THESIS

THE ROLE OF MEANING AND PURPOSE IN THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF

ADOLESCENTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this qualitative investigation was to explore the role of meaning and purpose in adolescent career development by examining 7th-grade students' responses to a semi-structured interview. Interviews were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methods as described by Willig (2001).

The findings supported the vast majority of the literature on the topic, contrasted with a few areas, and expanded others. In general, most participants had heard of the concepts of meaning and purpose in work, as well as the concept of a calling; however, many of them had not thought extensively about these topics. The students offered a variety of descriptions and definitions for each of these concepts. Continued research on the roles of meaning and purpose, and the infusion of meaning and purpose, in childhood career development can contribute to the theoretical knowledge base and practical applications of career curricula and counseling practice.

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Introduction

Adolescence has been marked as a period when individuals begin to develop belief systems that reflect purpose (Erikson, 1968; Loevinger, 1976). Erikson's (1968) model of development proposed that in adolescence individuals are focused on forming their identities. One of the central questions proposed during this period of identity development is "what work am I going to do in my life?"(Middleton, 1993, p.162). These ideas of identity exploration are applied to the world of work by Super (1960) who suggested that adolescence is the time for vocational exploration (more so than choice or selection). He defined vocational exploration as involving "a commitment to find out about oneself and about some aspect or segment of the world of work" (p. 109). In addition, identity is considered to be essential to the development of meaning and purpose in life (Dittman-Kohli & Westerhof, 2000). Damon, Menon, and Bronk (2003) concluded that meaning and purpose are both essential for adolescents. Therefore, we can surmise that adolescence is a vital period of time in the development of meaning and purpose in life, and in career, which may extend to activities that lay the foundation for eventual career decisions.

Though adolescence is generally recognized as a critical time in career development, there has tended to be an overemphasis on studying career aspirations, and a lack of research on other important aspects of children's career development (Dorr & Lesser, 1980; Phipps, 1995; Walls, 2000). This thesis reviews the variety of research literature on the career development of adolescents and children and the literature available regarding meaning and purpose. It then explores the hypothetical implications for meaning and purpose in the career development of adolescent children. The purpose of this study is to

qualitatively investigate this relatively uncharted territory.

Childhood and Adolescence Career Development Theories

In order to investigate the qualitative phenomenon of meaning and purpose in adolescent career goals, it is helpful to begin by reviewing pertinent career development theories. There are numerous theories ranging from a focus on multiple stages to the interaction of innate traits with social learning.

Ginzberg's Theory. Ginzberg (1952) developed the first theory of occupational choice that included children. He split childhood development into two stages; the first, 'fantasy choice,' occurs until age 11. The second stage was called 'tentative choice,' from ages 11-17, in which Ginzberg theorized there are four substages that children progress through: interests, capacities, values, and transition. There has been modest support found for Ginzberg's theory in several studies demonstrating a tentative choice stage and an increase in realism of aspirations with age (Davis, Hagan, & Strouf, 1962; Kelso, 1977). The existence of fantasy aspirations has been supported as well (Helwig, 1998, 2001, 2002). However, Bledsoe and Dalton (1980) tested this theory by using the Dalton Vocational Importance Questionaire with a sample of 1,220 students, in Grades 5-12, to examine the relative importance, by age, of three of Ginzberg's four tentative choice substages (interest, capacity, and values). They did not find significant differences in the importance of the substage topics by age, and concluded that their results did not support this aspect of Ginzberg's theory.

Havighurst's Theory. Another early theory was proposed by Havighurst (1964), who described six stages of career development with two occurring during childhood and adolescence. The first stage, which occurs between the ages of 5 and 10 years, was deemed 'identification with a worker.' This stage was the period during which children first develop their concepts of working. Parents are expected to be important models for the

children in developing their concept of work during this stage. During the second stage, which he labeled 'acquiring the basic habits of industry' (occurring from ages 10-15 years), children learn through home and school activities how to manage time and work to accomplish goals by putting work ahead of play.

Circumscription and Compromise. Gottfredson (1981) developed a theory of circumscription and compromise which involves four developmental stages: orientation to size and power (approximately ages 3-5 years), orientation to sex roles (approximately ages 6-8 years), orientation to social valuation (approximately ages 9-13 years), and finally orientation to the internal unique self (approximately age 14 years and on). Gottfredson, like Ginzberg, also theorized that children would engage in "fantasy" aspirations, which refers to aspirations that are not real occupations, or are highly improbable (e.g. being a princess or president). However, unlike Ginzberg, Gottfredson suggested that fantasy aspirations occur only until the age of 5 years, and she imposed stricter definitions of the term fantasy (more impossible than improbable). Considerable support has been found for Gottfredson's theory, particularly in regard to gender-typed occupations. For instance, Looft (1971) found that sex differences in occupational aspirations seem to develop early in childhood; the most frequent aspirations that boys expressed were football players and policemen, while the girls aspired to be nurses or teachers. Helwig (2001) found support for social valuation in their 10-year longitudinal study by demonstrating that the social value of childrens' occupational aspirations continued to increase into the early high school years, but began to decrease by their senior year in high school. At this point, internal and unique personal factors became more salient in the student's occupational aspirations. Several other studies have also supported these aspects of Gottfredson's theory (Miller & Standford, 1987; Trice, 1992; Trice, Hughes, Odom, & Woods, 1995; Auger, Blackhurst, & Wahl, 2005).

Life-Span, Life-Space Approach. Super (1990) developed one of the most

thorough theories of childhood career development as part of his life-span, life-space approach. His theory consists of nine concepts which are thought to impact the career decision-making and awareness of children. The concepts include: curiosity, exploration, information, key figures, interests, locus of control, time perspective, self-concept, and planfulness. A qualitative study of 4th- and 5th- grade students explored Super's nine concepts and found that the children exhibited career development qualities congruent with 8 of 9 of the concepts (Schultheiss, Palma, & Manzi, 2005). An additional concept expressed that was not identified in Super's theory was coded as 'Conceptions of Work.' It dealt with the children articulating their ideas on the meaning and purpose of work. However, a similar study conducted in Turkey by Nazli (2007) found the children's career development to be congruent in all 9 of Super's concepts and did not uncover this additional concept.

