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The Effect of Individual Differences on the Experience of Meaningful Work: The Influence of Social Status and Work Motivation

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

THE EFFECT OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES ON THE EXPERIENCE OF MEANINGFUL WORK:
THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL STATUS AND WORK MOTIVATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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PROGRAM IN COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

BY
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ABSTRACT

As the employment landscape continues to change through rapid advancements in technology, globalization, and the growing presence of contingent work opportunities, what remains the same is workers’ quest towards decent and meaningful work (MW). Such work depends on employees’ perception that their work is important and that it contributes to their own growth, as well as to that of society. Emergent research on the construct points to a host of benefits associated with obtaining MW. Among these include greater vocational satisfaction, increased organizational commitment, and improved job engagement.

However, not all individuals have access to such work. Differences in social status (in terms of differential access to economic resources, social power, and social prestige) are proposed as particularly salient in the experience of MW, precisely because workers from lower social status backgrounds often face barriers in occupational choice. Additionally, individual-level differences in terms of both intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation can moderate the proposed relationship between social status and MW. The goal of the present study was to explicate the relationships between these variables, with the hope of understanding what makes work significant and for whom.

Using data from a sample of 207 employed adults, correlational and hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to examine the impact of social status on MW, and to test the moderating effect of intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation on this proposed relationship.

Results from these analyses offered support for the first hypothesis of this study that
predicted a positive relationship between individuals’ social status and their experience of MW. Specifically, the regression results indicated that gender, social status, intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation all were significant predictors towards participants’ meaningful work scores. In contrast to the study’s second hypothesis, no moderation effects of intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation were observed.

An overview of these findings and implications for practice are included in the latter half of this manuscript. Also included are limitations and suggestions for future research on this important construct and its many unexamined correlates.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Work is an integral part of the day-to-day experience of most individuals. Studies suggest that the average person in the United States spends over one-third of their waking hours working (e.g., England & Misumi, 1986). Additionally, over a third of surveyed workers assign a value of importance to work that is greater or equal to other major life areas. Within the same sample, 88% of American workers endorse that they will continue to work even if they win the lottery or inherit a large sum of money that would allow them not to work (England & Misumi, 1986, p. 408). A more recent Gallup poll, the Work and Education Survey from 2013, replicates these findings. According to the results of this poll, over two-thirds of American workers (68%) intend to keep working even if they won a $10 million lottery (Newport, 2013). Likewise, a survey conducted by NORC in 2016 showed that 70% of surveyed adults agreed with the statement: “I would enjoy having a paying job even if I did not need the money” (Bowman, 2017).

Together, such findings point to the central role of work in the daily experience of most American workers. In addition to providing a source of income, work holds the potential to shape the broader social and economic advancement of both families and communities. Such advancement, however, depends on access to decent work. The International Labor Organization, a tripartite agency founded within the United Nations, describes decent work as including a fair income, workplace security, and the opportunity for personal and community development (ILO, 2019). Emerging research suggests that both paid employment and access to decent work are
critical in alleviating poverty and reducing inequality on a global scale (ILO, 2019). From this perspective, work extends to help individuals meet more than their basic survival needs; it offers meaning, opportunity, and a pathway towards both personal growth and fulfillment.

Beginning with the work of Frank Parsons in the early 1900s, a number of career theories developed within the field of counseling psychology to explicate and facilitate the role of work for individuals across the lifespan. These theories spanned multiple perspectives and borrowed from many disciplines found within psychology, including, but not limited to, developmental psychology (e.g., Gottfredson, 2005), person-environment fit (e.g., Holland, 1997), and social cognitive perspectives (e.g., Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

As comprehensive as the aforementioned career theories proved, recent scholarly work challenged their utility in addressing the work experience of all modern-day workers. For instance, Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, and Autin (2017) argued that such theories, though broad in nature, often lack the ability to explain the lived experience of individuals who do not have access to economic resources or social capital. Additionally, these theories provide little room in acknowledging a quickly shifting labor market characterized by expanding globalization, the rise of under- and un-employment, and multiple technological changes. Thompson and Dahling (2019) highlight how vocational realities such as unemployment, reemployment, and the changing nature of paid work all converge to influence both poverty and income inequality in the United States (p. 673). Such trends create an even bigger need for “decent work” – one that is characterized by access to sufficient income, a sense of safety and security at work, and a space for the voices of marginalized employees (Thompson & Dahling, 2019).

At the same time, barriers to securing such work abound. Primary among these are under-employment and non-employment, the rise of automation, and the growing presence of
contingent work opportunities. Non-employment refers to the experience of individuals that have been out of work for extended periods of time and who, as a result, are no longer able to effectively re-enter the workforce (Thompson & Dahling, 2019). On the other hand, contingent employment refers to the practice of hiring temporary or part-time workers to meet ebbing job demands. This type of practice is significant for workers because such employment often limits important trademarks of traditional, full-time work, including access to reliable compensation and benefits (e.g., healthcare insurance). Lastly, swift technological changes and improvements in automation, both lead to an ever-changing employment landscape, the implications of which are yet to be determined.

Given such emergent trends, counseling psychology has a duty to explore the nature and interrelationships among these social changes, as well as the way they come together to inform the experience of today’s employees. In addition, it is imperative for vocational scholars to consider the differential impact of these trends for specific groups of workers, including those from both privileged and less-privileged backgrounds. Nowhere is this more imminent and important than in the field’s growing efforts to understand the presence (or lack thereof) of meaningful work in the lives of modern-day workers.

**Meaningful Work**

Meaningful work (MW) is frequently defined as “work that is both significant and positive in valence (meaningfulness), [and where] the positive valence of MW has a eudaimonic (growth- and purpose-oriented) rather than hedonic (pleasure oriented) focus” (Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012, p. 2). Accordingly, the authors argue that MW is characterized by three main components: (1) positive meaning, (2) meaning making through work, and (3) greater good motivations. Within this framework, “positive meaning” relates to the way individuals assess
their work to matter. “Meaning making through work” adds to this, by looking at the way MW can help individuals develop a deeper sense of their life’s overall purpose. Lastly, “greater good motivations” refers to ideals of using work to benefit others.

However, many more definitions of MW exist in the literature. One of the oldest conceptualizations of the construct defined MW as: “The degree to which the employee experiences the job as one which is generally meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile” (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, p. 162, as cited in Steger et al., 2012). Within the last two decades, additional definitions proliferated. Among these include definitions which emphasize MW as a state of being (Chalofsky, 2003); MW as linked to identity (Lips-Wiersma, Wright, & Dik, 2016); MW as the discovery of existential meaning (Lee, 2015); and MW as a search for purpose beyond extrinsic work rewards (Arnold et al., 2007, as cited in Steger et al., 2012).

Based on an overall review of the extant literature, Both-Nwabuwe, Dijkstra, and Beersma (2017) propose their own definition: “Meaningful work is the subjective experience of existential significance from fit between the individual and work” (p. 7). Here, “the subjective experience” component refers to the perception of work as “making sense of one’s reason for existence in the world” (p. 7). Together, these multiple definitions suggest that MW refers to a positive intra-personal experience of one’s work as significant, benefiting others, and connected to a greater life purpose.

**Benefits of Meaningful Work**

Growing research on the construct underscores the way MW provides individual benefits that extend beyond compensation to meet workers’ socialization, self-determination, and meaning-making needs. For example, recent scholarly work points to the experience of MW as particularly important in increasing vocational satisfaction and success. Steger et al. (2012)
report evidence for the connection between MW and measures of important career outcomes, such as greater organizational citizenship, career commitment, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and intrinsic work motivation. Geldenhuys, Laba, and Venter (2014) found support for the hypothesis that psychological meaningfulness experienced at work predicts work engagement, and, together, the two predict organizational commitment. Additionally, MW is positively associated with job engagement and with self-rated performance (e.g., Fouché, Rothman, & Van der Vyver, 2017).

Other reviews (e.g., Duffy & Dik, 2013) highlight how experiences of meaningful work and particularly of calling, link positively to important outcomes such as increased career maturity, work meaning, and life satisfaction. In ways similar to MW, the experience of calling connects to greater job and organizational commitment (e.g., Duffy & Dik, 2013, p. 430).

Meaningful work further appears as constructive in helping individuals make sense of themselves and their work environments. Asik-Dizdar and Esen (2013) argue that this type of work relates to individuals’ ability to make meaning of their environment, in such a way that they achieve positive outcomes (e.g., personal satisfaction or fulfillment). Often, employees who experience MW, also report experiencing a type of “flow” that is both different and distinct from experiences of meaningless work (e.g., Bailey & Madden, 2017). The authors note that this type of flow is present across occupations and within worker groups (Bailey & Madden, 2017).

Importantly, research suggests that experiences of MW are negatively related to burnout (e.g., Fouché et al., 2017), as well as to absenteeism, withdrawal intent, and extrinsic work motivation (e.g., Steger et al., 2012). With regards to the latter finding, the authors highlight how MW accounts for a similar amount of variance in measures of job satisfaction, as do individuals’ organizational commitment and intent to withdraw. Based on this finding, it appears that
individuals may distance themselves from work not because of poor satisfaction or low organizational commitment, but also because the work holds little to no meaning for them (Steger et al., p. 12).

Other research on MW shows the impact of such experiences on life areas outside of the vocational sphere. For instance, Allan, Douglas, Duffy, and McCarty (2016) looked at the role of MW as an influence in the relationship between work stress and meaning in life. Using the framework proposed by Steger et al. (2012), they found that work stress had a negative relation to presence of MW and a positive relation to a larger search for meaning. However, meaning-making served as a moderator of this relationship, attenuating that connection. Importantly, Allan et al. noted that work stress in combination with the three MW moderators and their interactions, accounted for 35% of the variance in scores related to “presence of life meaning.” Hence, the authors concluded that meaning experienced at work is an important component of meaning experienced in life.

This sentiment is echoed by Steger et al. (2012) who state: “The idea that work could be meaningful without also leading people to build meaning in their lives as a whole makes little sense” (pp. 3-4). In developing and validating the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI; 2012), the authors report a positive relationship between WAMI scores and measures looking at meaning in life and life satisfaction. Conversely, they report a negative correlation between experiences of MW and instruments assessing hostility and depression.

Sources and Mechanisms of Meaningful Work

Broadly speaking, previous research on MW addresses both sources of MW and its associated processes. With regards to the former, multiple sources of MW exist. Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) identify four main factors: self, others, the work context, and spiritual
life. Within the category of “self,” MW relates to values, motivations, and general beliefs about work (p. 96). With regards to the latter, beliefs about work involve thoughts about the centrality of work, work orientation, and beliefs about calling.

In the category of “others,” sources of MW include coworkers, leaders, groups, communities and families. Accounting for these specific sources is important in capturing the way individuals make sense of their work experience in relation to that of others. For example, there are clear benefits in finding camaraderie with peers, a sense of community and belonging, and benefits in obtaining consistent social support at work.

Lastly, within the “spiritual category,” the authors note their surprise that so few studies assess the connection between work and spirituality, especially when religion and spirituality tend to be central sources of meaning in other life areas (Rosso et al., 2010, p. 106).

In terms of mechanisms of MW, Rosso and colleagues (2010) discuss seven distinct types. These include authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, purpose, belongingness, transcendence, and cultural and interpersonal sense-making (p. 108). Whereas sources of MW relates to the origin or presence of specific elements within one’s self, context, and relationships with others that give rise to the experience of meaningful work, mechanisms of MW refers to the process of how employment is imbued with meaning. For instance, experiences of MW occur when the enacted work matches the personality and preferences of the individual who enacts it (i.e., when there is an authentic match between the two). Similarly, MW is possible when a worker feels that they have control over their environment and, as a result, have agency within their own vocational process; that is, when they have a strong sense of self-efficacy to shape their work experience. In the same way, work takes on meaning when it contributes to an individual’s positive sense of self (i.e., self-esteem).
Meaning within work also derives from having a distinct sense of purpose. Within this category, there is an additional connection between one’s values providing a sense of purpose, and that purpose in turn linking to MW (Rosso et al., 2010). Other mechanisms of MW include that of transcendence, or the idea of connecting the self to a greater whole (p. 112). In this way, individuals feel as though their work contributes to something beyond themselves and their own experience. Lastly, the cultural and interpersonal sense-making mechanism is unique in that it moves away from self-based explanations of MW, in order to look at the impact of how the social milieu shapes such experiences (p. 113). For example, meaning can derive through interactions with others and in the relationships one forms with colleagues or through work.

Despite the articulation of different sources and mechanisms of MW, Rosso and colleagues (2010) point out how research related to both tends to be contained in “silos” (p. 116), outside of which there is a lack of theoretical integration. They speculate this may be because research on the construct of MW is still developing and expanding. Rosso et al. (2010) further underscore the importance in future research to consider the additive or interactive effects between the different sources of MW and its mechanisms. Specifically, there is a dearth in the literature with regards to exploring socially-based mechanisms that transform work into a meaningful endeavor (p. 116).

In addition, the authors note that a significant portion of the literature on MW views workers as passive experiencers or participants in the vocational sphere. That is, previous studies do not take into account workers’ agency and the way they might actively shape their environments to contribute to MW (Rosso et al., 2010).

Lastly, there is a call within this emerging body of work to reflect on the way important individual factors, including workers’ income and social status, shape their experience of MW.
As Rosso et al. (2010) specify, “… much of the literature continues to overlook, or remain agnostic about, whether different levels of employees—e.g., CEOs versus midlevel managers vs. frontline employees vs. unskilled low-wage laborers—tend to engage in different meaning-making processes or experience different types of meaning in their work” (p. 117).

Extrapolating on this latter critique, Ashforth and Kreiner (2013) offer a theoretical reflection on different types of what they call “dirty” work and strategies that workers use to make meaning from it. Accordingly, the three types of “dirty work” are as follows: (1) physically tainted occupations (often associated with death, waste, or ones performed under dangerous conditions), (2) socially tainted occupations (including jobs that involve serving others or coming into contact with stigmatized others), and (3) morally tainted occupations (such as work that involves deception, rule-breaking, or going against social standards) (p. 127).

Within these categories, Ashforth and Kreiner (2013) argue that the experience of meaning-making is subjective, and that workers may have different avenues that they can use to construct meaning from their unique circumstances (p. 128). These avenues further depend on workers’ individual personal values and beliefs, especially as they relate to the world of work. For instance, it is not uncommon for such workers involved with “dirty work” to develop strong subcultures to protect themselves from the judgment of outside others or to highlight the necessity of their work to the overall structure of society (p. 129).

For workers from lower socio-economic backgrounds or those who do not have the choice but to engage in “dirty work” occupations, there are a number of different strategies that allow these individuals to transform their experience into one associated with positive meaning and affect. Ashforth and Kreiner (2013) discuss the strategies of reframing, recalibrating, and refocusing. Here, reframing “refers to transforming the meaning of the work by infusing the
means (how one does the work) or ends (for what purpose) with positive value and by neutralizing the negative value” (p. 131). An example of this strategy may be when workers discuss the benefits their work provides to society as a whole. Recalibrating, then, involves adjusting the standards workers use to reflect on the magnitude or value of a specific dirty work aspect (p. 132). Finally, refocusing takes place when workers actively switch their attention to non-tainted aspects of their work or work environment. An example of this strategy is when workers focus on the intrinsic rewards of the work, including gaining knowledge or skills, or when they emphasize extrinsic aspects of the job, such as the compensation it provides (p. 134). The selected strategy or focal point of refocus then depends on the workers’ individual work motivation (to be discussed in more detail below).

Other factors that influence the use of reframing, recalibrating, and refocusing techniques as mechanisms towards meaning-making at work include: occupational prestige, social validation, and social comparison. With regards to the latter, this may happen when “dirty work” is compared to even more stigmatized occupations. Such a strategy serves as a particularly useful tool to bolster workers’ self- and collective-esteem (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2013, p. 137).

A caveat in using these strategies to create meaning from different kinds of work experiences is that refocusing on extrinsic rewards is not enough to instill intrinsic meaningfulness (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2013). This may be especially true for “dirty work” employees who, for one reason or another, are not able to use reframing and recalibrating to create meaning from especially difficult work situations. Ashforth and Kreiner poignantly argue that for these workers, access to intrinsic meaningfulness may be “actually a luxury that many individuals simply cannot afford” (p. 134).
**Related Constructs**

In research of MW, it is important to note that the construct is related to, yet distinct from other correlated constructs such as sense of calling (Chalofsky, 2003). Within this body of literature, MW is connected “perceptions of personal significance, understanding and impact at work” (Steger, Dik, & Shim, 2009). In contrast, calling is defined as 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, 2009).

