasized the role of social contexts in shaping shared perceptions of the meaning of work and of career boundaries and expectations. Some researchers from a sociological perspective have focused on the meaning of work itself, such as the impact of employment or unemployment on a societal level (Austin & Cilliers, 2011). Other scholars from a sociological perspective have focused on: (a) the way meaningful, responsible work design has impacted society as a whole (Tams & Marshall, 2011), (b) the influence that organizational discourse about differences had on employees' perspectives of the meaningfulness of their work (Kuhn et al., 2008), or (c) the need to create equitable programs to help people find meaning in their work (Long, 2007). According to Overell (2009), "work is key to understanding social change" (p. 2), making the study of the meaningfulness of work important from a sociological and historical perspective, while also indicating the value of understanding

the historical and sociological influences on work and on the perceptions people have of it.

Vocational. Researchers coming from the perspective of organizations or individuals devoted to helping people find or maintain employment have approached the meaningfulness of work from a vocational perspective (Hartung & Subich, 2011; Hirschi & Herrmann, 2012). This body of research has emphasized the influential role of meaningfulness in developing a career narrative (Savickas et al., 2009), guiding people towards a career choice (Kosine et al., 2008), and making vocational decisions that will be personally and professionally fulfilling (Dik & Hansen, 2008). According to Jacobsen (2010), career counselors carry out the "noble purpose of enabling people to find productive, enjoyable, and meaningful work" (p.26). Research based on a vocational approach has often been directed towards school guidance counselors (Lindorff, 2010; Perry, 2009) and career counselors in colleges or universities (e.g., Collin & Guichard, 2011; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Patton, 2005), with recommendations to consider ways to incorporate the meaningfulness of work in their interactions with the students they are counseling. Based on a qualitative, longitudinal study of 60 adolescents, Usinger and Smith (2010) pointed out that meaningful career exploration requires an internally defined sense of self. Although they failed to make specific recommendations for practical application based on the results of their study, their research indicated that vocational counselors could guide students in meaningful career selection by helping them to develop their sense of self more fully.

Another vocational approach to this topic came from a vocational rehabilitation perspective, looking at how important a role work plays in helping people with physical,

intellectual, or psychological challenges experience meaningfulness in their lives (Gold & Shuman, 2009; Leufstadius et al., 2009; Phillips et al., 2009). For example, vocational rehabilitation counselors can help those with psychiatric illnesses to experience recovery through "reconstruction of meaning and purpose in one's life, the performance of valued social roles, the experience of mental health and well-being and life satisfaction" (Waghorn & Lloyd, 2010, p. 10). Rehabilitation counseling also helps to forge a link between studies on the meaningfulness of work and social justice efforts, as empowering people with disabilities to access and maintain meaningful work helps them to "understand their rights and responsibilities, speak for themselves, make decisions and contribute to society" (Shallcross, 2010).

Organizational. Researchers approaching from an organizational perspective have studied how perceptions of the meaningfulness of work impact employees and the organization as a whole, often focusing on meaningfulness at work, within the workplace itself (Cardador & Rupp, 2011). The organizational approach emphasizes the viewpoint of the business or organization as the employer, rather than focusing on the perspectives of individual employees. Research on the meaningfulness of work coming from this perspective primarily originated within the fields of business management (Michaelson, 2010; Pajo & Lee, 2011), human resources (Craig & Silverstone, 2010; Shuck, 2011), organizational behavior (Rosso et al., 2010), and leadership (Piccolo, Greenbaum, Den Hartog, & Folger, 2010; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010b). This research focused on the ways that organizations could improve productivity, employee retention rates, and organizational reputation through an emphasis on meaningfulness in training programs, employee development efforts, leadership styles, workplace spirituality, and corporate volunteerism

(Pajo & Lee, 2011). The underlying implication of these articles is that addressing the need that employees have to do work that they perceive to be meaningful can help increase employee health, motivation, engagement, and organizational identification, leading to positive outcomes for the organization itself, not just for individual employees.

Contextual Factors Shaping Meaningfulness of Work Perspectives

Many researchers who have investigated the meaningfulness of work have noted that the different perspectives from which individuals view work are not created in a vacuum. Instead, they are shaped within specific contexts, including (a) internal sense of identity (Vondracek & Porfeli, 2011); (b) personal educational or work experiences (Baran et al., 2012); (c) family of origin, cultural, and community influences (Freie, 2010); and (d) factors related to the particular organizations where they work (Cardador & Rupp, 2011). Within each of these contexts and the identity-building role that they play in human lives, individuals form their beliefs about work, including their perspectives on the meaningfulness of work.

Internal Sense of Identity

Research on the formation of meaningfulness of work concepts that is conducted from a psychological perspective, is often related to an individual's internal sense of identity. While the basic underlying question of "who am I?" is at the heart of identity, scholars have pointed out that identity is a much more complex subject than that. Some scholars (e.g., Alvesson, 2010; Bamberg, 2010; Schachter, 2011) have described different opposing theories about how identity is formed, understood, maintained, or changed, such as the level of cohesion and stability (whether identity is fluid, changing, and ambiguous or is stable, consistent, and robust); agency (whether identity is primarily

constructed by the individual or directed by external influences); and focus of distinction (whether on sameness, such as in identification with a group or organization, or on difference, such as on the uniqueness of the individual). This concept of identity may include personality or temperament, unique interests, areas of strength or weakness, and personal values or beliefs (Hartung & Subich, 2011).

While many of these are shaped by family, community, or societal influences (Langman, 2011), there is also a degree to which they are inherent in the individual and help to shape the way that he or she reacts to the other types of influences that can play a role in forming perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. Previous research on work-related decision-making has emphasized the role played by individual differences in factors such as (a) personality and identity (Gilbert, Sohi, & McEachern, 2008); (b) cultural, family, and personal values (Sosik, Jung, & Dinger, 2009); (c) beliefs about self-efficacy and locus of control (Young, 2009); and (d) religiosity, spirituality, or a sense of calling (A. G. Walker et al., 2008).

The influences of personality and identity have been studied in terms of the impact of personality on career preferences (Ehrhart & Makransky, 2007) and the way that career choices are often made to align careers with current or ideal self-concepts and sense of identity (Scroggins, 2008). According to Barrick et al. (2013), personality traits influence the characteristics of a job in which an individual is most likely to thrive, as well as the types of purposeful goals he or she is motivated to strive for. The level of experienced meaningfulness of work is based on how well his or her particular job matches the personality-based needs. Other studies, such as those by Rehfuss, Del Corso, Glavin, and Wykes (2011), Usinger and Smith (2010), and Borgen and Betz (2011) have

examined the way that career choices and actions are impacted by beliefs individuals hold about what they are or are not capable of achieving (self-efficacy) and how much control they have over their circumstances (locus of control).

Differences in perceptions of the meaningfulness of work have been associated with a variety of demographic factors that contribute to an overall sense of individual identity, such as age (Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, & Mainiero, 2009), social class (Diemer & Ali, 2009), race/ethnicity (Cooper, Wilson-Stark, Peterson, O'Roark, & Pennington, 2008), disability status (Kortering, Braziel, & McClannon, 2010), and gender (Bonney, 2007). In some of the research, demographic factors were considered the primary focus of the study, such as in studies examining the impact of gender on career choices (e.g., Coogan & Chen, 2007; Hanappi et al., 2010) or how a sense of calling (with meaningfulness as a critical component) is influenced by differences in age cohort and gender (Eldridge, 2010). In other studies, demographic factors were presented as mediating variables that impacted the outcome of the study (Sturges, Conway, & Liefooghe, 2010).

Recently, there has also been an increased interest in the role that beliefs based on religion, spirituality, or a sense of calling may have on perceptions of the meaningfulness of work (Dik & Duffy, 2012b). According to Dik, Sargent, and Steger (2008), all major religions have a component of applying "spiritual or religious qualities to life domains and goals" (p. 26). Individuals differ in the way that they may or may not view the impact that spirituality has had on their career development goals or in what they perceive the spiritual significance of those goals to be. In a study of the potential connection between spirituality and work values, Duffy (2010) noted that those who were influenced most

strongly on a daily basis by their spirituality were more likely to pursue work that is meaningful, as the search for meaning in life is considered a key element of spirituality. Whether they consider themselves religious or not, seeking a greater sense of meaningfulness in their work may help employees both to infuse spirituality into their identity and to express the spirituality that is an integral part of their identity (Badrinarayanan & Madhavaram, 2008).

Educational or Work Experiences

Researchers have also examined the ways that both positive and negative experiences in educational or workplace settings may have shaped individuals' perceptions of the meaningfulness of work (M. Coetzee, 2009). For example, in a grounded theory study by MacIntosh, Wuest, Gray, and Cronkhite (2010), the experiences that 21 female health care providers had with bullying in the workplace negatively impacted their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. Whereas before they had viewed their work as a calling and something that had a greater meaning, the workplace bullying shifted their perspective "to a job orientation that provides more distance and requires less commitment" (MacIntosh et al., 2010, p. 1138).

According to Scroggins (2008), individuals may also differ in their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work based on their perspectives on work itself; their motivation for advancement (which may also be related to personality); the stage of career they are in (e.g., new employee, long-term employee, or ready to retire); and their career level (e.g., blue collar, clerical, professional, or managerial). Perceptions of the work itself include a focus on the tasks that are a part of the work that they do, on the interactions

they have with other people as they do their work, the specific roles that they play in relation to their work, and on their career expectations.

Tasks. People may consider their work more meaningful if they are engaged in tasks that challenge them, allow them to express their creativity, have clearly delineated goals, have variety, and encourage some degree of autonomy, competence, growth, and learning (Kahn, 1990). Harrison (2009) examined the impact of daily tasks on the ways people make sense of the meaningfulness of work, moving away from purely abstract theoretical concepts related to the meaningfulness of work by grounding these concepts within concrete day-to-day activities in the workplace. She specifically set out to answer questions about the types of events that workers view as meaningful and the characteristics of those events. Based on the results of her study, she concluded that the work experiences most often considered meaningful met psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, or competence (Harrison, 2009). According to Rothmann and Hamukang'andu (2013), tasks that align with a person's values and areas of strength are most likely to contribute to a higher sense of meaningfulness and to a better fit between the individual and his or her work role.

Interactions. Experiences interacting with others in educational and occupational settings may also impact perceptions of the meaningfulness of work (Vacharkulksemsuk, Sekerka, & Fredrickson, 2011). Positive views of meaningfulness may stem from interactions with colleagues, co-workers, clients, or others that promote a sense of respect, dignity, appreciation, and connectedness (Kahn, 1990)**.** In research with patients who had suffered from acute myocardial infarction, Bergman, Malm, Ljungquist, Berterö, and Karlsson (2012) disputed a theory that meaningfulness was the most

important component in a sense of coherence, with results instead pointing to comprehensibility as the driving factor. However, in the discussion of their results, they brought up the possibility that a higher level of comprehensibility could lead to a higher level of meaningfulness, suggesting that nurses could increase a patient's sense of meaningfulness and illness manageability by providing education about their illness and about how to deal with it effectively. Therefore, factors that may impact an individual's sense of meaningfulness when it pertains to the workplace may include interactions with others that help to increase comprehensibility of their role, tasks, and how best to take care of their work-related responsibilities.

Roles or Career Levels. A sense of meaningfulness has been associated with workplace roles that require identities that closely mesh with the workers' self-perceived identities and in roles in which employees feel that they have some degree of power due to their ability to influence others or to their status within the organization (Kahn, 1990). The roles that employees play may be related to their overall position within the company or department (such as line manager, cashier, CEO) or may be related to a particular task (such as the group leader on a particular short-term project). Based on the results of her study about the way that the role-identity salience of volunteers at the Mended Hearts organization influenced their sense of purpose, meaning, and well-being, Thoits (2012) concluded that the amount of value placed on role-identity directly influenced "sense of purpose and meaning in life, and perceiving purpose and meaning in life is associated with mental and physical health advantages" (p. 379).

Differences in work roles or career levels may impact the potential for employees to select the kind of work they desire or to adapt their work to make it more meaningful.

According to Berg, et al. (2010), the ability and motivation to influence one's own career or work-related tasks (known as job crafting) differ according to the level of career. Work roles with lower levels of power and autonomy (such as blue collar, clerical, and service work) often provide less flexibility and opportunity for job crafting compared to those with higher levels (such as professional or managerial work). Berg, et al. also suggested that the length of time employed at the same company could impact career decisions, which in turn could influence role-based perceptions of meaningfulness. Young (2009) pointed out that career decisions are also impacted by "perceived opportunities, networking ability, and career search skills" (p. 295). The more aligned an individual's work role is with his or her perception of self, the more likely he or she will be to experience a higher level of psychological meaningfulness (Rothmann & Hamukang'andu, 2013).

Career expectations. A sense of meaningfulness may be influenced by the vision people have of their ideal careers. Because a sense of identity is wrapped up in career perceptions and in the career choices that people make, researchers have also explored the vocational impact of perceptions employees have of their possible selves, including what they want to become, what they hope or aspire to become, and what they fear becoming (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007). Some researchers have suggested that an age-related gap between ideal and actual careers is to be expected, in which "occupational aspirations generally evolve from idealistic (e.g., expressing a dream job under ideal conditions) to more realistic options (e.g., expressing a job suited to one's talents and limitations) as one matures and prepares for adulthood" (Kortering et al., 2010, p. 231). Other researchers suggested that the gap is a result of a poor self-concept–job fit, and

recommended that human resources development (HRD) professionals "provide employees with an invaluable service by helping them explore and define their self-concept and incorporate that self-insight into career decision making" (Gilbreath, 2008, p. 21). Gilbreath (2008) suggested that Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals use the concept of possible selves as motivational tools for setting and achieving goals that would move employees from where they are (actual career or self) to where they hope to be (ideal career or self).

Family of Origin, Cultural, and Community Influences

Much of the research conducted from a sociological perspective emphasized the formative role that families of origin, cultural backgrounds, and communities have on the beliefs, values, and aspirations of those who grew up within them (Schnell, 2011). Cultural, familial, and personal values may dictate what types of careers are appropriate, determine boundaries for career options, influence career choices through role modeling and mentoring (Howard et al., 2010), and provide direction for identifying a good person-career fit. Examples of values instilled by family, culture, and community include the importance of working hard, having the courage to live according to convictions, following one's passions, engaging in moral and ethical behavior, believing in a particular religion or form of spirituality, and having personal discipline (Ballaro & O'Neil, 2013). Family, culture, and community also influence the value of seeking intrinsic rewards (including the meaningfulness of work) is also influenced by family, culture, and community. For example, growing up in a family in a better financial position and in which one or both parents have been college educated has been associated with a more intrinsic orientation (M. K. Johnson, Sage, & Mortimer, 2012).

Kortering et al. (2010) pointed out the influence that familial values and role models have, noting that "the jobs of parents and family members have considerable influence on the evolving ambitions of youth" (p. 236). Families, schools, and communities that are supportive can help elevate career aspirations and expectancies, contributing to an increased ability to seek work that is meaningful and careers that incorporate a vision of a possible self, while those that are not supportive result in a limiting focus on barriers to attaining an ideal career (Howard et al., 2010). While in some families and cultures following one's passion and seeking self-fulfillment and meaningfulness in a career are considered positive goals, in others the goals that people are encouraged to achieve are "to adjust to the system, to go to a good college, to get a good job, to make a lot of money, and not to make too many waves" (Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012, p. 333).

Families can also help guide the way that careers are viewed to cause a shift in the perception of the meaningfulness of doing a specific job. For example, Kerns (2013) helped his daughter to shift the way she thought about her monotonous summer job leading horses ridden by children around in a circle by showing her that, rather than the specific functional tasks of the job defining its value, her job was meaningful because she was enhancing the community's well-being and encouraging children to have courage. Some work-related socialization occurs very deliberately, such as the way that Kerns taught his daughter to perceive her work as meaningful, but socialization of children by their families, cultures, and communities can also occur indirectly as children pick up on which types of work those around them consider honorable and which are stigmatized (Berkelaar, Buzzanell, Kisselburgh, Tan, & Shen, 2012).

Organizational Factors

There are also many organizational factors that researchers suggested as formative influences on perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, such as the organizational culture or environment (Sadati, 2012), leadership (Kerns, 2013), and employee development practices or programs (Dimitrov, 2012).

Organizational culture. The values and overall atmosphere of the organizational culture can also influence perceptions employees have of the meaningfulness of work (Joo & Shim, 2010). Alvesson (2012) noted that there are many different definitions of organizational culture, but he generally defined it as "a shared and learned world of experiences, meanings, values and understandings which inform people and which are expressed, reproduced and communicated in symbolic form" (p. 3). Studies of organizational culture have been gaining momentum since the early 1980s when the concept was adopted from the field of anthropology, where the study of culture on various levels (such as national, regional, and group) yielded a rich understanding of the interactions between people and of the way that symbols are used to help them to understand one another (Tharp, 2009).

Organizational cultures that empower their employees (helping them to experience more meaningfulness, competence, impact, and self-determination in their work) have higher levels of employee commitment to the organization and of organizational citizenship behavior (Sadati, 2012). This is particularly true when it is a learning culture, one in which learning is valued, opportunities to learn are frequently available, and where structures and support have been put into place for capturing and sharing what has been learned (Joo & Shim, 2010). Other characteristics of an

empowering learning culture include the encouragement of dialogue and questioning, team learning and collaboration, inspiration for a shared vision, and connection between the organization and the environment (Joo & Lim, 2009). An organizational culture that is conducive to learning, engagement, and employee empowerment may increase perceptions of the meaningfulness of work.

Leadership. The type of leadership practiced within an organization can both create a sense of meaningfulness of work and also be shaped by meaningfulness. Leadership styles that have been particularly associated with meaningfulness include transformational leadership (Olsen, 2011), authentic leadership (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008), and servant leadership (Jones, 2011). Harrison (2009) found leadership to be a significant predictor of events that employees experienced as meaningful, particularly when using a transformational leadership style.

Transformational leadership. Transformational leaders use "inspiration, vision, and the ability to motivate followers to transcend their self-interests for a collective purpose" (Warrick, 2011, p. 12). Tools used to bring about this transformation include "idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration" (Aryee et al., 2012, p. 5). With inspirational vision, transformational leaders help unite employees with a shared purpose, demonstrating the meaningfulness of their work within the context of the organization and connecting it to their own personal growth and transformation (Williams, 2009). Transformational leaders inspire employees to have a vision of doing work that is meaningful, to engage proactively with their work and their lives to enact that meaningful vision, to find meaningfulness in personal growth and transformation, and to use reflexivity to evaluate how well they are living the

meaningful lives that they envisioned (Schippers, Den Hartog, Koopman, & van Knippenberg, 2008).

Authentic leadership. While authentic leaders may use many of the same tools as transformational leaders to bring about positive change in those they lead, with authentic leadership there is more of a concentration on the leader's ethical actions, morality, and compassion (how a leader is) than on behaviors leading to transformation (what a leader does) (Cassar & Buttigieg, 2013; Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008). Authentic leadership is defined by Walumbwa et al. (2008) as "a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development" (p. 94). Positive outcomes of authentic leadership include increased hope, self-esteem, and more effective work performance (Kira, Balkin, & San, 2012). Based on the results of their study about a possible link between authentic leadership and well-being in the workplace, Ménard and Brunet (2011) found that authenticity increased perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, which in turn led to a greater sense of well-being and psychological health. Another connection between authentic leadership and perceptions of the meaningfulness of work is based on the idea that the ability to live a full, honest, and authentic life requires a clear sense of self-concept and that it is the fit between that self-concept and authentic work that creates a sense of meaningfulness (Kira et al., 2012).

Servant leadership. The primary distinction between servant leadership and other leadership types is the emphasis placed on making sure the needs of the employees have

been met, above looking after the needs of the leader or of the organization (Jones, 2011), and on encouraging followers to take morality and stewardship into account when making decisions and choosing actions (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008). Another distinction is that "servant-leaders are motivated by a feeling of altruism and egalitarianism, in contrast to transformational leaders who are motivated by organizational success" (Williams, 2009, p. 56). Servant leaders are dedicated to making the growth and empowerment of their employees their top priority, rather than seeking first to have their own needs met (Liden et al., 2008). According to de Sousa and van Dierendonck (2010), the holistic approach to work, service to others, promotion of a sense of community, and sharing of decision-making power that characterize servant leadership provide an environment that fosters aspects of perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, such as the view of work as a calling, a desire to join with others to be a part of something greater, and the need for autonomy to fully experience fulfillment in the work itself (p. 235).

Regardless of their specific type of leadership style, leaders can help to increase their employees' level of experienced meaningfulness by acting with integrity and helping employees to feel like they have the power and ability to do work that is important (self-efficacy). They can also help by connecting the specific work that they are doing with the ultimate positive impact on others (higher purpose), uniting employees with a shared mission and meaningful goals, and showing employees the significance and positive outcomes of their work (Kerns, 2013).

Employee development. Human resource development (HRD) professionals can have a positive impact on employees "through career-development initiatives (e.g.,

providing career-relevant training, implementing mentoring programs, assisting with succession planning)" (Gilbreath, 2008, p. 8). Investing in increasing employees' sense of meaningfulness through career development has the potential to benefit the organization in the long run. In addition to the direct benefits that career development can have on individual career trajectories, appreciation that the company cared about their development may increase loyalty-based retention and lead to employees who are more positive, motivated, efficient, and competent (Gesme, Towle, & Wiseman, 2010). Providing evidence of caring about the employees also encourages them to practice internal career self-management while at the same time discouraging "externally focused career self-management, for example, mobility-oriented behavior" (Sturges et al., 2010, p. 113).

Depending on how well they are able to adapt programs and policies to the unique needs, barriers, desires, and aspirations of each of their employees, organizations can play a positive or negative role in creating an environment in which perceptions of the meaningfulness of work are used effectively for employee development and career guidance. Within organizational settings, career development programs, often planned and implemented by HRD specialists, must take into consideration the needs, culture, and challenges of the organization, in addition to considering how to help individual employees with career development.

Employee development assistance in career-conducive organizations is not limited to official career development programs, but also involves providing all employees with an atmosphere of support, challenging opportunities, and "a healthy workplace psychosocial environment" (Gilbreath, 2008, p. 9). According to Lippestreu

(2010), having supportive supervisors is important for employee development, influencing "motivation to learn, development effort, attitudes and interest toward development, favorable beliefs about one's career advancement, perceived benefits of development, and favorable perceptions of development opportunities" (p. 35). One suggestion for a way that organizations can use employee development to increase the meaningfulness of work is to use surveys to assess the extent to which employees feel that (a) their work is self-actualizing; (b) they are fulfilling their purpose, goals, values, and their desire to have a positive impact on society; (c) they are experiencing a sense of personal accomplishment; and (d) that they believe that they have the capability to pursue and attain their highest goals for their career (Fairlie, 2011, p. 518). Fairlie (2011) also recommended that organizations increase the meaningfulness of work by making employees aware of all available opportunities for meaningful work, such as helping them to see how their individual jobs connect to the overall purpose and vision of the organization, the way that what they are doing benefits society or achieves some other higher purpose, and how they can adapt their current jobs to make them more congruent with what is considered personally meaningful.

Encouraging employees to take charge of their own careers has been a growing trend in the field of organizational career development, particularly focusing on boundaryless and protean careers (not walled in by standard spatial or temporal limitations) as prime examples of the freedom inherent in not being forced into a prescribed organizational mold (Hite & McDonald, 2008). Employees would be able to create work that they believed to be meaningful if they had the flexibility and empowerment to shape their own careers. Other current areas of focus in career

development literature include "self and self-identity, perceived opportunities, confidence, and perceived control" (Young, 2009, p. 281), which can be used to help employees to increase their perceived meaningfulness of work by redesigning jobs to fit well with their sense of who they are, providing ample opportunities for self-actualization and growth, and aligning what they do with their idea of the way they would like to impact the lives of others (Fairlie, 2011, p. 519). Based on an in-depth look into new trends in organizational career development, Savickas, et al. (2009) concluded that rapid changes in the postmodern world, such as globalization and technological advancements, have required a major overhaul of the way that career development and vocational counseling are conducted. For example, they recommended a more holistic model that involves life design, rather than just career design, paying attention to "contextual possibilities, dynamic processes, non-linear progression, multiple perspectives, and personal patterns" (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 239).

Impact on Individual Employee Outcomes

Individual employees benefit from an organization's focus on employee development, on establishing an organizational culture in which attention to the meaningfulness of work is valued, and on leadership styles that emphasize the importance of authenticity and the meaningfulness of work. According to Ménard and Brunet (2011), employees in organizations that focus on those areas experience higher levels of job satisfaction, well-being, and reduced levels of workplace stress.

Job Satisfaction

When employees are engaged in work that they view as meaningful, they are more likely to experience an increased sense of job satisfaction (Truxillo, Cadiz, Rineer,

Zaniboni, & Fraccaroli, 2012; Wood et al., 2012). According to Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey, and Dik (2012), for people who perceive work as a calling it is the meaningfulness of that work (along with career commitment) that determines whether living out that calling will lead to job satisfaction. In an exploration of turnover intentions in family businesses, Khanin et al. (2012) found that meaningfulness of work, as a component of work centrality (which also includes the importance of work and excitement about it), was directly related to job satisfaction levels, with turnover intentions more likely to occur with lower levels of work centrality.

Employee Well-being

An increased sense of well-being experienced by employees is another positive impact associated with a focus on the meaningfulness of work (H. Coetzee & Wissing, 2010; Ménard & Brunet, 2011). According to Harrison (2009), workplace well-being, combining enhanced physical and emotional health, has been linked to the pursuit of meaningful work goals. As a key aspect of transformational leadership, meaningfulness of work has been associated with increased levels of employee engagement, subjective occupational success, and well-being (Vincent-Höper, Muser, & Janneck, 2012). Although well-being is an important outcome for individual employees, research has indicated that the organization as a whole benefits when employees experience a sense of well-being in the workplace (Tuckey, Bakker, & Dollard, 2012).

Reduced Workplace Stress

According to some researchers (e.g., Cassar & Buttigieg, 2013; Gilbreath, 2008; Rothmann & Hamukang'andu, 2013), employees who experience their jobs as meaningful also experience lower levels of workplace stress than those who view their

jobs as meaningless or as detrimental. The positive impact that the meaningfulness of work has on employee stress levels was shown in many studies to be directly related to the role it plays in improving job satisfaction and a sense of well-being (Padash, Rezaei Dehnavi, & Botlani, 2012). However, some researchers found the opposite to be true, that a higher value placed on the meaningfulness of work led to increased levels of work stress (Crowley, 2012; Kuchinke et al., 2010). One reason that stress can be both increased and decreased by perceptions of the meaningfulness of work is that there are many kinds of stressors and reactions to stress are based on individual differences (Griffin & Clarke, 2011).