Self-Organization. Humphrey (2002) suggested that occupational development occurs through the interaction of innate traits adapted through evolution and social learning. Her theory focuses on infancy and early childhood, and suggests that humans are born with traits which lead them to imitate the purposeful occupations of others. She used the term "self-organization" to describe the process through which infants organize their innate capacities into a pattern of behavior, and through observing the behaviors of others, develop this pattern into intentional and purposeful behavior. She illustrated this process with the example of a child learning to eat with a spoon, rather than from a bottle. The child has the innate capacity to learn this new purposeful skill, and models the behavior after observing it from others. Case-Smith (2005) proposed a similar theory, but one which placed more emphasis on the interaction between children and their environment. Studying children of various developmental levels and ages, she described the process by which the environment provides opportunities for the children to engage in occupational behaviors. She theorized that occupations develop out of an interaction

between the opportunities afforded by the environment and the capacities of the children to take advantage of those opportunities.

Children's Doings. A study by Wiseman, Davis, and Polatajko (2005) investigated the question of why children do the things they do, with 'children's doing' considered to be the early occupational behaviors of children, similar to Humphrey's (2002) purposeful behaviors (p. 29). These can be activities such as engaging in sports, reading, creating art work, and completing homework. In investigating this question, the researchers uncovered four themes driving these early occupational behaviors of children, as well as seven process stages for their development. The researchers combined the four themes (opportunities, resources, motivations, and parental values and views) and seven process stages (innate drive, exposure, initiation, continuation, cessation, transformation, and outcomes) into a model they named PECO (Process for Establishing Children's Occupations). They considered PECO to be a tentative place to start in examining this process, and theorized that individuals would go through this process hundreds of times in their lifetime, both simultaneously with different activities, as well as consecutively. The researchers concluded that their findings were consistent with the themes of Humphrey (2002), and Case-Smith (2005).

Summary. All of the aforementioned theories have at least modest research support, and several have been supported extensively. The theories available frequently offer various age-related stages of career development, or to address specific themes that may be present during childhood and adolescent developmental periods. There seems to be substantial overlap between the various theories, with the primary divergences relating to the central focus of each theory. For example, while Havighurst's theory focuses primarily on the influence of modeling during ages 5-10 years and work experiences from 10 - 14 years, Gottfredson seems to emphasize sex roles and social valuation during similar age ranges. While these emphases are distinct from one another, there is certainly overlap

(i.e. modeling is likely to have a direct effect on a child's perceptions of sex roles). In general, despite slight divergences in the central themes of the various theories available, there do not seem to be any obvious contradictions among them.

In general, it seems that gender and cultural socialization, exposure to relevant information and activities, and modeling (including parental influence) are the central factors involved in most adolescent career theory. These factors are also likely involved directly and indirectly in the roles of meaning and purpose in adolescent career development as well. For instance, children of parents who clearly express experiencing meaning in their work, and finding this to be important to them, would likely be more apt to focus on this area of their own development. Or, a cultural reality which either emphasizes or de-emphasizes meaning and purpose in career may guide the development of this schema during childhood and adolescence. All of these factors are also likely involved in the development of career aspirations in childhood and adolescence, which is one of the more extensively researched areas of career development during this phase of life.

Career Aspirations in Childhood and Adolescence

An important factor involved in theories of career development are career aspirations. Often career aspirations can be used to gauge a child's career developmental stage. For example, several researchers in the 1970s noted that when asked a sample question such as "what do you want to be when you grow up?" young children tend to give more fantasy aspirations, which become more realistic with age (Looft, 1971; Nelson, 1978; Vondrachek & Kirchner, 1974). In terms of career research with children and adolescents, aspirations are the most thoroughly researched. This research includes investigating stability of aspirations, cultural and sex differences in aspirations, and attempts to tie childhood aspirations in with adult career theory.

Career Aspiration Stability. Trice (1991) found that the career aspirations

reported by 8- and 11- year olds tended to be relatively stable (over an 8-month period of time) and reflected the careers of their parents or other members of the community (particularly for 8 year olds). A second longitudinal study supported these findings by showing a strong correspondence between childhood career aspirations and actual adult occupations, particularly in helping, scientific, artistic, and and skilled trade professions (Trice & McClellan, 1993).

Aspirations Across Cultures. Some studies have shown both similarities and differences in career aspirations across cultures, SES, and race/ethnicity. In a study comparing the career aspirations of U.S. children with Japanese children, the researchers found that while the children's aspirations were very similar, their reasons for choosing their aspirations were different (Taylor, Wang, VanBrackle, & Kaneda, 2003). Children in the U.S. tended to choose careers based upon self-related reasons, while Japanese children based their decisions upon both self and others. Weinger (2000) found that both poor and middle-class children perceive social status to be a large determinate of career success. The children, when prompted with pictures of other children living in middle-class homes or poor homes, expected middle-class children to attain more prestigious and highly paying jobs than poorer children. Trice (1991) found that the aspirations of rural children tended to be both more narrowly defined and more stable than those of urban youth. In a meta-analysis of the relationship between culture and vocational choice, Fouad and Byars-Winston (2005) found that aspirations appear fairly consistent across race/ethnicity; however, the perception of barriers and supports do not. A qualitative study examining the supports and barriers to educational and career goals in a racially diverse group of 16 ninth-graders uncovered the following barriers: friends/peers, self-discipline, family, drugs, school quality, neighborhood violence, and racial discrimination (Kenny et al., 2007). There was some overlap with the supportive factors that were reported, which included family, school and/or teachers, and friends.