The construct of calling evolved significantly over time. Whereas older definitions of the construct emphasized themes of “transcendence” or “fate,” certain modern conceptualizations of calling are broader in nature and further assess individuals’ drive to do fulfilling work (Steger et al., 2009). This type of work may or may not relate to experiences of feeling “summoned” towards a specific career (e.g., Dik et al., 2009). To differentiate between MW and calling, Steger et al. (2012) explain how calling is a smaller, more specific construct that falls under the purview of MW (p. 2).

MW further is distinct from the constructs of “work values” and “work orientation.” With regards to work values, extant literature defines these as outcomes that individuals desire and ones that they hope to enact through their work (e.g., Nord et al., 1990, as cited in Rosso et al., 2010, p. 96). Such values are important because they help to paint a picture of what orients others to work. Additionally, work orientation is a broader latent construct that frequently subsumes job involvement and work centrality. Work orientation is still a commonly cited factor in influencing the types of work individuals seek out (Rosso et al., 2010).

Lastly, MW is related to, yet different from job satisfaction. In contrast to measures of
MW, those of job satisfaction tend to address hedonic well-being, versus eudaimonic dimensions (Steger et al., 2009). In addition, such measures often examine highly specific facets of work (e.g., satisfaction with one’s co-workers) or look at global, cognitive (versus affective) appraisals of one’s position and the benefits it affords. Despite this, there is a longstanding research tradition on job satisfaction that surpasses the extant literature on MW (Steger et al., 2009).

**Limitations of Meaningful Work Research**

Despite a growing interest in the construct of meaningful work, multiple authors point out the lack of apparent consensus on its definition and operationalization. Scholars such as Both-Nwabuwe et al. (2017) argue that research on MW is at “the beginning of a paradigm development” (p. 2). These authors explain that such research further is impeded by a basic lack of common understanding of the construct of “work.” Both-Nwabuwe and colleagues define work as activities that are both “morally worthy and legal” and paid. They explain that such a definition is necessary because non-paid work is distinctly separate from paid labor, especially in the way receiving (or not) financial compensation for one’s labor can influence perceptions of its meaningfulness (p. 3).

Other scholars (e.g., Rosso et al., 2010) point to the way MW research is characterized by two types of operational approaches: those looking at specific variables connected to MW and others that attempt to study the construct from a comprehensive lens. The authors argue that this split in the field has led to confusion about the state of the MW literature and about what is known (versus what needs to be addressed). As such, they suggest the importance of differentiating between sources of MW and the mechanisms of MW (how it becomes meaningful, p. 93). However, doing so is complicated by the overwhelming use of proxy variables in previous research on the construct. For example, Britt, Adler, and Bartone (2001, as
cited in Steger et al., 2012) attempted to measure MW by looking at identity, engagement, and work importance. Others, including Claes and Ruiz-Quintanilla (1994) assessed work meaning by considering measures of work centrality, intrinsic and extrinsic work orientation, entitlement orientation, and oblation orientation (i.e., with reference to one’s feelings of obligation and duty) (p. 3).

Research on MW further is shaped by the multiple measures that exist which purport to assess this construct. A common critique of existing scales, however, is that they often capture similar constructs (e.g. “calling”), but not MW itself. Based on a review of the literature, Both-Nwabuwe et al. (2017) highlight four scales that they agree assess MW directly and also account for its multidimensional nature. These include: (1) the Comprehensive Meaningful Work Scale (CMWS; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012), (2) the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI; Steger et al., 2012), (3) the Meaningful Work Scale (MWS; Bendassolli, Borges-Andrade, Alves, & Torres, 2015), and (4) the Meaning in Work Scale (MIWS; Lee, 2015).

**Social Status Differences**

Based on this brief review of the literature, it appears that meaningful work is adequately conceptualized as an individual’s perception that their work is important and contributes to their own growth as well as to that of society. However, scholars argue that not all individuals have access to such self-determined work. Individual differences in terms of social status are proposed as especially salient in the experience of MW, precisely because workers from lower social class backgrounds may not have the privilege of unhindered occupational choice. Allan, Autin, and Duffy (2016) state that “People from lower social class backgrounds often lack access to societal resources (e.g., education) and may be coping with frequent economic uncertainty, [thus] limiting the freedom to choose work that meets intrinsic needs, given the urgency of satisfying
Before reviewing the literature on the impact of social status differences on the experience of MW, it is important to define this construct, as used here. Specifically, social status refers to “one’s relation to levels and types of economic resources, in addition to social valuation and access to societal control and influence” (Fouad & Brown, 2000, p. 382, as cited in Thompson & Subich, 2007, p. 228). This definition connects to the construct of “differential status identity” first put forth by Rossides (e.g., 1990, 1997, as cited in Thompson & Subich, 2007) that looks at social status in relation to three distinct variables: economic resources, social prestige, and social power. Compared to other definitions of social status, this interpretation offers a more nuanced understanding of the construct, because it takes into account how access to each of these three components is internalized on an individual and group level. For instance, it shows how even individuals who have a high income may lack social prestige or social power (e.g., as is the case with waste-management workers).

In looking closely at these variables, one theory which explicitly considers the impact of economic constraints and social marginalization on individuals’ access to decent, and subsequently meaningful, work, is the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT; Duffy et al., 2016). From this perspective, individuals’ experience of MW is likely to vary based on their differential access to intrinsically motivated work and/or barriers that prohibit such access. Among these include both social status variables (discussed here) and work motivation factors (to be discussed in detail below).

**The Psychology of Working Theory**

A relatively new, central career theory which decidedly incorporates social status variables into its approach towards understanding the career development process is that of the
Psychology of Working Theory (PWT; Duffy et al., 2016). PWT was created as a comprehensive way to study the work experience of all individuals, though it primarily looks at those facing poverty, marginalization, and significant barriers to obtaining decent work. As such, PWT places contextual variables at the forefront of its framework. The current study draws on elements found within PWT to examine how social status may be a primary factor in the experience of meaningful work, and how work motivation variables may influence this proposed relationship.

PWT is an extensive theory that emerged from an earlier vocational model titled the Psychology of Working Framework (PWF). PWF, in turn, was “… developed to complement existing vocational theories by directly highlighting the role that social class, privilege, and freedom of choice play in career selection and fulfillment” (Duffy et al., 2016, p. 127). The PWT extends on this framework and describes critical factors that influence individuals’ ability to secure decent work. Here, decent work is defined as one that affords workers: (1) physically and psychologically safe working conditions, (2) working hours that allow for rest, (3) sufficient compensation, (4) access to healthcare and other benefits, and (5) organizational structures that support pro-social values (p. 130). The theory argues that securing such work is important, because decent work is a determinant to the satisfaction of basic human needs, including ones for survival, social connection, and self-determination (p. 128). In addition, this type of work is said to lead to other positive outcomes such as work fulfillment and overall well-being (p. 128).

One of the central tenets of PWT is that the ability to obtain decent work rests on access to economic resources. Specifically, economic constraints are thought to impede individuals’ ability to invest their time and remaining resources towards educational achievement and specific career development outcomes (Duffy et al., 2016, p. 133). For instance, lack of economic resources during childhood is thought to have profound consequences on children’s access to,
and success within the educational system. Children from lower social status backgrounds may lack the same opportunity to participate in enrichment and extracurricular activities that are necessary to build their academic or vocational interests and self-efficacy. As these children become adolescents, they may face additional pressure to dedicate free time to the pursuit of paid employment as a means to support themselves and/or family members. The typical low-wage employment that is likely available to these adolescents is unlikely to offer the same educational and networking opportunities that unpaid, extracurricular activities (e.g., internships) may provide for their higher social status peers. As such, differential access to economic resources, social power, and prestige in early childhood creates a pattern of limited access that is perpetuated in adolescence (e.g., access to stimulating activities) and early adulthood (e.g., through access to higher education). Lastly, it is important to note that economic resources are closely linked to access to social and cultural capital. These factors are key in allowing for the transition from school to positions that allow access to decent and fulfilling work (Duffy et al., 2015, p. 134). This latter point underscores the dominant narrative of the PWT that individuals with greater economic constraints (that is, with limited social status means) are less likely to pursue and obtain decent employment.Extending this point to the current study, it is arguable that these same individuals are also less likely to secure intrinsically motivating and, therefore, personally meaningful work.

**Work Motivation Differences**

Given the limited empirical research on the connection between work type, social status, and the experience of meaningful work, it is further important to consider variables that may moderate this proposed relationship. For instance, it is important to understand the difference between individuals who experience their work as meaningful versus those who do not, even
when accomplishing the same types of tasks. Similarly, it is critical to consider why some privileged workers may not experience their work as important or fulfilling, while others, including those from less advantaged backgrounds, may derive meaning in spite of large barriers to stereotypically defined prestigious work.

To examine such differences, recent research on MW has grown to encompass additional, individual-level variables that may explain differences in the experience of such work. For instance, one potential variable that can moderate the proposed relationship between social status and MW is that of work motivation. Past research suggests that work motivation, especially so in the form of intrinsic motivation, plays a key role in the experience of MW (e.g., Rosso et al., 2010). Work motivation is a central source of MW precisely because doing internally stimulating work is often perceived as precursor to experiencing meaning in work as a whole.

Intrinsic work motivation is defined as work that an individual may pursue for its own value and reward, as opposed to work that relies on external supports. This type of work is driven by interests and the pleasure individuals derive from work, as well as by the way work makes individuals feel about themselves (e.g., Rosso et al., 2010, p. 97). In other words, there is both a cognitive and an affective component to intrinsic work motivation. With regards to MW, this type of motivation is important to consider precisely because a match between one’s work and one’s idea of themselves as a person (that is, between who they are and who they want to become), increases the likelihood of experiencing that work as more meaningful and significant (p. 97).

Early research on the construct often considered it in tandem with that of extrinsic work motivation. For instance, in designing the Work Preference Inventory, Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, and Tighe (1994), the authors created items to assess for differences in individuals’ intrinsic and
extrinsic motivational orientations (p. 950). Subsequently, they define intrinsic motivation as “the motivation to engage in work primarily for its own sake, because the work is interesting, engaging, or in some way satisfying” (p. 950). In contrast, extrinsic motivation is defined as “the motivation to work primarily in response to something apart from the work itself, such as reward or recognition or the dictates of other people” (p. 950). The authors further explain that although within the social psychology literature, motivation is strongly related to one’s social context, within the vocational landscape, motivational orientations tend to be more stable and should be seen as traits versus state dependent expressions (p. 951).

Understanding both intrinsic and extrinsic work orientations/motivations is important because each type can speak to the choices that individuals make within their educational and career pursuits. As Amabile and colleagues (1994) explain,

For example, those who see themselves as strongly intrinsically motivated may strive to select work assignments that allow them to develop new skills, exercise creativity, and become deeply involved in their work. They also tend to see their work environment in terms that support their intrinsic motivation, and they may seek occupations where intrinsic motivations are salient. On the other hand, individuals that who are strongly extrinsically motivated may view their work environment in terms extrinsic controls, and they may seek occupations where extrinsic motivators are salient. (p. 951)

While seemingly opposite, it is worth noting that both types of orientations are additive in nature. That is, research suggests that individuals may strongly identify with one, both, or neither. Dually motivated individuals are the ones that may experience conflict when asked to select between a strongly intrinsically motivated activity versus a strongly extrinsically motivated task (Amabile et al., 1994, p. 966). To obtain a full picture of both orientations, the WPI includes intrinsic motivation items that tap into self-determination, competence, task involvement, curiosity and interest, as well as extrinsic motivation items that examine factors such as evaluation concerns, recognition concerns, money, or other tangible incentives (p. 953).
Previous research with the WPI confirms the stability of the intrinsic and extrinsic orientations over time and shows possible gender differences in motivational patterns. For example, Amabile et al. (1994) found that, for adults, women tend to score higher than do men on the intrinsic primary scale of the WPI.

In terms of why work motivation may play an important role to facilitate or hinder the experience of MW, Rosso et al. (2010) suggest that engaging in intrinsically motivating work creates a match between the work that individuals do and their internal self-concept, which in turn results in feelings of meaningfulness (p. 97). This idea is echoed in the work of Crocker and Park (2004). These scholars posit that individuals often have specific ideas of who they need to be or what they need to accomplish in order to have worth and value. Subsequently, there is a natural tendency towards wanting to establish a match between one’s internal beliefs and one’s lived reality. Often, this takes form in the pursuit of self-esteem, both through vocational and other activities.

As previously stated, individuals vary in their levels of intrinsic versus extrinsic work motivation. Additionally, there are both internal and external factors that may shape the development or utility of one orientation over the other. Such factors include workers’ personalities, values, religious beliefs, and unique social context, including their social status and access to educational and vocational opportunities.

In terms of the moderating effects of work motivation on the link between social status and the experience of MW, more research is needed to examine how or when this effect may take place. Such research should take into account not only workers’ subjective social status and their subsequent report of MW, but also should look at how work motivation variables (including intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation) may change the size and direction of the social status-to-
MW relationship. This type of research can answer the seminal question posed by Brown and Lent (2016), who asked: “To what extent is work meaning (and other aspects of eudaimonic well-being, such as personal growth and self-actualization) enabled by social class, volition, or work conditions that favor self-expression or goal choice?” (p. 557).

**Social Status, Work Motivation, and Meaningful Work**

To-date, very few studies have explicitly tested the hereby-proposed connection between social status, work motivation, and meaningful work. One study from Allan, Autin, and Duffy (2016) attempted to do so by testing a structural model looking at the connections between social class and work volition to work motivation variables and their subsequent connection to MW. The authors proposed that intrinsic motivation is especially related to the experience of MW, because this type of work offers individuals more than external rewards. However, they further argued that not all workers have access to self-determined, intrinsically motivated work.

Based on the Self-Determination Theory articulated by Ryan and Deci (2008), six types of work motivation variables were tested: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, amotivation (i.e., lack of intent to act), introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation. The latter three variables refer to forms of internal motivation that vary in the extent of self-determination. For example, introjected regulation refers to partially internalized behaviors that are nonetheless selected to fulfill another need (e.g., avoiding negative emotions). Identified regulation refers to behaviors that are selected autonomously based on their personal value. Finally, integrated regulation (the most autonomous of all three options) refers to behaviors that are assimilated into one’s self-concept and are in accordance with one’s values. However, even these behaviors are considered external, as they are not selected for their pure intrinsic value, but are chosen to fulfill an external outcome or means (p. 2).
Results from the Allan, Autin, and Duffy (2016) study supported the authors’ original thoughts. Namely, the authors found support for the proposed connections between social class, work motivation variables, and the experience of MW. All three types of work motivation variables (external regulation, internal regulation, and amotivation) predicted the experience of MW. Internal regulation emerged as an underlying factor comprised of intrinsic motivation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation (p. 7). Within these, internal motivation was the strongest predictor of MW (p. 7). This was in accordance with the authors’ original hypotheses.

In addition, both external regulation and amotivation were negatively related to MW (Allan, Autin, & Duffy, 2016, p. 7). This is an important finding as it suggests that “…people who are extrinsically motivated to work (e.g., for income, security) or who had a lack of motivation (e.g., unsure why they are working at all), were less likely to experience their work as meaningful” (p. 7).

Interestingly, the authors found no support for a direct connection between social class and MW. Instead, the effects of social class were indirect through their connection to internal regulation, external regulation, and amotivation. For instance, there was a statistically significant and positive correlation between social class and external motivation and amotivation, suggesting that higher social class was linked to higher external regulation or lack of work motivation (Allan, Autin, & Duffy, 2016, p. 7). This was a surprising finding, as individuals from higher social classes also reported higher levels of work volition (i.e., the ability to choose one’s work). The authors speculate that this finding may represent a select group of individuals who are privileged socially and economically and yet, for one reason or another, feel stuck at work (p. 7).
As significant as are the results from Allan et al.’s work, several limitations to their study are worth noting. First, although the authors tested a structural model to explain the connections between the variables of social class, work motivation, and meaningful work, the cross-sectional nature of their design precludes causal inferences regarding the relationships among these three constructs. Second, the types of work motivation variables that Allan et al. assessed were based on the Self-Determination Theory proposed by Ryan and Deci (2008). However, as seen in Allan, Autin, and Duffy’s (2016) results, a more parsimonious measure of internal regulation should be used to capture the construct of work motivation. This will account for the way internal regulation is jointly shaped by intrinsic work motivation and the other three types of internal regulation variables, without unduly complicating the proposed variable relationships. One such extant measure is the Work Preference Inventory (WPI), developed by Amabile and colleagues (1994), which is discussed in greater detail below. Lastly, Allan, Autin, and Duffy’s (2016) study could be improved through the use of a more comprehensive measure of social status (versus social class). This type of measure is needed in order to capture individuals’ subjective perspective of their social status, and to explore what aspects of social status (e.g., access to resources, power, or prestige) may be most connected to the experience of MW. The study proposed below addresses each of these limitations. The goal of this study is to build on the existing MW literature in a way that adequately captures the important, recursive effects of social status and work motivation on the experience of MW by today’s modern workers.