Impact on Organizational Outcomes

Although the welfare of individual employees ultimately influences the organization as a whole, an organizational approach examines the impact of perceptions of the meaningfulness of work on organizational outcomes such as employee motivation, engagement, organizational citizenship behavior, and retention. One of the biggest concerns from the perspective of the organization is whether the employees are performing well. Employees who are more engaged in their work (Hirschi, 2012), who exhibit organizational citizenship behavior (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009), and who experience the intrinsic motivation (Grant, 2008) that comes with an increased focus on meaningfulness have been shown to perform at higher levels. This increased performance creates a better situation both for the individual and for the overall success of the organization.

Motivation

Studies on the best way to motivate employees towards optimum performance have been a part of research in organizational psychology from its beginning as a distinct field (Kanfer, 2009; Srivastava & Barmola, 2011). However, current studies about motivation have turned more directly to meaningfulness as an important factor in the intrinsic motivation of employees (Vallerand, 2012). Intrinsic motivation refers to the interest in and enjoyment of work itself, particularly the "enjoyment, interest, satisfaction of curiosity, self-expression, or personal challenge" (Cho & Perry, 2012, p. 384) as the core reason for expending effort or acting in the workplace (Grant, 2008). This is in contrast to extrinsic motivation, which emphasizes external forces driving workplace efforts and actions, such as monetary incentives, bonuses, perks, recognition, or praise (Lin, 2007). According to Joo and Lim (2009), organizations can increase intrinsic motivation by hiring employees with proactive personalities and high organizational commitment and by providing them with training, career development, job enrichment, supportive and transformational leadership, and opportunities to engage autonomously in tasks that are interesting and complex. Intrinsic motivation can benefit employees through greater job satisfaction (Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010), engagement (Fairlie, 2011; Thomas, 2009a), and a sense of meaning and purpose in their work (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009).

Intrinsic motivation can also benefit organizations through increased creativity (Bipp, 2010), proactive behavior, productivity, and higher levels of retention (Ritz & Waldner, 2011). Meaningfulness promotes motivation to work despite challenges that may exist in the workplace, as it has been defined as the underlying belief that "at least

some of the problems and demands posed by living are worth investing energy in, are worthy of commitment and engagement, and are challenges to 'welcome' rather than burdens that one would much rather be without" (Bergman et al., 2012, p. 332).

Though studies have indicated that there is a link between intrinsic motivation, meaningfulness, and engagement (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009), interpreting the results may be difficult due to potential measurement overlap when intrinsic motivation and meaningfulness are both included as variables. For example, Fairlie (2011) focused on the differences between the definitions of intrinsic motivation and meaningfulness to substantiate his claim that his results were influenced by a high correlation between the two, rather than an overlap. However, this did not take into account the potential for the very fact that work is intrinsically motivating to be a source of meaningfulness itself, regardless of whatever about the work was motivating.

Engagement

Employee engagement refers to both an energetic state of passionate, directed expression of self "physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances…in which the employee is dedicated to excellent performance at work and is confident of his or her effectiveness" (Kumar & Sia, 2012, p. 32), and to the process of helping employees to become engaged in their work. A plethora of articles and books on employee engagement have emerged in the popular media, among practitioners, and in scholarly research over the past two decades, and the concept of engagement continues to grow in popularity (Shuck, 2011). One of the initial connections between the meaningfulness of work and employee engagement was made by Kahn (1990), as his seminal research on the topic of engagement uncovered meaningfulness as one of the

essential psychological conditions (along with psychological safety and psychological availability) necessary for employees to be fully engaged in their work, able and willing to invest their energy, focus, and true selves in their work tasks, roles, and interactions. In his description of the Work Engagement Profile, a questionnaire designed to measure the four intrinsic rewards that the creators of the instrument believed to be necessary for employee engagement, Thomas (2009b) suggested that a sense of meaningfulness was a key component. Together with the other three intrinsic rewards (sense of choice, competence, and progress), a sense of meaningfulness was thought to increase employee engagement, ultimately having a positive impact on employee "well-being, job performance, and commitment to their organization" (Thomas, 2009b, p. 3).

Organizational Citizenship Behavior

An increased emphasis on meaningfulness of work not only impacts the way that employees experience their work, but also the way that they behave within the workplace. Employees engage in organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) when they move beyond the basic requirements of their jobs to act in ways that benefit the organization and other people within the organization, such as showing initiative, helping others, contributing ideas for positive change, and embracing civic virtue (Gooty, Gavin, Johnson, Frazier, & Snow, 2009). Employees who exhibit organizational citizenship behavior are willing to go beyond their prescribed work responsibilities; contribute to the success of their organization without necessarily expecting compensation beyond their usual salary; and help, support, and encourage their fellow workers as good team players (Sadati, 2012). OCBs have been contrasted in many studies with negative behaviors such as bullying, gossip, sabotage, and a lack of effort put into the work that is done (Tan &

Tan, 2008). Engaging in meaningful work has been shown to help increase prosocial OCBs by creating an environment in which employees feel their work is making a positive difference and so are motivated to contribute more and to persevere even under difficult conditions such as underemployment (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011).

Positive workplace behavior has been associated with perceived meaningfulness of work, as "experienced meaningfulness was highly predictive of internal motivation, general satisfaction, and satisfaction with personal growth and developmental opportunities" (Harrison, 2009, p. 3). This, in turn, can provide motivation for individuals to positively influence others and their environment. Perceptions of work as meaningful can also help to prevent the boredom, disengagement, and negative experiences of the workplace that stem from a sense of meaninglessness of work, which may lead to negative behaviors in place of prosocial ones.

Retention

The cost of training new employees is great, so it is important for employers to focus on retaining the employees that they already have (Sinha & Sinha, 2012). Research has provided evidence that the more meaningfulness employees feel in regards to their work, the more likely they will be to stay at their current company and find identification within their workplace (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). According to Scroggins (2008), the "creation of meaningful work experiences may be a key component to reducing employee intentions to leave and maintaining high performance" (58). Though retention is considered a positive impact of meaningfulness on the organizational level, it is also related to the items listed in the section on individual employee impact because employees are more likely to leave the company when they are dissatisfied with their

jobs, are not experiencing a sense of well-being while at work, and are struggling with an unhealthy amount of work-related stress (Sandhya & Kumar, 2011). Organizations can increase the likelihood of retaining their employees by creating an organizational climate conducive to empowerment, learning, and meaningfulness (Dimitrov, 2012); using leadership styles that have been associated with a focus on the meaningfulness of work, such as transformational, authentic, and servant leadership (Aryee et al., 2012; Cassar & Buttigieg, 2013); and by providing employee development practices that enhance perceptions of the meaningfulness of work (Fairlie, 2011).

Implications for Career Choice and Vocational Guidance

Scholars and career or vocational guidance practitioners have found that a greater understanding of perceptions of the meaningfulness of work has important implications for helping people to choose new careers or to effectively navigate their current career paths. There are many factors identified in scholarly literature as potentially influencing career decision-making. According to Sturges, Conway, and Liefooghe (2010), some of these factors may be related to individual differences (e.g., self-esteem, locus of control, personality, beliefs about work, culture, and gender), career-related (e.g., career goals, career stage, career level, and advancement motivation), or related to organizational programs, policies, or culture in support of employee career development. Combinations of these factors vary for each individual and are thought to work together within the context of life experiences to lead individuals to make "a series of decisions based on the opportunities and demands that become apparent" (Young, 2009, p. 282).

The importance of meaningfulness for career guidance has often been discussed in the literature in the context of people who are experiencing major periods of life and

career transition, such as “the move of young people from school to work and the moves of adults from work to other work, from work to nonwork…and from nonwork to work” (Fouad & Bynner, 2008, p. 241).

Many studies have specifically addressed vocational guidance for adolescents or young adults who are in the process of choosing a career path and possibly considering which educational avenue to take to get there. In a study on the career influences, perceived barriers to achieving career goals, and coping strategies of urban adolescents, Howard, et al. (2010) noted that, “Career aspirations may be compromised or changed by perceived barriers to their career development…including racial prejudice and discrimination, financial problems, familial influences and attitudes, low self-efficacy, and lack of opportunities” (p. 2) Another study examined the issue of a gap between career ambitions and realistic possibilities for young people with specific learning disabilities transitioning from high school to adulthood (Kortering et al., 2010). The discrepancy between aspirations for educational and occupational attainment and actual success in meeting those goals for urban teenagers from minority racial or ethnic groups is a critical social issue (Howard et al., 2010). In order to adequately address the complex issues faced by youth from a wide array of backgrounds, vocational counselors are advised to determine what their clients consider their ideal future selves to be, encourage them to reveal what they view as work that is meaningful, and then use that to help them make realistic and informed choices about their future education or job.

In other studies, scholars have examined issues relevant to stable employees and the career development programs that are concerned about them. In recent research on career development, there has been a focus on employees learning to make changes in

their current (potentially stable) jobs, to better meet their needs. This trend towards job crafting "occurs in the context of employees' prescribed jobs, which are marked by prescribed tasks, expectations, and positions in the organizational hierarchy; thus, any of these features may limit employees' perceptions of their opportunities to proactively change their jobs" (Berg, Wrzesniewski, et al., 2010, p. 159). Job crafting can be used to help increase employees' perception of the meaningfulness of their work by allowing them to conform the work they do more specifically to their values and to what they view as their purpose in life (Giancola, 2011).

In her examination of the role of frustration in career decision-making processes, Young (2009) noted that there were many employees who were in stable positions but were frustrated to be there, potentially leading to burnout, workplace deviance, or withdrawal from engagement due to resignation. However, she also pointed out that a lack of frustration could be a problem as well, because "when perceived frustration is low there is less possibility for abrupt changes to one's career" (Young, 2009, p. 291). This study looked at the consequences in career choices of employees that acknowledged frustration due to expectations that had not been met. By seeking to understand what frustrated, disillusioned, or burnt-out employees consider meaningful vocational and career guidance professionals can help to change the employees' perceptions of their work and help them to become more engaged, creative, and committed (Adekola, 2011; Dik et al., 2009; Nielsen, Yarker, Brenner, Randall, & Borg, 2008).

Impact of Gender and Social Class

Gender and social class may have an impact on perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and on how those perceptions influence vocational choices and career

development. Recent work-related studies have emphasized the need for an increased focus on gender (e.g., Heppner & Fu, 2011; Ku, 2011) and on social class (e.g., Blustein et al., 2011; Fouad et al., 2012), both individually and in combination. Research has indicated that there is a complex interaction between the influence that contextual factors (such as gender and social class) have on individual career aspirations and the impact that career choices can have on a person's identity within social and environmental contexts (Kosine et al., 2008; Lapour & Heppner, 2009).

Impact of Gender

Women in the workplace. There is a large body of research in which scholars have examined the impact of gender on issues such as vocational choices, career paths, workplace experiences, discrimination, and work-life balance (Debebe, 2011). Examples of issues related to women in the workplace that have been mentioned in the literature include the "glass ceiling" that still exists and keeps many women from being able to advance in their careers despite having the same level of education and experience as their male counterparts (Angelique, 2012), prejudice and stereotypes which interfere with how women are perceived and promoted (Debebe, 2011; Landy, 2008), and problems faced by women in leadership roles (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; Debebe, 2011; Duehr & Bono, 2006). Women are still barely represented in top leadership positions compared to men (Vincent-Höper et al., 2012).

Another prominent issue in the literature is the importance of improving work-family or work-life balance, particularly for female employees who end up with the majority of caretaking responsibility, even when both spouses are employed outside of the home (Coogan & Chen, 2007). Many books and articles have addressed the impact of

major personal life transitions on career aspirations and realities (particularly for female employees), such as pregnancy, parenting, needing to care for an aging relative, or a personal crisis (e.g., Bailyn, 2006; Gordon, Whelan-Berry, & Hamilton, 2007; Ollier-Malaterre, 2010). Gordon, et al. (2007) noted that in addition to helping individual employees, work-life balance might also increase organizational success through higher performance and lower turnover rates.

Rather than simply reporting facts concerning women in the workplace, much of the literature focused on the continuing need for improvement through research and practice, despite the advancements that have been made (e.g., Ernst Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010; Hoffman & Cowan, 2008; Todd, 2004). For example, The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) explored the way women are viewed and treated at work, focusing on issues such as subtle forms of discrimination, lack of equality in opportunities and pay, and ways discrimination is perpetuated or diminished (King, 2006).

Gender and the meaningfulness of work. While the meaningfulness of work is important for increased job satisfaction, well-being, engagement, and motivation for both men and women (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009), there are some differences in the ways that women perceive and experience the meaningfulness of work. For example, Eldridge (2010) found significant gender-based differences in scores on the Calling & Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ), with "women scoring higher than men on both presence of and search for calling" (p. 72), including on the specific meaningfulness of work dimension. In a study comparing the reactions of men and women to organizational restructuring, Worts, Fox, and McDonough (2007) found that the meaningfulness of their public service

work was more important to the women than to the men in determining how they reacted to the change.

Perceptions of work as meaningful have been associated with lower levels of workplace stress, partially due to the impact of meaningfulness perceptions on subjective well-being and on job satisfaction levels. Some studies have indicated that female employees tend to have an increased level of stress over that of their male counterparts (Singh, 2012), which would then make it more important for women to benefit from the stress-reducing role of increased perceptions of the meaningfulness of their work. According to Vincent-Höper et al. (2012), women in the workplace should be encouraged to view their work as meaningful as a practical outcome of transformational leadership because "correlations between transformational leadership and career satisfaction and between work engagement and career satisfaction were higher for women than for men" (p. 677).

Impact of Social Class

Social class, SES, and the social class worldview model. There has been a recent increased interest in research on the impact of social class or socioeconomic status (SES) on career development (Blustein et al., 2011; Diemer & Ali, 2009; Thompson & Subich, 2011). Although at times used interchangeably (Spencer & Castano, 2007), there is a significant difference between socioeconomic status and social class (Diemer & Ali, 2009; Lapour & Heppner, 2009). Factors often used to determine SES (including measures both for the individual and for his or her parents or family of origin) include income, educational attainment, and occupational prestige. On the other hand, there are

more subjective aspects of social class that go beyond these variables, reflecting a psychological perspective, worldview, identity, self-perception, and lived experiences.

While SES can be measured easily using quantitative research (Diemer & Ali, 2009), these more subjective perspectives are better addressed through qualitative methods, which can uncover unique nuances and potential contextual determinants of social class perceptions. The Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM) is a subjective approach that takes into account a person's perception and experience of social class within the context of their economic culture (Liu et al., 2004). Examples of characteristics associated with particular social classes include "values, beliefs, preferences, manners, language spoken, social exclusion and attitudes" (Diemer et al., 2013).

Gender-Social Class Interaction

Although there have been many studies about the roles of gender and social class independently, few take into account the distinct needs created by an interaction of the two. Sawyer, Salter, and Thoroughgood (2013) pointed out the importance of taking the intersection of social identities into account when conducting research, as the interaction between different aspects of identity (such as social class, gender, age, and race) results in a different experience and meaning than just the combination of individual separate identities. Heppner and Fu (2011) also discussed this intersection of gender and social class in terms of vocational identity, "with girls and women of low socioeconomic status often perceiving a very narrow range of possible alternatives" (p. 178). For example, the way that work is experienced by white women of a lower social class, black women of a lower social class, white women of an upper social class, or black women of an upper

social class may be entirely different because the interaction between race and social class can change the qualitative experience of both (Sawyer et al., 2013).

According to Lapour and Heppner (2009), it is not only important to look at the way that gender and social class interact to inform career choices in cases of lower social classes, but to also examine the impact of a combination of gender and various levels of social class. In response to the tendency in social science research to focus primarily on those of lower socioeconomic status (Abelev, 2009), Lapour and Heppner focused their study on young women from a more privileged social class. They found that there was a significant amount of pressure on women of higher social classes to choose careers considered fitting for their social class status, just as women of less privileged social classes may experience pressure to stay within the boundaries culturally expected of them.

Gender and Social Class in the Greater Pittsburgh Area

The issues of gender and social class are particularly pertinent within the Greater Pittsburgh area, defined by the United States Census Bureau (2004) as the City of Pittsburgh and the surrounding areas of Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Washington, and Westmoreland counties. The social class discrepancy in Pittsburgh has been present from the time it was founded in 1758, with the descendants of the founding families occupying the upper class (Rishel, 1990). In 1900, Pittsburgh industrial tycoons such as Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, Andrew and Richard Mellon, George Westinghouse, and Henry J. Heinz were the wealthiest men in the world (Skrabec, 2010). In stark contrast to the upper class elite was the poverty, terrible working conditions, and

unsafe environments of those, mainly immigrants, who worked in the steel mills, coal mines, and factories (Faue, 2012).

Considered part of the "Rust Belt" (Mitra, Movit, & Frick, 2008), Pittsburgh has experienced years of economic struggling due to industrial environmental pollution (Tarr, 2003), deindustrialization of the steel industry (Nagy, 2009), and employee cynicism that came with the economic collapse of the area in the 1980s and early 1990s (Sabatini, 2009). There has been a recent increase in class differentiation in what was once a primarily blue collar or working class city as the decline of the steel industry led to economic diversifying, with Pittsburgh becoming a leader in the fields of medicine, education, and technology (Madison, 2011). However, some scholars have pointed out that the values frequently associated with the blue collar social class have contributed to a slower progression in Pittsburgh compared to other cities towards a new class of creative, entrepreneurial, knowledge workers (Florida, 2012). According to Prins (2009), "contemporary Pittsburgh is still considered a 'polarized region' lacking social cohesion" (p. 98).

In addition to social class, the Greater Pittsburgh area struggles with gender inequality (Hegewisch & Williams, 2010). There are fewer women-owned businesses in Pittsburgh, relative to the size of the population, than in any of the other top 40 regions of the United States (Miller, 2011). Women in the Pittsburgh area also have fewer executive and managerial positions than men do, leading to female graduates leaving the Pittsburgh area to pursue careers elsewhere, citing the "glass ceiling" and lower salaries as reasons they will not stay in the region (Hansen, Ban, & Huggins, 2003). While advancements have been made in other parts of the country, there is a significant gender-wage gap in

Pittsburgh that exceeds that of the national average and contributes to a high poverty rate for female-headed households (De Vita, Pettijohn, & Roeger, 2012). Women in Pittsburgh make approximately 25% less dollar for dollar than men (Hegewisch & Williams, 2010). This gender wage gap led scholars to investigate the role played by unique characteristics of this region, such as the legacy of the old industrial segregation of careers, with men working in higher paying jobs in the manufacturing and construction industries while women mainly worked in lower paying service industries, such as education, office support, healthcare and social services (Deitrick & Briem, 2009).

Potential Negative Implications of Meaningfulness

Although most of the research presented positive implications of a focus on the meaningfulness of work, there were opposing views that brought up potential drawbacks. Negative implications included (a) lack of balance between work and home life, (b) lack of career development due to job embeddedness, and (c) inequity in opportunities for work that is perceived to be meaningful.

Work-Life Balance

While a focus on meaningfulness may increase employees' loyalty, commitment, and productivity when they are at work, what does this mean for the amount of time that they are able to spend at home? Some researchers have expressed concerns that work-life balance could be thrown off when work becomes more than just a job, leading to an increase in work stress (Kuchinke et al., 2010). When employees view their work as meaningful or as a calling, there is a greater chance that they will experience work role identification and make sacrifices for work that disrupt the work-life balance, potentially creating problems in their personal lives and relationships (Cardador & Caza, 2012). This

issue is particularly relevant to women because they often have more responsibilities in other areas of life, such as caring for children or aging parents, that may impact their ability to focus on the meaningfulness of their work.

Job Embeddedness

A potential problem with meaningfulness-based retention was brought up in studies examining the concept of job embeddedness, in which employees have become enmeshed in their current jobs so thoroughly that they have lost any motivation towards career development, networking, or building social capital. Some studies have focused on the positive aspects of embeddedness, particularly research indicating that embedded employees are less likely to leave the organization. However, the reduction in human capital development behavior observed in embedded employees "may also hurt the individual's career advancement in the long run" (Ng & Feldman, 2010, p. 696). Ng and Feldman (2010) also noted "as individuals more (less) actively develop social relationships with members of the organizational elite over time, they are increasingly (decreasingly) likely to be offered greater amounts of valuable career assistance" (p. 709). This emphasizes how important it is for organizational career development practitioners to pay attention to the needs of those who have become embedded in the organization, encouraging the aspects of stability that increase retention while also promoting continued employee learning, development, and personal growth.

Inequity in Opportunities for Meaningful Work

Other researchers have expressed concern that focusing on the meaningfulness of work will emphasize disparities in opportunities for meaningful work, particularly between levels of social class (Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012). For example, the flexibility

for people to design or choose careers that meet their expectations for meaningfulness is found more often in jobs that are associated with a higher level of education, making it less likely that those of a lower social class will have access to them. Those with a lower level of education and socioeconomic status have less opportunity to choose work they find meaningful and they work more often in careers associated with less job crafting flexibility (Berg, Wrzesniewski, et al., 2010).

While people who are working because they want to can afford to be selective and choose a job that is meaningful to them, those who must work to survive may need to take whatever is available (Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005). Researchers from this perspective pointed out the potential for employees who work in monotonous or devalued jobs to feel discouraged, less motivated, and less satisfied with their jobs when their company emphasizes the importance of meaningful work (Prilleltensky & Stead, 2012). In response to these concerns, other researchers noted that focusing on the meaningfulness of work could help people to see the bigger picture of what their work is accomplishing, regardless of the type of work they are doing (Dik, Duffy, & Steger, 2012).

Research Design and Methods

In order to help justify the research design and methods used in this study, I will present a brief background for those chosen and an explanation of why they are useful for this particular study. Before discussing the rationale for choosing a qualitative approach for studying the meaningfulness of work, I will take a look at the tools that have been used in quantitative studies of meaningfulness in general and in studies specifically focused on the meaningfulness of work.

Quantitative Tools for Analyzing Meaningfulness

Quantitative research, which is based on a more positivistic worldview, focuses on confirmatory outcomes, with the goal of understanding the relationship between variables and generalizing findings to population distributions. It is useful for helping researchers to "understand more context-independent and particularistic phenomena that are relatively distant from the 'natural' and holistic experiences lived by individuals" (Lieber, 2009, p. 219). According to Buchanan and Bryman (2007), quantitative methods are helpful for answering questions about whether there is a significant relationship between variables based on hypothesis testing, with results occurring within a specific controlled environment, and the extent to which something is happening (quantification of how much or how many).

Various tools and instruments have been developed for measuring meaningfulness within different contexts, either as the focus of research itself or as a component of a different concept being studied. For example, Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence scale was designed to measure "the degree to which the respondent found the world comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful" (Bergman et al., 2012, p. 333). Other instruments that have been used to measure meaningfulness include the Constructed Meaning Scale, Clarke's Creation of Meaning Episodes, Reker's Life Attitude Profile, Battista and Almond's Life Regard Index, Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006), and the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI; Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012).

While each of these tools has positive and negative aspects, the very nature of quantitative research, such as a preset choice of answers, rendered these quantitative instruments inadequate for my study. For example, confusion over definitions for

meaningfulness might have made it hard to tell the way that participants answering survey questions interpreted the terms “meaningful” or “meaningfulness” if they are not given the opportunity to describe their perception of the concept in their own words. The boundaries of set responses also make it impossible to find out if there are influences or impacts that have not been brought to light before because the context of the study involves previously unexplored areas of research.

Qualitative Research Design and Methods

According to Lee, Mitchell, and Harman (2011), “qualitative research is well suited for issues of vivid description of real-world phenomena, rich interpretation of those deeply contextualized phenomena, and the development of theoretical understanding of those phenomena” (p. 75). Key characteristics of qualitative studies include (a) naturalistic rather than lab-based environments; (b) an emphasis on context (including a holistic view of social worlds as complex); (c) the use of multiple sources of data (such as interviews, observations, and documents), with the researcher as the key instrument for data collection; (d) a design that is emergent and evolving rather than static; (e) an inductive, recursive, and interactive process of data analysis; (f) interpretive inquiry and reflexivity; and (g) a focus on the perspectives and subjective views of the participants (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Qualitative research is particularly effective for exploring “contextualised richness within organizational structures, relationships and practices” (Kempster & Parry, 2011, p. 108). Scholars often choose qualitative over quantitative methods when they seek to understand complex, dynamic, and contextual factors that require an in-depth exploration of an issue or problem. Qualitative research can also capture the unique

perspectives, experiences, meaning-making, and voices of individual participants in order to provide a richer understanding of the complexity of the issues or problems being addressed that quantitative methods alone cannot adequately capture or measure. According to Berg, et al., (2010), qualitative studies are particularly appropriate for "revealing more complex patterns of employees' subjective appraisals" (p. 160).

The main qualitative research approaches include narrative, phenomenological, case study, ethnographic, and grounded theory (Creswell, 2007). Additional types of qualitative research often used in organizational settings include focus group research, action research, and discursive research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Although Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) also listed critical and feminist research among the approaches, Creswell (2007) classified these as theoretical lenses through which the study is viewed rather than actual approaches.

Grounded Theory

Unlike other methodologies in which existing theories are used to structure and guide the data, grounded theory research is inductive, working from the data up to a theory (O'Reilly et al., 2012, pp. 247-262). The grounded theory method was originally created in the 1960s by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in an attempt to use a systematic qualitative research method to "show how such research projects could produce outcomes of equal significance to those produced by the predominant statistical-quantitative, primarily mass survey methods of the day" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010, p. 33). Differences in philosophical viewpoints created divergences in the conception of grounded theory, which in turn made a practical difference in how grounded theory research was conducted and presented (D. Walker & Myrick, 2006). Some scholars

(Covan, 2010) favored the positivistic approach advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in their seminal book on grounded theory. Others moved on to the next branch in the grounded theory family tree, the approach taken by Corbin and Strauss (2008), which is rooted in pragmatism and symbolic interactionism.