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Sex Differences in Aspirations. Sex differences also have been revealed in studies on childhood and adolescent career aspirations. Helwig (2001) found that through 8th grade, 40% of boys and 20% of girls reported fantasy career aspirations; this was found to decrease through the high school years. In a separate study, Helwig (2002) examined the career aspirations of children from 2nd to 8th grade, using the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, and found that across all three grades girls' aspirations required more complex functions oriented towards people, while boys' aspirations were more complex in functions oriented towards things. Another study found that boys often choose a larger number of different occupations than do girls (Looft, 1971). Lupart, Cannon, and Telfet (2004) found that in a sample of 1,419 adolescents, females tended to aspire to careers in artistic and health related fields, while males preferred careers in science and technology.

Holland's Theory Applied to Childhood Aspirations. Holland (1985) developed a theory of career choice which categorized individual interests according to six different types (Realistic, Investigative, Social, Conventional, Enterprising, and Artistic). There is copious research support demonstrating that Holland's theory is an accurate way of describing interests as well as an important factor in determining career fit for adults (Holland, 1996).

An exploratory-descriptive study by Watson and McMahon (2004) attempted to tie children's career aspirations in with Holland's theory of career choice. The researchers examined adolescents' answers to two items ("what is your favorite job?" and "what is it about you that would make you good at your favorite job?") They found that adolescents between 11-14 years old tend to relate their occupational aspirations to their personal attributes; therefore, they believe they have the ability to excel in their particular aspirations (p. 425). The children's responses were listed and coded according to primary Holland type. However, nearly 1/4 of the personal trait responses were found to not match any of the six Holland-type traits. Additionally, of the children who did identify

personal traits that matched with a particular Holland type, the researchers found that in approximately 57% of this reduced sample the Holland type of their personal traits did not match those of their occupational aspirations. Explanations for this, as suggested by Watson and McMahon, were that the children did not know much about the careers to which they aspired, or that Holland's theory does not apply at all developmental levels.

Summary. Adolescent career aspirations are significantly impacted by culture, sex, gender, and age. To date, there was not research available with a specific focus on meaning and purpose in the career aspirations of adolescents; however, the factors found to affect the development of aspirations also seem likely to impact the roles of meaning and purpose. Consistent with Ginzberg (1952), research seems to suggest that adolescence is the period during which the fantasy aspirations of children start becoming more realistic. There also is evidence that the career aspirations of adolescents are distinct from those of adults, and do not necessarily fit with adult career theory - such as with Holland's Theory (Watson & McMahon, 2004). Therefore, adolescence appears to be a distinct and unique period of career development important for further investigation. Also consistent with theory (e.g. Havighurst, 1964 and Wiseman, 2005), research in this area suggests that parental figures play one of the most important roles in influencing the career aspirations of adolescents (Trice, 1991).

Role of Parents in Childhood and Adolescent Career Development

As evidenced by the aforementioned impact of parental occupations on childhood aspirations, the role of parents in childhood and adolescent career development is immense. For instance, there is a substantial body of literature which suggests that children's self-esteem, psychological orientation, values, and self-competence are greatly influenced by their parents (Dusek, 1991). Additionally, there is evidence that the influence of parents in adolescent career development is stronger than that of even schools

or peers (Hartung, Porfeli, & Vondracek, 2005; Schulenberg, Vondracek, & Crouter, 1984).

A study by Young, Friesen, and Dillabough (1991) examined the manner in which parents influence adolescent career development. They found that parental influence seemed to be captured in five domains: open communication, development of responsibility, active involvement in their children's lives, encouraging independence, and specific direction and guidance. A subsequent qualitative study uncovered several dimensions found to impact the success of parental-adolescent interactions regarding career (referred to as 'family projects'): joint goals, communication, goal-step congruence ("congruence between project goals and means to implement them") and individuation (Young et al., 2001, p.196).

The primary career development task for adolescents is exploration of options (Morrow, 1995). According to Bryant, Zvonkovic, and Reynolds (2006) there appears to be a important time period in middle childhood for parents to share in satisfying activities with their children in order to promote greater career exploration during adolescence. Additionally, parents can indirectly facilitate educational activities for their children by engaging them in programs such as the Boy or Girl Scouts. Having a secure attachment to parents has been found to be linked to greater vocational exploration in adolescence (Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, & Palladino, 1991). Additionally, this exploration has been found to help adolescents develop a sense of autonomy by giving them license to plan their own futures (Super, 1990). Perceived availability of family support has been linked with greater self-efficacy, endurance in the face of challenges in academic pursuits, as well as motivation to establish relationships with faculty while in college (Torres & Solberg, 2001; Lopez & Lent, 1992).

Rosenthal (1979) found positive correlations between parents and children in occupational aspirations, career maturity, and positive occupational perceptions. Roe (1956) suggested that occupational behavior is determined primarily through the

interaction patterns of family. The prominence of the influence of family behavior in career development was also supported by Penick and Jepsen (1992) with a cross-sectional survey examining the relationship between perceptions of family functioning and adolescent career development. Adversely, dysfunction within a family system, particularly in terms of overidentification and undifferentiation, can contribute to the failure of adolescents to engage to purposeful career exploration (Zingaro, 1983).

To summarize, parents influence the career development of their adolescent children by modeling, exposing their children to various career-related activities, developing open communication strategies with their children, and through other family dynamics. Parents influence their children's career maturity, self-efficacy, perseverance, motivation, values, and exploration of career options. The research suggesting that parental influence is exceedingly important in the career development in adolescents is consistent with the theories which emphasized modeling (particularly parental modeling) and the influences of parental attitudes (e.g. Havighurst, 1964 and Wiseman, 2005). Again, parental modeling is also likely to be influential in the development of attitudes regarding the role of meaning and purpose in career goals, but there currently is not research specifically aimed towards investigating this question. Additionally, parents also seem to play a major role in expanding and informing their children's knowledge and perceptions about careers.