**Current Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of individual differences on the experience of meaningful work. Social status differences (in terms of access to economic resources, social power, and prestige) are proposed as differences that may affect the experience
of meaningful work (MW). As such, the research questions of the study were as follows:

1) What is the impact of social status on the experience of meaningful work?

2) Do work motivation variables moderate the relationship between social status differences and the experience of MW?

In turn, the main hypothesis of the current study was as follows: Social status differences will account for variability in participants’ experience of meaningful work. More specifically:

Hypothesis 1: Participants who endorse lower social status, will endorse experiencing less meaningful work.

Hypothesis 2: The effect of social status on the experience of meaningful work will be moderated by participants’ work motives.

Hypothesis 2a: The relationship between social status and the experience of meaningful work will be weaker for participants who report greater intrinsic work motivation.

Hypothesis 2b: The relationship between social status and the experience of meaningful work will be stronger for participants who report greater extrinsic work motivation.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review examines in detail research related to the main three constructs of interest: social status, work motivation, and the experience of MW. Particular attention is paid to research that previously looked at the connections between social status and MW, work motivation and MW, and how social status and work motivation are connected. The goal of this review is to provide a rationale for how the current study adds to the MW literature in a novel and important way.

The Significance of Social Status

A seminal report put forth by the American Psychological Association Task Force on Socioeconomic Status in 2006, argues that socioeconomic status has a myriad of implications for individuals’ well-being, including ones related to psychological functioning, physical health, and more. Socioeconomic status is a powerful determinant of one’s development, access to educational and work opportunities, and relationship with others. In addition, the impact of socioeconomic status is felt at many levels, including those of the family, the school system, and within larger communities. Not surprisingly then, socioeconomic status is one of the most commonly studied variables within the field of psychology (p. 7). Interest in the construct continues to expand, especially as studies suggest the presence of growing socioeconomic inequality within the United Status. For instance, the APA Taskforce explicitly points to the increasing income gap between individuals in the top 5% of income distribution and those in the
Broadly, socioeconomic status is a subset of the larger construct of social status. Whereas socioeconomic status often is assessed through measures of income, educational attainment, and occupational prestige, social status is examined by looking at individuals’ subjective perception of their overall social standing. Measures of social status subsequently capture both access to economic resources and look at individuals’ access to social power or prestige. Additionally, these measures, such as the Differential Status Identity Scale (DSIS), take into account how other factors, including individuals’ race and ethnicity, may influence access to these components, regardless of basic income (e.g., Thompson & Subich, 2007). Multiple scholars (e.g., Diemer & Ali, 2009) highlight the persistent difficulty of disentangling the effects of social status from those of race, ethnicity, and other demographic variables.

Within this literature, there is a critical idea of how social class and status are perpetuated by institutions, including those at the family level (e.g., through generational wealth) and at the macro-level (e.g., through social policies) (p. 7). Diemer and Ali (2009) agree with this perspective and emphasize the limits of traditional SES indices in capturing the effects of intergenerational wealth (p. 251).

Note, that in the current study, the terms social class and social status are used interchangeably. In contrast, socioeconomic status (SES) is used to define traditional measures of income, educational attainment, and occupational prestige.

**Social Status in the World of Work**

Despite a great interest in variables connected to SES and social status within the greater psychology sphere, within traditional career theories or career counseling, these variables can be overlooked or minimized (Diemer & Ali, 2009). Juntugen, Ali, and Pietrantonio (2012) agree
that the influence of social status on career development is especially understudied, compared to
the effects of other identities (including those of gender and race, p. 25). Critically, Juntugen et
al. argue:

Some aspects of career counseling theory may actually serve as a barrier to meeting the
needs of clients from a lower social status. That is, they are inherently designed to help
people find work that is satisfying based on various factors such as personality variables,
interests, skills, abilities, levels of ambition, past achievements, work experience, and
developmental goals. These are important career development issues, but they may not be
adequate for addressing the unique concerns or people living in poverty or lower
socioeconomic status. (p. 247)

Social Status in Career Development Theory

In a review of career development theories and their approach to incorporating themes
and issues of social status, Juntugen et al. (2012) found marked difference in the degree to which
each theory accounts for these variables. For instance, within person-environment (P-E) fit
theories, social status is implicitly examined in the connection between the needs of a worker and
ability of the work environment to meet those subsequent needs. However, within this
perspective, there exists an assumption of workers as agentic actors that have a choice in how
they react if the environment fails to meet their needs. This implied choice may or may not be
there for workers on the lower rungs of the social ladder, who may depend on work for basic
survival as opposed to optimal need fulfillment.

Juntugen et al. (2012) further articulate how most developmental theories also do not
explicitly address the unique circumstances of low-income workers. While these theories speak
to an “unfolding” process that sequentially develops over time, this process may look differently
for workers who react out of necessity rather than choice. Once again, lack of vocational choices
and opportunities may impact the way these workers are able to make meaning out of their
subsequent work experience. One exception, per the authors, is the work of Gottfredson (2005,
as cited), which examines how individuals circumscribe possible occupations based on what they see as possible for others like them in their environment. From this perspective, for instance, an adolescent from a lower social status background may not consider jobs that seem outside of the possibilities for him or her, as observed while growing up.

On the other hand, social learning theories are thought to use a more explicit lens in examining the impact of contextual factors on the career development process. For example, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) constructively includes the impact of background variables in shaping vocational self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Applying this theory to the previous example, a primary motivating factor for the adolescent from a lower social status background may be that of survival, and his or her outcome expectations may be heavily influenced by this background factor more than any other.

**Effects of Social Status at Work**

It is difficult to understate the pervasive effects of social status, especially within the field of work. Social status variables are directly linked to educational resources, employment opportunities, and influences on the experience of work itself (Diemer & Ali, 2009). Moreover, these effects begin to take shape at an early age. Previous research (e.g., Blustein, 2002 as cited in Diemer & Ali, 2009) shows variation in the way youth from different social class groups understand work. For example, youth from low social class backgrounds were found to view work as a means of survival, in contrast to their peers from higher social status backgrounds that saw work as a way to create an identity, obtain personal satisfaction, and ultimately as a path towards improving their own social standing.

Brown and Lent (2016) further specify how social class may influence the occupational attainment of adolescents from low-SES families and can do so through a set of intermediary
variables. These include parents’ educational expectations for their children, adolescent educational expectations, adolescent achievement and aptitude, and academic self-efficacy and outcome expectations.

Social Status Differences and Meaningful Work

In considering the impact of social status differences on workers’ experience of MW, two different lines of thought prevail in the extant literature. According to the first (e.g., that most aligned with the PWT), individuals from lower social status groups (i.e., those with limited access to economic resources, social power, and vocational prestige) are at a disadvantage in terms of their likelihood to experience MW in the same way that workers with access to financial and social capital may do. This makes sense when considering the multiple barriers such workers face in securing positions that they find intrinsically interesting, motivating, or deeply fulfilling. For instance, for workers that depend on their job to fulfill external needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing, access to opportunities for MW may be a secondary consideration.

In support of this argument, Brief, Brett, Futter, and Stein (1997) conducted a study with 168 hospital workers that examined antecedents and consequences of economic work dependency. Based on their sample, the authors report that feelings of economic dependency increase as a function of income (i.e., lower income equates with greater economic dependency), workers’ needs, their instrumental (i.e., external) work orientation, and workers perceptions of vocational mobility. Additionally, economic dependency was found to mediate the connection between workers’ number of family dependents, other family income, instrumental work values, and mobility, to their overall well-being (p. 1303). In other words, workers with lower income/social status, experienced a greater need for compensation, saw work as a means to an end, and felt stuck at their occupation, thus feeling more economically dependent on their work.
In turn, this predictably influenced their feelings of emotional well-being. As expected, there was a negative relationship between perceptions of economic dependency and a positive sense of well-being, both within and outside of work (p. 1310).

Social status differences based on the type of work that individuals report also shed light on the impact of social status on the experience of MW. For instance, Lips-Wiersma et al., 2016) conducted a study to compare the importance that blue-, pink-, and white-collar employees place on MW and the frequency with which they experience such work. This study was an effort to extend previous research on the subject that found significant differences in the amount of MW experienced by blue- and white-collar professionals (p. 535). As such, the authors aimed to answer the question of: To what extent does meaning emerge from the characteristics of one’s job compared to the worker’s perception of their position? They argued that while not all work may afford the same opportunities for meaning-making, this does not take away from the desire of individuals to find such work. In addition, because meaning-making is such a subjective experience, it is important to understand the impact of both external (e.g., income) and internal (e.g., perception) factors on the experience of MW.

To complete their study, the authors used the Comprehensive Meaningful Work Scale (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012) which taps into four dimensions of MW: (1) unity with others (e.g., shared experiences of belonging and connection), (2) expressing full potential (e.g., using one’s talents towards achievement and reaching one’s full capacity at work), (3) service to others (e.g., contributing to others), and (4) developing the inner self (e.g., staying true to one’s self and developing in a congruent way) (p. 536). Moreover, the authors used the following convention to classify workers: (1) white-collar workers included supervisors, managers, and other professionals, (2) pink-collar workers included those in hospitality, retail, and administration,
and (3) blue-collar workers included laborers and skilled trade workers.

In terms of their hypotheses, first, Lips-Wiersma and colleagues (2016) expected to find no differences between the importance that different worker groups placed on MW. However, they expected that blue- and pink-collar workers would experience more “unity with others” contrary to their white-collar counterparts. In support of this hypothesis, they proposed that demanding physical work environments may inspire a closer culture or connection among the workers. Second, the authors expected that blue- and pink-collar workers would experience less “expressing full potential” than white-collar workers. In fact, the authors argued that this is true because the first group of workers often may lack the same amount of autonomy or flexibility to craft their work in a meaningful way. Less access to resources may also limit these workers’ opportunities and sense of agency at work.

Third, Lips-Wiersma et al. (2016) thought that pink-collar workers would experience higher levels of “serving others” compared to blue-collar workers, and that white-collar workers would experience even higher levels of “serving others” compared to their pink-collar counterparts. This hypothesis was based on the speculation that white-collar workers may have a greater ability to have a pro-social impact at work, compared to that of other workers.

Lastly, the authors hypothesized that white-collar workers would experience higher levels of “developing inner self” compared to blue-collar workers, and blue-collar workers would experience even higher levels of the same compared to pink-collar employees. This provocative hypothesis was based on the authors’ rationale that, despite low-status work, blue-collar workers (more so than their pink-collar peers) could maintain a sense of dignity and self-affirmation outside of work (Lips-Wiersma et al., p. 540).

Two studies were used to test these hypotheses. The first study used a large sample ($N =$
401, 51.5% women, 75.4% Caucasian, with a mean age of 38.3 years) of university students from a variety of occupations. The second study used a dual sample of university students and MTurk (online) participants ($N = 607$). Together, the authors had a sample of 1,282 responses, among which 14.1% came from blue-collar workers, 50.4% were pink-collar workers, and 35.3% were categorized as white-collar workers.

Results from both samples showed a mixed variety of findings. First, the authors found no group differences in importance placed on “unity with others” and “developing the inner self.” However, group differences were shown for “expressing full potential” and “serving others.” Specifically, blue-collar workers appeared to place less importance on expressing their full potential than did their white-collar peers ($d = 0.47$).

In terms of the second hypothesis, group differences were found in the frequency of experiencing MW. Namely, white-collar workers reported experiencing more MW than did pink-collar workers, and pink-collar workers reported experiencing more MW than did blue-collar employees. However, these differences were not statistically significant and, subsequently, the second hypothesis was not supported.

With regards to the study’s third hypothesis, both blue- and pink-collar workers reported experiencing less “expressing full potential” than did white-collar workers. The latter also reported experiencing higher “serving others” than did their blue- and pink-collar peers (i.e., in contrast to what the fourth hypothesis predicted).

Together, these findings provide support for the strong impact of social status differences in the experience of MW. Within this study alone, white-collar workers seemed to place greater importance on employing their full potential at work and on serving others, compared to other occupational groups. These workers further tended to experience all four dimensions of MW
more frequently than did the less-privileged pink- and blue-collar workers. According to the authors, these findings also serve to balance the “overly romantic notion of MW” (p. 546). That is, they offer a striking reminder that one’s work type and position tend to significantly shape the frequency and magnitude of experiences of multiple dimensions of meaningful employment.

These findings are supported by the work of Allan, Autin, and Duffy (2014) who similarly looked at sources of MW and levels of MW experienced in workers across various social classes. The authors found that while sources of MW were much the same across classes, individuals from higher social class backgrounds reported more frequent experiences of MW.

On the other hand, a second line of thought within the research on MW, argues that all individuals, regardless of their work status or specific employment, can make positive meaning through their vocational experiences. For example, in a qualitative study of 44 workers from three occupational groups (waste collectors, stone-masons, and academics) from southeast England, Bailey and Madden (2017) used an interpretative methodology to examine the experience of time and MW in among these workers. The authors found support for their hypothesis that workers across these highly diverse occupations experienced their work as meaningful. Most importantly, however, they noted that such meaningfulness was experienced in bursts. As such, with each occupation, there were moments of both meaningfulness and meaningless time.

Returning to the early work of Ashforth and Kreiner (1999), the authors argue that even within seemingly “dirty work” occupations, workers can reframe their experience in a positive way through the creation of a shared work-culture and solidarity among fellow workers.

The little research that exists with regards to social status differences in MW is seemingly focused on the experience of workers employed in certain types of work and their subsequent
endorsement (or lack thereof) of meaningful work. Based on the studies reviewed here, it appears that, workers employed in low-status and low-income occupations overwhelmingly report barriers to the experience of MW. These barriers may be a result of the workers’ inability to use their positions to leverage greater work opportunities, more economic resources, and access to sufficient capital that would allow them to craft their work to provide greater meaning and fulfillment. However, it is also possible that these workers endorse fewer experiences of MW not because of their specific job types, but because of additional background factors (e.g., their overall social status) that may hinder their experience of fulfilling work. If that is the case, more research is needed to examine how individuals’ social status (as defined by access to economic resources, social power, and prestige) may influence their experience of MW. Extending the studies reviewed here, it is likely that individuals from lower social status backgrounds would be more likely to endorse fewer experiences of meaningful work. However, further empirical research is needed to test this assumption and to examine the unique contribution of each social status variable on the larger experience of MW.

**Work Motivation and Meaningful Work**

In addition to understanding the connection between social status and the experience of MW, it is equally important to examine how work motivation may influence this relationship. Broadly speaking, differences in extrinsic versus intrinsic work motivation may offer nuanced understanding regarding who experiences MW and why that may be the case. The studies reviewed below offer a general summary of research related to work motivation and the experience of MW, as well as the integrated impact of social status variables within relationship.

As an example, Brown (1996) conducted a meta-analytic study that looked at antecedents, correlates, and outcomes of job motivation and involvement (as opposed to job
alienation). Examples of antecedent variables included personality factors, job characteristics, supervisory variables, and role perceptions. Correlate examples were workers’ demographics (e.g., age, status, education) or career commitment. Lastly, outcome variables included work behaviors, job attitudes, and side effects (e.g., work-family conflict, stress, etc., p. 237). Based on a review of the literature, Brown provided an updated profile of a “job involved person,” strongly related to other definitions of an intrinsically motivated worker. Per Brown, such a person, “…strongly endorses the work ethic and is high in both internal motivation and self-esteem.” This person is not defined by a specific demographic, including their age, gender, and education. Instead, this person, “….considers work highly meaningful and challenging” and “….is also strongly committed to work in general and to his or her career as well as to the specific job” (p. 251).