There are also differences in the ways that students of Strauss and Corbin have applied their perspective in real grounded theory studies (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Charmaz (2006) took grounded theory in a new direction, viewing it through the lens of social constructivism, influencing the next generation of grounded theorists (Morse et al., 2009). Most of these theorists (all women) had been students of Glaser and Strauss and chose to adapt grounded theory based on their own philosophical perspectives. Clarke (2005) took a postmodern approach to grounded theory (called Situational Analysis) that emphasized the importance of multiple viewpoints and of fully exploring all aspects of the situation. Regardless of the branch of grounded theory chosen, there are several characteristics that differentiate all grounded theory research from other methods. These distinguishing characteristics of grounded theory research include "(a) the constant comparative method, (b) theoretical coding, (c) theoretical sampling, (d) theoretical saturation, and (e) theoretical sensitivity" (O'Reilly et al., 2012, p. 249).

Grounded Theory Research in I/O Psychology

Traditionally, research in industrial and organizational (I/O) psychology has primarily used quantitative methods (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). However, there has been an increased appreciation within the field, as well as in business research in general, of the unique ways that qualitative studies can add depth to business-related knowledge and provide explanations for why the results of quantitative studies occurred (Lee et al.,

2011). The growing emphasis within I/O psychology on a richer understanding of contexts, motivations, and links between organizational practices and subjective experiences of employees increases the value of qualitative research in business settings, both on its own and as an adjunct to quantitative studies (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). According to Kempster and Parry (2011), "Grounded theory adopts a contextual examination of social processes in organizations" (p. 109). Qualitative research can also enhance the ability of researchers and practitioners to understand complex organizational processes, systems, interactions, and motivations (Cunliffe, 2011). Grounded theory studies have been used in organizational research for many purposes, such as to gain a better understanding of customer-company interactions (O'Reilly et al., 2012), to explore leadership practices and processes (Bigl, 2012; C. F. Johnson, 2012; Kempster & Parry, 2011), to investigate organizational indifference (Fard & Eslami, 2010), to study organizational networks (Peters, Pressey, Vanharanta, & Johnston, 2013), and to research industrial marketing (Wagner, Lukassen, & Mahlendorf, 2010).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework underlying this dissertation consists of a combination of the philosophical approach taken to grounded theory research and the feminist critical perspective used to guide the content focus. To explain the way that these approaches influenced the methodology of my study, I review literature on symbolic interactionism and feminist critical theory. In addition, I discuss controversy within the literature regarding the potential for approaching a grounded theory study from a feminist critical perspective.

Symbolic Interactionism

The grounded theory method proposed by Corbin and Strauss (2008) is built on the philosophy of symbolic interactionism. Although there have been claims that grounded theory in general is rooted in symbolic interactionism, Glaser objected to this preconception as he felt it did not accurately reflect the use of grounded theory for both quantitative and qualitative studies (Holton, 2010).

The philosophy of symbolic interactionism, first espoused by George Mead, named by Herbert Blumer, and influenced by pragmatism, seeks to explain the way that people interact with and understand the world (Hall, Griffiths, & McKenna, 2013). According to Licqurish and Seibold (2011), symbolic interactionists view meaning as something that is "interpreted through social interactions, and the communication and understanding of verbal and non-verbal sociocultural symbols" (p.12). In symbolic interactionism, people relate to the world based on the subjective interpretation of symbolic meaning formed through social interactions (Carlson, 2013). In turn, that subjective interpretation of meaning is internalized and adapted on an ongoing basis according to experiences, actions, and interactions and the way that those experiences, actions, and interactions are interpreted (e.g., Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Licqurish & Seibold, 2011; Plummer & Young, 2010).

Feminist Critical Theory

Feminist critical theory provides a platform for seeking a greater understanding of the perspectives of women and the unique ways that their gender has impacted their views on work and on the importance of meaningfulness within that context. One impediment to improving the experiences women have in the workplace has been the

silencing of women's voices (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007), an issue common to many different groups of marginalized people. An emphasis on women's subjective lived experiences from their own perspective is a key aspect of feminist critical theory, as it allows women to have a voice and acknowledges their active participation in their own lives (Angelique, 2012; Krumer-Nevo, 2009).

Another important component of feminist critical theory is an awareness of issues related to power differences, marginalization, and social justice (Olesen, 2010). According to Angelique (2012), feminist critical theory takes the sociopolitical influences on women into account, viewing the lives of women and the struggles that they face in the context of the social system in which they are embedded. Taking into consideration the complex contexts in which women are situated helps to avoid "presenting participants' voices without investigating the influence of social processes on shaping them" (Krumer-Nevo, 2009, p. 290). As qualitative research, including grounded theory, has proven an effective tool for giving a voice to people who might not otherwise be heard (Rhodes & Brown, 2005), it has the potential for creating positive change for women in the workplace.

Grounded Theory and Feminist Critical Theory

Some scholars have argued that assuming a particular stance, as is required in feminist critical theory, is impossible in grounded theory studies because it can influence the direction of the research rather than the study being driven by the emerging data (e.g., Gibson, 2010; Plummer & Young, 2010). However, other scholars (e.g., Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Kushner & Morrow, 2003; Plummer & Young, 2010) disagreed with that perspective, suggesting that it is not only possible to mesh feminist critical theory with

grounded theory but that feminist critical theory is a natural fit with the underlying principles driving grounded theory research. There are many characteristics that feminist theory and grounded theory research share, such as the central role played by reflexivity, the conviction that knowledge is generated primarily through human experience and social processes, the use of interpretive language for defining meaning, and the ability to promote social change (Plummer & Young, 2010, p. 318).

According to Olesen (2010), both feminist research and grounded theory research have strengths that could be mutually beneficial. For example, she noted that grounded theorists could learn from feminist researchers to increase their use of reflexivity and to pay more attention to the ethical implications of their research and feminist theorists could expand their research to include the larger picture offered by grounded theory research. While feminist critical theory and grounded theory research together can help to make up for potential weaknesses in either one when used independently, it is important for the integrity of the grounded theory study to keep feminist critical theory in the position of a lens through which the data are viewed, instead of allowing it to directly control the content or direction of the data (Kempster & Perry, 2011). A conceptual framework combining symbolic interactionism and feminist critical theory benefits this study by bringing the perspectives of women from various social classes into the foreground, using the feminist critical theory lens to explore the underlying structures, institutions, and contexts in which individuals are situated and grounded theory rooted in symbolic interactionism to develop a theory based on their interpretations, reflexivity, and responses (Delbridge & Edwards, 2013).

Conclusion

In order to achieve positive organizational outcomes, such as greater employee engagement (Shuck, Ghosh, Zigarmi, & Nimon, 2013), intrinsic motivation (Cho & Perry, 2012), organizational citizenship behavior (Vigoda-Gadot, 2012), and increased retention (Cosack, Guthridge, & Lawson, 2010), current research calls for a more in-depth understanding of differences in perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. While research has indicated that an intersection between gender and social class is likely to influence how the meaningfulness of work is perceived (Bonney, 2007), there are few studies on how gender or social class impact perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and none that directly look at the potential combined influence of gender and social class. There is a need for research that can help elucidate the process of forming and responding to perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, including understanding what study participants believe the concept "meaningfulness of work" entails. This gap in the literature, along with the need for information on individual differences that could inform career development programs and policies, can be addressed effectively through grounded theory research with a feminist critical theory perspective.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

In spite of the increased interest in the meaningfulness of work and its potential positive implications for both individuals and organizations (Hirschi, 2012), there remains a lack of adequate research on this issue that takes the intersection of gender and social class into account (Hartung & Subich, 2011). Therefore, the main purpose of my study was to use grounded theory research to develop a substantive theory to help explain differences in perceptions that women from diverse social classes have of the meaningfulness of work, how important it is to their choice of careers, and how their perception of it influences their workplace experiences and behavior.

This chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of how this research was carried out. An introduction to the research design and explanation of the rationale for using grounded theory as the qualitative design method will be followed by a description of my role as the researcher. Next, I describe the methodology, including the logic used for participant selection, the context of the study, instrumentation, and procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, I discuss issues related to the study's trustworthiness (such a credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The design for this qualitative study of perceptions of the meaningfulness of work was guided by the following research questions:

RQ 1: What perceptions do women from diverse social classes have of the meaningfulness of work?

RQ 2: What influenced their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work?

RQ 3: What impact do they believe their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work have or have had on their career choices?

RQ 4: How do they believe that their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work influence their workplace experiences and behaviors?

RQ 5: What substantive theory can help explain differences in the perceptions that women have of the meaningfulness of work, their impact on career choices, and the influence of these perceptions on their workplace experiences and behaviors?

Central Concepts of the Study

The central concept for this study is the meaningfulness of work. There have been many conflicting ways that this term is defined, but for the purposes of this study I define it as "individual subjective experience of the existential significance or purpose of work" (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012, p. 657) in which people "transform themselves…and the world around them…while making progress toward important end states" (Fairlie, 2011, p. 509). Feminist critical theory, one of the lenses I used for this study, places importance on expressing and accounting for the unique voice of each female participant, so I also made sure to include the perceptions that the participants had of the meaningfulness of work and how they defined it. As discussed at length in Chapter 2, the growing body of scholarship on the meaningfulness of work and related concepts within multiple areas of study indicate that it is a relevant, important area to explore.

Another central issue for this study was the importance of including not only the potential influence of social class on perceptions of the meaningfulness of work but also

the way that social class and gender interact. Social class has at times been equated with socioeconomic status (SES), which is typically based on an objective measurement of "educational/occupational attainment, income, and/or occupational prestige" (Diemer & Ali, 2009, p. 250). Others have focused on a more subjective view of social class, such as the Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM), which takes into account a person's perception and experience of social class within the context of his or her economic culture (Liu, Soleck, Hopps, Dunston, & Pickett, 2004). Rather than limiting this study to one or the other of these measurements of social class, I took both into consideration as recommended by Diemer et al. (2013).

Grounded Theory Study

In order to best fulfill the purposes of the study, I used a qualitative, grounded theory research method to address the research questions. I selected a qualitative approach because it allows for a deeper, more in-depth exploration of a problem or issue, particularly when there are complex, dynamic, and contextual factors involved (Cunliffe, 2011; Lee et al., 2011). Consistent with a feminist critical theory lens, qualitative research allows the unique perspectives, experiences, meaning-making, and voices of individual participants to be explored in order to account for multiple subjective perspectives on the meaning ascribed to issues or problems through reflexive, personal, inductive analysis of data (Creswell, 2007). I used grounded theory research in this study because it is the most appropriate choice for developing a theory based on the expressed experiences of individuals regarding a particular phenomenon or process (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). As noted by Creswell (2007), the main purpose for grounded theory research is the generation or discovery of a theory based on the lived experience of

individuals, addressing questions about relevant processes, actions, or interactions (Birks, Mills, Francis, & Chapman, 2009). In this study, I addressed the process by which various factors influenced or were influenced by the perceptions individuals have of the meaningfulness of work.

For grounded theory research, data are usually collected from multiple participants who can help to further the understanding of processes related to a particular phenomenon or action. The report that is developed is a theory, often illustrated as a model or figure, based on an analysis of transcribed interviews through open, axial, and selective coding processes (Gurd, 2008). In keeping with methods consistent with grounded theory research, I used purposive theoretical sampling (Draucker, Martsolf, Ross, & Rusk, 2007) and data collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, demographic questionnaires, and reflexive researcher memos (Bringer, Johnston, & Brackenridge, 2004). Through an iterative process of data collection and analysis (Gurd, 2008) using constant comparison for analysis in open, axial, and selective phases (Walker & Myrick, 2006), my interpretation resulted in the generation of a substantive explanatory theory.

Role of the Researcher

Role Description

I personally carried out the study design, established contact with and obtained cooperation from the organizations that distributed participant recruitment flyers, and selected the participants. I created and set up a web-based survey using a secure server to collect demographic information and I also created a semistructured interview guide (see Appendix B) that I used to conduct individual interviews with selected participants,

which I then transcribed into QSR NVivo. Data for analysis and interpretation included researcher memos I created by engaging in reflexive journaling throughout the study. After the data was analyzed, I directly interacted with participants to report the results and to provide guidance based on the research conclusions. Although the research was conducted in Pittsburgh where I reside, the city is large enough that it was possible to avoid including participants in the study with whom any previous relationships existed.

Conflicts of Interest and Biases

Because there were no financial interests involved in this study, there was no potential conflict of interest. However, all human beings have conscious or unconscious biases that must be taken into consideration in order to understand their impact on the research design, data collection, and data analysis, as well as on the interpretation of the results (Amis & Silk, 2008). While objectivity and a lack of any bias are considered necessary for quantitative studies, qualitative researchers seek to understand and reflect on their own motives, thoughts, feelings, and perspectives in the process of conducting the research (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011). Because this was a grounded theory study, I worked to uncover personal biases and examined them in depth using researcher memos for reflexivity (Bringer, Johnston, & Brackenridge, 2004).

Although a greater understanding of personal perspectives and potential biases was developed throughout the research process, there were a few areas of bias that I recognized going into it. For example, I tend toward a perspective, informed by transformational leadership theory, in which vision, proactive engagement with life, personal growth and transformation, and reflexivity are highly valued (Schippers et al., 2008). As a Christian, I also have a bias towards a belief that every individual is uniquely

created, gifted, and called to make a positive difference in the world and in the lives of others (Blanchard & Ken Blanchard Companies, 2007). My cultural background, including being a married, heterosexual, female Caucasian, currently living in poverty within the United States also had an impact on the way that I viewed and interpreted the data received in this study. My experience with growing up in an economically poor family, but with values more typically associated with the upper middle class, also may have contributed to my perspective on the potential impact of social class on participants' perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and career perspectives (Bowman, Kitayama, & Nisbett, 2009). As noted by McIlveen, Beccaria, du Preez, and Patton (2010), reflecting on and writing about one's personal perspective "provides the psychologist with a method to understand himself or herself in the performance of his or her research into a particular phenomenon of interest, which, like himself or herself, is embedded in a sociocultural context" (p. 12).

Methodology

Because qualitative research is not generalizable to attain external validity in the same way that quantitative research is, its quality instead depends on the transferability that can be achieved through a detailed and rich methodological description. I conducted the study according to the plan laid out in this section which details (a) participant selection, (b) instrumentation, (c) context for the study, and (d) procedures used for recruitment, participation, and data collection. I also describe how I analyzed and interpreted the data, and include a table clarifying my data collection and analysis plans (see Table 1).

Participant Selection Logic

Research population. The initial target research population was women (ages 18-64) from distinct social classes who are currently employed or have had previous work experience. Based on the emerging importance of generational impact within the developing theory, I used theoretical sampling to add participants that were outside of the age group, so the target population changed to include all women 18 or older. I selected participants through purposive theoretical sampling from among respondents to invitations posted in organizations in Pittsburgh, PA. I asked respondents to fill out an online form to provide demographic and career data and then I interviewed them over the phone to collect qualitative data about their perceptions, experiences, and beliefs about the meaningfulness of work.

Sampling strategy. According to Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007), choosing the sampling scheme, the plan for selection of study participants, is important because it impacts the power that the qualitative study has for analytic generalizability. I used a purposive theoretical sampling scheme, as is typical of grounded theory research, which means researchers intentionally seek out participants that will add to the theoretical framework being developed, as well as comparison groups from which they collect new data based on the categories that are emerging from the current data. This meant posting invitations for participation at two organizations dedicated to empowering women and working with people from varying social classes, because these locations were likely to lead to participants who could help deepen understanding of my topic. I also collected data from "disconfirming cases which may contradict parts of the present theory development and hence enrich theory development" (Gurd, 2008, p. 128). Although my

proximity to the participants also made it a convenience sample, theoretical basis exists for locating this study in a city highly influenced by social class stratification (Florida, 2004) and gender inequality (Deitrick & Briem, 2009), which is important to understanding the potential impact of social class and gender on perceptions of the meaningfulness of work (Fouad & Fitzpatrick, 2009).

Sample size. The target number of participants was 20-30, with five or six representing each social class or job level. This number, which is typical for grounded theory studies (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007), allowed for sufficient diversity of race, ethnicity, age, job type, and level of work, but was still small enough for all responses to in-depth interview questions to be effectively collected and transcribed. My study met this target number, as there were 25 participants total and six or seven representing each social class.

The overall number of participants depended on the amount necessary to reach saturation level of the data, the point at which potential categories have been fully extracted from the data (Dougherty, Kramer, Klatzke, & Rogers, 2009). In grounded theory research, theoretical sampling requires sample size and characteristics to be evaluated on an ongoing basis during the data collection and analysis process (Fendt & Sachs, 2008). After I collected and analyzed data from 22 participants, theoretical sampling led me to interview three additional participants from different social classes in order to further the theory-building process and to ensure the data were sufficiently saturated to warrant moving on from the data collection phase.

Sample characteristics. I selected participants for this study using a theoretical sampling scheme from among adult women (ages 18 and over) who responded to an

invitation for participation posted in organizations in Pittsburgh, PA. The sample included individuals representing diverse social, occupational, and cultural groups, including "participants in a variety of occupations and jobs who held positions of relatively higher or lower rank in an effort to facilitate maximum variation" (Berg, Wrzesniewski et al., 2010, p. 161). According to Young (2009), "some variables relevant to career decisions include age, ethnicity, gender, education, skill levels, seniority, and industry" (p. 295). Dik and Duffy (2009) suggested that religion and spirituality could also play a role in career choices. Therefore, demographic factors that I considered when selecting participants included age, race or ethnicity, gender, religion, job type and level, educational background, and number of years in current position. I also examined social class, as McIlveen, Beccaria, du Preez, and Patton (2010) recommended that social class and classism be taken into consideration in career counseling training, defining social class as "a multifaceted psychological phenomenon, rather than a simplistic demographic and objectified descriptor based on income, occupation, or geo-graphic location" (p. 5).

While I based most of the sampling qualifications on experience or demographic characteristics, I also based the criteria for participation on the ability to communicate effectively in the interviews. As noted by Morse (2010), participants must also be able to expend the time needed to sufficiently provide their information or share their story, have the capability to be reflective, and be both "willing and able to speak articulately about the experience" (p. 231).

Justification for inclusion or exclusion. To be included in this study, participants needed to be female adults (ages 18 or over) who were both willing and able to participate in telephone interview sessions, to understand the questions asked, and to

respond to those questions. Participants also had to be either currently employed or have been employed in the past. I used the demographic information survey to identify individuals who met the inclusion criteria and those that needed to be excluded from the study because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. I also excluded potential participants who did not appear to add positively toward the theoretical development (such as those that were too similar to current participants to add sufficient variety).

Context of the Study

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This study took place within the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area (also called Greater Pittsburgh), "as defined by the United States Census Bureau, which includes seven counties in Western Pennsylvania" (Hegewisch & Williams, 2010). The problem that this region has had historically with social class polarization (Prins, 2009) and continuing issues with gender inequality (Deitrick & Briem, 2009) made Pittsburgh an ideal location to explore possible influences of gender and class distinctions (Florida, 2004). While there has been some degree of urban renewal and a push for improving Pittsburgh's competitiveness through greater inclusion of diversity and by attracting high quality employees to the area (Benner, Fox, Fox, & Axel-Lute, 2008), there are still major problems with inequity that were addressed in this study.

Interview location. It is important that the interviews take place in a location where participants will feel comfortable, where there is privacy and the ability to limit distractions and intrusions. The interviews were conducted over the phone, so I made the calls from a locked room in my house in order to limit distractions and intrusions. I also

cautioned the participants to seek a private place to take the phone call so that their interviews would not be overheard or interrupted.

Instrumentation

I used two types of instruments to collect data for this study: interviews to get responses to questions about perceptions participants have of the meaningfulness of work, how important it is to their career choices, and how it influences their workplace experiences and behavior, and a demographic survey to gather demographic information (e.g., age, ethnicity, social class, religion, educational background, and occupational history). I also used memos for theory development and then included the content of the memos as data.

Interview guide. For the interviews, I developed a general interview guide (see Appendix B) with questions that provided direction for the interview without limiting the freedom to follow leads or to ask additional questions in response to what the participant discussed. The questions in the guide were based on the research questions, but with prompts for questions based on what the literature review revealed as potential factors related to the meaningfulness of work. For example, for the research question requesting each participant to share their thoughts about what may have influenced their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, I asked questions about family of origin, community, or societal expectations, as the literature suggested that these factors might have an impact (Schnell, 2011). However, it is a fine line because in grounded theory studies it is important to allow the theory to emerge and not use previous research to push the data to conform to a preconceived notion.

Although I used the demographic survey to obtain information about participants' occupation, income, and education to get an objective idea of their socioeconomic status (SES), I assessed each participant's subjective understanding of her social class and its impact by asking questions based on the Social Class Worldview Model (SCWM) in the interview (Diemer et al., 2013). These questions asked the participants about how they view social class and about their experiences with it within the following domains: (a) consciousness or awareness of social class, (b) referent groups (including family, peers, and aspiration), (c) property relationship (materialism), (d) lifestyle (organization of time and resources), and (e) behaviors (Fouad & Fitzpatrick, 2009).

Demographic survey. Most of the items on the survey that I created collected standard demographic data, basic contact information, age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and marital status. Some items were helpful for evaluating participants' work-related experience and their socioeconomic status, such as job title, number of years in their current job, educational background (both for the participant and her parents), annual income, and career information. Because the specific location within the Pittsburgh area has important implications due to its unique social class and gender discrepancies, I also asked participants about the number of years that they have lived in the Pittsburgh area.

Researcher memos. I used the literature about memoing in grounded theory research as a basis for memos, which I stored in the NVivo database so that I could code them as data. As suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2008), I wrote memos throughout the analytic process that included, but were not limited to: "open data exploration, identifying/developing the properties and dimensions concepts/categories, making

comparisons and asking questions, elaborating the paradigm (the relationships between conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences), and developing a storyline" (p. 118).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participant Recruitment and Participation

Participant recruitment. I selected an organization in the Greater Pittsburgh area for participant recruitment because of its emphasis on supporting and empowering women and its potential for producing participants from a wide variety of social classes. On April 5, 2014, my contact person within this organization posted my participant recruitment flyers in the main office of her organization and at multiple branches in low-income areas, and she also handed them out to senior executives of the organization. When the response to my initial attempt for recruitment did not yield at least 20 demographically diverse participants with the potential for contributing to theory development, I obtained IRB permission to advertise for participants through another organization that focuses on female empowerment and advocacy for gender equity.

Screening surveys. The advertisements for participation in this study contained my email address and phone number so that participants could contact me to express interest in taking part in the study. I responded to their phone calls or emails by asking if they had any questions and then provided the participants with a link to take an online demographic survey. I was willing to provide a paper version of the survey to anyone that wanted to participate but did not have access to the Internet or did not feel comfortable filling out an online survey, but this was not necessary as all of the participants used the online survey. Before they could begin taking the survey, I required participants to digitally sign a consent form in which I made it clear that this was an initial screening

phase only and not a guarantee that they would be selected for interviews, and I also provided information about confidentiality, risks, and privacy of the survey information they were submitting.

Participant selection. A total of 40 women responded to my invitation to participate. Seven were unresponsive after initial contact and did not take the demographic screening survey. After receiving their demographic surveys online, I excluded two more potential participants because they did not meet the study requirements for inclusion.

I selected 31 demographically diverse women to participate in the interviews and I invited them by phone or email to set up an appointment for their phone interviews (at a time convenient for them). I also emailed each potential participant a copy of the informed consent letter, with instructions to sign it and return it to me via email, fax, or mail. Additionally, I asked participants if they preferred to be compensated with a $10 restaurant gift card or a $10 donation to the charity of their choice, as well as details about the restaurant or the charity so that they could be sent a gift card or donation receipt. I informed those who were not chosen that they had not been selected for the interview at this time but that their willingness to participate was appreciated.

Of those invited to the interview, four were unresponsive to my attempts to set up an interview, one withdrew from participation, and one was sent the requested compensation and scheduled for the interview, but did not show up and then remained unresponsive. Of the 25 participants who went through the interview process, nine received restaurant gift cards, 11 received receipts of charitable donations made in their name, and five declined compensation.

Introductory greeting and informed consent. I began the interview phone calls by warmly greeting the participants, welcoming them, and asking if they were still comfortable with doing the interview at that time. I reminded participants about the informed consent form that they had previously signed and returned, which included potential risks and benefits, steps taken to ensure data protection, their rights (including to withdraw at any time), and compensation for their time ($10 gift card to a local restaurant or a $10 donation to a charity of their choice). Once fully informed, I asked them to orally confirm their informed consent to participate in the study and their consent for the interview to be audio recorded. I also asked them to describe what they hoped to learn through participating in the study and I instructed them to feel free to ask any questions they may have at any point during the interview. The interview itself took place immediately following the greeting and oral confirmation of consent.

Follow-up procedures and participant debriefing. After each interview session, I thanked participants and advised them of the next steps in the research process. I also informed them that there might be follow-up interviews to expand upon or clarify information from their previous interview sessions, or they might be asked additional questions based on analysis of previous data gathered in the iterative process of constant comparison (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). After completing the interviews, I asked participants for their feedback on the process and interpretation, provided information about the results of the study, and invited them to ask any questions that they may have.

Data Collection

I collected data in the form of demographic surveys, verbatim transcribed semistructured individual interviews, and researcher memos. As is essential for grounded

theory research, data collection did not take place in a single, distinct phase, but was an ongoing, cyclical process of moving back and forth between the data and the analysis to ensure that there was sufficient depth in the explanatory theories that were discovered through openness to emergent concepts and to the perception of relationships between those concepts (Sousa & Hendriks, 2006). This process is described in a discussion about qualitative research methods, in which Shin, Kim, and Chung (2009) noted that "inquiry-making, listening, searching, comparing, verifying, compositing, confirming, and evaluating are carried out in endless cycles to ensure fundamentals of knowledge" (p. 856).

In order to provide ample data, grounded theory researchers seek out comparison groups from which they collect new data based on the categories that are emerging from the data analysis, followed by "disconfirming cases which may contradict parts of the present theory development and hence enrich theory development" (Gurd, 2008). For my study, this meant that I analyzed the results of the initial data collection through the process of constant comparison, and then I collected more data until the information that I collected sufficiently provided enough data for the theory to emerge and until I did not find disconfirming data that invalidated the emerging theory.

Demographic survey data. I collected demographic data using a survey I designed for this study, which was used both as a screening tool to rule out potential participants who did not meet study requirements and also as another source of data for analysis. Data collected included basic contact information, age, race, ethnicity, religion, marital status, job title, number of years in current job, years living in Pittsburgh, educational background (both for the participant and her parents), annual income, and

career information. The survey was web-based and located on a secure server. After receiving survey responses from participants, I imported the information from the surveys into my NVivo database.