Childhood and Adolescent Knowledge and Perceptions about Careers

According to Phipps (1995), more is known about the careers to which children aspire to than what information children actually know about the careers themselves. However, some research on the career expectations, perceptions, and knowledge of youth does exist. One study indicated that, by fifth grade, children have developed a conceptual framework with which to understand the requirements of career preparation, but continue to be inaccurate in their ability to apply this to specific occupations (Blackhurst, Auger,

& Wahl, 2003). The same children tended to overestimate the necessity of a college education, as well as the realistic likelihood that they would be attending college themselves (approximately 93% of 119 students reported they planned on attending college which is a higher percentage than typically goes to college). According to Dorr and Lesser (1980), children begin forming concepts of work at an early age, but since their knowledge is so fragmented, their concepts are stereotypical and narrow. If no effort is made to contradict these narrow and stereotypical concepts, children maintain them into adolescence and young adulthood when they will proceed to make relatively uninformed career decisions in terms of the range of opportunities actually available to them.

According the Blackhurst, Auger, and Wahl (2003), existing theory and research support that having an accurate knowledge and understanding of career training requirements is essential to developing congruent and realistic aspirations. However, research suggests that children's knowledge about preparation requirements is not as well-developed as their knowledge of other occupational information (Walls, 2000; McGee & Stockard, 1991). Blackhurst et al (2003) conclude that children's career aspirations are most likely influenced by inaccurate perceptions of preparation requirements, which does not seem to improve much with maturation.

A study of children from grades 5-12 found that age was an important developmental factor in the processing of career information (Borgen & Young, 1982). In grades 5-7 children tended to describe occupations primarily in terms of activities and behaviors. Responses involving interests, aptitudes, and abilities peaked by grade 10, but continued through 11th and 12th grades. In a study examining what information children believe they need to know about occupations (using the open-ended question: "When you think about jobs, what information do you need to find out?") McMahon and Watson (2005) found that children want to find out information primarily related to life and career implications and life and career management tasks. Secondly, the children also gave

responses associated with learning more about interests, personal characteristics, and the nature of work in general.

In summary, research in this area indicates that children may have a lack of information or misconceptions about the requirements of career training. This trend seems to begin in early childhood, and persist through high school. Super's (1990) Life-Span, Life-Space approach emphasizes exploration, curiosity, information, and key figures - all of which would likely be involved in the development of career knowledge and perceptions. Other career development theories suggest that adolescent career perceptions are largely developed from exposure to modeling and experiences, and that it is a time during which fantasy aspirations are becoming more realistic (e.g. Gottfredson, 1980, Ginzberg, 1952, and Havighurst, 1964). It may follow that this transition from fantasy to realistic aspirations is a challenging one in which adolescents are struggling to re-organize their career perceptions. This transition may likely be enhanced by more accurate information to form appropriate perceptions of career options. Research also suggests that having an accurate knowledge and perception of career preparation requirements is an important aspect of making positive career decisions later in life. This could include children and adolescent perceptions of the importance of deriving meaning and purpose from career, and the impacts this might have upon their career choices.

Meaning and Purpose

Victor Frankl, the man who arguably is most associated in psychology with the concept of finding meaning in life, wrote about his own experiences of the necessity of finding purpose and meaning while in concentration camps during the Holocaust (Frankl, 1963). He believed that his ability to find a sense of purpose was essential to his survival. Frankl believed so much in this concept that he founded a form of therapy known as logotherapy (which translates into "meaning-healing"). Frankl's work and logotherapy

served to increase interest in psychological research on the topic of meaning in life. Since Frankl's work, research in the area of meaning and purpose has also been accelerated by the "positive psychology" movement which emphasizes "authentic happiness"(Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2002). Many of the end goals of positive psychology require some level of meaning and purpose, "authentic happiness" being one of them.

One difficulty that has arisen in the more recent research on meaning and purpose has been finding clarity regarding definitions for these terms. Frankl, as well as Ryff and Singer (1998), used the terms meaning and purpose interchangeably. Others, however, have noted distinctions between the terms; Baumeister (1991), for example, defined purpose as one of four factors involved in the composition of meaning (along with value, efficacy, and self-worth). Damon, Menon, and Bronk (2003) define purpose as "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self" (p.121). A definition of meaning in life offered by Steger (2009) defined the phrase as a sense which "enables people to interpret and organize their experience, achieve a sense of their own worth and place, identify the things that matter to them, and effectively direct their energies"(p. 1).

Unfortunately, there is a lack of research on how the concepts of purpose and meaning are expressed by adolescents. Indeed, Inhelder and Piaget (1958) encountered adolescents expressing grandiose aspirations of becoming world leaders and great thinkers, but dismissed these sentiments as expressions of the "egocentrism of adolescence" and "the crisis of juvenile originality" (pp. 344-345). These researchers went so far as to suggest that the individuals who expressed these lofty aspirations would look back on them as adults as "signs of pathological megalomania" (p. 344). However, it was theorized by Damon et al. (2003) that this dismissal was a product of bias on the part of the researchers, and a failure to recognize that the ambitions expressed by the adolescents may well have been manifestations of their desires for finding purpose and meaning in life.

Children may express their desire for meaning and purpose in ways different from adults, and more research designed to give children space to voice their thoughts on these topics is necessary. Therefore, although there have been efforts to distinguish between the definitions of meaning and purpose by past researchers, for this paper the working definitions will evolve as much as possible from the responses of the adolescent participants. This will reduce the likelihood of bias or constrictions on their perceptions, and also will facilitate a clearer understanding of the ways adolescents are considering the concepts of meaning and purpose in their own terms.

Although there is a scarcity of research on youth purpose or meaning, youth is generally understood to be a critical period for developing a sense of purpose in life. According to research that is available, it is likely that youth purpose will lead to positive outcomes such as strong moral commitment, high self-esteem and achievement, as well as more pro-social behaviors (Damon et al., 2003; Damon & Gregory, 1997). However, there is a need for further study to fully examine positive impacts of the role of purpose in adolescence. Conversely, it has been clinically demonstrated that when purpose is not developed early in life, individuals find it increasingly difficult to acquire motivating belief systems later in life (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980). The most well-known work on purpose are studies using the PIL (Purpose in Life) measure (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1967). Such studies have suggested that high scores on the PIL are positively correlated with commitment to social action, and mediating the relationship between spirituality and happiness (Butler & Carr, 1968; French & Joseph, 1999); low scores on the PIL are related to participation in antisocial behaviors as well as drug and alcohol use (Sappington & Kelly, 1995; Waisberg & Porter, 1994; Noblejas de la Flor, 1997). Indeed, research also has identified that individuals with a strong sense of meaning and purpose in life experience fewer psychological difficulties, and greater happiness overall (Ryff & Singer, 1998).