In addition to the influence of personality variables, intrinsic and extrinsic work motivations also are determined by individuals’ values, especially those related to education and work. For instance, Gandal, Roccas, Sagiv, and Wrzesniewski (2005) found that students of economics tend to endorse more self-enhancement values (like achievement and power) versus universalism values (such as benevolence and concerns for the world), compared to other student groups. The authors argue that these differences are important to understand, as individuals frequently self-select themselves into careers that align with their values (p. 1245).

Finally, it is equally important to consider how the social context, including individuals’ social status, may affect levels of intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation. Although all individuals are able to experience both, it may be the case that for those from lower social status backgrounds, the experience of intrinsic work motivation may not translate to pursuing or obtaining intrinsically satisfying work. That is, strong external barriers, including a lack of
economic resources, low social power and prestige, and the need to fulfill basic (versus esteem) needs, may create little opportunity for these individuals to actively mold their work in a way that aligns with their preferred orientation. Put differently, workers’ social status may directly influence their experience of meaningful work, even as their work motivation serves to moderate that proposed relationship.

In one of the few empirical works that explicitly looked at these variables together, Hu and Hirsh (2017) conducted four studies to test the hypothesis that certain workers are willing to accept lower financial compensation for meaningful work. They proposed that for a subset of these workers, the desire for meaning in one’s work would act a primary work motivator, supplanting the wish for great financial rewards. Within their analysis, the authors framed meaning as a type of psychological reward.

In Study 1, participants included 96 women, 149 men, 82.96% Caucasian, with a mean age of 34.0 years \( (SD = 12.36) \) and a median yearly household income of $50,000-$59,999. Approximately half were employed in a full-time job. Participants were asked the following questions:

1. What is a job or career that you are capable of doing that you think would provide you with a sense of personal meaning?  
2. What is a job or a career that you are capable of doing that you think would fail to provide you with a sense of personal meaning?  
3. If you didn’t currently have a job, what is the lowest yearly salary that you would realistically be willing to work for in the following job [listed two positions]?

Results to these questions showed that participants provided a list of 86 different meaningful jobs and a list of 64 meaningless jobs. Fifty-five percent of the jobs listed as meaningless by one participant were listed as meaningful by at least one other person. This suggests considerable subjectivity in the experience and perception of what constitutes meaningful work.
Results showed that participants were willing to reduce their acceptable salaries significantly in order to obtain meaningful work ($M = 31.83\%, SD = 23.71\%$). In addition, a higher education level was associated with a greater willingness to accept less pay for meaningful work. Given the role of educational achievement as one index of social status, this finding in particular may point to the impact of social status and privilege in affording vocational choice.

In Study 2, the authors used occupational data to identify common jobs in the upper, middle, and lower brackets of financial occupation. From these, they selected a representative position from each category (e.g., they picked “lawyer” to represent the upper bracket, “elementary school teacher” to represent the middle-income bracket, and “delivery service driver” to represent the lower bracket). Participants were then presented with one of six job descriptions in a 3 (lawyer, teacher, driver) x 2 (meaningful, control condition) design. Those in the meaningful condition were asked to think about and write down how working in the listed job may provide them with a sense of meaning. All participants were then asked: “If you didn’t currently have a job, what is the lowest yearly salary (before taxes and in US currency) that would realistically be willing to work for in this job?”

The sample for this experiment consisted of 303 total participants (175 women, 128 men), with a mean age of 34.0 years ($SD = 12.36$) and a median household income of $50,000 to $59,000. Results of a 3 x 2 factorial ANOVA showed that participants assigned to the meaningful condition reported lower acceptable salaries ($41,670) compared to those in the control condition ($46,657). This was true for those working as a lawyer but not for the other two jobs. The authors interpreted this finding to mean that beyond a certain point of obtaining a basic amount of income, individuals become less vested in pursuing higher pay when they are afforded the
opportunity to pursue meaningful work. Additionally, it is possible that for the lower two income bracket positions, participants were more focused on the financial compensation of each job, regardless of the meaning it possibly afforded.

In Study 3, Hu and Hirsh used data from the International Social Survey Program’s Work Orientation Module that was conducted in 2005-2015. In their 2005 sample, the authors used data from 18,919 full-time employees (9,941 men) with a mean age of 41.7 years. In their 2015 sample, data was used from 18,472 full-time employees (9,346 men) with a mean age of 43.41 years. Using information from the provided questionnaire, the authors created a composite measure of meaningful work by averaging the participants’ responses to the following three items: “My job is interesting,” “In my job I can help other people,” and “My job is useful to society.” They then used this composite score to predict participants’ responses to the question: “I would turn down another job that offered quite a bit more pay in order to stay with this company.”

Results from this experiment were consistent with those from the previous two studies. Specifically, participants who were employed in positions that they perceived as more meaningful were more likely to turn down higher paying positions. Interestingly, this relationship was stronger for the 2015 sample, which the authors suggest might be because meaningful work is even more important among younger work cohorts.

Study 4, the final study here, tested the hypothesis that workers who have access to meaningful work would be less likely to accept different jobs in the same organization and less likely to accept the same job in a different organization. Participants in this study included 185 women and 240 men (N=430), with a median age of 35.78 years (SD = 10.80) and a median yearly household income of $50,000 to $59,999. All participants were asked to use a 7-point
Likert scale to indicate their agreement with the following three statements:

(1) I would turn down a higher-paying job with my current employer in order to keep working the job that I am in now. (2) I would turn down a higher-paying offer for the same job, but in a different company, in order to stay with my current employer. (3) I would turn down another job that offered quite a bit more pay in order to stay with this organization.

Additionally, all participants complete the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI) to assess their experience of MW within their current position.

Results from this study showed that participants with higher WAMI scores (that is, those who reported more experiences of MW) were more likely to turn down a higher paying position in order to stay with the same organization ($r = 0.34, p < 0.001$). Likewise, participants who reported experiencing more MW were more likely to turn down a different but better paying position within the same organization ($r = 0.29, p < 0.001$). Lastly, these same participants were more likely to turn down the same job but for a higher pay in a different organization ($r = 0.38, p = 0.001$). Together, these results underscore the importance of experiencing MW, both in relation to the type of work that an employee is engaged with, and the organizational context where the work takes place.

Collectively, the results of these four experiments are important to consider for several reasons. First, they show support for the authors’ hypothesis that workers are willing to accept lower salaries for meaningful work. In fact, this hypothesis was supported in both self-report (studies 3 and 4) and experimental (studies 1 and 2) conditions. Second, these results highlight the importance of work motivation; that is, the value these participants placed on their experience of real or hypothetical MW. The choice participants made to select MW positions over higher pay speaks to the motivational power and intrinsically satisfying work. These results appear consistent across large and diverse samples, and across time (e.g., an interval of at least
10 years, as indicated in Study 3). Lastly, these results are important to consider because they offer clear support for the proposed relationship between work motivation and MW as proposed in the current study.

Another study that examined the connection between work motivation and the experience of MW is that conducted by Allan, Duffy, and Collisson in 2017. In this study, the authors used three participant samples (students, online sample of working adults, and public university employees) to test how helping others increases participants’ experience of MW. To do so, Allan et al. created three experiments where they manipulated a variety of tasks to give participants the impression that they would be helping themselves or helping others. For example, in the first experiment, students were placed in one of three conditions where the task they were completing could benefit themselves, a charity, or would benefit someone who had gained from the charity they were helping. Similarly, in the second experiment, online workers were asked to recall a time when their work helped someone else or a time when their work helped themselves. Lastly, in the third study with university employees, workers were asked to track the frequency of how often they helped others over the course an entire work week. The authors found that across all three studies, participants who perceived their task as helpful to others reported experiencing greater meaningfulness in their work. This was true even when the participants were asked to complete relatively meaningless tasks (e.g., hitting alternating letters on a keyboard as many times as possible). Within these conditions, it was the added perception that the participants were helping others that served as an intrinsic work motivation, which in turn added to their increased experience of MW. This series of studies further illustrates the impact of intrinsic work motivation in shaping individuals’ experience of MW, beyond other factors within their job tasks. This is important because if such results can be generalized to non-experimental samples, there
will be additional support for the hypothesis that work motivation serves as an important predictor or potential moderator in the promotion of MW.

**Limitations of Work Motivation Research**

Based on the studies reviewed here, it appears that work motivation, particularly when intrinsic in nature, contributes to individuals’ experience of MW. Although previous research suggests that individuals can be motivated intrinsically, extrinsically, dually, or in neither way, the studies reviewed here point to a strong connection between the experience of intrinsic work motivation and MW. This is congruent with the research reviewed in Chapter One, which further made clear that intrinsic work motivation plays a key role in promoting more frequent experiences of MW.

However, a central limitation of the studies reviewed in both chapters is their lack of clarity on the connection between social status and work motivation. In other words, these studies do not provide sufficient detail to understand how participants’ work motivation and subsequent experience of MW may be shaped by their context and identities. Given that many of these studies were experimental in nature, it is difficult to know how accurately their results generalize to real-world settings, especially ones where individuals need to contend with multiple barriers to pursuing intrinsic interests or drives as a way to obtain MW. The studies reviewed next offer insight into this connection.

**Social Status and Work Motivation**

The relationship between individuals’ social status and their subsequent educational or vocational work motivation begins in childhood. A study completed by Eshelman (2013) speaks to this pattern. Using SES and social class as predictors of career adaptability and educational aspirations in high school students, Eshelman found that both SES and perceived social class
each predicted students’ educational aspirations and achievement expectations. Additionally, SES independently predicted occupational aspirations and expectations. These results highlight the impact of both objective socioeconomic status (as measured via income and education) and perceived social status to influence students’ educational goals and subsequent career expectations.

In another study with prospective Brazilian college students, the authors sought to understand the impact of socioeconomic conditions on students’ career choices. Specifically, Leitao, Guedes, Yamamot, and Lopes (2013) attempted to examine why some students select to pursue higher education, whereas others chose to enter the workforce immediately after completing high school. The authors hypothesized that students’ socioeconomic background was a key differentiator between the two groups. They argued that students from lower income backgrounds were more likely to discount future economic rewards by entering the workforce quicker, versus their peers from higher income backgrounds who had the choice to delay their workforce entry in favor of pursuing a university degree. That is, whereas the low-income students sought to improve their immediate economic condition through starting work post high school, students from the higher income bracket had the benefit of obtaining additional training and education in an area of intrinsic interest to them.

To test their hypothesis, two studies were conducted. Study 1 looked at the relationship between income and future career plans (e.g., to enter the workforce or to apply for university). The study sample included 200 senior high school students, 133 of whom were women. About half of the sample ($n = 105$) were students enrolled in public (generally low SES) schools, while the other half (95) were enrolled in three private institutions. Data for the study was collected at the end of the school year using a questionnaire to ask for students’ plans for the following year.
Results of this study showed that private school students reported more often that they planned to pursue a university degree during the following academic year, versus the public-school students who endorsed plans to pursue additional non-degree work (e.g., computer courses) or to work full-time. This finding was in-line with the authors’ original prediction.

Study 2 sought to examine the connection between social class and career choices more closely, by looking at the difference in students’ career choices (as judged by their undergraduate majors) and their current income. The authors used a sample of 46,649 subjects from the 2006 and 2007 applicant pool to one of the largest universities in Brazil and analyzed data for all 72 offered undergraduate majors. Next, the authors calculated a score to reflect the difficulty of each major by looking at entrance difficulty indicators, such as the number of applicants versus vacancy ratio for each major. Using these calculations, they sought to find potential group differences in the way students from different income backgrounds were selecting each major.

As predicted, the results showed that students from lower income backgrounds tended to select courses with lower entrance difficulties, compared to their high-income peers. The authors argued that these findings suggest two main points. First, students from diverse income backgrounds make different choices, based on factors such as their income and/or based on the likelihood of obtaining short- versus long-term rewards. These are students who are likely to minimize or forego pursuit of their intrinsic interests in favor of satisfying more immediate economic needs. Second, to make these choices, students take into account environmental cues beyond their own income level. For instance, they consider the career trajectories of those around them and weigh the prospect of educational and career options that are perceived as realistic based on their social status and that of important others (e.g., family) around them. In other words, these students circumscribe their educational and vocational aspirations based less on
their work motivation (e.g., intrinsic, extrinsic, or both), and more because of their social status and what they see as possible for other students with similar backgrounds.

In terms of the specific connection between intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation, income, and important outcome variables such as MW and personal well-being, Malka and Chatman (2003) conducted a study that tested work orientation as a moderator on the effect of annual income on subjective well-being (SWB). Subjective well-being was defined as “people’s cognitive and emotional evaluations of their lives” (p. 737). Where MW relates to individuals’ cognitive and affective experience of their work, SWB is a broader category that looks at one’s overall valuation of their day-to-day experience.

This study was built off previous literature that found only a small (in magnitude) connection between income and SWB. The authors proposed that this relationship might be more nuanced in nature, such that the connection is stronger for individuals who value income over more intrinsic work rewards. That is, for individuals who are primarily motivated by income, then it stands to reason that income would have a stronger influence on their overall cognitive and emotional evaluation of their well-being. This is similar to the hypothesis of the current study which argues that the same type of relationship can be found between social status and meaningful work.

In the Malka and Chatman study (2003), intrinsic and extrinsic work orientations were defined as work-related reinforcement preferences (p. 738). For example, for individuals with a high intrinsic orientation, the work-related reinforcement manifests in the form of subjective rewards (e.g., mastery) that their work can provide. The authors based their hypothesis on two theories. First, the Values as Moderators Perspective, which argues that resources (such as income) are important to SWB insofar as they are an important value to the individual. Second,
the Cognitive Evaluation Theory, which posits that providing extrinsic rewards for tasks that are already intrinsically rewarded negates the positive effects of those intrinsic rewards. The latter occurs when workers perceive that they are being controlled or unduly influenced through external means, and this in turn lowers their work satisfaction or subsequent SWB.

To test their hypothesis that extrinsic and intrinsic work motivations would moderate the effect of income on SWB, the authors used a sample of 124 MBA graduates of the University of California, Berkeley’s Haas School of Business who completed their education between 1987 and 1992. The participants were surveyed during their first year of their degree and again 4-9 years after. The average age of participants during the first survey was 28 years old. Of the total sample, 77% were Caucasian. In terms of income, at the 1995 survey follow-up, annual income for the participants ranged from $18,000 to $2 million, with a median of $80,000.

The surveys for the study consisted of questions regarding intrinsic and extrinsic work orientation, SWB (as measured by the Satisfaction with Life Scale and the Positive and Negative Affect Scale), and two items designed to assess job satisfaction (“All in all, how satisfied are you with your current job?” and “How close is your current job to your ideal job?”) both rated on a 1-7 Likert-scale.

Results of the study showed that, in line with the authors’ initial hypothesis, for individuals with high extrinsic work orientation, SWB and job satisfaction were highly correlated with income. In contrast, for individuals with high intrinsic work orientation, SWB was negatively related to income (Malka & Chatman, 2003, p. 743). Additional analyses revealed that income had a positive effect on life satisfaction for highly extrinsically motivated workers but had a negative impact on life satisfaction and on positive affect for individuals who reported high intrinsic work motivation.
Of note, both types of work orientations (i.e., intrinsic and extrinsic) were highly correlated in this study, suggesting that there may be a larger motivational factor underlying both. This is hard to tease apart given that the authors did not use a standardized and validated measure to assess for each type of motivation.

On the other hand, additional research suggests that the connection between social status, work motivation, and subjective well-being may not be entirely negative. Instead, there may be a protective role in the way workers interpret their own vocational experience. A study conducted by Bullock and Waugh (2005) illustrates this phenomenon.

In their survey of 124 Mexican immigrant farm workers on their beliefs about poverty and upward mobility in the United States, Bullock and Waugh (2005) found that even when faced with difficult challenges such as poverty or racism, these workers held positive beliefs about their opportunity for upward mobility, both for themselves and for their offspring (p. 1132). Participants’ beliefs were influenced by both their recognition of structural barriers in their work, as well as their sense of agency (i.e., the belief that they could move ahead through hard work, p. 1143).

**Gender Differences in Social Status and Work Motivation**

Interestingly, the connection between social status and work motivation may also depend on other background variables, including on workers’ gender. One study which explicitly addresses this possibility was conducted by Nie, Luo, Wentworth, and Sturkie (2014) in China. Using a sample of 1,032 Chinese adults who completed the 2005 Chinese General Social Survey, the authors attempted to answer three main questions:

(1) Are there gender differences in work values? (2) Are gender differences in work values explained by gender differences in family roles and socioeconomic statuses?
(3) Are gender differences in work values in part explained by gender differences in SES status and occupational characteristics?