Interview data. I collected data from personal, in-depth semistructured interviews that I conducted via the telephone, recorded onto audio files, and then transcribed line by line. Interviews were anticipated to take from 20 to 60 minutes, and ended up ranging from 28 to 87 minutes, with an average of 43 minutes, median of 39 minutes, and mode of 36 minutes. I conducted the interviews from April 5, 2014 to March 11, 2015 (see Appendix E for interview details), using the semistructured general interview guide I created specifically for use in this study (see Appendix B).

The initial interview questions addressed both the central research questions and sub-questions. For example, to answer the first question about their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work (RQ1), I asked participants, "What do you think of when you hear the phrase 'meaningfulness of work'? How would you define meaningfulness?" In order to answer RQ2, about the factors they perceive as having caused or contributed to their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, I asked participants, "What influenced your perceptions of the meaningfulness of work?" Depending on how much or how little they answered on their own, I used prompts to help encourage more in-depth and comprehensive responses. As part of gathering information about potential influences, I also asked participants what they perceived their social class to be, what influenced them to choose that classification, and how it impacts their lives. In order to find out how their meaningfulness of work perceptions impacted their career choices (RQ3) and influenced their workplace experiences and behaviors (RQ4), I asked participants directly, "How do

you think your perception of the meaningfulness of work impacted your career choices?" and "Has the meaningfulness of work impacted the way you interact with others in your workplace, the amount of time you spend at work, or the effort you put into your job? If so, how?"

Due to the iterative process of constant comparison in grounded theory research, analyzing the results of data collected from each interview opened up additional areas of inquiry for subsequent interviews (O'Reilly et al., 2012). I added new questions and made adaptations to the interviews according to what the participants said, including "follow-up questions to encourage participants to expand on relevant responses" (Berg, Wrzesniewski et al., 2010, p. 163). For example, when a participant mentioned how her perceptions of the meaningfulness of work were influenced by books she read, especially biographies of historical figures, I added a question about what books or historical figures may have influenced participants.

Researcher memos. Additional data included in the study came from memos that I wrote, exploring reactions and thoughts that occurred in the process of planning the study (such as exploring potential biases and motives for the underlying design philosophy), during data collection (such as impressions, thoughts, and ideas that arose when interviewing participants), during data analysis (such as reasoning for category choices), and during interpretation (such as providing an explanation for the interpretations made).

Although the memos for my study were helpful throughout each of those phases, memos played a larger role in the interpretation phase designed to address RQ5, helping to discover or develop an explanatory emergent theory, because I did not directly address

RQ5 in the questions I asked participants during the interviews. In grounded theory studies, researcher memoing provides data based on "periods of structured reflection and periods of spontaneous recollections, both associated with various emotional experiences" (McIlveen et al., 2010, p. 8). I used the memo feature in the NVivo software to enhance reflexivity, to find connections between codes, and to form links between memos and other forms of data (Bringer et al., 2004).

Table 1

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Research Question	Data Collection	Data Source	Data Analysis
RQ 1: What perceptions do women from diverse social classes have of the meaningfulness of work?	- Semistructured, in-depth individual interviews	- Interview participants	Grounded theory analysis with QSR NVivo for constant comparison & coding
RQ 2: What influenced their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work?	- Semistructured, in-depth individual interviews - Demographic information	- Interview participants - Demographic survey	Grounded theory analysis with QSR NVivo for constant comparison & coding
RQ 3: What impact do they believe their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work have or have had on their career choices?	- Semistructured, in-depth individual interviews	- Interview participants	Grounded theory analysis with QSR NVivo for constant comparison & coding
RQ 4: How do they believe that their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work influence their workplace experiences and behaviors?	- Semistructured, in-depth individual interviews	- Interview participants	Grounded theory analysis with QSR NVivo for constant comparison & coding
RQ 5: What substantive theory can help explain differences in the perceptions that women have of the meaningfulness of work?	- Literature review - Interpretation of analyzed data	- Scholarly literature - Researcher memos - Combined data from interview participants	Grounded theory analysis with QSR NVivo for constant comparison & coding

Data Analysis

The choice of data analysis method for grounded theory research is highly dependent on the philosophical approach favored by the individual researcher. Based on a philosophical approach in which reality is knowable, and also on the recommendation made by Creswell (2007) that a structured grounded theory design is more appropriate for beginning qualitative researchers, the data analysis for this study followed the systematic grounded theory analysis procedure suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990). However, the existence of an inherent, knowable reality was also paired with the view that truth is multi-faceted, requiring a combined understanding from multiple perspectives in order to properly perceive reality's bigger picture. This value placed on understanding multiple ways of seeing and communicating reality also connected this study to an interpretive philosophical approach (Long, 2007).

Coding strategy. I analyzed the data by using an inductive process of constant comparison, in which I went back and forth between collecting and analyzing data (Walker & Myrick, 2006), to ensure that the emergent categorization and theorizing were based on a thorough, rigorous, in-depth examination of all of the data. Coding was accomplished in three interconnected phases that proceeded in a spiral, rather than in distinct sequential steps. In the open coding phase, I used line-by-line exploration of the data to determine the categories, sub-categories, and properties of the phenomenon or process under investigation. During the axial coding phase, I identified a central category, as well as causal conditions, strategies, context, intervening conditions, and consequences. Finally, in the selective coding phase, I developed a story that helped to explain the connections between categories. As is required for grounded theory studies,

the process of data collection and data analysis were interwoven (particularly during open coding, axial coding, and selective coding).

Qualitative data analysis software. I used QSR NVivo, a software program for qualitative data analysis, for data storage, memoing, coding, and theory modeling. This software program helped me to conduct in vivo analysis (directly using the words of the participants to help create the categories); to use a node-based tree structure for both open coding (category analysis) and axial coding (making links between codes which can be include as child nodes); and to engage in "coding according to demographic information, and the exploring of ideas visually with a modeler" (Bringer et al., 2006, p. 248). I added all of the collected data into NVivo, including data from demographic surveys, audio files and their transcriptions, and relevant scholarly literature. In addition, I used the software program to analyze and incorporate the researcher memos written throughout the process, including applying the codes already in use to the memos, searching them, and linking thoughts and ideas from the memos to the specific parts of the interview transcript that they related to most.

Data Interpretation

Although grounded theory studies begin with a focus on the raw data, breaking the information gleaned from the data down into categories and then putting it together to tell a whole story, in the interpretation phase the data are integrated and then viewed in light of other resources, such as existing research evidence and participants' perspectives.

Integrating data. I used the coding process to integrate different sources of data, such as demographic surveys, participant interviews, occupational descriptions, and researcher memos, and then I connected related concepts using QSR NVivo software to

make links between them. To answer RQ1, I compared the descriptions participants provided of what they perceive the meaningfulness of work to be and how it is defined with other ways it has been defined in the literature and with how other participants defined it. For RQ2, I integrated the demographic survey data provided by participants with their answers to interview questions about factors that may have caused or influenced their meaningfulness of work. I used the combined data from interview transcripts, researcher memos, and other literature to help me answer RQ3 and RQ4. All of the data together, once analyzed and interpreted, helped form the answer to RQ5, resulting in an explanatory theory.

Existing research evidence. In grounded theory studies, existing research evidence is not used prior to data collection to form a conceptual framework, though it may be used to help establish the existence of a problem and to justify the use of grounded theory research to address it (Fendt & Sachs, 2008). However, existing research evidence does play an important role during the process of data interpretation, as previous research can help to provide a context for interpretation and can help triangulate the data, as the results that emerge from the data can be compared to other studies to note potential similarities or differences (Sousa & Hendriks, 2006).

Participants' perspectives. In qualitative research, participants are valued as individuals with unique perspectives and with voices that should be heard. As noted by Creswell (2007), qualitative research focuses on the meaning making and perspectives of the participants themselves, rather than on an external meaning assigned by the researcher. One of the most obvious ways to ensure that the participants' perspectives are reflected accurately in the interpretation of the data is for the researcher to check with

them to get feedback on the accuracy of the interpretation and to find out their thoughts and opinions about the results of the data analysis. After completing the data collection and analysis process, I checked in with interview participants individually to ask for their feedback as to whether or not my interpretation of the data made sense to them and accurately described their perspectives.

Issues of Trustworthiness

According to Collingridge and Gantt (2008), validity in qualitative research means "selecting an appropriate method for a given question and applying that method in a coherent, justifiable, and rigorous manner" (p. 391). I made the choice to use grounded theory for this study with careful consideration (using researcher reflexivity through memoing) of the most appropriate method to answer my research questions. To make sure my research fit the needs of a grounded theory study, I verified that the key element studied focused on a process, action, or interaction in order to develop or discover a larger theoretical model, generated directly from the coding of the data (Bertolotti & Tagliaventi, 2007). As the trustworthiness of research results is a primary goal of validation for qualitative research, I ensured the trustworthiness of my study through its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Amis & Silk, 2008; Nastasi & Schensul, 2005).

Credibility

As Nastasi and Schensul (2005) pointed out, credibility can be demonstrated using prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, reflexive journaling, an audit trail, and referential adequacy. I increased the credibility of my study by investing sufficient time (prolonged

engagement) to ensure that the target phenomenon was understood in both breadth and depth, including both typical and atypical cases (such as both those who value the meaningfulness of work highly and those who did not view it as a priority in their career decision-making process).

Triangulation of the data is one way to show the value of rigorous qualitative research methods (Annells, 2006). In this study, I compared the qualitative description of their social class given by participants during the interviews with the answers they gave in the demographic survey revealing their objective socioeconomic status (SES). Other ways that I used triangulation were adapted to the emergent nature of the data during the process of analysis. For example, when participants mentioned that the for-profit or non-profit organizational status was an influence on their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, I found it to be helpful to triangulate by examining the web sites of the organizations that employed them for indication of non-profit or for-profit status. I used negative case analysis to account for disconfirming evidence. I also gave participants the opportunity to check the accuracy of the data perception, transcription, and interpretation, as well as to read and discuss their opinions about the results before publication. Review of relevant literature and occupational descriptions also helped to evaluate the accuracy of the data.

Transferability

To demonstrate transferability, studies must include rich enough description to enable other researchers to create their own similar studies that can test the believability of the methods in a particular context (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). While external validity is not applicable in terms of other researchers achieving the same exact results, the ability

to conduct the same kind of research is made more reliable by a high degree of specificity in describing the research methods, context, participants, researcher biases or relationships and in clearly operationalizing all variables, constructs, concepts, and terms used. According to Delmar (2010), in addition to providing details of the methodology it is also important for the researcher to clarify his or her own personal ontological and epistemological position as this has an impact on how the research was approached.

By spending considerable time and effort collecting the stories that participants have to tell about their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, I was able to increase the specificity (thick description) and transparency of this study. I gave in-depth descriptions about my research design, sampling scheme, interactions with participants, data collection and analysis. I also discussed the major categories that arose and how I selected them, the concepts that were generated and how they were related, the density of conceptual linkages, and consideration for variation and broader conditions.

Dependability

In grounded theory research, reflexivity (both by the researcher and the participants) is considered to be an important tool for ensuring dependability, such as consideration given to the veracity of the statements made and how representative they are of the general perspectives of the researcher and of the participants (Joannidès & Berland, 2008). Rather than statistical generalizability from a sample to a population, as is common in quantitative studies, qualitative researchers often focus on generalizability that is analytical, based on theoretical generalization, and naturalistic, based on experiential generalization (Buchanan & Bryman, 2007).

Dependability can be shown through the use of a reflexive journal and through an audit trail (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). Reflexivity is an essential element of grounded theory research in which researchers use memos throughout the research process to provide an in-depth record of their thought processes, ideas, conceptual frameworks, perceptions, biases, and reactions (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005). I increased the dependability of this study by engaging in reflexivity through the memos that I created throughout the process detailing my thoughts, process of research, ideas, conceptions, biases, and reactions.

Confirmability

Nastasi and Schensul (2005) also noted that an audit trail, along with referential adequacy, might demonstrate confirmability. By consistently keeping memos throughout the research process, I provided an audit trail that increased confirmability for this study (Montgomery & Bailey, 2007). The use of QSR NVivo also helped to create an audit trail, keeping track of each step in the research process, providing evidence of referential adequacy (Bringer et al., 2006). I also achieved referential adequacy through the data management plan, by establishing the retention of an archive record of the data that will be stored in a locked safe for at least ten years.

Ethical Procedures

Legal regulations and ethical guidelines require researchers to make sure that the rights of human participants are protected, that the benefits of the research are greater than the risks, that risks are minimized as much as possible, that participation is voluntary after potential risks have been fully disclosed, and that benefits and risks are equitably distributed (Koocher, 2007). In addition to complying with IRB regulations for Walden

University (IRB approval number 03-17-14-0084070), I also have certification of successful completion of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Human Research Protections training (see Appendix C).

I did not recruit participants or collect data in countries other than the United States, but before I conducted my research in Pennsylvania, I made myself aware of research legislation for the state of Pennsylvania (which is based on APA ethics principles). For example, psychologists in the state of Pennsylvania have a legal obligation to carefully consider how their research will contribute to human welfare and to psychological science in a way that most effectively allows them to "carry out their investigations with respect for the people who participate, with concern for their dignity and welfare, and in compliance with Federal and State regulations and professional standards governing the conduct of research with human participants" (State Board of Psychology, 1976 & Supp. 1998). In this study, I followed ethical procedures to comply with these regulations and guidelines, including: (a) obtaining permission to advertise for participants from all organizational partners; (b) protecting participants' confidentiality; (c) requiring all participants to sign an informed consent form for both the initial screening survey and for participating in the study itself; (d) using secure data management techniques; and (e) minimizing risks while working towards an equitable distribution of potential risks and benefits.

Obtaining permission from organizational partners. I obtained permission to conduct this study from organizations representing a variety of employment levels (e.g., blue-collar, clerical/service, professional, and administrative). Initial contact took place through an email to make an appointment to discuss my study. During this meeting, I

explained the study in detail, including potential risks and benefits for the organization and for participants. I asked for permission to pursue participants through their organization by providing participant recruitment flyers that they could hang or distribute to inform their staff and clients about the opportunity to take part in my study.

Confidentiality. Beneficence requires consideration for protecting participants from harmful breaches of confidentiality. Researchers need to pay attention to confidentiality throughout the study, but particularly when it comes to contacting the participants, allowing other people to view the data, and in the dissemination phase of the study. Although full protection of privacy was not an option for this study, as my communications with potential participants and consent procedures required that personal identifiers be shared with me, I protected their confidentiality. The risk of confidentiality or privacy breaches was minimal, as participants were not revealed to the companies they work for. I also used pseudonyms in place of participants' names and I removed or disguised all identifiable information.

Contacting participants. I asked the cooperating organizations to hang up or distribute participant recruitment flyers that I created or to inform staff members and clients that they thought might be interested in participating how to call or email me for more information. Criteria for participation was specified in the notice itself, including an age range of 18-64 initially (and then 18 or over when representatives of the older generation were added to the study), the ability and desire to respond to in-depth interview questions in English, and current or previous employment. I included my phone number and my email address on the recruitment flyers so that potential participants

could call or email to let me know that they were interested in participating in the initial screening process for my study.

Those who were interested and believed they met the criteria for participation called or emailed and I asked them to provide their contact information and then sent them an email containing a link to take the survey online. Having the interested participants call me helped to maintain confidentiality, rather than the organization or organizations sending contact information of all of their clients to me, which would have included people who would not end up wanting to participate.

I have kept contact information for participants in a password-protected file that only I can access. After I completed the data collection, I retained a link between the codes assigned to participants and their personal identifiers in order to recognize which participants wanted me to withdraw their data and also so that I could provide participants with individualized reports based on their goals for the study and their interview answers. After the study was over, or if anyone decided during the study that they did not want to participate any longer, the contact information was deleted.

Access to research data. I did not provide anyone else with the participants' personally identifying information or with the links between participant codes and their contact information.

Privacy during dissemination. Ethical psychologists make sure they provide research participants and organizational partners that may be affected by the dissemination of the results of the study with the results before prior to publication. When they do make the results public, researchers are ethically and legally required to protect the confidentiality and privacy of participants by not allowing personally identifiable

information to be included (C. B. Fisher, 2009). Before publishing the results of my study, I provided participants with the results to review in the form of a comprehensive customized report based on what they hoped to learn through the study and also on what they said during the interview. This report is not visible or accessible by any other participants, companies, or the public. Also, I will not include any personally identifiable information in articles or books based on this study that I may publish in the future.

Informed consent. As noted by Knapp (2008), many ethical dilemmas can be avoided or mitigated by setting and clearly communicating explicit boundaries, expectations, responsibilities, roles, and guidelines in advance. Legal requirements for informed consent are based on the ethical principle of autonomy, which helps to protect the dignity and self-determination of participants (Frankel & Siang, 1999).

Consent form. For this study, I respected participant autonomy by requiring each participant to sign a consent form after she was fully informed about the study (both orally and in writing). I provided participants with one form for consent to participate in the initial demographic information web-based survey and another consent form for those I selected to participate in the in-depth interview phase of the study. This form also included consent for audio recording the telephone interview sessions. In the consent form, I provided participants with detailed information about the voluntary nature of participation; their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time; potential risks, including limitations on confidentiality; potential benefits; my contact information; contact information for a Walden representative with whom they could discuss their rights; and compensation details. I also gave participants the opportunity to ask questions and learn more about the study before giving their consent.

Vulnerable populations. Those most vulnerable to not having the mental or emotional capacity (such as children, pregnant women and unborn babies, the elderly, people in extreme crisis, and people with cognitive or psychological disabilities) or the freedom (such as prisoners, the economically disadvantaged, or those in custodial institutions) to be able to give fully informed consent are specially protected by ethical guidelines and laws (LeCompte, Schensul, Weeks, & Singer, 1999). Vulnerable populations that might be represented in this study include facility residents, those with mental or emotional disabilities, those in crisis, and the economically disadvantaged.

Because all of the participants had to be competent enough to have been employed, to call or email to volunteer for participation, to fill out the demographic survey, and to indicate that they were able to understand and respond to interview questions, I do not believe competency to give consent was a problem. However, I made sure the information was fully described in clear language (both written and oral) and provided ample opportunity for them to ask questions before signing the informed consent form.

Minors, the elderly, and pregnant women. Inclusion for this study initially required participants to be adults between 18 and 64, so I screened for age to exclude minors and elderly individuals. Participants over the age of 64 were added to the study later, based on the emerging theory. I initially chose to exclude those over 64 because I thought being retired or soon to retire would prevent them from answering questions about the implications of meaningfulness for their future plans for work, but the direction that the research took made consideration of generational issues more of a focal issue than consideration of future employment. Due to the focus of this study on

meaningfulness in the context of work, including discussion of previous work experiences, I did not include children in my study (avoiding a potential vulnerable population). The invitation for participation specified that the age requirement excluded those 17 and under. I verified participants' ages based on their dates of birth listed on the demographic survey.

Facility residents, non-English speakers, coercive relationships. Although I did not recruit in any residential facilities, it is possible that participants may have been facility residents without my knowledge as it is possible for residents to work during the day and then go back to their treatment facility, halfway house, or other residential facility at night. I alerted participants to the voluntary nature of participation, provided them with the opportunity to ask questions, and checked with them verbally to make sure they understood what they were signing. The fact that they voluntarily called or emailed to be included in the study suggested freedom from coercion. Facility residents also needed to be able to use the phone in a private environment to be included, and information about their residency was not divulged in the results.

I also screened non-English speakers so that they could be excluded. Participants needed to confirm that they were able to understand and answer the interview questions. If they could not, then they would have been excluded. In order to avoid the potential for coercive participation due to existing or expected relationships with the researcher, it is important that multiple relationships be avoided (such as participants who are also subordinates, students, or clients of the researcher). However, there is no risk of coercion as I do not have any subordinates or students and examining the names of potential participants precluded current clients from being selected for the study.

Mentally or emotionally disabled individuals or people in crisis. Participants might have been mentally or emotionally disabled or undergoing personal crisis without my knowledge. As long as those who are mentally or emotionally disabled or in crisis were able to give informed consent, fill out the demographic information form, participate in telephone interview sessions, and understand and respond to interview questions, then it would not have been appropriate or just to exclude their opinions and perspectives from this study that could benefit them by helping them potentially improve their career outlook and to understand themselves better (Blustein, 2008). However, they did need to be mentally and emotionally capable enough to call or email to volunteer to participate. If they were selected for participation after screening, then the regular safety and privacy risks applied.

I explained the voluntary nature of participation clearly, including the right to withdraw at any point, and I encouraged them to consider whether they were currently able to commit their time. I also made sure that they had my contact information and was flexible when they needed to reschedule their interview or follow-up. Using the telephone to conduct the interview may have made it easier for those with disabilities or in crisis situations to participate. I took extra care to ensure that their identity and disability status or crisis were not disclosed, and I made a list of counselors (some offering income-based payment plans) available for all participants should the interviews cause too much distress (see Appendix D).

Economically disadvantaged. My research topic required at least some of the participants to be economically disadvantaged in order to have representatives from all different social classes. Although I provided all of the participants with a $10 gift card to

a local restaurant or a $10 donation to a charity of their choice to thank them for their time, I did not overly induce participation, as the amount of the compensation is reasonable for the time they took to participate. I also assured participants that they would still be compensated even if they withdrew. I did not ask participants to spend any money to participate and I kept their economic statuses confidential.

Secure data management. Another source of protection for participants is the level of security used in managing, storing, and dispensing of collected data (Singh, Taneja, & Mangalaraj, 2009). For this study, I took steps for secure management of demographic survey data, interview data, and researcher memos. It is not necessary to secure public occupational or demographic data, as they are already available to everyone who wishes to access them. I imported all of the collected data into QSR NVivo software and stored in a password-protected file within that program.

Demographic survey data. Protection for demographic survey data included collecting web-based surveys using encrypted data transfer, password-protected access, and a secured survey format.

Interview data. I recorded each interview in audio format and then transcribed the interviews word for word into a password-protected file in NVivo. I also saved audio files and transcripts from interviews in password-protected files on my computer with a copy burned onto discs and saved in a locked, fireproof, waterproof safe. I also saved all data within QSR NVivo in a password-protected file.

Researcher memos. I typed memos directly into a password-protected file within NVivo, making use of the memo feature included within the software, promoting reflexivity and allowing links to be made between memos and other forms of data

(Bringer et al., 2004). Although the memos did not necessarily contain identifiable information about organizations or participants, it is important to keep them secure due to their personal nature, as they record my private thoughts, ideas, and opinions.

Data retention and disposal. After the dissertation was approved, I saved all digital files (including audio files, scanned and web-based survey files, and any other electronic or digital files associated with this study) on an archive DVD to be kept for at least ten years in a locked safe.

Minimizing harm and demonstrating justice. The ethical guideline of beneficence underlies the legal obligation psychologists have to carefully weigh the benefits of any research study against the risks to participants as they make research design decisions (Frankel & Siang, 1999). As noted by Fisher (2009), psychologists can successfully navigate ethical ambiguities caused by conflicts in legal, ethical, clinical, or reimbursement issues by asking themselves what their responsibilities are to each party involved. In order to ensure that justice prevails, researchers must compare potential risks and benefits of the study, acting to minimize the harm that could occur due to risks that may or may not have been anticipated.

Justice. According to Prilleltensky (1989) and O'Neill (2005), psychologists have a responsibility to go beyond simply treating human participants according to ethical and legal guidelines, but also to make sure that the research that they are conducting will result in positive social change, is empowering, and is conducted with mercy, compassion, justice, and respect for diversity. Choosing a subject for research that will benefit humanity in general, and hopefully the research participants in particular, can be one way to ensure that human participants are being treated with dignity. Qualitative

research tends to be empowering and respectful of differences based on the underlying belief that each individual perspective is unique and valuable, empowering people by providing a way for their voices to be heard (Amis & Silk, 2008). In order to uphold justice, researchers need to make sure that the sampling strategy used is equitable, which requires balancing the need to not over-recruit those that cannot be adequately protected during the study due to easy availability, with the need to avoid under-recruiting a particular participant group, reducing their opportunity to enjoy the benefits of the study (Lynn & Nelson, 2005).

Benefits. A better understanding of the processes that contribute to perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and the impact that those perceptions have on career choices and workplace behavior has the potential to aid in parenting decisions, vocational guidance, career counseling, job design, employee development, employee engagement, leadership, recruitment choices, and retention efforts. Participants in this study might have benefitted through reflexivity, as the interview helped them to better understand themselves and their motivations, influences, career choices, and workplace behavior (Ybema et al., 2009). They also received individualized reports after the data were analyzed and interpreted. Organizations can also use the results in career development program design, evaluation, or improvement.

Risks. The previously mentioned potential benefits of this study need to be weighed against the potential risks. Although I took precautions to ensure confidentiality of the data (noted in sections on confidentiality and secure data management above), demographic survey data or interview data could have been intercepted through online survey transmission or stolen from my home office. People in the participants'

environment might have overheard phone interviews if they were in a public space or not alone in their location. By making sure to conduct phone interviews from my home office with the door locked, I helped minimize the risk of unwanted intrusions from other people on my end.

There was also the potential for participants to share information (without being asked) that is personal, private, and not relevant to the study. This is particularly likely in qualitative research and in semistructured interviews as the adaptive, emergent structure and open-ended questions allow room for unexpected answers (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

Though there was no risk of physical injury for participants involved in this study, there was the potential for participants to experience some psychological distress and confusion greater than normally experienced in daily life due to discussing feelings about their career, workplace behaviors, social class, and life events that may have influenced their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. These feelings could potentially lead to decreased satisfaction with their current job, which could also result in a risk of economic or social loss if employees became unhappy enough to leave their jobs. There is no risk of misunderstanding as the result of deception because the study did not incorporate deception tactics.

Minimizing or preventing harm. Although the risks in this study were unlikely to occur and the potential benefits to the individuals, companies, and society as a whole appeared to outweigh the risks, it is important for researchers to be prepared to handle problems should they present themselves during the course of the study. For example, I provided participants with resources to help them to receive counseling (see Appendix D)

if they experienced any distress during the interviews, whether or not they decided to continue participating in the study. If any unintentional breaches of confidentiality or privacy had occurred (such as intercepted or stolen data), I would have contacted affected participants and alerted them to what information was compromised.