A cross-cultural study by Steger, Kawabata, Shimai, and Otake (2008) found

cultural differences in the presence of, and search for, meaning in life between American and Japanese individuals. The researchers created a dialectical model of meaning in life, using adapted theories of self-concept and cognitive style, to predict potential cultural differences in these variables. As their model predicted, Japanese participants reported greater search for meaning while Americans reported greater presence of meaning. Additionally, as predicted, in Japan the search for meaning seems to be harmonious with a presence of meaning and well-being, while American individuals appear to experience the two variables as dichotomous and negatively correlated.

To summarize, not much is known about the role of meaning and purpose in adolescent life. What is known seems to suggest that meaning and purpose play an integral role in healthy behaviors and development. Additionally, given that youth is considered a critical period for developing a sense of purpose in life, and adolescence is an important time in career development, it follows that learning about and considering meaning and purpose in careers is crucial topic to address.

Meaning and Purpose in Careers

In the past, the primary role of work was ensuring the basic necessities of life: food, water, and shelter. As society has progressed, and people have begun to specialize more and more, work has become less directly linked to survival, and more closely related to personal identity (Kosine, Steger, & Duncan, 2008). Therefore, in order to succeed in the new world of work, individuals must identify a *reason* for doing the work that they do in order to maintain motivation. Indeed, many individuals identify work as an important source of meaning in their lives, and at times, the most important (Baum & Stewart, 1990). According to Kosine et al. (2008) for individuals who view their work as more than just a way to make money, purpose is considered to be at the center of their career satisfaction.

Several models have been offered for thinking about meaningfulness and work. One such model includes the components of meaningfulness *at* work as well as *in* work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Pratt and Ashforth separate these components by defining meaningfulness at work as something that is derived from the social relationships developed in the workplace. Meaningfulness in work, on the other hand, is achieved by developing an identity congruent with work tasks and roles. They suggested that truly meaningful work will satisfy both of these components. Another model, offered by Steger and Dik (2010), is consistent with Pratt and Ashforth in its separation of meaningfulness *in* work and *at* work; however, it deviates by defining these concepts with more of a P-E fit approach. They define meaningfulness at work as an understanding of one's fit within an organization, whereas meaningfulness in work is defined as one's understanding of the self. A third model, supplied by Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz (1997), suggests that meaningfulness in work is less about what people actually do for their jobs, and more about their perceptions of their work.

The impact of a calling or vocation are important to cover when discussing meaning and purpose in careers. An article by Dik and Duffy (2009) reviews the importance and history of finding meaning or purpose in one's occupation and lays out the groundwork for working definitions of the terms "vocation" and "calling" where vocation is "an approach to a particular life role that is oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation" (p. 427). Calling is similar to vocation, but differs by adding the concept of a "transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self" (p. 427). For the purposes of this research, these working definitions will be used when referring to vocations or callings. With the recent increase of research in this area, it is important to note that viewing work as a potential outlet for deriving purpose or meaning is not a new concept; the notion that an occupation can be viewed as a vocation or calling

can be traced back at least as early as the 16th century (Dik & Duffy, 2009). However, despite the rich history of the roots of this concept, only recently has social science research investigated the topic.

The research that is available suggests that individuals who consider their work to be a calling or vocation are expected to have greater work commitment, intrinsic work motivation, and career decision self-efficacy, as well as feel more engaged, and experience greater satisfaction in work and life (e.g., Serow, 1992; Dik, Sargent, & Steger, 2008; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz (1997) demonstrated that individuals could clearly define their work as either a job, a career, or a calling, and those who reported having a calling also reported the highest life and work satisfaction - even when income, education, and occupation were roughly controlled. Additionally, often embedded in the term calling is the construct of spirituality. Spirituality has been closely tied to meaningfulness in life, as well as with career development (Park, 2005; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). Duffy and Blustein (2005) found that spiritual awareness is positively correlated with career decision self-efficacy (in a predominantly White Catholic sample). In two qualitative studies, participants reported finding support in their spiritual beliefs when coping with career difficulties (Constantine, Milville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006; Royce-Davis, 2000). Along these lines, Dik and Duffy's (2009) definition for calling includes the component of "transcendent summons," which for many individuals may entail themes related to spirituality.

However, though spirituality often is considered an important component to the concept of calling, few researchers suggest that religious background is necessarily a prerequisite for an individual experiencing her or his as a calling (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Hall suggests that the experience of a calling revolves more primarily around the feeling that one is 'meant to do the work they do,' regardless of the spiritual basis for that feeling. This interpretation of calling would fall more in line with Dik and Duffy's criteria for

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vocation. Perhaps important to note, of the three components of calling as defined by Dik and Duffy (i.e. meaningfulness, pro-social value, and transcendent summons), Steger and Dik (2010) suggest that meaningfulness in work may be the most commonly experienced.

To summarize, research suggests that having a sense of meaning and purpose in one's career is associated with increased career satisfaction, life satisfaction, career decision-making, intrinsic work motivation, and work commitment. Additionally, theorists have noted that adolescence is an important life stage for children in developing their occupational goals. However, the role of meaning and purpose is notably absent from extant theories of youth career development. Several researchers have acknowledged that this is an area that needs to be explored in more detail (Schultheiss et al., 2005; Dik & Duffy, 2009; Damon et al., 2003; Kosine et al., 2008). The current study is designed to investigate this gap in the literature.