Nie et al. (2014) argue that there are longstanding, observable differences in gender roles and values, such that might influence individuals’ perceptions regarding work. For example, previous research has found that men place greater importance on financial earnings, job security, and promotion, while women endorse greater importance on a sense of accomplishment, work interests and autonomy, and the social aspects of work (p. 54). In the language of intrinsic versus extrinsic work motivation, this type of research may suggest gender differences across work motivation orientations.

Using a combination of t-test and chi-square analyses to test for gender differences, and using ordinal regression models to estimate gender differences in work values (while taking into account other variables such as SES), the authors found that men in their sample did indeed place more importance on extrinsic work factors such as job prestige, job authority, and opportunity for promotions. On the other hand, women were found to place more importance on shorter work time, greater job autonomy, and security (Nie et al., 2014, p. 61). The authors further observed that these gender differences in values could be explained by gender differences in socioeconomic status. That is, workers’ SES and the job characteristics they reported seeking fully explained the relationships between gender and subsequent emphasis on high earnings or job security (p. 61). Although these findings were reported within a Chinese context, it is important to consider if similar results would hold true within a US sample of workers.

**Social Status, Work Motivation, and Meaningful Work**

Tying all three variables of interest together, a recent dissertation by Shim (2016) looked at the experience of meaningful work in lower socioeconomic status workers. Using
interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), seven themes emerged from extensive interviews of eight such workers. These themes included: definitions of MW; perception and psychological experience of MW; internal conditions of MW; external conditions of MW; personal impact of MW; strategies to enhance meaningfulness in work; and perspective on the relationship between MW and SES.

Similarly to other definitions of the construct, participants in this study defined MW as “intrinsically motivating work that gets them up in the morning, and [that they] would enjoy doing even without the financial rewards” (Shim, 2016, p. 98). An important internal condition to experiencing MW was that of high self-efficacy and competence (i.e., when participants felt that they were able to do their work and complete it well, as opposed to feeling stuck in situations where they have less control). However, it is important to note that given their social status, these are the very same workers that might have fewer options to exert control in their work environments. Although this may not preclude them from experiencing MW, it may add a barrier not faced by their higher-income peers.

For some participants, income itself was seen as a work motivator and source of meaning, particularly when it was important to their living circumstances (Shim, 2016, p. 104). For these participants, it is likely that the connection between their social status and MW was influenced by their extrinsic drive to improve their financial circumstances. On the other hand, the connection between income/social status and MW might not have been as salient for those participants who did not feel additional pressure to provide for themselves and their families.

Across all participants, each discussed a number of challenges to finding MW. These included navigating unemployment, the need to find a job for financial security, and lack of resources to pursue MW (Shim, 2016, p. 104). Faced with these barriers, participants often took
action to increase the meaningfulness in their work, in part by being proactive. In ways similar to the ones discussed above, these participants used perception management, regulating their emotional experience, and taking action to pursue other avenues for MW (p. 108).

Together, these findings suggest that although MW is not necessarily a luxury reserved for high income workers, there are barriers experienced by lower social status workers that may limit their ability to experience MW as often as do their more privileged peers. At the same time, this relationship between social status and MW also seems to depend on workers’ internal motivation and perceptions of their work environment. Based on the studies reviewed in this chapter, it appears that work motivation moderates the relationship between social status and MW. In other words, for workers that are highly motivated by extrinsic rewards, the connection between social status and MW is likely to be stronger in nature (e.g., Malka & Chatman, 2003). On the other hand, for workers driven by intrinsic rewards, the relationship between social status and MW is likely attenuated. For this latter group of workers, meaning might depend on their perception of the work environment and the strategies they can use (regardless of class) to reframe their work experience in a more positive way (e.g., Allan, Autin, & Duffy, 2016).

**Summary of the Problem**

Putting this research review together, it is apparent that more attention is needed to clarify the proposed relationship among social status, work motivation, and meaningful work. That is, while clear connections exist between social status—meaningful work, social status—work motivation, and work motivation—meaningful work, no studies to date has looked at these relationships together, and through the theoretical lens of the PWT.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This chapter includes the following sections: data collection procedure, instruments, and an overview of the study’s participants.

Procedure

Prior to conducting the study, Loyola University’s Institutional Review Board reviewed the study’s procedures, potential risk, and proposed analyses. After written permission was obtained to conduct the study, data were collected online using the Opinio Survey software package. To recruit participants, recruitment scripts were posted on various social media webpages (e.g., Facebook) and were emailed directly to potential participants by this author. Snowball sampling was used to encourage participants to pass along the study information once they completed the survey.

Interested participants read and reviewed the recruitment script. Within the script, participants were able to access a hyperlink directing them to an online survey consisting of the survey package. Once accessed, the first page of the online survey included a consent page that described the terms of participation. This page included a statement informing potential participants that, by accessing the survey, they agreed to the terms of the study and its eligibility requirements. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of this study and had the option to self-select. Individuals who consented to participate in this study completed the online survey consisting of a demographic questionnaire and the following measures: Work and Meaning
Inventory (WAMI), the Differential Status Identity Scale (DSIS), and the Work Preference Inventory (WPI). At the end of the survey, participants were given the option to provide an email address to be entered into a raffle to win one (1) of five (5) $20 VISA gift cards.

No identifying information was collected and all data was stored in a secure, password-protected computer. Participants names and contact information was not matched to their online surveys and was deleted after gift cards were sent to the selected winners.

**Instruments**

**Demographic Questionnaire**

A demographic questionnaire consisting of questions pertaining to participants’ age, gender, race/ethnicity, approximate household and individual income before taxes, their self-reported social class, and the highest level of education that they have obtained, was administered to all participants.

**Work and Meaning Inventory**

The Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI) was developed by Steger et al. (2012). The inventory consists of 10 items that assess individuals’ experience of meaningful work. Items are rated on a 1 (*Absolutely Untrue*) to 5 (*Absolutely True*) scale. Higher scores indicate “the depth to which people experience their work as meaningful, as something they are personally invested in, and which is a source of flourishing in their lives” (Steger et al., 2012). Total scores range from 0 to 50. Using a sample of 370 university employees, representing diverse occupations, the scale was developed to measure three facets of meaningful work: positive meaning in work (PM); meaning making through work (MM); and greater good motivation (GG). Per the authors, PM is intended to capture individuals’ experience that their work matters and is meaningful (e.g., “I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful”). In turn, MM is related to the way
meaningful work can facilitate overall life meaning by helping individuals better understand themselves and the broader context of their work (e.g., “My work helps me make sense of the world around me”). Lastly, GG is connected to individuals’ experience that their work contributes to the greater good and serves as a way to positively impact others (e.g., “The work I do serves a greater purpose”).

Steger et al. (2012) further examined the reliability of WAMI scores and provided initial evidence for the construct validity of the instrument. The authors found that WAMI scores correlated in expected ways with work-related and general well-being indices. As predicted, WAMI scores were positively correlated to scores on measures of calling, career and organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and intrinsic work motivation. WAMI scores were negatively correlated to days reported absent from work, withdrawal intentions, and extrinsic work motivation. Lastly, WAMI scores were positively related to important well-being variables including presence of meaning and life satisfaction, but were negatively related to measures of anxiety, hostility, and depression.

Additionally, WAMI scores accounted for unique variance beyond common predictors of job satisfaction, days reported absent from work, and overall life satisfaction. They reported alpha coefficients of .93 for the total WAMI scores. For the purposes of this study, only total WAMI scores were calculated. Cronbach’s alpha for the current study was .944.

**Differential Status Identity Scale**

The Differential Status Identity Scale (DSIS) was developed by Brown et al. (2002) as a measure of perceived social status. The scale is based on the Differential Status Identity framework articulated by Fouad and Brown (2000), which in turn extended previous research looking at the multifaceted nature of social class (as cited in Thompson & Subich, 2007).
The DSIS was originally proposed to have three subscales: economic resources, social power, and prestige. The results of a more recent exploratory factor analysis completed by Thompson and Subich (2007) argued that a four-structure model offers a more interpretable fit. Thompson and Subich’s analyses showed that in addition to the existence of the social power and social prestige subscales, the economic resources subscale could further be divided into two other scales consisting of 15 items each. As such, the DSIS was indicated to have the following four factors: Economic Resources- Amenities (ERA), Economic Resources- Basic Needs (ERB), Social Power (SPO), and Social Prestige (SPR).

The DSIS consists of 60 items rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from -2 (very much below average or much less) to +2 (very much above average or much more). Total scores range from 0 to 75 per scale. To complete the instrument, participants are instructed to compare themselves to “an average citizen in the United States.” The first 15 items ask individuals to indicate their ability to engage in behaviors that require economic resources (ERA), including “travel recreationally” and go to the dentist.” The next 15 items ask individuals to rate what is available to them (ERB) in terms of cars, life insurance, quality schools, etc. in comparison to what is available to the average US citizen. The Social Power subscale (SPO) asks about participants’ ranking in society, as well as their perception that they can influence public and social policies or various institutions. Finally, the Social Prestige (SPR) scale asks how socially valued participants feel in terms of their ethnic group, physical abilities, and the neighborhood where they reside.

Thompson and Subich (2007) reported internal consistency estimates of .97 for scores on the total DSIS, and .95, .95, .94, and .92 for scores on the ERA, ERB, SPO, and SPR subscales, respectively. Examination of related measures showed that scores on the DSIS correlated in expected ways with traditional measures of social class, including level of income in childhood.
and self-identified social class ($r = .32$ to $.56$; Thompson & Subich, 2007). For the current study, internal consistency estimates for the total DSIS scores were $.975$, and $.950$, $.921$, $.950$, $.908$ for the ERA, ERB, SPO, and SPR sub-scale scores, respectively. For the purposes of this study, total scores for the DSIS were calculated and used in subsequent analyses.

**Work Preferences Inventory**

The Work Preference Inventory (WPI) was developed to assess “the individual differences in the degree to which adults perceive themselves to be intrinsically and extrinsically motivated” at work (Amabile et al., 1994, p. 952). The scale consists of 30 items rated on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (never or almost never true) to 4 (always or almost always true). Total scores range from 0 to 60 for each of the scales. Higher scores in each subscale indicate either greater intrinsic work motivation (for the Intrinsic Motivation scale) or greater extrinsic work motivation (for the Extrinsic Motivation scale). Fifteen items comprise two prosed scales for Intrinsic Motivation (e.g., Enjoyment and Challenge) and 15 items comprise two other scales for Extrinsic Motivation (e.g., Outward and Compensation). Sample items from the IM scale include “I enjoy tackling problems that are completely new to me” and “Curiosity is the driving force behind much of what I do.” Sample items from the EM scale include “I am strongly motivated by the money I can earn” and “I am strongly motivated by recognition I can earn from other people.”

A sample of 2,418 respondents (including 1,363 students and 1,055 working adults from diverse occupations) was used to develop the instrument. Amabile et al. reported internal consistency estimates of $.75$ for the IM scale scores and $.70$ for the EM scale scores. In addition, since its publication, the WPI has been cited multiple times in the literature and has been used to assess the work motivation of a variety of workers including students, individuals in business-
related jobs, and professional artists (e.g., Stuhlfaut, 2010). For the purposes of this study, both IM and EM scores were calculated. In the current study, internal consistency estimates were .713 for the IM scale scores and .731 for the EM scale scores.

**Participants**

To determine the appropriate number of participants for this study, the author used G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner & Lang, 2009) to conduct an apriori power analysis. G*Power is a software developed through the Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf. It is used to compute statistical power analyses for a variety of tests including t-tests, F-tests, chi-square tests, and more. Additionally, G*Power can be used to compute effect sizes based on sample size and vice versa. To detect a small effect size of .02 at an alpha level of .05, assuming a power level of .80, the results of this analysis showed that a minimum of 485 participants would be necessary for this study.

Data were collected from adults aged 18-years-old and older, who were employed part- or full-time. A total of 217 participants initiated the survey. One participant (aged 13) was removed for failing to meet recruitment criteria. Nine others were removed after they consented to complete the survey but did not answer any questions beyond providing initial consent. The final sample thus consisted for 207 participants.

The sample consisted of 142 women (68.6%), 64 men (30.9%), and one participant who identified as “other” (0.5%) but who did not offer additional specification. The mean age of the sample was 37.25 years with a standard deviation (SD) of 12.01. In terms of race/ethnicity, 21 participants (10.1%) identified as Latino/a, 14 (6.8%) as African American/Black, 143 (69.1%) as White/Caucasian, 12 (5.8%) as Asian American/Pacific Islander, and one (0.5%) participant identified as Native American. Ten participants (4.8%) self-identified as multiracial and six
participants (2.9%) selected the “Other” category.

Concerning social status, the majority of participants (n = 114, 55.1%) described themselves as middle class. The remainder were split among lower class (n = 4, 1.9%), lower-middle class (n = 42, 20.3%), upper-middle class (n = 42, 20.3%), and upper class (n = 4, 1.9%). Income-wise, both individual and at a household level, participants were widely distributed (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Sample Demographic Characteristics

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<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>21</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American/Black</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Household Income</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>$20,000 to less than $40,000</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>22</td>
<td>10.6</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$180,000 to less than $200,000</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Income</td>
<td>Count (N)</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $20,000</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
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<td>18.8</td>
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<td>11.1</td>
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<td>$100,000 to less than $120,000</td>
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<td>3.9</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200,000 or more</td>
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<th>Self-reported Social Class</th>
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<td>Lower-middle class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle class</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper-middle class</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper class</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Count (N)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>GED</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s Degree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Degree (J.D., M.D., etc.)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Note. N=207*

Lastly, in terms of education, two participants (1.0%) reported having their GED, 22 (10.6%) were high school graduates, 17 (8.2%) reported having an associate’s degree, 95 (45.9%) reported a bachelor’s degree, 55 (26.6%) identified having a master’s degree, and 12 (5.8%) of participants reported having a doctoral degree. Four other participants (1.9%) reported having earned a professional degree of some kind (e.g., a J.D., M.D., etc.).

**Preliminary Analyses**

The data were stored and analyzed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS; IBM Corp, 2016). Preliminary analyses included downloading and cleaning the data. First, participants who did not meet the* eligibility criteria for the study (in terms of age or
employment status) were removed. One participant was thus eliminated from the data set. Second, participants who initiated the survey but did not answer any questions also were removed. Nine such cases were excluded from subsequent analyses.

To clean the remainder of the data, appropriate items within the different measures were reverse-coded and scale scores were computed. Percentages of missing data were calculated and Little’s Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) test was conducted to determine the nature of missing values. Results from this analysis determined that the data were missing at random. As such, the Expected Maximization (EM) method was used to impute missing values at the item level for all scales. Following this imputation, both sub-scale and total scale scores for each of the study measures (i.e., WAMI, DSIS, ERA, ERB, SPO, SPR, and the WPI) were calculated.

After the data were cleaned, each subscale and scale was analyzed to test assumptions of normality, homoscedasticity, and linearity. To do so, analyses of means, standard deviations, skew, and kurtosis were calculated for each scale. Additionally, histograms, P-plots, and scatter plots were examined for evidence that the data met the necessary assumptions. Select results from these analyses are presented in the following section.

A linearity test was conducted to determine if the data were appropriate for conducting regression analyses. Standard scores (z-scores) were calculated for the total scores on the DSIS, IM, and EM scales. These analyses were necessary given the potential for multicollinearity in subsequent regression and moderation analyses (Franzier, Tix, & Barron, 2004). Lastly, Tolerance and VIF values were examined and collinearity diagnostics were run to ensure that assumptions on non-collinearity were met. All results from these analyses were within the satisfactory range.
Given that all assumptions necessary to continue with the subsequent planned analyses were met, the next step involved computing bivariate correlations between all of the variables. These were reported as Pearson $r$-values. A table including all bivariate correlations and the statistically significant relationships between these variables is presented in the following chapter.

**Main Analyses**

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed to test the study’s two primary hypotheses. As a reminder, Hypothesis 1 proposed that participants who endorse lower social status would also endorse experiencing less meaningful work. Hypothesis 2 suggested that this effect of social status on the experience of meaningful work would be moderated by participants’ work motivation. Specifically, Hypothesis 2a argued that the relationship between social status and meaningful work would be weaker for participants who reported greater intrinsic work motivation. On the other hand, Hypothesis 2b stated that this relationship would be stronger for those participants who endorsed greater extrinsic work motivation.

The hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted in a series of steps. In Step 1, gender and age were entered as a single block of covariates, to control for the impact of these demographic variables on subsequent analyses. Race/ethnicity was not included in this block because results from the correlational analyses suggested that this variable was not significantly correlated with any of the study variables.