In addition to the ideas for minimizing or preventing harm mentioned in previous sections, the potential for harm can also be minimized if researchers clarify in advance the limitations of the study, the potential for results to be unexpected and not necessarily what the participants want to hear, and what will or will not be possible for the researcher to do to help the participants if problems surface during the study. I included this information in the explanation of the study that I provided to the participants before they signed the informed consent form.

One of the primary ways that I minimized or prevented harm in this study was through the oversight of Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is a protective partner, offering ethical and legal counsel to ensure that participants are treated with respect (requiring autonomy and protection for vulnerable populations), with beneficence (eliminating or reducing risks and making sure the benefits outweigh any dangers), and with justice (making sure that the participants are fairly chosen and that the benefits and the risks are equitably distributed) (Frankel & Siang, 1999; Lynn & Nelson, 2005). The IRB approval number for this study was 03-17-14-0084070. If unexpected risks or conflicts of interest appeared, if a change in the situation or participants required reevaluation of the study, or if there was a breach of confidentiality, I would have contacted the IRB for guidance and filed an adverse event form or a request for change in procedures form as appropriate.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the type of method that I used to address the research questions, along with the rationale for that choice, and what my role was as the researcher. I described details of how the research was carried out, including the sampling, selection, and recruitment of participants; data collection using a demographic survey, in-depth interviews, and researcher memos; and data analysis and interpretation. This was followed by a discussion about the trustworthiness of my study and about the steps that I took to ensure that my study was conducted ethically. In the next chapter, I will move into examining the results of this grounded theory study, followed by a final chapter discussing those results and the theory that emerged throughout this process.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

To fulfill this study's purpose of developing an explanatory theory for the processes involved with perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, I used grounded theory methodology to analyze transcribed data from in-depth phone interviews with 25 women from different social classes. I explored the following research questions: (a) What perceptions do women from diverse social classes have of the meaningfulness of work? (b) What influenced their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work? (c) What impact do they believe their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work had on their career choices? (d) How do they believe their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work have influenced their workplace experiences and behaviors? and (e) What substantive theory might help explain differences in their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, the impact of those perceptions on career choices, and the influence of their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work on workplace experiences and behaviors? In this chapter, I will present the results of the analyzed data within the context of each of the first four interview questions. I will explore the fifth research question more thoroughly in Chapter 5. Before presenting the study results, I will discuss the participant demographics, data collection and analysis (including coding procedures), and the verification of the trustworthiness of this study. Pseudonyms were used for all participants to protect anonymity.

Demographics

The following demographic characteristics describe the 25 women who took the demographic screening survey, were accepted for participation in the study, and then took part in the interviews.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Frequencies

Characteristic	*n*	%
Race/Ethnicity		
Black/African-American	4	16%
White/Caucasian	21	84%
Religion		
Protestant	14	56%
Catholic	2	8%
Other	4	16%
Prefer Not to Say	2	8%
No Religious Preference	3	12%
Marital Status		
Married	14	56%
Living Together	1	4%
Single	6	24%
Separated	1	4%
Divorced	1	4%
Widowed	2	8%
Educational Level		
Less than high school	2	8%
Completed high school	1	4%
Some college	1	4%
Two-year college degree	2	8%
Four-year college degree	6	24%
Some graduate work	1	4%
Graduate degree	12	48%

Social Class

Social class is a demographic factor that played an important role in this study because the premise for the study specifically looked at perceptions of the meaningfulness of work from the perspective of women from different social classes. Social class was measured using both objective and subjective criteria. The objective measurement of their socioeconomic status (SES), for both childhood and current social class, was based on their answers from the demographic survey regarding their own and their parents' occupation (used to calculate occupational prestige scores), income (used to formulate equivalized income based on income range and number of people in the household), and education (highest level of education attained). It was not likely that participants would have known what their household income was when they were children, so in place of using an income range to determine childhood social class, I used measurements of wealth (home ownership and number of cars), as well as whether participants believed their parents' income was lower, higher, or the same as their own income.

I measured the participants' subjective social class using their responses to questions about social class during the interview. I did this by comparing the qualitative description of their social class given by participants during the interviews to the answers they gave in the demographic survey revealing their objective socioeconomic status. Table 3 summarizes the objective social class of the participants now and during their childhood.

Table 3

Objective Social Class

Social Class	Frequency	Percent
Current		
Lower/Working	6	24%
Lower Middle	6	24%
Middle	7	28%
Upper Middle/Upper	6	24%
Childhood		
Lower/Working	7	28%
Lower Middle	8	32%
Middle	5	20%
Upper Middle/Upper	5	20%

In order to have a sufficient size for each social class group, I combined the lower and working class groups into one and the upper middle and upper groups into another. The end result was four social classes: lower/working class (n = 6), lower-middle class (n = 6), middle class (n = 7), and upper-middle/upper class (n = 6).

Generation

The generation into which the participants were born impacted them in many ways. I calculated each participant's generation based on the date of birth they provided in the demographic screening survey. The break-down of participants by generation is shown in Table 4, while the generation of their parents is shown in Table 5.

Table 4

Participant Generation

Generation	Frequency	Percent
Silent/Traditionalist (1925-1945)	3	12%
Baby Boomers (1946-1964)	3	12%
Gen X/Busters (1965-1980)	7	28%
Gen Y/Millennial (1981-2000)	12	48%

Participants' childhood experiences were also influenced by their parents' generations, which I determined based on a typical generational calculation of 20 years beyond the birth date for the participants (Ball & Legagneur, 2014). One exception to this was a participant who specifically mentioned the age of her parents, who were almost 40 years older than she.

Table 5

Parent Generation

Generation	Frequency	Percent
Greatest/GI (1901-1924)	3	12%
Silent/Traditionalist (1925-1945)	4	16%
Baby Boomers (1946-1964)	11	44%
Gen X/Busters (1965-1980)	7	28%

Data Collection

I collected data from participants in the form of demographic surveys and verbatim transcribed semistructured individual interviews. Out of the 40 women who initially expressed interest in taking part in this study, seven never took the demographic survey and were non-responsive to further attempts to contact them. Responses to the demographic surveys were submitted online by 33 potential participants from March 27, 2014 through August 12, 2014. Out of those who took the survey, two were rejected because they did not meet the criteria; one withdrew after being accepted; and five more were accepted, but failed to respond further to multiple attempts to contact them in order to move into the interview phase. I conducted phone interviews from April 5, 2014 to March 11, 2015 (see Appendix E for interview details) and recorded audio files (with permission from participants) using eCamm Call Recorder for Skype. The interviews ranged from 28 to 87 minutes, with an average of 43 minutes, median of 39 minutes, and mode of 36 minutes.

There were several variations from the original data collection plan. After discovering that many of my participants brought up the issue of generational differences in perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, I sought and received IRB approval for a change of study to add participants from the older generation (over 65). After the majority of the analysis was completed, I also added additional interviews with three participants who represented different social classes to test the developing theory and to make sure the data was sufficiently saturated to warrant moving on from the data collection phase. Also, as additional areas of inquiry were raised by participants, I added relevant questions to subsequent interviews. For example, when a participant mentioned

how her perceptions of the meaningfulness of work were influenced by books she read, especially biographies of historical figures, I added a question about what books or historical figures may have influenced participants. When several participants mentioned that they thought their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work changed over time, I questioned subsequent participants about the stability of perceptions of the meaningfulness of work.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data through an inductive process of constant comparison (comparing incident with incident, within and between interviews, for similarities and differences), during which I went back and forth between the data collection and the analysis, so that categories and the emerging theory were based on a thorough, rigorous, in-depth examination of all of the data. Rather than proceeding in distinct sequential steps, I coded the data in a spiral through the open coding, axial coding, and selective coding phases.

Open coding. The first phase focused on open coding, in which line-by-line examination of the data determined the categories, sub-categories, and properties of the phenomenon or process under investigation. I began the open coding phase by listening to the interview audio files, reading through the transcribed transcripts to get an overview of what the participants were saying, and then going through the transcript of each interview, line by line, and coming up with codes that emerged from the data. As each new code emerged, I looked for its properties and dimensions, and based on those I organized the codes into hierarchies.

I went through all of the codes and combined or consolidated them in order to organize and refine them. Some of the coding organization was determined by the initial interview questions. For example, I was able to place "Interactions with Others" under the category "Workplace Behaviors" because that is the section that I was exploring when I asked the participant to describe their interactions with others in their workplace. By the end of this process, I had a total of 467 individual codes.

Axial coding. During the axial coding stage, I identified "impacting" as the central category, as it seemed to be key to understanding perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. It connected the way that meaningfulness was defined to the end results for individuals, organizations, and society. I then began to organize all of the codes as they related to that central category, including the context (contextual and experiential factors), causal conditions (shaping of meaningfulness of work perceptions through the filter of personal identity), intervening conditions (blocking factors and the channels that bypassed them), and consequences (the successful completion of the objectives for impact). Discrepant cases, such as those in which the participants did not seem to be motivated by the meaningfulness of work, were used to help refine the emerging theory and to gain a deeper understanding into the values held by participants.

Selective coding. In the selective coding phase, I used the analogy of a stream to develop a story that helped to explain the connections between categories. The story for this study will be fully explored during the discussion in Chapter 5.

Qualitative data analysis software. I used QSR NVivo, a software program for qualitative data analysis, for data storage, memoing, coding, and theory modeling. This software program helped me to classify participants and organizations, conduct in vivo

analysis (directly using the words of the participants to help create the categories), use a node-based tree structure for both open coding (category analysis) and axial coding (making links between codes which can be include as child nodes), and create multiple memos that aided in theory development. I also used this software to help integrate different sources of data, such as demographic surveys, participant interviews, occupational descriptions, and researcher memos, with links made connecting related concepts.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of research results is a primary goal of validation for qualitative research. Therefore, I verified the trustworthiness of my study by taking steps to increase its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

The credibility of my study was increased by investing sufficient time (prolonged engagement) to make sure that the target phenomenon was understood in both breadth and depth, including both typical and atypical cases (such as both those who value the meaningfulness of work highly and those who did not view it as a priority in their career decision-making process).

I used triangulation in order to help determine social class by comparing the qualitative description of their social class given by participants during the interviews to the answers they gave in the demographic survey, which was used to come up with their objective socioeconomic status (SES). Job titles, important for determining job prestige (an element of social class), were triangulated by comparing the title participants gave in the demographic survey with the job descriptions they gave during the interview. Then

the titles were cross-walked to numerical values on the Nakao and Treas (1994) prestige scale, and verified by checking the job titles and descriptions using the O*Net occupational database (National Center for O*NET Development, 2015).

After participants mentioned that the for-profit or non-profit organizational status was an influence on their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, I used triangulation by examining the web sites of the organizations that employed those who participated in this study for an indication of their employer's non-profit or for-profit status. I also examined the data in light of relevant literature, as previous research can help to provide a context for the interpretation and can help triangulate the data, as the results that emerge from the data can be compared to other studies to note potential similarities or differences.

After completing the data collection and analysis, I checked in with interview participants for their feedback on whether or not the interpretation made sense to them and seemed accurate for describing their perspectives. I used negative case analysis to account for disconfirming evidence and I increased the credibility of my study by asking participants to verify the accuracy of my transcription and interpretation of the data.

Transferability

I increased the transferability of my research by spending considerable time and effort collecting the stories that participants had to tell about their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. Doing so enabled me to increase the specificity (thick description) and transparency of this study. I also provided in-depth descriptions of the research design, sampling scheme, interactions with participants, data collection and analysis, and the research results.

Dependability

The dependability of this study was increased through reflexivity in the form of researcher memos created throughout the research process. I used memos to describe my reactions and thoughts during the planning stage (such as exploring potential biases and motives for the underlying design philosophy), during data collection (such as impressions, thoughts, and ideas that arise when interviewing participants), during data analysis (such as reasoning for category choices), and during interpretation (such as providing an explanation for the interpretations made).

Confirmability

Consistently writing memos throughout the research process provided an audit trail, increasing confirmability for this study. I used QSR NVivo software to create the audit trail, keeping track of each step in the research process to provide evidence of referential adequacy. Referential adequacy also was achieved through the data management plan, which established the retention of an archive record of the data that will be stored in a locked safe for at least ten years.

Study Results

The results presented in this section are organized according to the research questions that they helped answer. Before examining the results related to each research question, I will present the results of the preliminary question I asked each participant about their reasons for participating in this study.

Reasons for Participation

The majority of the participants indicated that the reasons that they chose to take part in the study were their interest in research in general (often because they or someone

they know has done academic studies), their commitment to gender issues, a desire to help someone (me, the researcher, and people the research might impact), or an interest in the topics being studied. For example, Marigold had an interest in "understanding more about female leadership and leaders in different sectors," Zinnia in "anything related to women and their perceptions of the work/life balance, and how they succeed in the workforce," and Holly in "why people choose their career paths and the type of jobs that they have."

When asked what they personally hoped to gain from the interview process or from learning about the results of the study, several participants responded that they hoped to learn something about themselves. For example, Zinnia stated that she thought "it always is a good exercise in self-awareness and improvement to learn what your values are and force yourself to focus on that and examine those things." Poppy shared a similar point of view, noting that "self-analysis is always good and understanding my own feelings and experiences with work I think will only make me a better person."

For some participants, the impetus for participation was their own increased focus on the meaningfulness of work. Some of the catalysts for the increased focus that participants were experiencing included going through a major transition in their lives, hitting a certain age, or feeling discontented and like something was missing. For example, Jasmine talked about feeling increased discontentment in her current position, saying, "I don't know yet what I'm missing that I need. I don't know if it's a career change or if it's an industry change, but there's definitely something." As an example of certain age-related milestones triggering an increased focus on the meaningfulness of work, Zinnia explained that the interview process had been helpful for her because she turned

30 the previous month, “I've been thinking a lot about where I want my career and my life to go, so this is a good reminder of kind of how I got to where I am today.” In our culture, turning 30 is considered a milestone that has often been viewed in a negative light. Arriving at this milestone has been frequently associated with taking a closer look at the direction and impact of our lives. This fits with Erikson's middle adulthood stage in his theory of human development, characterized by a crisis of generatively versus stagnation (August, 2011).

Reflecting on their reasons for participating in this study and, for some, on the reasons for an increased focus on the meaningfulness of work, helped participants to understand themselves and their lives better. It also helped me to understand their expectations and to see if those expectations had been met as a result of the interview process.

Perceptions of the Meaningfulness of Work

In the first research question, participants were asked to discuss their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. Specifically, they were asked to share their definitions of the meaningfulness of work and of meaningfulness in general (not necessarily related to work), and to express what they thought made work meaningful. Several participants asked whether I was talking about what would make work meaningful to them personally or what would make work meaningful to people in general, so I added that distinction to the list of questions in the interview guide.

Meaningfulness of work defined. Based on a combination of all of the ways that the participants described their perceptions of it, the meaningfulness of work was defined as a subjective evaluation of the extent to which work has the characteristics of being

meaningful and successfully carries out its function, which is its potential impact. The characteristics are the distinguishing traits of meaningful work (what it is made of) and the impact is the function of meaningful work (what it does), with function defined as "the special purpose or activity for which a thing exists or is used" (Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, n.d.)

Perceptions of the meaningfulness of work may include both a person's perceptions of the extent to which work has the characteristics of being meaningful and successfully carries out its function (potential impact), and also the level of importance of doing work that is meaningful. Perceptions of the characteristics and functions of meaningful work are influenced by contextual and experiential factors that have been filtered through the elements of personal identity (values, beliefs, and goals). Work is perceived as meaningful when it is characterized by having traits which enable the worker to potentially create the type of impact that matches the values, beliefs, and goals of their personal identity.

Characteristics of work that is meaningful. Participants had many different ideas of what would characterize work that is meaningful. Some participants also differentiated what they thought people in general might think made work meaningful and what made work meaningful for them personally.

Work that is meaningful was characterized as active, work that accomplishes something, work that the participants believe in, something they care about, and something that they have confidence in. For many participants, creativity was an important aspect of work they would consider meaningful. Speaking of ways employers could help make work more meaningful for their employees, Magnolia said, "they want

to inspire people to unleash their creativity in order to create the best work environment possible."

Some participants described an emotional aspect of a sense of meaningfulness, discussing it on a feeling level, rather than just a thinking one. It was not just that the word "feel" was used often, but it formed a significant backbone of the way that participants experienced and described the meaningfulness of work. For example, Camellia had a hard time defining the meaningfulness of work and noted, "I think it's something that we just kind of know. It's almost an emotion, kind of like an emotional response that we, as people, have."

Other ways that they described work that is meaningful was that it is energizing, exciting, fulfilling, good, deep, interesting or interest-driven, and new or novel. Some described it in terms of being invested in or having a personal connection with the work, something that matters because it relates to the individual personally, often based on their past experiences or relationships. Work that is meaningful was also described as being driven by what a person is passionate about, positive (often used in the context of having a positive attitude, positively impacting society, or making a positive difference), valued, and important.

To some participants, there was a more practical sense of the meaningfulness of work as something productive and useful. For others, the meaningfulness of work was viewed in the context of other aspects of a person's life, putting an emphasis on work-life balance, with work that is meaningful making good use of one's time, spending time on something deemed worthwhile. For example, Ivy struggled with being away from her children while working, so for her it was important that work not be "just to work, but to

do something I'm passionate about…worth my time away from my family to energize me and to help the greater good."

Potential impact. In addition to describing characteristics of work that is meaningful, participants defined the meaningfulness of work by its potential impact. Even those participants who did not seem to initially describe the meaningfulness of work as an active force of transformation still ended up mentioning ways that they hoped to make a difference or improve something, such as improving the lives of the next generation by working hard to provide them with a higher education.

Impact measurement. Some of the participants talked about elements of meaningfulness that had to do with measurement, such as the consistency of impact, its duration (how long the effects of the impact extend), quality of improvement, and quantity of improvement. One way to evaluate impact appears to be whether the person impacted is better off than they were before. Many participants mentioned their desire for the meaningfulness of work to have a daily impact on their lives. Daisy described a meaningful job as one in which she was "challenged every single day, in a good way, to expand my horizons and my boundaries and learn to be a real professional." Rose described meaningful work as "feeling like you're good at what you do on a day-to-day basis, every time you do it" and for Myrtle, meaningful work meant "that each day you get up you want to do that work." Whether they mentioned it in terms of every day, every morning, or day-to-day, there is a sense of continuity and of ongoing interest or excitement.

Scope of impact. The scope of impact describes the realms in which the impact is felt. For example, Poppy said, "I think that it has an impact beyond just me or the

immediate people I work with… I would probably boil it down to having a positive impact on people." External impact, directed beyond the self, occurred (a) on an individual level (affecting one person at a time), (b) on an interpersonal group level (impacting a community, family, people in one's circle), (c) on an organizational or industrial level (making a difference to a company, institution, organization, or industry), or (d) on a societal level (impacting a cause, culture, society, something larger, or the entire world). Internal impact focused on the impact to oneself on an internal personal level.

Target of impact. The target of impact is the one to whom the impact is directed. Participants cited as examples of the intended target of impact: animals, church members, co-workers or staff, customers or clients, volunteers, kids, or foreigners. They also focused on distinguishing characteristics or experiences of the people they wanted to impact, such as grieving parents, disabled people, victims of injustice (people who have not been treated justly, such as innocent people in jail), women in need due to poverty, and people who are lonely, poor, disabled, or suicidal.

Type of impact. Impact is the active force of the meaningfulness of work and it is about making something happen. As with the scope and target of impact, the type of desired potential impact differed from person to person, based on their values, beliefs, and goals. Some participants described the action of the potential impact as "bettering" (e.g., better off, better person, better place). For example, Holly defined the meaningfulness of work as "making other's lives better or making a difference or helping people be better off than what they were before." Others mentioned the acts of building

(e.g., building relationships or building a program), communicating, contributing, creating, educating or training, inspiring, and expanding horizons.

Some participants brought up the act of furthering or advancing (pushing something forward, often used in the context of furthering or advancing a particular cause) or of moving (setting something into motion, driving something onward). Sage described the meaningfulness of work as "how my work is affecting other people or what cause it's furthering." Other types of impact included giving back (actions for good based on one's own experiences of positive impact, often directed at the same or similar impact target as the one that impacted the person who is giving back), helping, improving, making a difference, meeting specific needs, providing for, shaping, and touching lives (although it carries a similar connotation to helping people, there is a sense of personal connection that is conveyed more fully in the concept of touching lives or touching people's hearts).

Stability of perceptions. Several participants brought up the issue of whether perceptions or definitions of the meaningfulness of work changed over time or were static. As this seemed like a significant point, I added an interview question about potential shifts in perception or definition. Making this addition to the interview guide was consistent with the evolving nature of grounded theory research.

Most of the participants indicated a lack of stability in perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. Participants who were asked about this issue clarified it further, specifying conditions under which their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work had changed, such as due to a religious conversion, becoming a parent, or a change of role within the workplace. According to Magnolia, "meaningfulness changed when I had

children…it also changed when I became a Christian." Other people saw the change in perceptions of the meaningfulness of work as part of the life-cycle, dependent not only on physical age, but also on maturity. Marigold said,

> I think it's changed over time in my career of what that means… I think if you would have asked me in my 20s what it meant to have a meaningful career versus now, I think it might be a little bit different.

This change included both what the person considered meaningful and also how important the meaningfulness of work was to them.

Meaningless work. In their descriptions of how they defined the meaningfulness of work and how work can be meaningful, participants often described it in terms of what was its opposite, which was meaningless work.

Tedious or menial work. Work that was boring, repetitive, draining, tedious, or menial was viewed by many as meaningless work, particularly by people who valued a challenge in their work. In describing work she considered meaningless, Azalea said, "I'm not the type of person to just be okay with mindless work, and busywork, and just filing things, and working numbers."

Unnecessary work. Participants also considered work meaningless when it served no purpose, was unnecessary, outdated, redundant, or a waste of time. For example, participants considered work meaningless when they were expected to do work that was based on an outdated system of doing things because that was how they had always been done. It differs from tedious work, as work that is tedious may still be necessary.

Unappreciated work. Work that is not appreciated can be perceived as meaningless, particularly if someone considers respect, gratitude, or appreciation as part

of what makes work meaningful to them. Even if work was necessary or important to do, some participants considered it meaningless if it was unappreciated by their boss or their co-workers.

Unfulfilling work. There were many different reasons that work was not viewed as fulfilling, such as work that is stagnant, not in one's job description (the person thought they were signing on to work in a certain job, but were instead asked to do things that were not related to their job), or superficial (work that is meaningful is presented in contrast to work engaged in solely for superficial reasons or rewards).

Negative work. While participants considered meaningful work as something that made a positive contribution, work that made a negative contribution, was something they were uncomfortable with doing, went against their conscience, or had the potential to cause harm was considered meaningless. Examples included work that was dishonest or unfair. As Rose noted, "If you're working for a company that's doing something bad, or something like that, or duping people, I would think that would not be a meaningful job or meaningful work."

Influences on Perceptions of the Meaningfulness of Work

To answer the second research question regarding influences on perceptions participants had of the meaningfulness of work, I asked them directly what they thought led to their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. Participants described a wide variety of influences, both contextual factors (determined by the participant's personal and social context) and experiential factors (based on life experiences).

Contextual Factors

Contextual factors that influenced perceptions that participants had of the meaningfulness of work were based on personal and social factors, most of which were details disclosed in the demographic screening survey. Examples of these factors included the highest level of education that the participant attained, their generation, race or ethnicity, religion, personality, locale, and social class.

Educational level. The highest level of educational attainment had a large impact on the perceptions that participants had of the meaningfulness of work. People with a lower educational level tended to view their options for meaningful work as being more limited, while those with a higher level more often went out of their way to intentionally seek out meaningful work. For example, in discussing the impact of social class on her career aspirations, Willow noted that she never looked beyond blue-collar work, that "with my education level, that's the only thing that I really think was available to me." The courses they took, teachers and mentors encountered, and exposure to a more diverse group of people were all cited by participants as ways in which their educational level made a difference.

Generation. Participants also brought up the way that generational differences impacted perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. The generation for each participant was calculated according to their year of birth provided on the demographic survey. In addition to their own generation, they were also influenced by parents who were a part of a different generation. These were calculated using the standard 20 year cycle of births, as defined in literature on demographic generational studies (Ball & Legagneur, 2014).

Greatest/G.I. (1901-1924). Though none of the participants were from this generation, three participants had parents that fell into this category. Linden, Violet, and Willow described their parents as practical, having a good work ethic, and valuing the ability to provide for their families.

Silent/Traditionalist (1925-1945). Descriptions of perceptions of the meaningfulness of work held by this generation primarily focused on meaningfulness in terms of practical provision. They did something because that was what was needed; it was helpful in a practical way. According to Violet, "what I was doing, they needed, so I would think if you are doing something and getting it completed, and that was something that they really needed someone to do, then I would say that was meaningful." They wanted to like what they did, to be a part of something larger that was helping people, to have "a little bit of a creating thing to their work" (Linden), and to find satisfaction and fulfillment in their jobs. It was in helping other people that their own needs would be fulfilled. The types of impact that participants from this generation viewed as meaningful were (in order from most to least affirmed): (a) contributing (e.g., Linden found it meaningful to contribute expertise and advice to the creative projects she worked on with customers and also to contribute towards the company's mission of helping people who needed implants get the right ones); (b) helping (e.g., Willow found it meaningful to help someone in general, help satisfy customers, help people unfairly jailed to have justice done, and to help take care of family); (c) and meeting specific needs (e.g., Willow discussed meeting financial needs of family members and Violet talked about her dad providing jobs to friends who were out of work).

Baby Boomers (1946-1964). For the Baby Boomers generation, the meaningfulness of work was related to a sense of accomplishment, giving back, leaving a legacy for one's children, and making sure to pass on values, such as the view that "work is a productive and good thing" (Fern). This makes sense as they are entering a phase of life when they are looking back at what they have accomplished and contributed. Fern noted,

> I look back over my career…it's about the lives that I touched, and the people that I've met over the years, and the experiences that I've had, and level of education and bosses, and different experiences I've had where I've grown as a leader.

In looking back to the work she had done in the past, Dahlia felt she had "touched some lives…spoke to them in certain ways that made them think about how they should do things in their lives." Baby Boomers are seeking for work to be fulfilling and to allow them to have a chance to be good at something. They also focused on meaningfulness in relationship to something having a practical purpose, intentional, and not wasteful (Heather). Both Heather and Fern mentioned the service aspect of the meaningfulness of work in terms of working in a restaurant, where even if it is not an enjoyable job, by seeing the way that it serves people or provides something that they need, then it can still be meaningful. Types of impact that were most important to participants who were Baby Boomers (in order from most to least affirmed): (a) contributing; (b) giving back (especially giving back to the community); (c) helping (mentioned in the context of taking care of family, by providing financially, helping someone, being in service to someone, providing practical help for them like cleaning or serving food and "pouring into kids" (Fern); (d) shaping (experiences from being a leader and being a part of a

community helped shape Fern's career in social service and led to her giving back to the community); and (e) touching lives (Dahlia).