The current study was designed qualitatively due to the lack of knowledge which currently exists about the roles of meaning and purpose in adolescent career goals. The interview protocol was specifically designed to investigate the adolescents' prior experiences and exposure to meaning, purpose, and calling, their thoughts and beliefs about the meanings of the topics, and their projected application of the concepts to their own career goals. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for a less restricted exploration of these topics than would a survey, and in that respect the participant responses should provide rich information which can be utilized in further investigation of this topic. There are several potential benefits that can be gained from more knowledge on meaning and purpose in adolescent career development. First, it would be helpful to school and career counselors to supplement their existing knowledge on the career counseling needs of the adolescent population. For instance, this could serve to inform a specific meaning and purpose component to career exploration/development curriculum for this age group. Additionally, this information could be helpful to increase parents'

awareness of their children's career needs, as well as encourage them to talk to their children about seeking meaning and purpose in their career goals. Finally, these benefits could all serve to increase the awareness of children and adolescents to an additional role that work can play beyond simply making money: as a context in which one can live out a sense of meaning and purpose.

Method

This study is based within the theoretical framework of phenomenology. A phenomenological perspective enables researchers to explore the lived experience of the individual and how those individuals make sense of their particular experiences (J. A. Smith & Eatough, 2006). Phenomenology posits that reality is experiential; and therefore, experiences are "inherently meaningful"(p. 180).

Participants

Twenty (10 females, 10 males) seventh-grade students in a Colorado junior high school were recruited to participate in this study. The students were recruited from the school with the assistance of the school guidance counselor. All the participants were required to attain consent from their parent or legal guardian, and also signed an assent form stating that they were willing to participate. No incentives were offered. The sample was recruited purposively to be fairly homogenous but representative of the demographic of the school as a whole. Ages ranged from 12-13 years. Participants self-identified as 75% White/Non-Hispanic, 15% Hispanic, 5% African-American, and 5% Other. Participants self-reported to be 90% Christian, 5% Catholic, and 5% No Religious Affiliation. A complete breakdown of the participants' demographic information along with their participant ID numbers can be found in Table 1. The race and ethnicity statistics of the school from which participants were recruited can be found in Table 2. Additionally, an

overview of socioeconomic status of the student body based upon free and reduced lunch status can be found in Table 3. In general, the student body was predominantly White, Non-Hispanic (79%) with Hispanic being the largest racial minority group represented (18%). Approximately 25% of students at the school qualified for either free or reduced lunch.

Measures

The study consisted of twenty, 25-30 minute, semi-structured interviews. The list of interview questions were designed to be open-ended, and used as a model (with permission) the Youth Purpose Project Interview Protocol from the Stanford Center on Adolescence Youth Purpose Project, funded in part by the John Templeton Foundation and the Thrive Foundation for Youth (Andrews et al., 2006). The initial interview questions were piloted with several students at the junior high by the school guidance counselor. After piloting, the school guidance counselor discussed his observations with the researcher and the questions were revised according to his recommendations.

The interview began with general warm-up questions such as: "Tell me a little about yourself," and "What do you do really well?" It then progressed to more specific career-oriented questions like: "What do you think the word career means?" and "What does it mean to you to have a good career?" Finally, the interview covered questions specifically about the concepts of calling, purpose, and meaning: "What does the term calling, as in, my career is my calling, mean to you?" "What do you think the word purpose means, as in, my career gives me a sense of purpose?" and "What about the word meaning, if a career had meaning, what do you think that would be like?" The interview also involved follow-up questions and reflections as needed to gain a better understanding of participants' responses. A complete list of the interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Procedure

With approval from the university's Institutional Review Board, as well as the Poudre School District's Human Subject Review Committee, the first author (with graduate training in counseling and qualitative research) conducted individual semi-structured interviews with each of the twenty participants. The same interview guide was used with each participant but questions were altered slightly at times in accordance with participant responses. Each interview was audio-recorded and included obtaining demographic data via a form developed by the researcher. The interviews were transcribed, verbatim, with the assistance of undergraduate research assistants.

The data analysis was performed following the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach of Willig (2001). Interpretative phenomenological analysis was first articulated as an approach to qualitative research by J. Smith (1994), and it is described as being concerned with examining the details of individual lived experience, and how individuals make sense of that experience. IPA attempts to investigate lived experience using systematic procedures which emphasize the interpretative features of analysis (Eatough & Smith, 2006). However, IPA also accepts the impossibility of directly accessing the participants' experiences as such an exploration utilizes the researcher's own perspectives; therefore, phenomenological analysis can only ever be an *interpretation* of the participants' experiences (Willig, 2001). In order to be aware of ones biases and predispositions, prior to the start of analysis, the researchers commonly write a full description of their experiences with the phenomena (Creswell, 2007). The author's description of her experience with meaning and purpose in careers can be found in Appendix B.

According to Willig (2001) IPA works with the verbatim transcriptions of semi-structured interviews. The first stage of analysis involves reading and rereading the

transcriptions. During this stage, researchers work to produce unfocused notes reflecting their initial reactions and observations. During the second stage, the researcher attempts to identify themes that seem to categorize trends seen within the text. In the third stage, the researcher attempts to introduce structure by thinking about the themes in relation to one another. It is likely that some of the themes will form clusters or concepts with share meanings while others may demonstrate hierarchical relationships. These clusters are given labels which capture the essence of the themes. During the fourth stage of analysis the researcher develops a summary table of the themes along with quotations which demonstrate each theme. This table should only include the themes which capture an essence of the participants' experience of the phenomenon under investigation; therefore, some of the themes generated in stage two will not be included. The researcher's decisions regarding which themes to include are influenced by her or his interests and focus, which is accepted as an inevitable aspect of IPA. The numbers of clusters and themes are entirely dependant on the text and can vary significantly. Finally, after the researcher develops the summary table of themes and theme clusters for each participant, she or he will then work to integrate the cases into a list of "master themes" which reflect the experiences of the participants as a whole. Again, the number of master themes identified in any one study can vary, and ultimately should reflect the data from which they are derived.