In Step 2, total scores on the WAMI inventory were regressed on total scores of the DSIS, IM, and EM scales. Test statistics, including the standardized and non-standardized regression coefficients, $R$ and $R^2$ change, and significance of $F$-change were examined to determine if social status and work motivation variables explained unique variance in the outcome of interest (i.e.,
Step 3 involved entering the proposed moderation variables (i.e., intrinsic work motivation and extrinsic work motivation). Based on the recommendation of Franzier et al. (2004), these variables were standardized so that they have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. Second, two interaction terms were created to look at the effect of the two moderators. The first interaction term was calculated by multiplying the converted z-scores for DSIS and intrinsic work motivation (DSIS x IM). The second interaction term was created by multiplying the z-scores for DSIS and extrinsic work motivation (DSIS x EM). Both interaction terms were entered in Step 3. $R^2$ change and the standardized coefficients were examined to determine the presence of a significant interaction effect (i.e., per Hypothesis 2).

If an interaction effect was discovered, further analyses were planned to understand the form of the interaction. Franzier et al. (2004) recommend plotting the predicted values for the outcome variable (meaningful work) for the representative groups. For this study, such a plot would include choosing groups at the mean, at the low (-1 SD from the mean) and at the high (+1 SD from the mean) values of the predictor (social status) and looking at differences in the slopes for the extrinsic and intrinsic work motivation variables. However, given that no significant interaction effects were discovered, the analyses were concluded at the completion of the original hierarchical multiple regression.

The following chapter provides a review of the study’s preliminary and main findings, as well as a summary of the results.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

This chapter includes sections to describe the results from the preliminary analyses, the findings from the main analyses of Hypothesis 1 and 2, and a summary of the main results. The final section of this chapter discusses post-hoc analyses that were conducted to improve the reliability of scores on two of the main scales used in this study (i.e., the IM and EM scales). This last section also includes results from a secondary set of correlational and hierarchical analyses that were conducted with the improved scales.

Preliminary Analyses Results

The results provided here present the mean, standard deviation, Cronbach’s alpha, skewness and kurtosis for each of the study scales (see Table 2). All variables demonstrated satisfactory skewness and kurtosis values (skew < 2, kurtosis < 7) and each met assumptions for normality. As such data were not transformed prior to subsequent analyses.

Preliminary analyses revealed acceptable internal consistency values for each of the study variables. However, Cronbach’s alpha for scores on both the EM and IM scales was relatively low (IM = .713 and EM = .731). This suggests that the reliability for scores on each of these scales was lower than preferred. In combination with the low sample size (N=207) this further suggests that the study lacked the power necessary to detect the proposed interaction effects (to be discussed further below).
Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, Skewness, and Kurtosis for Major Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WAMI</td>
<td>37.73</td>
<td>8.94</td>
<td>.944</td>
<td>-.695</td>
<td>.055</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERA</td>
<td>47.94</td>
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<td>.950</td>
<td>-.051</td>
<td>-.243</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERB</td>
<td>46.77</td>
<td>9.95</td>
<td>.921</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.106</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPO</td>
<td>41.68</td>
<td>10.67</td>
<td>.950</td>
<td>-.446</td>
<td>-.212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPR</td>
<td>50.25</td>
<td>9.12</td>
<td>.908</td>
<td>.045</td>
<td>.813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSIS</td>
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<td>.975</td>
<td>-.169</td>
<td>.005</td>
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<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>44.05</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>.713</td>
<td>-.184</td>
<td>.095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td>38.09</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>.731</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Correlations**

Zero-order correlations for all of the major study variables are reported in Table 3.

**Correlations between demographic and predictor variables.** Demographic variables in this study included participants’ age, gender, race/ethnicity, household and individual income, self-reported social class, and education level. Results from the correlational analyses showed a significant positive relationships between participants age and their individual income ($r = .337, p < .01$), household income ($r = .339, p < .01$), and self-reported social class ($r = .148, p < .05$). Likewise, there was a positive relationship between participants’ household income and their individual income ($r = .704, p < .01$) and their self-reported social class ($r = .571, p < .01$). In general, participants with higher individual and household incomes categorized themselves as belonging to a higher social class.

In terms of education, there was a positive relationship between participants’ education level and their self-reported social class ($r = .161, p < .05$). This suggests that participants with higher educational achievements (e.g., a graduate degree) also described themselves as belonging to a higher social class.
Table 3. Correlation Matrix for Major Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
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<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
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<td>1. Age</td>
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<td>2. Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. R/E</td>
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<td>-.007</td>
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<td>4. House Inc.</td>
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<td>.128</td>
<td>-.012</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Ind. Inc.</td>
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<td>.014</td>
<td>.704**</td>
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<td>6. SC</td>
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<td>.136</td>
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<td>.571**</td>
<td>.463**</td>
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<td>7. EDU</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>-.033</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.161*</td>
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<td>8. WAMI</td>
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<td>-.028</td>
<td>.167*</td>
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<td>.227**</td>
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<td>9. ERA</td>
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<td>.444**</td>
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<td>.486**</td>
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<td>11. SPO</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.370**</td>
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<td>.431**</td>
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<td>.109</td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td>.369**</td>
<td>.315**</td>
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<td>13. DSIS</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>-.053</td>
<td>.521**</td>
<td>.433**</td>
<td>.566**</td>
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<td>.238**</td>
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<td>.862**</td>
<td>.796**</td>
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<td>14. IM</td>
<td>-.040</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>-.040</td>
<td>-.058</td>
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<td>.010</td>
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<td>15. EM</td>
<td>-.288**</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>-.060</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>-.013</td>
<td>-.126</td>
<td>-.231***</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N= 207. *p < .05, two-tailed. **p < .01, two tailed.

Additionally, there was a significant relationship between participants’ gender and their individual income ($r = .222, p < .01$). Specifically, men in this study reported higher incomes compared to their female counterparts.

**Correlations between demographic and outcome variables.** In looking at the aforementioned demographic variables and their connection to the experience of meaningful work, several noteworthy results emerged from the correlational analyses. First, there was a positive relationship between age and meaningful work ($r = .181, p < .01$), suggesting that older participants also reported experiencing more meaningful work compared to their younger counterparts.

Second, there was a negative relationship between gender and meaningful work ($r = -.166, p < .05$). This was a unique result as it suggested that men in this sample reported experiencing less meaningful work compared to sampled women.

Third, there was a connection between participants’ experience of meaningful work and their household income ($r = .167, p < .05$) and self-reported social class ($r = .227, p < .01$). In this case, participants who reported greater household incomes and described themselves as belonging to a higher social class also reported experiencing more meaningful work. This is consistent with the study’s expectations and previous research which shows that individuals with higher social status (as indicated by both explicit measures, such as income, and implicit measures, such as one’s self-report) is connected to more frequent experiences of meaningful work.

Lastly, there was a significant and positive relationship between participants’ educational achievement and experience of meaningful work ($r = .140, p < .05$). Once again, participants who reported higher educational achievement also reported experiencing more meaningful work.
This makes sense when considering the overall connection between participants’ education level and their self-reported social class. Together, these results show that experiences of meaningful work are predictably influenced by individuals’ education, income, and self-reported social class. Unexpectedly, such experiences further seem connected to participants’ gender. Suggestions for why this may be the case are discussed in the following chapter.

**Correlations between social status and outcome variables.** As originally predicted, there was a significant and positive relationship between social status and the outcome variable of interest, meaningful work. Notably, positive relationships were observed between each of the social status scales (as measured by the DSIS). Scores on the WAMI thus were positively correlated with the ERA ($r = .198$, $p < .01$), ERB ($r = .215$, $p < .01$), SPO ($r = .229$, $p < .01$), and SPR ($r = .191$, $p < .01$). In addition, scores on the WAMI were positively correlated with the overall DSIS scores ($r = .238$, $p < .01$). These relationships are significant because they speak to the strong connections that exist between social status and meaningful work. Such a relationship appears to be present even within measures of overall social status, including when looking at the combined effect of economic resources, social power, and social prestige. Although these scales purport to measure distinct, yet related constructs, their general significance suggests that they each play a role in connecting to the experience of meaningful work. Likewise, social status as a whole (as measured through the DSIS) likewise appears strongly connected to individuals’ experience of meaningful work.

**Correlations between work motivation and demographic variables.** In terms of the connection between work motivation and the study’s demographic variables, only a single relationship emerged as significant. Correlational analyses revealed a negative relationship
between age and extrinsic work motivation \( (r = -.288, p < .01) \). This is another unique finding because it suggests that as individuals age, they become less extrinsically motivated in terms of their work.

**Correlations between work motivation and social status variables.** Interestingly, there were no significant correlations between work motivation variables (i.e., IM, EM) and any of the social status variables, including both sub-scales of the DSIS and its overall scores. Correlations between these variables ranged from .006 to .136. This suggests that there was no significant relationship between individuals’ social status and their motivation for working.

**Correlations between work motivation and outcome variables.** Similarly to the strong, positive correlations between social status variables and meaningful work, one significant relationship was uncovered between the work motivation and outcome variables of interest. Specifically, extrinsic work motivation was negatively correlated with scores on the Work and Meaning Inventory \( (r = -.231, p < .01) \). This result was significant because of the evidence it provides for the negative connection between external motivators and workers’ experience of MW. In other words, MW is likely based on more than satisfying external needs.

On the other hand, no such relationship was observed between intrinsic work motivation and participants’ WAMI scores \( (r = -.058, p > .05) \). This result was unexpected given previous research which points to the strong connection between intrinsic motivation and important work outcomes, including satisfaction, organizational commitment, and more. Possible explanations for this unique finding are discussed below.
Main Analyses Results

Looking at the results from the regression analyses below (see Table 4), several important findings stand out. First, results from the hierarchical regression show three significant main effects of DSIS, IM, and EM on the outcome variable of interest, WAMI. In Step 1 of the multiple regression model, both age and gender emerged as significant predictors within the model: $R^2 = .058$, $F(2, 200) = 6.186$, $p = .002$. Together, the two explained approximately 5.8% of the variance in WAMI scores. Age had a significant positive regression weight, indicating that older individuals were expected to report experiencing more meaningful work. On the other hand, gender had a significant negative weight, indicating that men were expected to report lower WAMI scores (i.e., to experience less meaningful work).

In Step 2 of the regression model, there was once again a direct effect from gender to meaningful work (see Table 4). In Step 2, total DSIS, IM, and EM scores also were included as potential predictors. The multiple regression model with these new predictors produced the following result: $R^2 = .184$, $F(5, 197) = 8.873$, $p < .001$. Together, the model explained 18.4% of the variance in total WAMI scores. Main effects were observed for all three new predictors: DSIS, IM, and EM scores. DSIS had a significant, positive regression weight ($\beta = .261$, $p < .001$), indicating that participants with a higher social status were more likely to have higher WAMI scores. Likewise, IM had a significant and positive regression weight at $\beta = .140$ ($p < .05$), again suggesting a connection between intrinsic work motivation and the experience of meaningful work. As predicted, EM scores had a negative and significant effect on total WAMI scores ($\beta = -.235$, $p < .001$), showing that participants with greater extrinsic work motivation were expected to have lower meaningful work scores. All three of these results supported the first hypothesis of the study.
Table 4. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$R^2$ change</th>
<th>$F$ change</th>
<th>Sig. $F$ change</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>.175</td>
<td>.011*</td>
<td>.058</td>
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<td>.002</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.021*</td>
<td>.058</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>.196</td>
<td>.184</td>
<td>10.102</td>
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<td></td>
<td>DSIS</td>
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<td>.261</td>
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<td></td>
<td>IM</td>
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<td>.140</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>1.113</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>EM</td>
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<td>-.018</td>
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<td></td>
<td>DSIS x EM</td>
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<td>.096</td>
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Note. The dependent variable for all regressions was the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI). DSIS= Differential Status Identity Scale. IM=Intrinsic Motivation. EM=Extrinsic Motivation.

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01.
Contrary to the second hypothesis, however, no moderation effects were observed when adding the two interaction terms (DSIS x EM and DSIS x IM) in Step 3 of the regression model. Doing so produced the following result: \( R^2 = .193, F (7, 195) = 6.663, p = .331 \). In this case, neither intrinsic work motivation nor extrinsic work motivation emerged as significant predictors in the final model (see Table 4). Given these results, no other analyses were conducted to look at the moderating effects of IM and EM on meaningful work.

**Post-Hoc Analyses**

Given the low score reliabilities of the IM and EM scales, post-hoc analyses were conducted to bolster the observed Cronbach’s alpha levels and to determine if adapting these scales would impact the correlational and multiple regression results. To do so, the extant IM and EM scales were re-analyzed and individual items were selected for removal based on statistical results showing that this would improve the score reliabilities of these two scales. As such, two items were removed from the IM scale (“I prefer work that I know I can do well over work that stretches my abilities” and “I enjoy simple straightforward tasks”). The subsequent Cronbach’s alpha for the IM scores was .78 (up from the original .71). Similarly, four items were removed from the EM scale. These included: “I am keenly aware of the career goals that I have for myself,” “I seldom think about salary and advancement,” “I am not concerned about what other people think of my work,” and “I prefer to have someone set clear goals for me in my work.” Re-analysis of the EM scale showed the new score reliability to be .78 (up from the original .73).

Following the scale adaptations, both the correlation and multiple regression analyses were conducted again with the new IM and EM scales. Results from the correlational analyses showed a single change. Namely, the relationship between extrinsic work motivation and social
prestige was now significant ($r = .157, p < .05$).

In contrast, no statistically significant changes were observed at any step of the hierarchical multiple regression results. This confirmed the absence of observable moderation effects of IM and EM on the outcome variable of interest, meaningful work.

**Summary of Results**

**Hypothesis 1**

Overall, the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analyses did support the first hypothesis of the study which predicted a positive relationship between individuals’ social status and their experience of meaningful work. Specifically, the regression results showed that gender, social status, intrinsic work motivation, and extrinsic work motivation all were significant predictors towards participants’ WAMI scores. Within this model, men and those participants who endorsed higher extrinsic motivation (on the EM) scale were predicted to have lower WAMI scores. In contrast, participants who endorsed higher social status (per the DSIS) and greater intrinsic work motivation were predicted to have higher WAMI scores. The implications of these results are discussed in greater detail in the subsequent chapter.

**Hypothesis 2**

Contrary to the second hypothesis of the study, no moderating effect was observed for either intrinsic work motivation nor extrinsic work motivation. In other words, though both IM and EM had a direct effect on the outcome variable of interest (see Table 4), the third observed connection between social status and meaningful work was not changed in size or direction with the addition of either/both interaction terms to the model. The discussion section in the following chapter includes an in-depth analysis of this null result.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Gallup polls conducted every four years since 1997 consistently highlight the growing work engagement of the average American worker (Bowman, 2017). Time and again, surveyed workers describe the benefits they receive from work which extend beyond financial compensation. In the 2016 “General Social Survey” conducted by NORC, a full 55% of surveyed workers disagreed with the statement: “A job is just a way of earning money, nothing more.” Findings from such polls underscore the pivotal role that work plays in the experience of workers across the country. Contrary to popular belief, it appears that work offers more than fiscal benefits; instead, there are a number of factors that seemingly make work more meaningful and worthwhile for today’s average employee.

Within the counseling psychology literature, a primary factor that has been proposed and examined as a predictor of increased satisfaction and engagement with one’s job or career is that of meaningful work. Growing research on this construct defines MW as “the subjective experience of work as purposeful and significant and linked to a sense of identity, with a positive valence that is principally eudaimonic (growth- and purpose-oriented) rather than hedonic (pleasure oriented) in nature” (Lips-Wiersma et al., 2016, p. 534). This type of work has been linked to a number of positive individual outcomes, including increased career commitment and maturity, job satisfaction, life meaning, and life satisfaction (e.g., Duffy & Dik, 2013).

However, other research suggests that not all individuals have access to such work
experiences. The Psychology of Working Theory (Duffy et al., 2016) explicitly names the lack of vocational choice and low agency that characterize the working experience of today’s economically marginalized workers. Central to the tenets of PWT is the idea that the ability of individuals to obtain decent work is strongly shaped by one’s access to economic resources. Within this theory, variables such as work volition (i.e., agency) and background factors (e.g., a proactive personality) are framed as important mediators and moderators, respectively, that influence the connection between social status and optimal work outcomes.