Gen X/Busters (1965-1980). Those in the Gen X group seemed to highly value the ability to see how their contributions fit into a bigger picture. For example, Marigold said, "Whatever task I'm working on, or project, or work I'm doing, I understand how it's contributing to the greater good." They wanted to make a difference in the world, but had more concern for work/life balance. According to Laurel, a single mom, "for me, it's the flextime and them working with you." Types of impact most important to participants in the Gen X group were (in order from most to least affirmed): (a) contributing; (b) bettering (e.g., making something or someone better, better off, or in a better place); (c) helping; (d) making a difference; (e) giving back; and (f) building (in the context of building relationships).

Gen Y/Millennial (1981-2000). There was more of a sense of optimism and energy in the way that participants from the Gen Y group viewed the meaningfulness of work. They mentioned having hope for improvements and wanted to be a part of that forward momentum. Types of impact most important to participants in the Gen Y group included (in order from most to least affirmed): (a) helping, (b) contributing, (c) making a difference, (d) shaping, (e) improving, (f) bettering, (g) education and training, (h) furthering or advancing, (i) expanding horizons, (j) inspiring, (k) meeting specific needs, (l) communicating, (m) creating, (n) giving back, and (o) moving.

Generation Z/Digital (2001-present). There were no members of this generation among the participants as they would have been under the minimum age of 18 required for this study. However, several participants discussed this generation in terms of

generational differences between their generation and the one that came after them. For example, several participants remarked that the younger generation seemed to expect instant gratification, were not as grateful, and acted as thought they were entitled.

Race or ethnicity. The influence of race or ethnicity was mentioned by several participants, often in their responses to questions about their social class. All four of the African American participants discussed race as an influential factor, while this issue was brought up by only three of the Caucasian participants, all of whom either have African American family members or work in organizations devoted to racial equality advocacy. In discussing the difficulties for women in leadership positions Fern said, "it's tough to be a woman, especially an African American woman…and be in leadership, especially over males, and then over African American males. It tends to have its issues and its problems along the way."

Locale. There are several different ways that locale played a role in the development of perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. For example, exposure to people in need, to different social classes, and to different races and ethnicities can vary depending on locale. Different locales can also have stereotypical qualities or legends that can affect perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, of gender, and of social class such as the idea of the blue-collar, hard-working Pittsburgh steelworker.

Pittsburgh. I asked participants about the influences that living in the Greater Pittsburgh area had on their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, as well as experiences with gender and social class specific to the area. Some participants mentioned that they noticed an "old school" mentality (Azalea), having very traditional values and leadership models (Marigold), and that it was "a little more backwards about

women's issues" (Laurel). However, most of the participants noted that there were changes taking place in this area as far as gender equity.

Differences between locales. For a number of participants, the differences between living in a rural, suburban, or urban area impacted their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. Specific types of towns were also mentioned as significant. For example, Holly explained that "growing up in a college town, my schoolmates were pretty diverse. I met kids whose parents were professors who had come from Lebanon, China, and Italy…I think that influences you...you develop more awareness as a child." Other participants brought up differences between different areas within a town or city, such as the difference between poor and wealthy areas.

Movement between locales. Participants were also influenced by the experience of moving from one type of locale to another, such as from a small town to a big city. While there were attributes of both places that differed, it was the transition itself that was the main focus for these participants.

Personality and interests. Individual personality differences, and the interests related to both personality and experiences, provided an internal context for perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. While there are many different theories of personality and types of personality evident in the literature, the main personality traits specified as influential by participants in this particular study included pro-activity, competitiveness, and sociability (often referred to by participants as being "a people-person")**.**

Social class. There were differences in the way that social class impacted perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. To gain a better understanding of these influences, as well as to triangulate the objective social class with the participants'

subjective experiences of social class, I asked participants to discuss their childhood social class (what class, why they chose it, advantages and disadvantages of that social class, and how their social class compared with their peers and those around them). They were also asked to discuss these same issues from the perspective of their current social class, as well as examining how their experiences in it differed from those in their childhood social class.

Lower and working. For people in the lower/working class, the meaningfulness of work was often viewed in more practical terms. They focused more on helping people in their own environment (such as family, friends, co-workers) rather than focusing on a more distant, general goal to help society or the world. Their view of the meaningfulness of work was shaped by their values, which were (in order from most to least affirmed): work ethic, independence, honesty, family, gratitude, security, advancement, helping people, high standard, justice, and religion or spirituality.

Lower middle. Those in the lower middle class seem to have more idealism than those in the lower/working class who had favored more practical ways of impacting. They also tended to look to advance in the world, as evidenced by the value they put on education, money, success, change, and achievement. The values that guided their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work included (in order from most to least affirmed): work ethic, change, education or learning, money, success, achievement or accomplishment, advancement, helping people, honesty, happiness or joy, high standard, gratitude, family, freedom, sacrifice, advocacy, communication, and health.

Middle. Participants in the middle class frequently mentioned the importance of education and of being challenged in their work. The values that guided the perceptions

of the meaningfulness of work for those in the middle class were (in order from most to least affirmed): work ethic, challenge, change, education or learning, achievement or accomplishment, advancement, balance, gratitude, growth, money, success, creativity, doing good, family, freedom, helping people, honesty, and sacrifice.

Upper middle and upper. Participants in the upper middle/upper class frequently mentioned balance as an issue of importance to them, and both work/life balance and balance in general were valued. The values most important to those in the upper middle/upper class group were (in order from most to least affirmed): work-life balance, work ethic, family, change, education or learning, diversity and equity, meaningful life, achievement or accomplishment, advocacy, balance, ability to work, helping people, justice, success, happiness or joy, challenge, being active, and community.

Gender. Most of the participants indicated that gender played a large role in their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. Their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work were influenced by their context and experiences as women in a particular time and place, as well as by the values and beliefs they and others around them held about being a woman. These values and beliefs influenced expectations held by individuals or by society in general as to what a woman should or should not do. Gender-related themes that the participants discussed included: empowering women, female leadership, female vs male roles, feminism, glass ceiling, inequity, motherhood, and the need to prove self.

Gender-social class interaction. As noted previously, the ways that gender and social class interact make a difference beyond what each does on its own. One of the ways that this interaction showed in this study was in the level of feminism (value placed on advocating for women's rights and on gender equity) displayed by participants. The

higher the social class, the greater emphasis the participants placed on feminism. In the lower/working class, 17% of participants indicated feminist leanings, 50% of those in the lower middle class, 71% of those in the middle class, and 100% of those in the upper middle/upper class. This difference could be affected by the generational composition of each social class group. The lower/working class consisted of 60% Silent Generation, 17% Baby Boomers, 17% Gen X, and 17% Gen Y; the lower middle class consisted of 83% Gen Y and 17% Gen X; the middle class consisted of 57% Gen Y, 29% Baby Boomer, and 14% Gen X; and the upper middle/upper class consisted of 67% Gen X and 33% Gen Y).

Another way that gender-social class interaction influenced participants was in the models that surrounded them as they were growing up. Examples of what it meant to be a woman were viewed within the context of their social class. For example, Willow noted that she became a cashier after seeing that modeled as a job that women around her did. However, if she had been in a higher social class, the women who were around her that were working may have modeled other types of jobs, such as being office managers, teachers, or nurses. These jobs require a higher education level, so they would not be as accessible to someone from a lower social class who does not have a college education. Similarly, in describing an example of a job that was was more typically male than female, Dahlia (from the lower/working class) used a construction worker as an example, Jasmine (from the middle class) used a banker, and Magnolia (from the upper middle/upper class) used a partner in a law firm.

Experiential Factors

While contextual factors describe aspects of who a person is, experiential factors focus on what has happened to a person or what they have done. The primary experiential factors discussed by participants in my study were based on interactions with other people, such as: (a) parents, significant others, and other family members; (b) teachers and mentors; (c) inspirational historical figures; and (d) members of a community. Other experiential factors include advantages (such as opportunities and privilege), difficulties (such as unemployment, financial struggles, health problems, trauma or tragedies, or discrimination), and experiences related to specific events or activities (such as school, traveling to work with or learn about other cultures, past work experiences, and books participants read).

Parents and family members. The biggest influence that participants cited were those of their parents or other family members. The perceptions that their parents or other family members had of the meaningfulness of work were very influential in participant perceptions. Definitions that parents had of the meaningfulness of work sometimes were the same from those that participants and other time were different. Witnessing the work experiences and career paths of their parents or other family members had an influence. In some cases, the participants were influenced to emulate their parent or family member who demonstrated a priority on the meaningfulness of their work. In other cases, either the participant themselves or the family member suggested that the participant learn from the mistakes of the parents or family members who did not pursue meaningfulness in their work. The priorities placed on education and types of jobs that the participants were exposed to were other ways they were influenced by their parents or family members.

Values and family culture. The values that they were taught, whether directly or indirectly played a role in the development of participants' perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. Values have been passed on by those who influenced perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, often in the form of expectations for what one "should" do.

Openness of communication. The influence of communication was brought up by several participants, particularly in conjunction with having trouble identifying the perceptions their parents had of the meaningfulness of work. For some of the participants, a lack of communication about things like motivation, feelings, beliefs, and reasons for actions made it difficult to understand their parents' perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. Other participants brought up positive examples of ways that their parents communicated their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and how that influenced the participant in their own perceptions.

Expectations. Participants were influenced by the expectations that they were exposed to. Some expectations focused on education, the expectations that parents, society, and the participants themselves had as to what level or what type of education they should have. Gender-based expectations held by participants, other people, or society focused on issues such as what jobs women should or should not do, whether women should work at all, or expectations related to marriage and parenting.

Community and society. The communities in which they grew up and the views of the meaningfulness of work communicated by society in general, such as societal norms and stereotypes, also influenced participants. They were also impacted by experiences related to diversity within their communities.

Community support and expectations. Communities, such as neighborhoods, churches, or organizations, provided support when it was needed and helped many women develop their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and their leadership skills. Dahlia spoke extensively about the important role that community played in her life, "I did arts in my community and that's where I grew as a leader…the wonderful thing about it is that community was always there." Along with that support, communities often held expectations for those that they supported. According to Myrtle,

> The community of strong African American women I came from, they expected a lot from me...they expected me to do well in school, to not have children out of wedlock, to not end up on public assistance, and to be a positive light in society.

Societal norms, stereotypes, and diversity. Some of the participants discussed societal norms that influenced them, such as the norm that dictates that it is more acceptable for women to be stay-at-home moms than for men to be stay-at-home dads (Zinnia). While at times those norms were obvious to people, Poppy noted that "sometimes I feel like it's hard to tell how much impact societal norms have on you as an individual." Exposure to diversity within their communities and experiences with discrimination both influenced the way that participants perceived the meaningfulness of work.

Old-school thinking. The term "old school" was used by some participants in a positive light to describe classic or timeless core values which were more obvious in a previous era. For example, Olive explained, "I definitely think some of my views and values may tend to be more on the old-fashioned side compared to what some people might believe now." Others used the term in a negative light, to depict an outdated,

negative mentality that was stuck in a past era and needed to move forward into more contemporary ways of thinking.

School, teachers, and mentors. Many participants discussed the way their teachers or education helped form their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. That influence often took place by the example set by teachers or something they said, subjects studied, experiences at school, or something specific that they learned while at school. Several participants mentioned the influential roll that mentors played in their lives. For example, Marigold mentioned that she was "fortunate to have good role models." Magnolia discussed the influential role a mentor played in her career, "When I was mentored, I was able to do tasks that were harder than my abilities when I joined that firm."

Books and inspirational people. Participants brought up several categories of books and also the lives and examples of inspirational current or historical figures that influenced their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. While I had anticipated education in general to play an important role in the development of meaningfulness of work perceptions (based on the literature covered in the literature review), I had not considered the specific contribution of books. In line with the adaptive nature of grounded theory research, this has led me to include a question about books in subsequent interviews.

The most common types of books that had an influence were biographies or autobiographies that presented the lives of current or historical figures. Some of the inspirational people that participants encountered in biographies or autobiographies included Rosa Park, Susan B. Anthony, Gandhi, Martin Luther, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Poppy noted that in some ways the inspirational people she read about in books were like mentors to her. She said they inspired her by showing her "that there were people who really wanted to change the world and that I found their contributions very meaningful and very relevant. And I think maybe that I wanted to model myself on that." Other people were influenced by books on advocacy issues, such as Rose, who said, "I have read and researched information specific to women and work and the value that they add, and the glass ceiling, and all that kind of stuff." The Bible, books of sermons, letters by religious leaders, and other religious texts also helped shape perceptions of the meaningfulness of work.

Spirituality and religion. Participants spoke often of how their religion, faith, or spirituality impacted their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. This was not unexpected, as the literature showed a close connection between the meaningfulness of work, spirituality, and the idea of vocation or calling. What has been more of a revelation is that there were significant differences in how religion or spirituality impacted participants' view of the meaningfulness of work.

Accountability. The idea that God is watching and you are accountable for your actions even if nobody else can see you was one way some participants were influenced by their religious beliefs. According to Fern,

> Someone is watching the way you wait on customers and the things you do, so the integrity piece was not just about making sure a human being didn't see the stuff that I really didn't do, but just having the faith and knowing that God is a God who sees, and knows, and understands.

Motivation to think about and pursue meaningfulness. For some, it served as a motivation to think about the topic of meaningfulness in general or in relation to work. For other participants, spirituality or religious beliefs motivated them to purposefully and consciously seek out work that would have a meaningful impact on others.

Guidance or direction. In addition to motivating people to start thinking about the meaningfulness of work and then motivating them to purposefully pursue meaningful work, some participants shared their belief that God was actively guiding them to find a meaningful job or to notice the meaningfulness of the job that they were in. For example, Camellia said, "For me personally, what makes work meaningful for me is knowing that it's where God has put me." Rosemary, emphasizing her desire to seek guidance from God, said, "I would like to see like what God's will for me would be."

Identity and values. Some participants described the influence of religion or spirituality as something that gave them or gave others identity. This sense of identity arises from identification with the values, beliefs, and goals of a particular religion or form of spirituality. Most religions present adherents with a system of values, such as importance placed on helping people, pursuing social justice, and improving the world. The emphasis that most religious and spiritual belief systems place on helping people in need (helping people, showing compassion, and loving others) contributed to that being a focus for participants. In speaking of the value she places on helping people, Dahlia said, "I say I love God…how can I not love my brother?" The responsibility to improve the world or make it a better place was also motivated for some participants by their religion or spirituality. The values for equity and justice that are espoused by religions motivated participants to care about and help with social justice. Holly described the influential role

religion played in her perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, particularly “the value system that was instilled in me…based in religious teachings… a belief that there shouldn't be injustice in the world and that we should be doing something to change that.”

Responsibility to use talents and work well. For others, it contributed to the sense of responsibility to use their God-given talents and skills in their careers. In addition to using these skills, several participants said that their religious beliefs compelled them to work hard, work well (high quality of work), and to always do their best at whatever task they are asked to do. They cited instruction from the Bible that demands a high level of work quality and of work commitment (work as hard and as well as you are able to), often referred to as the "Protestant Work Ethic". For example, speaking of doing her best at work, Linden said, “I feel that God expects that of me. He doesn't expect anything less. He never did anything less for me than his best. And so how can I do less?” Willow noted, “I think the Bible kind of indicates to be good at what you do and give your whole heart to it, and to do well in what tasks that are given to you.”

Previous work experiences. For some participants, perceptions of the meaningfulness of work were shaped by their previous experiences in the workplace. Some of those experiences were positive and some were negative, which helped them to see what they did not consider to be meaningful work. As Zinnia put it,

> I think having been in positions in which I did not feel I was contributing something positive or wasn't feeling my time was spent in a meaningful way, and then now being in the job that I do, I see the contrast, and so I feel like I'm much more attuned to that principle than I might have been in the past.

Advantages and difficulties. Several participants mentioned that they were privileged or were aware of having opportunities that other people might not have due to their social status or other contextual factors. These advantages that they experienced were most often brought up in the context of the privilege of having options or the ability to make choices, such as the choice of a job. Coming from the perspective of someone in the upper middle/upper social class, Rose said,

> I guess I'm a little bit privileged in the fact that…someone in low income or lower-class...they're forced to work. They're forced to do whatever they need to do and make whatever level of money they need to make in order to survive, but I feel like I have all these options of different things that I could do if I don't feel like my work is meaningful.

Impact on Career Choices

Participants addressed the third research question in their discussions of the impact that they believe their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work have or have had on their career choices. They discussed their career aspirations, the reasons for the career choices they made, and the impact or lack of impact of their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work.

Career aspirations. Participants responded to questions about what they had wanted to do when they were growing up and what job they would do if they could choose anything and time or money were not a problem. They were then asked what prevented them from choosing the career they mentioned that they had aspired to or what is preventing them from pursuing the career that they said they would do if they did not have to worry about time and money. The things most often mentioned as preventing the

pursuit of the career aspirations included: the belief that their career path was determined by fate, fear, ignorance, lack of education, lack of time, or resignation.

Career paths. Participants described different paths by which they came to their careers. For some, it was an intentional, purposeful job search that aimed directly at the meaningful career that they had hoped for. Holly was grateful that she was able to pursue a career for more than just the income it could provide. She said the meaningfulness of work

> just really influenced everything that I did and the types of jobs that I got right out of college. I did a year of service, basically working at a nonprofit in a very poor area, and then I worked overseas for a little bit, and it all led to this drive to want to continue learning and be in different cultures, but also to make a difference.

For most of the participants, however, the path to their career meandered. Some came to their career choice after extensive exploration into other career options, whether through conversations with others, research, internships, or crossing jobs off after trying them. Others talked about having "fallen into' their career. Some felt like they had the opportunity to choose a career thoughtfully, while others cited circumstances as taking away their options, such as the need to take whatever job was available in order to make ends meet.

Importance of meaningfulness in career choice. Participants were asked about the importance of meaningfulness and what impact their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work had on their career choices. All of the participants said that the meaningfulness of work was important to them, though their definitions of it did differ. When asked about the importance of the meaningfulness of work, Aster said,

> I think it's really important because that's how you spend a good chunk of your life. If you were to break down hours, it's a huge portion of just your existence. If what you're doing you feel is meaningful, it gives you fulfillment and happiness and joy in the rest of life too.

Myrtle also believed the meaningfulness of work was very important because "if you're not making a difference, if you're not doing something that you love every day, you are not going to want to get up. You're not going to want to get out of bed." However, not all of the participants believed that the meaningfulness of work played a significant role in their career choices. Iris, Linden, Violet, Willow, and Rose all said that they did not think that the meaningfulness of work impacted their career choices, though Rose said that in the future she intends to choose a job with the meaningfulness of work in mind.

Factors that contributed to career choice. In addition to the meaningfulness of work, a number of other factors contributed to participants' career choice.

Skills and abilities. One of the main factors participants cited in their choice of careers was a job that gave them a chance to use their skills and abilities. Jasmine talked about how she took her skills into account when she was considering changing jobs, asking herself "What skills do I have that I was going to use there, and that I can use in another career?"

Interests and political beliefs. For some participants, their interests or political beliefs helped draw them to the career that they chose. According to Daisy, her political views were different from those in which she grew up and so "living in that environment changed my political beliefs, which also changed the kind of work I was planning to do."

Uses education. It was important for many of the participants to put their education to use in their careers. Azalea, glad to find a place to work in which she could use her degree, said, "I really wanted to do something that I went to school for, finally."

Calling. Some of the participants said that they chose their career because it was what they felt "called" to do. For example, Camellia, describing her choice to become a pastor said, "I don't know that I chose it...it chose me."

Fit with job or organization. The choice to take or to stay in a particular job was often made due to the fit or lack of fit with a particular job or organization. Lily shared that she felt like the technology company that she recently started working for was a good fit for her because "here people are just cool, approachable, and they have made me, as a whole, feel as though I have something to offer, and so that has made me feel as though my work is meaningful."

Location. For some participants, location was the primary motivator in the job that they chose, usually mentioned in terms of a job being in close proximity to their homes. As Willow explained, "I wanted to be somewhere closer to where I live, and that way I would be able to get back and forth to work easier, and I would not be as far away from my family."

Influence on Workplace Experiences

To answer the fourth research question about how participants thought their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work influenced their workplace experiences and behaviors, I asked participants to describe their jobs and what they do on a regular basis and to discuss the meaningfulness present or absent from their jobs.

Work environment. Participants discussed ways that their work environment both was influenced by the meaningfulness of work and also influenced it. When employees felt a sense of safety in their work environments, they felt like they were able to perceive their work as more meaningful or to take steps to make it so. Lily mentioned that employers had a responsibility "to create a healthy work environment so that employees feel safe in their workplace, they can be themselves…and make a contribution of their individual gifts and talents." In discussing problems with an environment that fostered a lack of trust, Marigold noted that "sometimes individuals can be in environments where it doesn't feel safe to challenge the way that the leadership has set up the environment." Meaningfulness of work also contributed to a good morale, while a lack of meaningfulness led to tension in the workplace. Olive shared the way her company helped create a positive work environment, such as "trying to have morale-boosting morning meetings and motivating interactive activities, things they can contribute and make them feel they are part of the overall success of the team." Teams were able to unify around a common goal of enabling the impact of the meaningfulness of work to reach its objectives, but a lack of a shared sense of meaningfulness could also cause problems for teams when the members did not share a sense that their work was meaningful.

Leadership. One of the biggest factors in the meaningfulness or lack of meaningfulness experienced by participants in their workplaces was related to either positive or negative leadership. Participants felt their sense of meaningfulness in their work increased when leaders appreciated or valued them. Laurel said that it was meaningful to her that her employers "appreciate me and that they know that I'm valuable

to them." Similarly, Marigold said an important aspect of meaningfulness of work was "being appreciated for what you're contributing, and being recognized for what you can contribute to the organization." Being valued and appreciated may be based on the work or tasks they do, the quality of their work, their contribution to the organization or environment, or something about them personally. Other critical leadership behaviors that led to an increased sense of meaningfulness were regular and helpful feedback, respect, trust, and understanding. Servant leadership was mentioned by Fern, along with a description of characteristics of good leadership. From her perspective as a leader employing young people, she hoped they could say,

> "I'm learning, I'm growing, I'm doing well at this place, I have good leadership, I have somebody who's encouraging me. I work at a place where the leadership has integrity… willing to train me, and talk to me, and deal with issues, if issues come up...a place that cares, a place that believes that what they're doing matters and that we aren't just robots here producing money." …I believe in servant leadership. It's not written on my job description that I have to be a servant leader, but its sure written on there where I'm concerned…if I'm calling my team to clean the resource room, then I'm going to be in the resource room with them.

Speaking of the importance of transparency, Marigold pointed out that "when decisions are made behind closed doors or they're made by like one or two individuals, but then impact the whole staff, that sets up a very distrustful environment." The importance of good communication was brought up by Rose, as well as the need for leaders to understand what is going on within the organization in order to effectively communicate. Speaking of an example of poor leadership, she said, "they're not really in

the office enough to see what the employees are doing… to have the correct information about what they need to know and what needs to be communicated." Rose contrasted this with an example of good leadership, in which "leaders were engaged and they sat right by us, and so someone in a high up VP or Senior VP position, you could walk right up to and ask them a question and they would answer you."

Job factors. A number of factors that related to the job itself also contributed to the perception participants had of the meaningfulness of their work. Participants discussed the need for autonomy, flexibility (such as to set one's own schedule or to adjust the job to fit with changing circumstances), challenge, variety, and competence in their jobs. For example, in discussing employer responsibilities for making work meaningful, Willow said, "you have to have an employer that is willing to give you the chance to do the things that you're good at or that you want to do." They also felt it important that there was a good fit with field or industry, fit with organization, and fit with the job itself. As Jasmine noted, "I knew that that job wasn't a good match for me, even though it was in an industry that I was really interested in." Participants also discussed job factors related to a type or field of work, or to specific projects and tasks, including the topics of difficult work, hard versus easy work, job versus career, and mental versus physical work.

Power was mentioned as another important factor. While power may appear to be an extrinsic motivator rather than an intrinsic one and tends to be viewed as negative (e.g., power-hungry, power corrupts), the force that drives the potential impact of the meaningfulness of work forward must have power behind it in order to move. When discussing her reasons for being a feminist, Daisy mentioned that women "are powerful

and I think we are so strong and so wise, and I just want to help increase the places that we can go." When employees have great ideas and want their work to be meaningful, but then have no power to bring their vision to fruition, then it becomes meaningless. Power is not bad, but the motivation for attaining it and how it is used determines whether it is a negative or a positive goal.

Organizational factors. In addition to the job factors, there were also organizational factors that were influenced by and also influenced perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. The most critical factor, in terms of the meaningfulness of work, is the organizational mission. Whether or not an employee values and feels a connection with the mission of the organization can impact the level of meaningfulness of work. For Poppy, part of what made work meaningful was "being part of something that is bigger and has a goal and a mission."

The structure of the organization (such as whether it is a hierarchal structure), type of organization (such as for profit or non-profit), as well as roles that people have at work or levels within the organization (e.g., upper management, middle management, junior management) can all make a difference. For example, Jasmine said, "I work in a very structured corporate environment, so there's not a lot of decisions that I can make on my own without having to have them be checked and verified by at least four other people."

Organizational policies and practices can impact employees' sense of the meaningfulness of work. The value an organization places on diversity is reflected in diversity and inclusion policies, both formal and informal, celebrating, encouraging, and providing equitable treatment towards anyone they interact with (either internally or

externally) representing diverse races/ethnicities, ages, religions, genders, disabilities or any other distinguishing characteristics. Participants revealed that when they felt those policies and practices were fair and being upheld, then their work seemed more meaningful. For example, it was important to Laurel that the workplace had a "policy…that there is not favoritism…towards one employee and not the other."