There are numerous paradigms and terms for establishing the credibility of qualitative research. These tend to vary across the differing methods of qualitative research, and even within each particular approach. Therefore, the suggestions of Creswell (2007) were used in this study to attempt to synthesize these various viewpoints into a list of key methods which can be employed to increase the validation of qualitative research. He lists eight different methods which include (in no particular order): prolonged engagement/persistent observation, triangulation, peer review or debriefing, clarifying researcher bias, refining working hypothesis as the inquiry advances in negative case

analysis, member checking, rich thick description, and external audits. Creswell (2007) suggests that researchers engage in at least two of his eight recommended procedures in any given study. Three of these methods were selected for the purposes of this study. These included clarifying researcher bias, employing peer review and debriefing, and providing rich and thick descriptions of participants' responses. The peer review process involved cross-referencing theme labels applied by the researcher against those offered by a group of approximately six peers. Peers were given example quotations from various participants and aspects of the interviews, and asked what themes they might apply to these examples. Peer responses were incorporated into the revising of theme labels and the organization of theme groups. Once themes were revised and organized, the researcher again brought the altered themes to the peer group for additional refinement.

At the outset of the project the researcher outlined her own beliefs and perspectives about the phenomena at hand. She then regularly reflected back upon these perspectives when coding to attempt to discern when they were having an undue impact upon the interpretation of the results. Additionally, during consultation with peers she was transparent about her own perspectives which may be influencing the results in order to get outside opinions about her process.

Peer review and debriefing included attaining written notes from the undergraduate research assistants regarding their reactions and observations of each participant's interview responses. Additionally, as the researcher began stage two of the analysis process, she collaborated with a panel of graduate students and her faculty advisor regarding the applicability and appropriateness of various theme and cluster labels. This process was conducted again during stages three and four of the coding process as well. Panel opinions were taken into consideration when working to best capture the essence of participant response's with theme codes.

In order to provide readers with as much information as possible, the researcher

provided detailed passages and quotations throughout the results section of this manuscript. This provides readers with the opportunity to consider the theme codes and the extent to which they are representative of the participants' responses.

Results

The results section is organized by the primary domains that were covered in the semi-structured interviews. These domains include Career Perceptions, Career-Related Activities and Conversations, Calling, Meaning and Career, Purpose and Career, Meaning and Purpose, and finally, Comparing Themes across Calling, Meaning, and Purpose.

Career Perceptions

This domain represents participants' descriptions of defining a career, the main purpose of a career, their thoughts regarding careers which help community, and what they believe constitutes a good career. These four topics represent the four categories identified in this domain.

Defining Career. This category includes participants' descriptions of what they thought the word career means, and distinguishing a career from a job. The primary themes which emerged were *Desire & Enjoyment, Duration, and Commitment & Investment.*

Fifty percent of the participants (ten students) defined the term "career" to be something that someone wants to have, or desires, and something that someone feels passionate about and enjoys. These concepts were combined in to the theme of Desire & Enjoyment. The following passage is a response which demonstrates the theme of Desire & Enjoyment:

> "It's something that you want to do. It could be like a job. I think it's like a job that you do with a passion because you love to do it and that you would do it without

getting paid." (*Participant Four - Desire & Enjoyment*)

Many of the students in the sample (45%) defined the term "career" to be a long-term job. The following passage is an example of this Duration-themed response:

"I think it's a job that is held for a certain period of time ... A job you might just have for a little bit, but a career you have for a long time." (*Participant Fourteen - Duration*)

Additionally, 20% of students indicated that a career involves Commitment and Investment, typically more than would a job.

"I think of a career as more of a bigger thing that you're doing. And you're doing it for a while and you're set to it. You can't back out anytime." (*Participant Six - Commitment & Investment*)

Finally, there were also several responses that were only expressed singularly. One student felt that a career and a job are exactly the same, and defined them both as being "what you do for a living." Other single responses involved abilities, interests, a career being made up of multiple jobs, and doing what others expect from you.

Main Purpose of Career. This category includes participants' thoughts about the main purpose(s) of having a career. The primary theme which emerged was *Financial Support*. In fact, all but one participant identified this factor as at least one of the main purposes of career. Another theme which was also mentioned by 30% of participants was *Enjoyment*. The following passage is a response from a student which represents both of these themes:

"I think it's different for everybody. I think some people will have it just to have money and to support your family. And some people do it cause they love it and it's what they want to do the rest of their life." (*Participant Six - Financial Support and Enjoyment*)

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Additionally, 20% of participants indicated that they felt *Helping Others* was a main purpose, and 10% that *Keeping Active* is also an important main purpose of career.

> "Help the community and help pay for things that you need..." (*Participant Twenty - Helping Others*)

> "There are many purposes of having a career but I think the main purpose is to get you more active and get you off the couch." (*Participant Nineteen - Keeping Active*)

Finally, the singular responses included: traveling, having goals, making friends, and learning.

Careers that Help Community. This category encompasses students' responses to being asked if they could think of any careers that help community, and whether or not they believed this to be important. Most students identified careers such as Law Enforcement/Fire-Fighters (40%), and Medical Workers (30%). Several students indicated that they felt Teaching (15%), Construction/Building (15%), Environmental (15%), and Military (10%) careers helped community. Additionally, a few students expressed that they felt All Careers help the community in some way (10%).

Most participants (55%) felt that helping the community in your career is important. Of these 55%, students suggested it is important for the following reasons: *Helping Others, Balance, Increasing Happiness*, and *Ensuring Safety*.

> "Yea, I think it is important because our society wouldn't be society it would just be mayhem." (*Participant Eleven - Balance*)

> "I think it's really important. The United States is a place where people are kind of like each other, but they're really not, but you're just helping everybody out. Just keeping everybody in a safe community and making people happy." (*Participant Thirteen - Helping Others, Ensuring Safety, and Increasing Happiness*)

Many participants (45%) indicated that helping the community is potentially, or somewhat, important. These participants either felt that other aspects of careers, such as

Enjoyment, are more important than whether or not it helps community; that helping

community through your career is a *Personal Choice*; or they expressed that they felt that

careers are *Two-Sided* and can both help and hurt community.