However, additional research suggests that work motivation, in the form of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, is equally important to consider when trying to understand why some individuals experience MW, while others do not. Previous studies (e.g., Amabile et al., 1994) explain that assessing for both types of motivations is important because each can speak to the choices that individuals make regarding their educational and career pursuits. In addition, there is a proposed, distinct connection between work motivation and social status differences (e.g., Leitao et al., 2013), as well as work motivation and meaningful work (e.g., Hu & Hirsh, 2017).

The current study explicitly explored the relationships among social status, work motivation, and meaningful work. Specifically, the study tested two central hypotheses: (1) that there is a positive relationship between social status and the experience of meaningful work, such that individuals who report a higher social status also would endorse experiencing more MW; and (2) that the relationship between social status and MW is moderated by intrinsic and extrinsic work motivation variables.

The following sections offer a summary of the study’s findings and their position within the overall meaningful work literature, implications for practice, and study limitations and suggestions for future research.
Summary of Findings

Correlational Analyses

Correlational and hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to test the study hypotheses with a sample of 207 working adults. Results from the correlational analyses largely were consistent with the study’s predictions. For instance, the demographic variables in the study (e.g., age, gender, and individual or household income) correlated predictably with social class. Older participants, men, and those with more education also reported having higher incomes and self-selected into higher social class categories. Interestingly, there was a positive relationship between age and meaningful work. This finding may be a factor of the ability of older, and presumably more experienced, workers to have more agency and control over their work environment in such a way that allows them to derive greater meaning. This result also was consistent with the findings of Steger et al. (2012) who discovered a similar positive correlation between age and WAMI scores.

Another unique finding was the significant negative relationship between gender and meaningful work. In this study, men had significantly lower WAMI scores compared to their female counterparts. This result was inconsistent with previous studies that found no gender differences in scores (e.g., Steger et al., 2012). However, previous research (e.g., Nie et al., 2014) points to a larger gender difference in the way men approach work. Namely, men in the Nie et al. study were found to place more importance on extrinsic work, including on prestige and authority. This type of motivational difference may account for variability in the way men understand and rate their work experience. In other words, for men, the depth and experience of MW may be less connected to the three factors measured through the WAMI (i.e., positive meaning, meaning making through work, and greater good motivations), and might be more
dependent on the work’s ability to fulfill their extrinsic needs.

As predicted, there was a positive and significant relationship between all of the social status variables and participants’ WAMI scores. This finding is strongly consistent with the overall literature connecting social status and MW. It appears that individuals who endorse greater access to economic resources, social power, and social prestige, also endorse greater experiences of MW. From the perspective of the Psychology of Working Theory, this finding may speak to the way social status influences work volition and subsequent vocational choice. That is, participants with greater economic resources tend to have more access to both educational and vocational opportunities that align with their interests and aptitudes. This is in contrast to participants from lower social status backgrounds that may circumscribe their career choices in an effort to fulfill more imminent economic (i.e., survival) needs.

In terms of the connections between work motivation and each of the study variables (demographic, social status, and MW), several noteworthy findings emerged. First, there was a negative relationship between age and extrinsic work motivation, suggesting that older workers were less motivated by extrinsic rewards. It may be that once older workers achieve a certain level of professional development, they become less focused on external rewards and more thoughtful towards other work factors, including that of positive meaning and greater good motivations. This is consistent with theories of psychosocial development (e.g., Erik Erikson; Slater, 2003), which posit that workers in the generativity stage of their development (i.e., those 45-65 years old) are primarily concerned with the task of contributing to society and making a difference in the world. From this perspective, such workers are more likely to focus on the intrinsic benefits of their work compared to the extrinsic rewards it affords.

Another explanation for the connection between age and extrinsic work motivation rests
on the idea that freedom from the need to fulfill rising extrinsic demands makes meaningful work more salient and obtainable for older workers. This is in contrast to the potential experience of younger workers who may place greater emphasis on the need to fulfill external needs, including the need to support themselves and their families, to save for retirement, and more.

Second, in terms of the connection between work motivation and MW, a negative relationship emerged between extrinsic work motivation (EM) and participants’ WAMI scores. This finding was consistent with the result from the subsequent regression analyses, which likewise suggested that workers who are highly motivated by extrinsic rewards are less likely to report experiencing MW.

Lastly, there were no observed significant relationships between social status and work motivation, both extrinsic and intrinsic. While previous research has found support for the positive connection between social status variables and extrinsic work motivation (e.g., Brief et al., 1997), the low reliability of scores on the IM and EM scales used in this study may account for why this relationship was not observed in the current correlational analyses.

Main Analyses

Results from the hierarchical multiple regression analyses demonstrated the presence of direct main effects of gender, social status, and work motivation (both intrinsic and extrinsic) on participants’ WAMI scores. Together, these four variables accounted for 18.4% of the variance in participants’ WAMI scores.

Hypothesis 1. Beginning with gender, men in this study were predicted to have lower WAMI scores and thus less experience of MW. The explanation for this finding may rest within the three factors that are measured by the Work and Meaning Inventory (i.e., positive meaning, meaning making through work, and greater good motivations). These three factors are
conceptually more aligned with intrinsic work orientation, which previous authors have defined as “the motivation to engage in work primarily for its own sake, because the work itself is interesting, engaging or satisfying in some way” (Amabile et al., 1994, p. 950). On the other hand, as discussed above, past research already points to gender differences in the way men (versus women) seek to make meaning from their work. In their validation study of the Work Preference Inventory, Amabile et al. found gender differences across the four subscales of the WPI. Specifically, men in their study had higher scores on the Outward orientation sub-scale, which looked at orientation “towards recognition and the dictates of others” (p. 955). In contrast, women had higher scores on the Enjoyment orientation subscale, which was part of the overarching intrinsic orientation (IM) scale.

On the other hand, social status was a positive predictor of MW. Participants who reported higher social status scores also were predicted to report higher WAMI scores. This is consistent with the study’s first hypothesis that posited the existence of such a relationship. In addition, this finding is consistent with the broader literature on social status and its impact on individual work outcomes. Authors such as Diemer and Ali (2009) underscore how individuals’ social class can determine their access to educational resources, employment opportunities, and can influence the experience of work itself. More importantly, these effects begin in early childhood. For example, research by Blustein (2002 as cited in Diemer & Ali, 2009), found how youth from lower social class backgrounds tend to view work as a means of survival, in contrast to peers from higher social classes that see work as a way to create an identity, increase personal satisfaction, and improve their own social status. From this perspective, social status impacts an individual’s worldview and expectations, as well as their realistic access to work that easily fits with one’s intrinsic interests, abilities, and aptitudes.
Finally, both intrinsic work motivation and extrinsic work motivation were significant predictors within this model. Once again, this is finding is consistent within the broader literature on work motivation and MW. In their review of sources and mechanisms of MW, Rosso et al. (2010) propose that motivation is a central source of MW. Engaging in internally stimulating work is perceived as a precursor to experiencing meaning in work (Rosso et al., 2010). Given this, it makes sense that individuals who report higher levels of intrinsic work motivation also are more likely to experience more meaning in their work.

The opposite seems true for individuals who report higher levels of extrinsic work orientation. To understand this specific finding, it is important to consider not only the definition of extrinsic work orientation, but also why some individuals may endorse this orientation as higher than intrinsic motives.

First, extrinsic work orientation is defined as “the motivation to work primarily in response to something apart from the work itself, such as reward or recognition or the dictates of other people” (Amabile et al., 1994, p. 950). When defined this way, this type of orientation is logically less connected to the experience of MW, if the latter is defined as a search for positive meaning and greater good motivations. As such, it is possible that individuals with a high extrinsic work orientation may make meaning of their work in a different way.

On the other hand, it is equally important to consider that individuals high in EM are less likely to experience MW not because of the way they define their work’s meaning, but due to environmental constraints that may lead them to prioritize external needs. For instance, marginalized workers who do not have access to economic resources and social power or prestige may seek work that fulfills their survival needs at the expense of work that aligns with their intrinsic interests. These workers may report higher EM scores not because they lack an
intrinsic orientation towards work, but because they are precluded by environmental demands to focus on finding work that satisfies their most pressing livelihood needs. A study by Brief et al. (1997) illustrates this phenomenon. In their study, Brief and colleagues found that workers with lower incomes tended to experience a greater need for compensation, saw their work as a means to an end, and felt stuck at their occupation.

Together, these findings highlight the importance of considering not just an individual’s intrinsic or extrinsic work orientation, but also their reason for being oriented in such a way. Additionally, it is necessary to evaluate the strength of each orientation. Given that intrinsic and extrinsic work orientation are thought of as independent from one another, it is possible that both, one, or neither can contribute to an individual’s subsequent experience of MW.

**Hypothesis 2.** In contrast to the study’s second hypothesis, no moderation effect was observed for either of the work motivation variables. In other words, the relationship between participants’ social status and MW scores was not connected to their work motivation. Several explanations may account for this finding. First, moderation analyses of this nature require large sample sizes to discover even small in magnitude significant effects. Apriori analyses for this study indicated that a minimum sample of 485 participants would be needed to detect a small effect size of .02 at an alpha level of .05, assuming a power level of .80. Due to recruitment difficulties, the final sample of this study included only 207 participants. As such, the study was underpowered to detect a possible moderation effect among these variables.

Second, as previously explained, scores on both the IM and EM scales had low internal consistency, barely above the .70 thresholds. While these findings were consistent with those obtained by Amabile et al. (1994) in their construction and validation of the Work Preference Inventory, as well as in other studies (e.g., Stuhlfaut, 2010) that previously used this measure,
these low score reliability estimates also may have influenced the reliable measure of participants’ extrinsic and intrinsic work motivation, and therefore the subsequent connection between both of these variables and MW.

Specifically, it was highly unlikely to find the proposed interaction effects when the low score reliability of the IM and EM scales affected (i.e., attenuated) the reliability of the subsequently created interaction terms. Given that interaction terms already have lower reliabilities than those of the scores from the variables which create them, such a dramatically attenuated reliability (as was observed on this study), precluded the author’s ability to discover any meaningful interaction effects, as were originally proposed.

**Implications for Practice**

Given the direct impact of gender, social status, and work motivation on the experience of MW, it is important for counselors to consider how to attend to each of these factors when working with clients who present with vocational difficulties related to finding purpose, meaning, or satisfaction within their working lives. While a number of these variables cannot be directly changed, a number of strategies exist that can ameliorate or promote their subsequent impact on MW.

Research on unanswered vocational callings offers several insights into how individuals can bolster their experience of MW. Based on the work of Berg, Grant, and Johnson (2010), four strategies are facilitative for workers who are not able to engage in intrinsically satisfying work. These include: task emphasizing, job expanding, role reframing, and engaging in vicarious experiences or hobbies. The first two techniques refer to workers ability to focus on tasks within their experience that do align with their perceived calling or to add tasks to their work in a way that incorporates aspects of their preferred position. On the other hand, role reframing includes
changing one’s perspective of the work role to fit in with parts of the unanswered calling. The example provided by Berg et al. is that of a teacher who looks for the similarities between teaching and being a musician.

These techniques are congruent with those promoted by Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) who similarly argued for the use of reframing, recalibrating, and refocusing as a way to create positive meaning, even among “dirty” work situations. According to Ashforth and Kreiner, reframing involves changing the meaning that is attached to a stigmatized work position, while recalibrating includes changing the standards against which the work is judged. Lastly, refocusing is highly similar to Berg et al.’s (2010) task emphasizing, in that it includes focusing on the socially acceptable features of one’s work.

In addition to the use of cognitive reframing strategies to help individuals achieve a different perception of MW, counselors may also wish to consider the salience and centrality of work for each individual. Techniques such as the ones above may be more efficacious for those individuals who endorse work as particularly salient in their daily experience. In contrast, for other workers it is equally helpful to identify other life areas (e.g., family, leisure) as potential sources of meaning and purpose. According to the Work/Family Border Theory put forth by Clark (2000), for these workers it is important to understand how they move between work and family domains, depending on the domain that they most strongly identify with at a given point in time. Identification here refers to “whether individuals find meaning in their responsibilities and find that their responsibilities mesh with their self-concept” (p. 760).

This latter approach is especially useful when working with clients to help them identify their personal and vocational values, and to find strategies that can facilitate a more optimal fit between the two. For instance, past research conducted by Gandal et al. (2005) argues that values
are important predictors of work engagement, in that individuals tend to self-select into careers that align with their personal values. By helping workers identify these values (e.g., towards self-enhancement or universalism), counselors work with these clients to find strategies to promote greater person-environment fit.

Last in terms of the individually focused strategies is that of increasing workers’ self-efficacy and competence perceptions at work. Previous studies (e.g., Shim, 2016) point to a connection between workers’ perceived efficacy and task competence, and their subsequent experience of MW. Workers who reported feeling able to do their work and to complete it well were more likely to endorse experiencing MW, especially compared to workers who felt constrained by situations where they had little personal control over their work and work environment.

For individuals from lower social status background, it is centrally important for counselors to acknowledge and validate common barriers to MW that include navigating under- and un-employment, the need for work for financial security, and a lack of resources to pursue educational or vocational opportunities that will promote such an experience (e.g., Shim, 2016). For these clients, individual strategies such as the ones outlined above may fall short in addressing the very real impact of their work and life environment. Thus, counselors are called upon to consider broader community and societal interventions that can improve the working conditions for all of today’s employees.

A first step toward broader social change to promote MW is change that provides greater access to decent work. As previously discussed, decent work includes access to sufficient income, allowing for a sense of safety and security at work, and making space for the voice of marginalized workers (e.g., Thompson & Dahling, 2019). This type of work is a natural
precursor to that of MW. Access to this type of work can be improved by both community and social interventions aimed at increasing workers’ economic resources and social power. Examples of such interventions include reemployment programs or community-based programs that increase workers’ access to social support and community capital (Thompson & Dahling, 2019). Additionally, it is important for clinicians and researchers to join in advocacy efforts for public policy that supports those individuals who struggle to secure decent work (Thompson & Dahling, 2019). Most often, these are individuals from marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds who also face the pervasive negative impact of institutionalized racism, xenophobia, sexism, and many other kinds of –isms that cumulatively impact their access to economic resources, social power, and social prestige.

**Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Several important limitations warrant consideration for this study. First, the study was limited by its relatively small size, especially in reference to the statistical power necessary to detect the proposed moderation effects. Second, while high internal reliability estimates were calculated for the scores on the used scales (including the WAMI, ERA, ERB, SPO, and SPR), scores on both the IM and EM scales had significantly lower Cronbach’s alpha levels. As discussed above, low score reliability interferes with reliable measurement of the proposed constructs and influences subsequent analyses. Future research that builds on these constructs should consider the use of other measures of work motivation, particularly ones with higher internal consistency estimates. Third, the non-experimental design of this study precludes the exploration of causal relationships among the study variables. Longitudinal designs should be considered when looking to see the long-term impact of social status on work motivation and MW. Fourth, there was a failure to differentiate in the present study between full- and part-time
workers. Doing so in subsequent research is important because of the implications of different pay rates between part-time and full-time work. In other words, the salience of work and its compensation may vary in part-time versus full-time work, which in turn may impact the overall meaningfulness of the work itself.

In general, significantly more research is needed to ascertain the factors, both direct and indirect, that contribute to the experience of MW. While social status and work motivation variables offer a glimpse into why some individuals experience this type of work while others do not, based on the results of this study, close to 80% of the variance in MW remains unexplained. Previous research (e.g., Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999) suggests that the experience of MW depends less on one’s job position or type, and more on the idiosyncratic way each person makes meaning of his or her vocational experience. Thus, it is possible that personality factors, including one’s openness, level of agreeableness, or neuroticism, may account for why some individuals are able to extract more meaning from their work compared to others who are not.

Environmental factors that support the experience of MW also need to be considered in future studies of the construct. For instance, previous studies suggest that workers endorse their work as meaningful are less likely to change their positions or organizations, even when offered higher compensation to do so (e.g., Hu & Hirsh, 2017). Therefore, it is important to understand what role workplace organizations play in support of the experience of MW, and what steps each organization can take to promote this type of experience for all of its employees.

As research on MW continues to build, a critical next step in this process is the creation of a theoretical foundation that can synthesize the variety of individual findings regarding this construct. Such a theory should not only propose a single, operational definition of MW that can guide future studies, but also should make explicit variables that are connected to this construct
(e.g., social status) and their proposed relationships (be they causal or not). Without such a unifying theory, it is difficult to envision how research on MW can continue to grow beyond the use of individual studies to test specific hypotheses, without offering a comprehensive framework where each of these studies can be positioned.