Influence on Workplace Behaviors

Reactions to workplace experiences, shaped by a person's contextual and experiential factors, as well as by their values, beliefs, and goals, contribute to workplace behaviors. To explore the potential impact of the meaningfulness of work on workplace behaviors, I asked participants to discuss whether they thought their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work had influenced the way that they interacted with others in their workplace, the amount of time they spent at work, or the effort they put into their jobs. The participants discussed both their behaviors in the workplace and the behaviors they observed in others around them, often contrasting their actions with those who did not share their view of the importance of the meaningfulness of work.

Participants suggested that a focus on the meaningfulness of work helped them to have better workplace behaviors, and that when they were in jobs that they did not perceive as meaningful they ended up putting in less time and effort and having a harder time interacting well with their fellow employees. In discussing differences between a job she did not find meaningful and one she did, Sage said,

> I didn't feel that my position was very valued, and so I think that my perception of meaningfulness decreased and I didn't spend as much time at work. I might not have put as much effort in, because I didn't feel that I was making as much of a

> difference to the company. Whereas, in my position now, I feel that my work is much more meaningful, and that my position is held in a much higher regard. So it motivates me to stay later, come in earlier, put in the extra effort, and put in the extra time.

Meaningfulness was reported to contribute to unity or positive interactions as it led to working together toward a common objective or being unified in purpose. Jasmine described meaningfulness of work as "working on projects that you are passionate about or with people who you really connect with towards a goal that you all share." Other issues that participants mentioned in terms of workplace behaviors were the important role that attitudes play in perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and the need for asserting oneself when appropriate, both of which were considered part of the employee responsibility for the meaningfulness of their work. They also discussed the importance of engagement, focus, integrity, pleasing one's employer, productivity, and quality of work.

Discrepant Cases and Non-Conforming Data

Discrepant cases were those which appeared to contradict the emerging theory participants had in which the meaningfulness of work was defined primarily by its potential for positive impact. Rather than expressing a desire for her work to make the world a better place, transform lives, or fulfill some other goal for positive impact, Willow said that she just worked to provide for her family because her financial situation made it necessary to do so. This view seemed similar to that expressed by participants describing perceptions that they believed their parents had of the meaningfulness of work, which fit with the generational difference between Willow (born in 1941) and the

younger participants. This non-conforming data led to a more in-depth analysis about the nature of the potential impact of the meaningfulness of work, concluding that while the scope of impact for this participant was limited to her family, she still sought to improve their lives and make a positive difference by providing for their needs. This also increased understanding about the perceptions that the parents of participants had of the meaningfulness of work, as further review of the interview transcripts revealed that their parents often sought to improve the lives of their children through providing them with a better education so that they could have more opportunities than their parents had.

While all of the other participants indicated a continuing or increasing pursuit of meaningfulness through their careers, Sage indicated that she had previously chosen a job based on the meaningfulness of the work, but now was looking to move to one that held less intrinsic meaning, but provided more extrinsic benefits (increased pay). At first, this appeared to contradict the emerging theory, but the contradiction is based on her own conflict over how she defined the meaningfulness of work. What is causing this to appear to be a discrepancy, as though someone was not seeking meaningfulness, is instead the result of a conflict of values, with one value (helping others) in conflict with another value (making enough money). Her previous job was driven by the first value and the new direction that she took was based on the second value.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the results from the data collected from my participants using my survey and in-depth semistructured interviews. With these results, I was able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the ways that the meaningfulness of work is defined (as a subjective evaluation of the extent to which work

has the characteristics of being meaningful and successfully carries out its function, which is its potential impact), what participants considered to be meaningless work (such as work that is tedious, unnecessary, unappreciated, or negative), and what they thought would cause work to be meaningful to people in general and to them personally. Differences in the specific traits that characterized the meaningfulness of work for each participant, as well as individual differences in perceptions of the type, scope, target, and objectives of its impact, were influenced by both the contextual factors (e.g., race, religion, and educational level) and the experiential factors (e.g., experiences with family, community, school, mentors, books, previous work experiences) that helped form the participants' identity (their values, beliefs, and goals).

Participants also discussed their career aspirations, job choices, the importance of meaningfulness, and the impact that their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work had on their selection of their job or career. Finally, I examined the ways that perceptions of the meaningfulness of work influenced participants' experiences and workplace behaviors, looking at whether they felt their current jobs were meaningful, the responsibilities of both the employers and the employees for meaningfulness, how they believe meaningfulness impacts employee motivation and engagement, and the impact on organizational citizenship behaviors.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss the interpretation of the results presented in Chapter 4, the limitations of this study, recommendations for further research, and the potential implications for social change, for research, and for practice. I will also present the substantive theory that emerged from my research to help explain differences in the perceptions that women have of the meaningfulness of work, the impact on career

choices, and the influence of these perceptions on their workplace experiences and behaviors.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The primary purpose for this study was to develop a substantive theory that could help explain the perceptions that women from diverse social classes have of the meaningfulness of work, what influenced those perceptions, the impact those perceptions may have had on their career choices, and the influence on their workplace experiences and behaviors. The results from the analysis of transcribed interviews and survey responses from 25 women, along with researcher memos, led to the following findings:

1. The meaningfulness of work was defined as a subjective evaluation of the extent to which work has the characteristics of being meaningful and successfully carries out its potential impact.
2. What those particular characteristics are that make work meaningful, along with the type (what kind of impact), scope (where impact is felt), target (who is impacted), and objectives of its impact differ from person to person.
3. Those individual differences in perception are based on influential contextual factors (e.g., race, religion, and educational level) and experiential factors (e.g., experiences with family, community, school, mentors, books, previous work experiences) that have been filtered through the elements of their personal identity (values, beliefs, and goals).
4. A person's social class, generation, and gender, as well as interactions among these factors, made a difference in perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, how it was defined, and how it was experienced.

5. Perceptions of the meaningfulness of work may be static or may change over time or because of certain circumstances (e.g., religious conversion, becoming a parent, or change in work role).
6. Meaningfulness of work was deemed to be important because of its potential positive impact on individuals (e.g., well-being, job satisfaction, enjoyment, personal growth, independence, and leaving a legacy), organizations (e.g., retention, productivity, employee engagement, and positive workplace behavior), and society (e.g., social justice, volunteerism, and positive social change).
7. Job choices (either initially or in future jobs) were often influenced by the meaningfulness of work and the work that was chosen served as the means to carry its impact forward.
8. Workplace experiences and behaviors were influenced by the meaningfulness of work and served to either block or enable the flow of impact. Negative workplace experiences and behaviors blocked the flow of impact, while positive workplace experiences and behaviors helped to enable the flow of impact.
9. Some of the blockages experienced by women, particularly in the Greater Pittsburgh area, included pay rate inequity and a lack of representation in leadership positions and in boardrooms. Avenues made to bypass these blockages included mentorships by women in leadership positions, organizations that are making strides in educating and empowering women, and a gradual shift, as perceived by participants, towards increased pay equity and equal representation.
10. There are specific steps that both employers and employees can take to increase the meaningfulness of work. Employees can have a positive attitude, look for

ways to make their work more meaningful, communicate with their employers, and be aware of the impact that their individual job has on fulfilling the overall organizational mission. Employers can practice good leadership (especially transformational and servant leadership), communicate clearly, offer flexibility, encourage creativity, help their employees see how their work connects with the bigger picture, and create a work environment in which employees feel safe, empowered, listened to, and valued.

Interpretation of the Findings

Although the memos for my study were helpful throughout each phase, they played a larger role in the interpretation phase, helping to answer to the fifth research question about the development of a theory as this question was not directly addressed in those asked during the participant interviews. Because this study was conducted through the lens of feminist critical theory, my interpretation placed value on the women's subjective lived experiences from their own perspective, and I took their experiences of gender into consideration within the larger issue of the meaningfulness of work.

Feminist Critical Theory

Approaching the topic of the meaningfulness of work from a feminist critical theory perspective, this study allowed women to have a voice, viewed their struggles in the context of the social system in which they are embedded, and acknowledged their active participation in their own lives (Angelique, 2012; Krumer-Nevo, 2009). A feminist perspective played a role from the very start of this study in my purposeful selection of organizations that championed women's rights as partners for participant recruitment. Throughout the interview, I asked participants directly how they thought that gender had

influenced their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, as well as their career choices. Many of the women brought up gender-related issues on their own, particularly in the context of discussing organizational mission, female leadership, and the value that they placed on achieving greater equity for women.

Stream of Meaningfulness of Work Impact

Understanding the processes of the meaningfulness of work requires an understanding of how all of the elements discussed in the previous chapter fit together. To this end, I am using the analogy of a stream to show how each element fits into the process of the impact of the meaningfulness of work (see Figure 1). When one views meaningfulness as an active forward movement or stream, the factors that influenced perceptions of meaningfulness can be thought of in terms of force. They propel the stream into motion and create a current that carries the potential for positive impact forward. The relative strength or weakness of that force may be related to how important meaningfulness is to those experiencing it, while the type (what kind of impact), scope (where impact is felt), target (who is impacted), and objectives of the impact are directed by the person's identity (their values, beliefs, and goals) which has been shaped by their individual context and experiences.

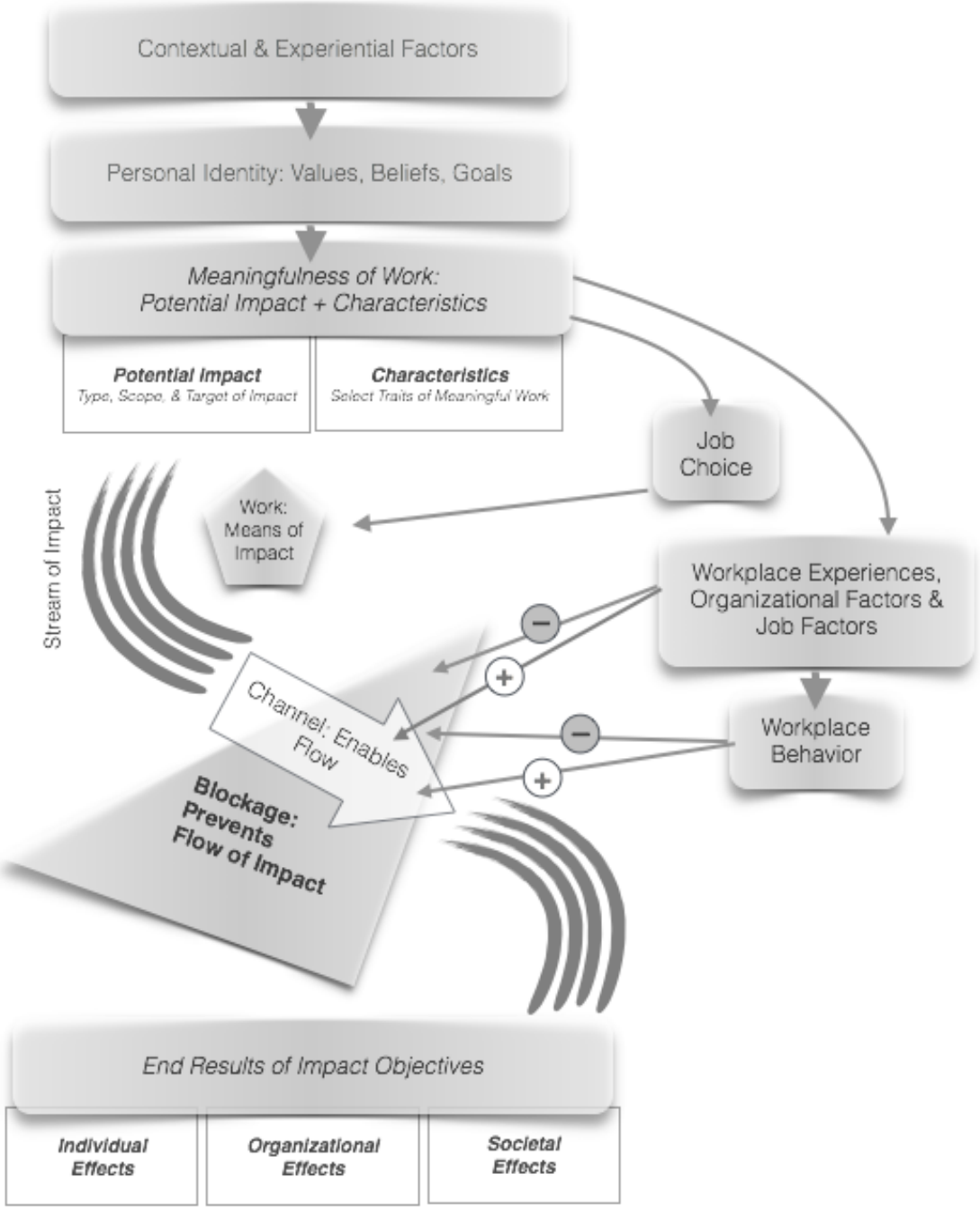

Figure 1. Impact stream theory.

Meaningfulness Primarily Defined by Impact

Many studies include an active component to the definition of the meaningfulness of work, such as the use of the verb "transform" in Fairlie's definition of how people "transform themselves…and the world around them…while making progress toward important end states" (Fairlie, 2011, p. 509). This active component is also evident in Fossen and Vredenburgh's (2014) emphasis on the outcomes and functions of work when they suggest that "the meaning of work refers to an individual's beliefs, values, and attitudes about the outcomes of work and the functions or purposes that work serves in life" (p. 102). This fits with my theory, in which the potential impact is an active force that moves towards the outcome or end result. However, the perceptions of the meaningfulness of work shared by the participants in my study placed primary importance on the potential impact of the meaningfulness of work, while the emphasis on the impact is not as evident elsewhere in the meaningfulness of work literature.

Impact Characteristics Shaped by Personal Identity

The impact of the meaningfulness of work is shaped by multiple contextual and experiential factors, filtered through the values, beliefs, and goals of personal identity. These factors serve as the underlying basis for the formation of a person's values, beliefs, and goals, which together make up personal identity. When these contextual and experiential factors have been processed through the filter of personal identity, they help to define the meaningfulness of work and the type, nature, and objectives of the impact that their work will have.

Personal identity. Also sometimes referred to as core identity, personal identity is a person's self-concept, formed of their values, beliefs, and goals. According to Shim (2015), "self-concepts are influenced by individuals' beliefs and values developed through one's early life experiences" (p. 6). The sensemaking process through which people make sense of the contextual and experiential factors of their lives is often done through the formulation of a personal narrative that tells the story of their identity. While Meca, et al. (2015) include "life story" in their definition of personal identity (p. 2), I view it instead as a means for forming personal identity out of the individual's various contextual and experiential factors. According to Hillenbrand and Money, "Often, an individual's sense of identity is reflected in personal narratives, in which the individual is the author of an autobiography that makes sense of past, current, and potential future situations and experiences of the self" (2015, p. 150).

Values. A person's values are those things that he or she views as significant or important and that serve as the basis for decision-making and for action. Values held by participants in this study were: ability to work (for some, what is meaningful is the ability to have a job and to be productive, regardless of the type of job or the organization), achievement or accomplishment, advancement, advocacy, balance, being active, challenge, change, comfort, communication, community, creativity, diversity and equity (value placed on racial, ethnic, religious, gender, etc. diversity and on equity between various of these groups in terms of discrimination, equal pay, etc.), doing good (emphasis on the "doing" rather than just on the good, such as being good), education or learning (value placed on learning, whether through formal education or in other ways), family, freedom (value placed on freedom, either one's own freedom or the freedom of other

people or value placed on the abstract concept of freedom without a particular target), gratitude, growth, happiness or joy, health, helping people, high standard, honesty, independence, integrity, justice, meaningful life (value placed on a having a life that is meaningful; includes meaningful work as well), money (includes values placed on wealth, on financial security, etc.), power, relationships (value placed on relationships, which may include friendships, love, relationships with family, relationships with co-workers, etc.), religion or spirituality, responsibility, sacrifice, security, self-care, self-knowledge, self-reliance, stability, success, sustainability, and work ethic (value placed on working hard, doing one's best, working well, putting forth the effort necessary to fulfill responsibilities, and producing as high quality of work as one is able).

Values conflict. When one or more values held by a participant were incompatible together, the result was a value conflict. This conflict can be difficult to resolve and participants mentioned feeling like they were involved in an ongoing internal struggle over these conflicting values.

Changes in values or beliefs. Participants noted that their sense of personal identity was sometimes impacted by a change in their system of values or beliefs, which often occurred as a result of a life change (such as a religions conversion) or with becoming an adult, which usually involves a transition from the values held by parents and other authority figures to embracing personal values and beliefs.

Difference between communicated and practiced values. When values are communicated and then not put into practice, it can lead to disillusionment, discouragement, rebellion, lack of motivation, and a loss of a sense of meaningfulness.

Beliefs. Examples of the beliefs discussed by participants included: close-minded, entitlement, ideal world, importance of education, importance of meaningfulness, personal perspective, political, right place (a sense that one is in the right location in time, place, or circumstances in one's life to perform the actions being taken in order to have an impact), right thing (a sense or belief that what one is doing is the correct or best thing in the given circumstances), self-esteem, and beliefs related to what a person "should" or "shouldn't" do (related to responsibility, guilt, values, and spirituality).

Spirituality. Spirituality was the area of beliefs most significant to the participants. Participants spoke often of how their religion, faith, or spirituality impacted their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work. This was not unexpected, as the literature showed a close connection between the meaningfulness of work, spirituality, and the idea of vocation or calling. What has been more of a revelation is that there are differences in how religion or spirituality impacted participants' view of the meaningfulness of work. For some, it served as a motivation to think about the meaning of their work and to pursue work that would have a meaningful impact on others. For others, it contributed to the sense of responsibility to use the talents and skills that they were given by God in their careers. Other ways that spirituality impacted them were: accountability, fellowship, guidance or direction, the call to help people (helping people, showing compassion, and loving others were often motivated by the dictates of a person's religion or spirituality), identity, and motivation to improve the world (the responsibility to improve the world or make it a better place was motivated for some participants by their religion or spirituality). Other topics discussed in reference to religion and spirituality included social justice, value system, and work quality expected.

Goals. Another aspect of personal identity is the goals that a person has. These goals greatly influence the objectives of the potential impact. Examples of goals mentioned by participants were to: achieve, advance, do something, dream, make a living (adequate pay, have needs met, provide for family), live up to potential, establish and live by priorities, have a purpose, and be successful.

Impact Carried by Work

Work is the means by which the impact of the meaningful work is pushed forward and carried towards its objectives. This vehicle for impact is itself affected by various organizational and job factors that can increase its ability to reach the objectives of impact by creating channels or decrease its ability to reach the impact objectives by putting up blockages.

Blockages

In nature, the forward motion of a stream can be blocked by man-made dams or by circumstances of nature. Similarly, blockages preventing the flow of impact may be caused by natural circumstances (such as contextual and experiential factors) or by negative workplace experiences and behaviors. Many of the blockages that participants reported were based on a lack of something that was considered positive, such as a lack of autonomy, lack of communication, lack of support for creativity (either a sense of not having the ability to be creative or a situation in which creativity is stifled, or at least not encouraged), lack of freedom, lack of power to impact, lack of transparency, or lack of work-life balance. They also considered meaningless work to be a blockage. Meaningless work is stagnant. Employees often become cynical about the meaningfulness of work when their employers promised meaningfulness, but then nothing happened, no change

occurred...it was just words. As noted in the previous chapter, there were many different conceptions of what made work meaningless, such work that was dishonest, draining, menial, negative, not fulfilling, not in job description, stagnant, superficial (work that is meaningful is presented in contrast to work engaged in solely for superficial reasons or rewards), tedious or boring, unappreciated, uncomfortable, unfair, unnecessary, or a waste of time. Some other examples of blockages mentioned by participants are: feeling forced to work somewhere or to do a particular job, frustration, feeling like they were trapped or stuck, negative attitudes, not making a difference, poor leadership (leadership that negatively affects their employees and increases blockages to the forward flow of impact), red tape (excessive bureaucracy or adherence to rules, formalities, policies, or procedures that impede the forward flow of impact), something missing, and stress.

Channels

Channels are used by both man and nature to bypass dams and blockages and allow the stream to move forward towards its destination. Likewise, in the context of the meaningfulness of work, channels are things, situations, or factors that bypass blockages, enabling the forward motion of active impact. One of the most important channels brought up by the participants was awareness. The progress of impact was enabled by being conscious of and knowing the impact. It is not enough just that an impact is made. To be meaningful, the person making the impact needs to be able to know what impact they are making. Related to this are mindfulness, being really present, reflection or reflexivity, self-knowledge, and self-talk.

Vision is important to channels as well. The forward motion, the active nature of meaningfulness of work indicates that some kind of change is occurring. To fully engage

in the process of change, at least some degree of vision is required. Even if people are not consciously following a vision for their lives and their careers, they nevertheless have some picture of how they want themselves and their lives to be in the future. This vision is guided by their values. A person's sense of the meaningfulness of their work and the efficacy of it's impact improve with deliberate, intentional review of values, assessment of current reality, and cultivation of vision for an improved future. Another way of living with awareness is being able to see the big picture. While vision allows for a view of what something can become, seeing the big picture means being aware of a larger context of where that something currently is and what it can do. In order to avoid blockage and to have awareness of impact, the person needs to be convinced (by self or others) of the meaningfulness of what they are doing and of the end results. Being able to see both a vision for the future and the big picture of what is going on in the present can be useful in helping to convince oneself or someone else of the meaningfulness of work.

Other examples of channels brought up by the participants included: balance, connectedness, support for and encouragement of creativity, freedom, good communication (communication that is clear, effective, and helpful), good leadership (practices of good leaders and examples of ways that these leaders help can increase the sense of meaningfulness or forward motion of impact), intentional efforts to make work more meaningful (ways in which a job can be made meaningful, even if it is not usually or currently perceived to be), and empowerment.

Some of the characteristics of channels that have emerged from this study seem to fit with the Job Characteristics Model (JCM). In describing the relationship between meaningfulness and the JCM, Cleavenger and Munyon (2013) note that

> skill variety, task identity, and task significance contribute to the meaningfulness individuals experience from work. To experience meaningfulness, the employee must perceive that his/her work is worthwhile or important by some accepted system of values. Since leaders are responsible for establishing and supporting the values of the organization, they are in an ideal position to influence employees' perceptions of their work through this mechanism (p. 355).

End Results of Impact Objectives

The end results are the ultimate impact of work on the intended target. The goals for the impact of meaningful work are influenced by identity, as the work is defined as being meaningful when it has traits that enable the worker to potentially create the type of impact that matches the values, beliefs, and goals of their personal identity. The successful completion of those goals produces the end results that are subjectively evaluated to determine the meaningfulness of the work.

Downstream results. Sometimes the results are clearly tied to the work that is being done, but downstream effects can result even if the individual contributions made upstream did not appear to directly cause the outcome. According to Lily, the meaningfulness of work can be increased by awareness of and identification with the downstream effects. Speaking of a co-worker's inability to see that her everyday tasks were part of a bigger picture, she said, "I think it's the employer's responsibility to help the employees see the downstream effects of their work, because it's not always obvious". By downstream effects, I believe she is referring to the end results that are not always obvious to those upstream who are contributing their small part to the larger flow of impact.

When an employee only sees their own tasks and not how they fit into the overall mission and vision of the organization, they may not feel their work is as meaningful. The story of the three stone cutters is a classic example of being able to recognize the downstream effects of one's work. In this old story, one stone cutter, when asked what he was doing, replied that he was cutting the stone into a block; the second said he was doing a job to provide for his family; and the third, able to envision the downstream result of his labor, replied that he was building a cathedral.

Individual effects. There were a number of potential positive effects of the successful completion of the impact objectives on an individual level. Participants listed these impact objectives as: an increased sense of pride, completeness, enjoyment, satisfaction, fun (fun is similar to enjoyment, but is included here as a separate item, as there can be other reasons something is enjoyable, but not necessarily fun), growth, happiness, health, high self-esteem, independence, legacy (as in leaving a legacy for one's children or for others who will benefit from one's life and the lessons learned), personal change (positive changes on an individual level, whether internal or external), personal success, sense of accomplishment, and well-being.

Organizational effects. The effects of the successful flow of impact on an organizational level included positive organizational change, increased profit, and the success of the organization. Retention was cited as one of the major positive organizational effects. Several participants brought up the point that people want to stay in a workplace characterized by the channels that allow successful completion of impact

objectives (e.g., good leadership, a positive work environment, a compelling mission, flexibility, autonomy) and that people tended to leave a job if there were blockages.

Societal effects. Some positive societal effects included a focus on a "greater good", positive social change, and social justice. The impact made on a societal level also included an increase in volunteerism as both individuals and organizations pursued areas of social need, including organizations providing their employees the opportunity to engage in volunteer activities during their work day.

Example of the stream of impact process. Aster's contextual factors included being White, from Generation Y, raised in a Middle Class family, and having a graduate degree level of education. Her experiential factors included being raised by a father who was a musician, a mother who was a teacher, being read to by her parents and encouraged to get a higher education, and exposure to religious beliefs as a Protestant Christian that taught her that "everything that we do as humans is more than just a superficial thing…we should be looking out for the interests of others, caring for other people, seeking to love other people, and make the world a better place." These factors helped her develop an identity that included the following values: religious beliefs (influenced by her religious affiliation as a Protestant Christian), helping people (also influenced by the teachings of her religion), the arts (influenced by exposure to her father's music), growth (influenced by her religious beliefs), happiness/enjoyment (influenced by her generation, for which this is a common value), and education (influenced by her mother being a teacher, by values commonly held by her social class, and by the values typical of her generation).

Her definition of the meaningfulness of work, comprised of the specific characteristics she attributed to meaningful work and the type, scope, and target of its impact, was therefore shaped by these values. To her, work was considered meaningful if it was enjoyable and made herself and others happy (influenced by happiness/enjoyment value); if it served a higher purpose beyond superficial financial gain (influenced by religious beliefs value); and if it "really matters as far as helping other people, helping society" (influenced by helping people value). The type of impact she hoped to make was inspiring (influenced by the arts, growth, and education values), the scope of that impact was individual and societal, and the target included music students (influenced by education value) and concert attendees (influenced by arts value). Her choice to be a violinist was influenced by her skills, her values, and her desire to do work that was meaningful rather than just to make money (which was consistent with the traits with which she characterized meaningful work). Her work as a violin teacher and concert violinist was the means through which the flow of inspiration impact was carried forward.