Lastly, as research with each of these variables continues to expand, scholars further need to reconsider their sampling criteria and techniques in order to draw diverse participants from all social status backgrounds. This is necessary to counter the current bias within the vocational literature that results from oversampling individuals with jobs or careers that entail more education (e.g., sampling from college-educated adults). In order to understand the work experience of all workers, future research has to expand beyond sampling from middle- to upper-middle class adults. Finding ways to incorporate the viewpoints of self-reported working class or blue-collar professionals is needed if vocational studies seek to make recommendations that will improve the vocational experience of today’s workers.

That said, challenges to sampling from blue-collar work professionals exist. Primary among these is the recruitment of such individuals to participate in both survey and experimental research studies. Methodologically, this suggests that researchers need to make an active effort to approach communities where these professionals reside and work. This can be done through building connections with community leaders and organizations (e.g., employment offices, religious institutions) that support these workers. Additionally, it is important to offer compensation for the time and effort of these professionals should they self-select to participate in a research study. Most importantly, it will be incumbent for researchers to share the results of any project that involves these workers and to find ways to make recommendations or to advocate for changes that will contribute in a positive way to these workers and their
communities.

Together, these recommendations align with those put forth by Isaac Prilletensky (2001, as cited in Romano, 2015) who argued for the concept of “praxis,” as the unison of theory and action towards collective well-being (pp. 72-73). In other words, it is not enough for researchers to articulate a theory, design and test a study, and publish its results; it is equally important to consider how this research is grounded in a set of values that should aim to “….balance voices of the powerful with those less powerful” (p. 73). This type of research fits with the social justice objectives of both vocational psychology and counseling psychology.

**Conclusion**

As the employment landscape evolves, factors such as under- and un-employment, technological changes and the rise in automation, and increased globalization will continue to mold and shape the experience of today’s average worker (Thompson & Dahling, 2019). Trends in each of these areas hold the potential to impact individual and societal outcomes, including workers’ access to decent work, levels of poverty and income inequality, and the broader social policies aimed at promoting equitable educational or vocational opportunities. On an individual level, these trends are particularly important to consider when promoting positive work outcomes, including the experience of more meaningful work.

Efforts to understand the presence and promotion of MW are critical for workers across social status backgrounds. The current study offered one such contribution to the MW literature. Many more are needed to fully explore the nature, relationships, and outcomes of this important work variable. This is especially true from a social justice perspective that openly acknowledges that not all current workers have access to such intrinsically fulfilling work. In a greater effort to promote access to decent work, scholars must also consider how to conceptualize and integrate
access to meaningful work experiences that align with workers’ search for purpose and growth. It is our duty as counseling psychologists to work towards this goal in the service of all working professionals, and especially those from economically marginalized backgrounds.
APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT
Hello,

My name is Plamena Daskalova and I am a doctoral candidate in the Counseling Psychology Program at Loyola University Chicago.

I would like to ask for your participation for a study that I am conducting for my dissertation. It takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete the study, and you can submit your email to enter a raffle to win one of five $20 VISA gift cards!

Participation in this study is voluntary, and if you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a set of questions about your demographic information, your experience of meaningful work, your social status, and motivation for working.

I would like to extend an invitation to anyone who meets the required criteria. I am looking for participants who:

1. Are 18 years of age and older
2. Are currently employed (part-time or full-time)

If you would like to participate please follow the link below to obtain more information about the survey and complete the questions.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Plamena Daskalova
APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**Project Title:** Individual Differences in the Experience of Meaningful Work
**Researchers:** Plamena Daskalova, M.Ed.
**Faculty Sponsor:** Elizabeth Vera, Ph.D.

**Introduction:**
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Plamena Daskalova, M.Ed. under the supervision of Elizabeth Vera, Ph.D., in the Department of Counseling Psychology at Loyola University Chicago.

You are being asked to participate because you have indicated that you meet the requirements of the study and are a currently employed adult, 18-years-old or older. Approximately 350 persons will participate in the study.

Please read this form carefully and email any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

**Purpose:**
The purpose of this study is to find out more about the way individuals experience meaningful work, as well as to understand how social status and work motives/motivation may influence their experience of meaningful work.

**Procedures:**
If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to answer a series of questions as accurately as possible as described in the instructions. These questions will focus on your experience of meaningful work, your social status, and motivation for working. Completing the study should take no more than 15 minutes.

**Risks/Benefits:**
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study beyond those experienced in everyday life. If you encounter distress at any point in answering these questions, please contact the National Suicide Prevention & Crisis Hotline at 1.800.273.TALK and you will be connected with a crisis counselor.

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study, but the results of this research may aid psychologists, universities, consultants, and employers in understanding how people experience meaningful work, and in sculpting relevant policies, services, and interventions related to promoting meaningful work.

**Compensation:**
After the study, you will have the opportunity to email the primary investigator for a chance to win one (1) of five (5) $20 VISA gift cards. You may only participate in this study once. Once data collection has been completed, five email addresses will be selected at random to receive the gift cards from the study. The participants will be notified via the email addresses provided, and
the gift cards will be sent electronically to the participants’ email addresses.

Confidentiality:
Information gathered from this study will be coded so that you are represented with a unique identifying number that will not reveal any identifying information, including your IP address. If you choose to email the primary investigator, your email address will be kept only until the study is complete.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in the study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions:
If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Plamena Daskalova at pdaskalova@luc.edu or the faculty sponsor Dr. Elizabeth Vera at evera@luc.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

Statement of Consent:
By selecting “I consent to participate in this study” below, you indicate that you have read the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in the research study.
APPENDIX C

SURVEY PACKAGE
Demographics

Age: __________

Gender:
__________ Male
__________ Female
__________ Other (please describe) __________

Race/Ethnicity:
__________ Latino/a
__________ Native-American
__________ African American/Black
__________ Multiracial
__________ Caucasian
__________ Other
__________ Multiracial
__________ Asian-American/Pacific Islander

What is your approximate household income before taxes?

__________ Under $20,000
__________ $20,000 to less than $40,000
__________ $40,000 to less than $60,000
__________ $60,000 to less than $80,000
__________ $80,000 to less than $100,000
__________ $100,000 to less than $120,000
__________ $120,000 to less than $140,000
__________ $140,000 to less than $160,000
__________ $160,000 to less than $180,000
__________ $180,000 to less than $200,000
__________ $200,000 or more

What is your approximate individual income before taxes?

__________ Under $20,000
__________ $20,000 to less than $40,000
__________ $40,000 to less than $60,000
__________ $60,000 to less than $80,000
__________ $80,000 to less than $100,000
__________ $100,000 to less than $120,000
__________ $120,000 to less than $140,000
__________ $140,000 to less than $160,000
__________ $160,000 to less than $180,000
__________ $180,000 to less than $200,000
__________ $200,000 or more

How would you describe your social class?
__________ Lower class
__________ Lower-middle class
__________ Middle class
__________ Upper-middle class
__________ Upper class

What is your highest level of education?

__________ Did not complete high school
__________ High School Diploma
__________ Associate’s Degree
__________ GED
__________ Bachelor’s Degree
__________ Doctoral Degree
__________ Master’s Degree
__________ Professional Degree (J.D., M.D., etc)
**Work and Meaning Inventory**

Work can mean a lot of different things to different people. The following items ask about how you see the role of work in your own life. Please honestly indicate how true each statement is for you and your work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Absolutely Untrue</th>
<th>Mostly Untrue</th>
<th>Neither True nor Untrue</th>
<th>Mostly True</th>
<th>Absolutely True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have found a meaningful career</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I view my work as contributing to my personal growth</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My work really makes no difference to the world</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand how my work contributes to my life’s meaning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know my work makes a positive difference in the world</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My work helps me better understand myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My work helps me make sense of the world around me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The work I do serves a greater purpose</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Differential Status Identity Scale**

Compare yourself and your family to what you think the average citizen/family in the United States is like. Please indicate how you compare to the average citizen/family by circling one of the responses on the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Much</th>
<th>Below Average</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Equal</th>
<th>Above Average</th>
<th>Very Much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, if you believe you and your family are equal to the average U.S. citizens in terms of your ability to afford to go to the movies, you would circle “0” on the first item below.

1. Ability to afford to go to the movies, restaurants, and/or the theater on a regular basis.
   -2   -1   0   +1   +2

2. Ability to afford additional educational experiences like ballet, tap, art/music classes, science camp, etc.
   -2   -1   0   +1   +2

3. Ability to join a health club/fitness center.
   -2   -1   0   +1   +2

4. Ability to afford regular dental visits.
   -2   -1   0   +1   +2

5. Ability to afford dry cleaning services on a regular basis.
   -2   -1   0   +1   +2

6. Ability to travel recreationally/take a family vacation.
   -2   -1   0   +1   +2

7. Ability to travel overseas for business and/or pleasure.
   -2   -1   0   +1   +2

8. Ability to shop comfortably in upscale department stores, such as Saks Fifth Avenue.
   -2   -1   0   +1   +2

9. Potential for receiving a large inheritance.
   -2   -1   0   +1   +2

10. Ability to secure loans with low interest rates.
    -2   -1   0   +1   +2
11. Ability to hire professional money managers.
   -2  -1  0  +1  +2

12. Ability to go to a doctor or hospital of your own choosing.
   -2  -1  0  +1  +2

13. Ability to hire others for domestic chores (e.g. cleaning, gardening, child care, etc.).
   -2  -1  0  +1  +2

14. Ability to afford prescription medicine.
   -2  -1  0  +1  +2

15. Ability to afford elective surgeries and/or high-cost medical examinations, such as MRIs or CAT scans.
   -2  -1  0  +1  +2

Compare what is available to you and your family in terms of type and/or amount of resources to what you believe is available to the average citizen/family in the United States. Please indicate how you compare to the average citizen/family in terms of the type and amount of resources by circling one of the responses on the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Much</th>
<th>Below Average</th>
<th>Below Average</th>
<th>Equal</th>
<th>Above Average</th>
<th>Above Average</th>
<th>Very Much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, if you believe you and your family are equal to the average U.S. citizen in amount of money you have, you would circle “0” for item 1 below.

1. Money  
2. Land Owned  
3. Stocks and Bonds  
4. House(s) Owned  
5. Cars  
6. Computers  
7. New Appliances (Washers, Dryers, Refrigerators, etc.)  
8. Amount of Education  
9. Quality of High School(s) Attended  
10. Life Insurance  
11. Quality of Health Insurance  
12. Savings
Compare yourself and your family to what you think the average citizen/family in the United States is like. Please indicate how you and your family compare to the average citizen in your ability to do the things below by circling a response on the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Much</th>
<th>Below Average</th>
<th>Below Average</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Equal</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Above Average</th>
<th>Very Much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, if you believe you and your family are equal to the average U.S. citizen/family in your ability to contact people in high places for a job, you would circle “0” for item 1.

1. Contact people in high places for a job or position.
   -2 -1 0 +1 +2

2. Contact people who can help you get out of legal problems.
   -2 -1 0 +1 +2

3. Start a job in a high-profile position that requires responsibility.
   -2 -1 0 +1 +2

4. Get information and services not available to the general public.
   -2 -1 0 +1 +2

5. Control how your social group is represented in history, media, and the public.
   -2 -1 0 +1 +2

6. Receive a fair trial.
   -2 -1 0 +1 +2

7. Become a millionaire by legal means.
   -2 -1 0 +1 +2

8. Control the type and amount of work of others.
   -2 -1 0 +1 +2

9. Control the salary and compensation of others.
   -2 -1 0 +1 +2
10. Influence the laws and regulations of your state or city/town.
   -2   -1   0   +1   +2

11. Influence state or federal educational policies.
   -2   -1   0   +1   +2

12. Influence the policies of a corporation.
   -2   -1   0   +1   +2

13. Influence where and when stores are built and operated.
   -2   -1   0   +1   +2

14. Influence where and when waste treatment facilities are built and operated.
   -2   -1   0   +1   +2

15. Influence the decision-making of foundations, charities, hospitals, museums, etc.
   -2   -1   0   +1   +2

Compared to how society values or appreciates the average U.S. citizen/family, how does society value or appreciate your . . . ?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Much Less</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>Equal</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>Much More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ethnic/racial group</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Socioeconomic group</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Nationality</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compared to how society values or appreciates the average U.S. citizen/family, how does society value or appreciate the . . . ?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Much Less</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>Equal</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>Much More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Neighborhood in which you live</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Type of home you live in</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Places where you shop</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Places where you relax and have fun</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Type and amount of education you</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Type of car you drive</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Position you hold in society</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compared to how society values or appreciates the average U.S. citizen/family, how much does society value or appreciate your . . .?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Much Less</th>
<th>Less</th>
<th>Equal</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>Much More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Physical appearance</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Occupational success</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Financial success</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Physical abilities</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Economic background</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Work Preference Inventory**

Please respond to the individual items using a scale of 1= Never or almost never true for me to 4= Always or almost always true for me.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Never or Almost Never</th>
<th>Sometimes True</th>
<th>Often True</th>
<th>Always or Almost True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy tackling problems that are completely new to me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy trying to solve complex problems</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The more difficult the problem is, the more I enjoy trying to solve it</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want my work to provide me with opportunities for increasing my knowledge and skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity is the driving force behind much of what I do</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to find out how good I really can be at my work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer to figure out things for myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What matters most to me is enjoying what I do</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important for me to have an outlet for self-expression</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer work I know I can do well over work that stretches my abilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No matter what the outcome of a project, I am satisfied if I feel I gained a new experience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m more comfortable when I can set my own goals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy doing work that is so absorbing that I forget about everything else</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to me to be able to do what I most enjoy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy simple, straightforward tasks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am strongly motivated by the money I can earn</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am keenly aware of the career goals that I have for myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am strongly motivated by recognition I can earn from other people</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want other people to find out how good I really can be at my work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I seldom think about salary and advancement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am keenly aware of the income goals I have for myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To me, success means doing better than other people</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have to feel that I am earning something for what I do</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As long as I can do what I enjoy, I’m not concerned about exactly what I am paid</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that there is no point in doing a good job if nobody else knows about it</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>I’m concerned about how other people are going to react to my ideas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer working on projects with clearly specified procedures</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I’m less concerned with what work I do than what I get for it

I am not concerned about what other people think of my work

I prefer to have someone set clear goals for me in my work
REFERENCE LIST


VITA

Plamena A. Daskalova was born and raised in a small town in Bulgaria, before she moved with her family to Chicago, Illinois. Dr. Daskalova graduated from Northside College Preparatory High School in 2009. She holds a B.S. degree in Psychology, with a minor in Political Science, and a M.Ed. in Community Counseling, both from Loyola University Chicago (LUC). Most recently, Dr. Daskalova completed her doctoral studies in the APA-Accredited Counseling Psychology program at LUC.

Throughout her undergraduate and graduate studies, Dr. Daskalova was actively involved in social-justice informed research and clinical practice. Her education in psychology began in a research-focused program where she volunteered in a lab studying infant and early childhood development. In her graduate program, Dr. Daskalova expanded her research focus to look at the educational and career development of diverse adolescents and working-age adults. In the area of educational research, she assisted with projects looking at the impact of parental messages, school belonging, social class, and more, as predictors of bullying in ethnic minority adolescents; a project that examined how to promote up-stander behavior in youth; and a retro-active study that sought to understand the social and emotional worlds of English-language learners. Within the career development literature, Dr. Daskalova assisted with a meta-analysis examining supports and barriers to career and educational outcomes; a study looking at contextual predictors of vocational hope in ethnic minority and low-income youth; and her dissertation research that focused on individual differences in the experience of meaningful work.
Additional research projects that Dr. Daskalova assisted with include ones focused on acculturation and enculturation, and an ongoing study that seeks to understand trainees’ experiences of microaggressions in clinical supervision. Dr. Daskalova continues to be actively involved in research work. She is currently contributing to a project that looks at the social and emotional needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Clinically, Dr. Daskalova had the privilege of training in a variety of settings, including a large, community-based non-profit organization, a hospital-affiliated behavioral health clinic, and three university counseling centers. She further served as a secondary supervisor to master’s-level trainees completing their practicum training in community counseling. Additionally, she volunteered with an agency serving immigrant and refugee families, and for two years facilitated career development workshops at an organization offering career transition services to clients in the Chicagoland community.

Lastly, Dr. Daskalova is passionate about teaching, as well as training and supervision of novice mental health professionals. In her future work, she hopes to remain engaged with a variety of clinical, research, and teaching initiatives.