That flow towards successfully inspiring her students faced potential blockages in the form of frustration with students not practicing, lacking musical ability, and behaving badly. Her inspiration of concert attendees may have been blocked by the frustration of a music career in which the pay rate is low compared to the long hours and difficult work. However, the channel that enabled her to bypass the potential blockage to inspiring her students was the awareness that what she was actually doing went beyond teaching them violin and included mentoring them and helping them learn overall life lessons. One example of the individual impact from that successful flow of inspiration was a student

with learning disabilities who would likely never play violin well, but was inspired by the life lesson to persevere, overcoming her previous tendency to quickly give up when frustrated. The channel that enabled the inspiration to successfully flow towards the concert attendees was the belief that the value of the arts to positively transform society was more important than the frustration with the difficult aspects of that career. The positive societal impact of this flow of inspiration included an expressed increased interest in the arts. An unexpected individual impact of this flow was the saving of a life when a suicidal concert attendee let her know that he or she chose to reconsider after attending a concert and listening to her play.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations inherent in qualitative studies also impacted this study, though many of these are also the positive characteristics that make qualitative research valuable. For example, due to the small sample size used in this study, it is not generalizable in the same way that a quantitative study may be, but it also has the advantage of providing a richer, more in-depth understanding of the data. The subjectivity and self-reporting in the study could be viewed as rendering it less reliable or accurate, but the intention was to allow the voice of the individual to be heard, which means that for the purposes of this study the accuracy of their statements is less important than their perception of them.

The use of a phone for this study, rather than conducting the interviews face to face, may have limited the ability to view the non-verbal reactions and facial expressions that could have been used to better understand the connotations of what the participants were saying. On the other hand, the choice to do the interviews over the phone may have

given the participants the freedom to do the study where they are most comfortable, and therefore enabled them to be more relaxed and more likely to speak freely.

Another limitation of this study was due to the restrictions of the scope. As the perceptions of participants was the main focus, there was no verification that what the interviewees described about their family of origin, career history, or workplace behavior was accurate.

Recommendations

There are a number of areas that were briefly touched on in the process of doing this research that could not be addressed more fully at this time. To address the lack of verification mentioned above in the limitations section, future research could be conducted to check the perception that individuals have with the way family members, co-workers, supervisors, or other people in their lives view the same situations. Another issue not covered in this study, but which may make an interesting follow-up study, is the way that organizations are currently implementing perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, potentially by going to organizations or their human resource departments directly to get this data.

Race, Ethnicity, and Gender

Several people brought up race and ethnicity as factors, both in association with social class (describing them as intertwined) or in place of social class. Future research could be done to include race and ethnicity as more of a focal point. Also, as this research was approached from a feminist perspective, the participants are all female. Future research could look at the issues from the male perspective as well.

Communication between Generations

Although this study briefly touched on the topic of inter-generational communication in connection to perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, further research could explore this in greater depth. Do parents communicate their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work? How do they communicate their perceptions? What stops them from communicating? How do they communicate their values? Going the other way, do people of the younger generation communicate their perceptions to the generations older than them?

Personality

Additional research could more fully explore the impact personality has on perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, on how people choose to use those perceptions to help shape their career choices, and how it affects their workplace behavior.

Religion/Spirituality

Religion or spirituality was listed by many participants as a key factor in their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, their career choices, and their workplace behavior. I noted elsewhere that these perceptions impacted them in different ways. Future research could be done to explore this area in more depth, as far as the impact of differences in denomination, in religiosity, or in childhood vs adult religious beliefs.

Longitudinal Study

Several participants mentioned that their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work have changed over time and the circumstances that they associated with that change. For example, for some, the change was a result of becoming a parent and for

others it was a result of a religious conversion or conviction. A longitudinal study could be helpful as a means to investigate this aspect of perceptions of the meaningfulness of work more fully.

Implications

Social Change Implications

This study has demonstrated ways that individuals, organizations, and society in general can experience the positive end results of the impact of meaningful work. By removing blockages to the flow of impact and creating or utilizing channels to bypass blockages, employers and those in leadership positions can help to usher in positive change. This study also clarified the contextual and experiential factors and the way they are filtered through the values, beliefs, and goals of personal identity. Understanding that will help improve the ability for vocational counselors and career development practitioners to understand differences in perceptions of the meaningfulness of work and to apply that knowledge toward creating or improving their policies, programs, and practices can help create positive social change for both individuals and organizations. Also, from a social justice perspective, the greater understanding of the factors involved in perceptions of the meaningfulness of work of women from a variety of social classes that was shown in this study could help organizations in the "removal of barriers to meaningful work experienced by marginalized members of society" (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 443).

Implications for Research

This study increased understanding of the unique ways that the meaningfulness of work is defined, the individual influences on perceptions of the meaningfulness of work,

and the implications for related areas of study. The emphasis on the active impact of the meaningfulness of work and the addition of a new theory of how the process occurs will add to the current understanding of the meaningfulness of work as presented in current literature. The implications of channel development and blockage removal will positively impact the field of organizational psychology. This study also provided greater insight into the interaction of gender and social class, as well as the interface between grounded theory research and feminist critical theory.

Implications for Practice & Policy

This study helped to shed a great light into the process by which perceptions of the meaningfulness of work develop and influence workplace behavior, in turn positively impacting organizational outcomes. Understanding the way that the contextual and experiential factors combine and are filtered through personal identity can help inform practices and policies so that they can more effectively meet the needs of those they seek to help.

The influential role of books may have implications for educators and vocational counselors. For example, they could recommend books that may be inspiring to their students or clients in order to help them see or seek meaningfulness in their work. This also could inspire people who do perceive their work to be meaningful to write books or articles that could help to motivate others, whether focused on meaningfulness in general or within a specific job or industry.

Conclusion

I approached this grounded theory study of the perceptions women of diverse social classes had of the meaningfulness of work with a feminist critical theory lens,

which highlighted the unique perspectives of 25 women from the Greater Pittsburgh area as they shared their responses to questions about their definition of the meaningfulness of work, what they believed influenced their perceptions of it, how it may have impacted their career choices, and how it influenced their workplace experiences and behaviors.

The key finding from this study was that meaningfulness of work is not just a passive intellectual concept. Perceptions participants had of the meaningfulness of work focused on the active force of its impact: transforming, changing, contributing, improving. Their responses made evident their enthusiasm and excitement about the potential for "making an impact"...doing something, not just existing as passive observers. The meaningfulness of work depends on how successful it is in moving forward and reaching the objective of its impact, enabling the individual to potentially create the type of impact that matches the values. beliefs, and goals of their personal identity.

Organizational leaders can help to increase the potential for employees to experience the meaningfulness of their work. When employers allow the movement, the forward motion of the impact, it makes work meaningful for the employees. When they put up walls that block that movement, it makes the work meaningless, stagnant, unable to reach its objective. Awareness of the personal factors that have shaped and influenced perceptions of the meaningfulness of work, a vision of the impact that meaningful work can have, and the power to act on what makes work meaningful can help people avoid the stagnancy that comes from blockages to the forward motion of the meaningfulness of work. Channels can be formed through deliberate, intentional review of values, assessment of current reality, and cultivation of vision for an improved future.

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Appendix A: Sample Demographic Screening Survey

Contact Information

1) **Please provide the following contact information:**

First and Last Name: _____
Street Address: _____
City: _____
State: _____ Zip Code/Postal Code _____
Phone Number: _____
Email Address: _____

2) **County: _____**

3) **Which way do you prefer to be contacted?** ☐ Mail ☐ Phone ☐ Email

4) **How many years have you lived in the Greater Pittsburgh area (includes Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Washington, and Westmoreland counties)?**

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1-3 years
- ☐ 5-10 years
- ☐ Over 10 years, but not all my life
- ☐ All of my life
- ☐ I have never lived in the Greater Pittsburgh area

Basic Information

6) **Year of birth (4 digits): _____**

7) **Gender:** ☐ Female ☐ Male

8) **Marital Status:**

☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Living together ☐ Separated ☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed
☐ Would rather not say

9) **Racial/Ethnic Identity:**

- ☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black or African-American
- ☐ Latino or Hispanic
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- ☐ White/Caucasian
- ☐ From multiple races
- ☐ Rather not say

10) **What, if any, is your religious preference?**

- ☐ Protestant
- ☐ Catholic
- ☐ LDS / Mormon
- ☐ Jewish
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ Hindu
- ☐ Buddhist
- ☐ Other
- ☐ No Preference / No religious affiliation
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Household

Your Current Household

11) **What approximately is your household's average annual income (before taxes)?**

- ☐ $0 - $9,999
- ☐ $10,000 - $19,999
- ☐ $20,000 - $29,999
- ☐ $30,000 - $39,999
- ☐ $40,000 - $49,999
- ☐ $50,000 - $59,999
- ☐ $60,000 - $69,999
- ☐ $70,000 - $79,999
- ☐ $80,000 - $89,999
- ☐ $90,000 - $99,999
- ☐ $100,000 - $149,999
- ☐ $150,000 or more
- ☐ Rather not say
- ☐ Do not know

12) **How many people live with you in your household (including yourself)? _____**

13) **Please indicate how many people in your household fall into each age category. Select N/A If nobody is in an age group.**

Age Groups	1	2	3	4 +	N/A
Ages 0-5					
Ages 6-10					
Ages 11-18					
Ages 19-25					

Ages 26-35					
Ages 36-49					
Ages 50-64					
Ages 65+					

14) **How many vehicles do you currently own?** ☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 +

15) **Do you rent or own your home or apartment?**

☐ I pay rent ☐ I own my residence ☐ I live in someone else's house or apartment

16) **Please select the best options that describe your current residence. More than one may apply.**

- ☐ I live in a single-family house or duplex
- ☐ I live in an apartment
- ☐ I live in an institution (such as a hospital, communal house, retirement home)
- ☐ I am homeless
- ☐ My residence is in an urban area (city)
- ☐ My residence is in a suburban area (close to city, but not in it)
- ☐ My residence is in a rural area (out in the country)

Your Childhood Household

17) **Please select the best options that describe your residence as a child. More than one may apply.**

- ☐ We rented
- ☐ We owned our residence
- ☐ We lived in someone else's house or apartment
- ☐ We lived in a single-family house or duplex
- ☐ We lived in an apartment
- ☐ I lived in an institution (such as a hospital, communal house, orphanage)
- ☐ We were homeless
- ☐ Our residence was in an urban area (city)
- ☐ Our residence was in a suburban area (close to city, but not in it)
- ☐ Our residence was in a rural area (out in the country)

18) **Please indicate how many people in each category lived in your household. Use N/A If there was nobody in a particular category**.

	1	**2**	**3**	**4 +**	**N/A**
Fathers or Step-fathers					
Mothers or Step-mothers					

Brothers					
Sisters					
Grandparents					
Other relatives					
Non-relatives					

19) **How did the average income in your childhood household compare with your current income?**

- ☐ My current income is higher
- ☐ My current income is lower
- ☐ My current income is about the same
- ☐ Rather not say
- ☐ Do not know

20) **How many vehicles did your family own when you were growing up (the maximum owned at one time)?**

☐ 0 ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 +

Education

21) **What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

- ☐ Elementary school only
- ☐ Some high school, but did not finish
- ☐ Completed high school
- ☐ Some college, but did not finish
- ☐ Two-year college degree / A.A / A.S.
- ☐ Four-year college degree / B.A. / B.S.
- ☐ Some graduate work
- ☐ Completed Masters or professional degree
- ☐ Advanced Graduate work or Ph.D.
- ☐ Rather not say

Parent's Education

22) **What is the highest level of education your father completed?**

- ☐ Elementary school only
- ☐ Some high school, but did not finish
- ☐ Completed high school
- ☐ Some college, but did not finish
- ☐ Two-year college degree / A.A / A.S.
- ☐ Four-year college degree / B.A. / B.S.

- ☐ Some graduate work
- ☐ Completed Masters or professional degree
- ☐ Advanced Graduate work or Ph.D.
- ☐ Rather not say
- ☐ Not sure

23) **What is the highest level of education your mother completed?**

- ☐ Elementary school only
- ☐ Some high school, but did not finish
- ☐ Completed high school
- ☐ Some college, but did not finish
- ☐ Two-year college degree / A.A / A.S.
- ☐ Four-year college degree / B.A. / B.S.
- ☐ Some graduate work
- ☐ Completed Masters or professional degree
- ☐ Advanced Graduate work or Ph.D.
- ☐ Rather not say
- ☐ Not sure

Career

Your Career

24) **What is your current career status? More than one option may apply.**

- ☐ Employed for someone else full-time
- ☐ Employed for someone else part-time
- ☐ Self-employed, full-time
- ☐ Self-employed, part-time
- ☐ Unemployed, looking for work
- ☐ Unemployed, not looking for work
- ☐ Homemaker
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Student full-time
- ☐ Student part-time
- ☐ Rather not say

25) **Where are you employed? If not employed, select "N/A".**

- ☐ I work from home
- ☐ I work in an office
- ☐ I work in a factory
- ☐ I work in a mine
- ☐ I work in a store
- ☐ I work in a church or religious institution

- ☐ I work in an educational setting
- ☐ N/A
- ☐ Other (Please Specify): _____

26) **In what industry is my current or previous job? Please select as many as apply.**

- ☐ Advertising & Marketing
- ☐ Agriculture, Farming, Fishing, & Forestry
- ☐ Airlines & Aerospace (including Defense)
- ☐ Automotive
- ☐ Broadcasting
- ☐ Business Support, Information, & Logistics
- ☐ Construction & Machinery
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Entertainment, Recreation, & Arts
- ☐ Finance, Insurance, & Financial Services
- ☐ Food & Beverages & Hospitality
- ☐ Government & Public Administration
- ☐ Health Care & Pharmaceuticals
- ☐ Manufacturing
- ☐ Mining
- ☐ Military
- ☐ Nonprofit
- ☐ Publishing
- ☐ Religious
- ☐ Retail, Sales, and Consumer Products
- ☐ Real Estate
- ☐ Science
- ☐ Social Services
- ☐ Technology, Internet, and Electronics
- ☐ Telecommunications
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Utilities, Energy, and Extraction
- ☐ N/A
- ☐ Rather not say
- ☐ Other (Please Specify): _____

27) **Which best describes your current work role? If unemployed, list your most recent work role.**

- ☐ Business owner
- ☐ Upper management
- ☐ Middle management
- ☐ Junior management

- ☐ Administrative staff
- ☐ Support staff
- ☐ Trained professional
- ☐ Skilled laborer
- ☐ Consultant
- ☐ Temporary employee
- ☐ Researcher
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ N/A
- ☐ Other (Please Specify): _____

28) **What is the name of the location where you currently work? If unemployed, where did you most recently work? _____**

Your answer is confidential. We will not be sharing anything you say with your current/previous employer.

29) **What is your job title? If currently unemployed, what was your previous job title?**

_____

30) **How long have you been working at your current job? If unemployed, how long did you work at your previous job?**

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1 year
- ☐ 2-5 years
- ☐ 6-9 years
- ☐ 10 or more years

Father's Career

31) **What was your father's career status? More than one option may apply.**

- ☐ Employed for someone else full-time
- ☐ Employed for someone else part-time
- ☐ Self-employed, full-time
- ☐ Self-employed, part-time
- ☐ Unemployed, looking for work
- ☐ Unemployed, not looking for work
- ☐ Homemaker
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Student full-time
- ☐ Student part-time
- ☐ Rather not say
- ☐ Not sure

32) **Where was your father employed? If not employed, select "N/A".**

- ☐ He worked from home

- ☐ He worked in an office
- ☐ He worked in a factory
- ☐ He worked in a mine
- ☐ He worked in a store
- ☐ He worked in a church or religious institution
- ☐ He worked in an educational setting
- ☐ N/A
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Other (Please Specify): _____

33) **In what industry was your father's job? Please select as many as apply.**

- ☐ Advertising & Marketing
- ☐ Agriculture, Farming, Fishing, & Forestry
- ☐ Airlines & Aerospace (including Defense)
- ☐ Automotive
- ☐ Broadcasting
- ☐ Business Support, Information, & Logistics
- ☐ Construction & Machinery
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Entertainment, Recreation, & Arts
- ☐ Finance, Insurance, & Financial Services
- ☐ Food & Beverages & Hospitality
- ☐ Government & Public Administration
- ☐ Health Care & Pharmaceuticals
- ☐ Manufacturing
- ☐ Mining
- ☐ Military
- ☐ Nonprofit
- ☐ Publishing
- ☐ Religious
- ☐ Retail, Sales, and Consumer Products
- ☐ Real Estate
- ☐ Science
- ☐ Social Services
- ☐ Technology, Internet, and Electronics
- ☐ Telecommunications
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Utilities, Energy, and Extraction
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Rather not say
- ☐ Other (Please Specify): _____

34) **Which best describes your father's work role?**

- ☐ Business owner
- ☐ Upper management
- ☐ Middle management
- ☐ Junior management
- ☐ Administrative staff
- ☐ Support staff
- ☐ Trained professional
- ☐ Skilled laborer
- ☐ Consultant
- ☐ Temporary employee
- ☐ Researcher
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ N/A
- ☐ Other (Please Specify): _____

Mother's Career

35) **What was your mother's career status? More than one option may apply.**

- ☐ Employed for someone else full-time
- ☐ Employed for someone else part-time
- ☐ Self-employed, full-time
- ☐ Self-employed, part-time
- ☐ Unemployed, looking for work
- ☐ Unemployed, not looking for work
- ☐ Homemaker
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Student full-time
- ☐ Student part-time
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Rather not say

36) Where was your mother employed? If not employed, select "N/A".

- ☐ She worked from home
- ☐ She worked in an office
- ☐ She worked in a factory
- ☐ She worked in a store
- ☐ She worked in a church or religious institution
- ☐ She worked in an educational setting
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ N/A

- ☐ Other (Please Specify): _____

37) In what industry was your mother's job? Please select as many as apply.

- ☐ Advertising & Marketing
- ☐ Agriculture, Farming, Fishing, & Forestry
- ☐ Airlines & Aerospace (including Defense)
- ☐ Automotive
- ☐ Broadcasting
- ☐ Business Support, Information, & Logistics
- ☐ Construction & Machinery
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Entertainment, Recreation, & Arts
- ☐ Finance, Insurance, & Financial Services
- ☐ Food & Beverages & Hospitality
- ☐ Government & Public Administration
- ☐ Health Care & Pharmaceuticals
- ☐ Manufacturing
- ☐ Mining
- ☐ Military
- ☐ Nonprofit
- ☐ Publishing
- ☐ Religious
- ☐ Retail, Sales, and Consumer Products
- ☐ Real Estate
- ☐ Science
- ☐ Social Services
- ☐ Technology, Internet, and Electronics
- ☐ Telecommunications
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Utilities, Energy, and Extraction
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Rather not say
- ☐ Other (Please Specify): _____

38) **Which best describes your mother's work role?**

- ☐ Business owner
- ☐ Upper management
- ☐ Middle management
- ☐ Junior management
- ☐ Administrative staff
- ☐ Support staff

- ☐ Trained professional
- ☐ Skilled laborer
- ☐ Consultant
- ☐ Temporary employee
- ☐ Researcher
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ N/A
- ☐ Other (Please Specify): _____

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Introductory Questions

1. "Do you have any questions for me before we begin?"
2. "Why did you decide to take part in this study and what do you hope to get out of it?"

RQ1: What perceptions do women from diverse social classes have of the meaningfulness of work?

1. "When you hear the phrase 'meaningfulness of work', what does that mean to you?"
2. "How would you define meaningfulness?"
3. "What do you think would make work meaningful?"

RQ2: What influenced their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work?

1. "What do you think led to you having the perceptions you do of the meaningfulness of work?"
2. "What perceptions do you think your parents or other family members had of the meaningfulness of work? What makes you think so?"
3. "What was the main source of income in your home growing up? Do you think your parents' level of education or job choices impacted you? If so, how?"
4. "In addition to the influences that you just mentioned, I am also curious about the potential influences of social class. How would you describe your social class when you were growing up? Why did you select that social class?"
5. "What were the positive or negative aspects of growing up in that social class?"

6. "How would you classify your current social class? How does your current social class compare with your social class growing up?"
7. "Do you believe your social class or gender played a role in your perceptions of the meaningfulness of work? If so, what?"
8. "Do you think that living in the Greater Pittsburgh area influenced your perceptions of the meaningfulness of work? If so, how?"

RQ 3: What impact do they believe their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work have had on their career choices?

1. "What were the main factors that went into your choice of job or career?"
2. "How important do you feel it is to do work that is meaningful?"
3. "Do you think your perception of the meaningfulness of work impacted your career choices? If so, how? If not, why?"
4. "What did you want to be when you grew up? Why?"
5. "If you could choose any career that you wanted to pursue, and time and money were not a problem, what would you do? If not your current career, what are the main factors that prevented you from pursing that career?"

RQ 4: How do they believe that their perceptions of the meaningfulness of work influence their workplace experiences and behaviors?

1. "Can you please state your job title and give a brief description of what you do in your job on a regular basis?"
2. "Do you believe that your current or most recent job is or was meaningful? Why or why not?"

3. “Whose responsibility do you think it is to make work meaningful, the employer or the employees? Why?”
4. “Has the meaningfulness of work influenced the way that you interact with others in your workplace, the amount of time you spend at work, or the effort you put into your job? If so, how?”

Concluding Question

1. “Do you have any other thoughts or comments you would like to share?”

Appendix C: “Protecting Human Research Participants” Certificate

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Jennifer Hutmire** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 09/16/2013

Certification Number: 1270426

Appendix D: Counselor Contact Information

Participants who experience emotional distress as a result of the interview process will be provided with information for contacting a counselor in the county that they reside within the Greater Pittsburgh area (Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Washington, and Westmoreland).

Allegheny County

- Allegheny County re:solve Crisis Line (24 hours a day): 1-888-796-8226

Call this hotline at any time for crisis counseling and referrals to professional counselors.

- Allegheny County Peer Support Warmline Service: 1-866-661-9276

Call from 10 am to midnight, 7 days a week, to hear a friendly voice and talk with a peer about anything that is on your mind. This is not a crisis line, so call the Allegheny County re:solve Crisis Line above if you are in a mental health crisis.

- Service Coordination Unit/Base Service Units

Depending on where you live in Allegheny County, you can receive help with locating a counselor that will meet your needs by contacting your local Service Coordination Unit. If you are not sure which one is closest to you, call one and they will be able to direct you to the correct number.

  - Milestone Centers, Inc. (formerly Allegheny East): 412-731-9707
  - Chartiers MH/MR Center: 412-221-3302
  - Mercy Behavioral Health Services, Northern MH/MR: 412-323-4500
  - Family Services of Western PA: (24 hr.) 1-888-222-4200 or 412-820-2050
  - Mon-Yough Community Services, Inc.: 412-675-8480

- Mercy Behavioral Health Services, Southwest MH/MR: 412-488-4040
- Turtle Creek Valley MH/MR Program: 412-351-0222
- Staunton Clinic, Sewickley Valley Hospital: 412-749-7330
- Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic: 412-624-1000 or 1-888-796-8226

Armstrong County

- Armstrong/Indiana County MH/MR Program: 724-548-3451
- Armstrong County Crisis Hotline: 724-548-345, after business hours call 911
- Family Counseling Center of Armstrong County: 724-543-2941

Beaver County

- Beaver County Behavioral Health: 724-847-6225
- UPMC/BV Mental Health Services Crisis Line: 724-775-5208 or 1-800-400-6180

You can call this hotline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and get counseling or referral to a professional counselor. Walk-in crisis services are also provided.

- Beaver County Direct Service Unit: 724-891-2827
- Beaver County Mental Health Association: 724-775-4165

Butler County

- Butler County MH/MR Program: 724-284-5114
- Butler County Crisis Hotline: 724-287-0440 or 800-292-3866
- Center for Community Resources, Inc.: 724-431-0095
- Mental Health Association in Butler County: 724-287-1965

Fayette County

- Fayette County Behavioral Health Administration: 724-430-1370

- Fayette County 24-Hour Crisis Line: 724-437-1003
- Mental Health Association in Fayette County: 724-438-6738
- Chestnut Ridge Counseling Services: 724-437-0729
- Crosskeys Human Services, Inc.: 724-785-6180
- Fayette Resources: 724-437-6461
- SPHS Behavioral Health: 724-628-3435

Washington County

- Washington County MH/MR Program: 724-228-6832
- Washington County 24-Hour Crisis Line: 724-225-6940
- Centerville Clinics (multiple locations): 724-632-6801
- Washington Communities: 724-225-6940
- Mental Health Association of Washington County: 724-225-2061
- WARMLINE: 724-223-1026 or Toll Free: 1-800-MHA-2466

Call the Warmline to receive peer support and information about community resources, but not for emergencies or if you are in crisis.

Westmoreland County

- Westmoreland County Behavioral Health Services: 724-830-3617
- Westmoreland County 24-Hour Crisis Line: 1-800-836-6010
- Westmoreland Casemanagement & Supports, Inc. Toll Free: 1-800-353-6467
- Southwestern Pennsylvania Human Services, Inc.: 724-489-9100
- Mental Health America of Westmoreland County: 724-834-6351

Appendix E: Interview Date, Time, and Duration

Interviewee	Date	Time	Duration
Aster	07-16-2014	10:30 a.m.	48:22
Azalea	05-09-2014	11:30 a.m.	30:51
Camellia	07-30-2014	10:32 a.m.	52:36
Dahlia	07-21-2014	7:30 p.m.	01:27:31
Daisy	04-17-2014	12:00 p.m.	28:22
Fern	07-15-2014	10:31 a.m.	1:01:50
Heather	08-13-2014	4:30 p.m.	36:51
Holly	04-15-2014	8:38 p.m.	36:11
Iris	07-28-2014	2:37 p.m.	46:45
Ivy	03-11-2015	1:34 p.m.	32:12
Jasmine	04-19-2014	10:01 a.m.	47:34
Laurel	06-23-2014	10:30 a.m.	34:04
Lily	07-29-2014	8:31 p.m.	54:50
Linden	08-12-2014	9:00 a.m.	39:21
Magnolia	03-10-2015	7:00 p.m.	1:00:03
Marigold	07-10-2014	7:02 p.m.	52:48
Myrtle	08-16-2014	12:17 p.m.	37:23
Olive	07-16-2014	1:15 p.m.	33:33
Poppy	04-05-2014	11:30 a.m.	44:31
Rose	04-18-2014	10:30 a.m.	39:01
Rosemary	03-11-2015	3:23 p.m.	30:57
Sage	05-13-2014	7:00 p.m.	38:55
Violet	08-13-2014	9:00 a.m.	35:51
Willow	08-07-2014	6:00 p.m.	28:38
Zinnia	05-10-2014	11:30 a.m.	35:45