> "Well, I think people need to have that in the world, but if people don't like it I don't think people should make them do it. It's just, I know people, like, being fire-fighters and building contractors so we already have a lot of those in the world, so people should just do what they love." (*Participant Eighteen - Enjoyment*)

> "I think it's important, but for some people it's just not them. Some people just don't like helping and I would rather have someone who really enjoys the community help than someone who is just helping because they have to. Because then you can tell." (*Participant Four - Personal Choice*)

> "Well they can help and they cannot help. They can help by building things that help with our safety like building hospitals and stuff. And they cannot help when they build stuff that we don't need and they tear down really beautiful areas for stuff that we don't really need. Like maybe for entertainment, something we want but don't need." (*Participant Six - Two-Sided*)

None of the students expressed thinking that helping the community is not at all

important.

Good Career. The category includes the students' descriptions of what they

thought constitutes a 'good career.' *Enjoyment & Satisfaction* was the most common

theme which emerged in 80% of the students' responses.

> "[A good career means] that you have fun while you're doing it and you're not just sitting there asking 'when do I get to retire?" (*Participant One - Enjoyment & Satisfaction*)

> "Doing something that you like to do, something you would do when you're sitting in your house having nothing else to do..." (*Participant Eleven - Enjoyment & Satisfaction*)

Many participants (35%) also thought that earning a *Good Salary* is a major aspect

of a good career.

"A good career is something that, well all careers are good because it's something you look forward to everyday. But I guess if it's the difference between a good career and a career, I guess a good career is something that pays well so you can keep living." (*Participant Four - Good Salary*)

A few participants (15%) indicated that a good career would involve an *Absence of Negative Factors* (such as stress, not draining, and having fewer problems).

"Not coming home from your career, like, being exhausted and just wanting to do nothing for the rest of the day." (*Participant Two - Absence of Negative Factors*)

Finally, there were several responses which were only mentioned once by participants: learning, helping others, worthy investment, prestige, ability, and uncertainty.

Career-Related Activities and Conversations

This domain represents students' descriptions of career-related activities in which they had engaged, and conversations that they had regarding careers with family, peers, teachers, religious organizations, and others.

Career-Related Activities. All of the participants in this sample had recently completed a career exploration assignment as part of their school curriculum. The activity was incorporated into their English class. The assignment required them to take an interest-based career assessment, and to then choose three of their top matches to research further. They then wrote essays expressing what they had learned about these three potential career choices. When the question regarding career-related activities was asked, all of the students referred back to this class assignment.

Most of the participants (75%) indicated that they gained something from this assignment. The most common theme, reported by 70% of participants, was that they learned *Specifics* about the careers they researched, such as salary ranges, education and skill requirements, and typical tasks involved.

"[I learned] like what the jobs pay and everything. Like I learned that a general surgeon gets $181,895 I think average a year. And a game designer makes about $63,000, which is just above average.... [I also learned] like what you do with them. Like for game designer you use mathematics to design them and stuff like that to help program dimensions and stuff." (*Participant Fifteen - Specifics*)

Additionally, several students (25%) indicated that they learned about *New Potential Options* for their career goals.

"That's where I got my pediatrician idea, cause I read about it and thought it sounded very cool and I thought it was very me...I learned that there were way fun jobs out there that I didn't even know about, and that sound a lot like me." (*Participant Twelve - New Potential Options*)

Thirty-five percent of students expressed that the assignment had in fact had an impact upon their current career goals – either *Confirming Current Goals* or *Inspiring New Goals*.

"It kind of impacted my goals because it helped me learn more about what [the careers] were and gave me ideas for what else I would be able to do." (*Participant Seventeen - Inspiring New Goals*)

"It did, well like I just kind of vaguely put in my mind that I'm going to be an astrophysicist and after that career essay I'm like well those jobs seem kind of fun too but I'm still probably going to stick to astrophysics." (*Participant Sixteen - Confirmed Goals*)

There were several students (20%) who reported that they did not feel they had gained anything new from the assignment (*No Impact on Goals*), typically because they already knew about the careers they researched for the assignment.

"Not really cause like I said it wasn't really surprising to me since I have sort of known that's like what I'll do." (*Participant Nineteen - No Impact on Goals*)

Career-Related Conversations. This category includes descriptions of the various career-related conversations students reported. The primary themes which

emerged were conversations regarding *Education* and *Career Aspirations*. Some other themes were: *Other's Experiences & Processes*, *Conflictual*, *Experiential* (rather than conversational), and *Minimal & Casual*.

Career-related conversations with parents were the most commonly reported conversations, discussed by 70% of participants. These conversations typically revolved around the topics of Education (25%) and Career Aspirations (30%). The following response included both of these themes:

> "Yeah, and sometimes I like talk to my mom about college and like jobs and stuff.... Just saying what I want to be and how I'm going to pursue it." (*Participant One - Education and Career Aspirations; Parents*)

Less common, but also reported (15%), were a few conversations with parents about their own work Experiences and Processes of choosing their careers.

> "[A conversation] that I've had with family is just to help me figure out what they enjoy and what would be a good job or career for me to go to college for..." (*Participant Eight - Other's Experiences & Processes; Parents*)

A couple of participants (10%) noted that they have had Conflictual conversations with their parents regarding their career aspirations, and have felt pushed by their parents in certain directions.

> "Sometimes it's kind of stressful because my parents will have different things and I'm always just so busy so it's hard keeping up with school, and my dad is really big on sports, and my mom is really big on keeping me in performing arts. So I just need some room to breath sometimes." (*Participant Four - Conflictual; Parents*)

Several participants (25%) also indicated having conversations with siblings, teachers, and youth pastors regarding potential Career Aspirations. Notably, a few participants (15%), when asked about career-related conversations, discussed Career-Related Experiences instead (both themes present in the passage below).

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"Well, I have technology this quarter and we had to draw all this stuff and build it, and I've talked to our teacher about how I want to be a contractor and they said that was good.... And I've talked with like my church, my pastor and he like gets my dad and I out there if he needs like a shed or something at the church to hold stuff and we just go out there and build like fun stuff." (*Participant Eighteen - Career Aspirations and Experiential; Teacher and Pastor*)

A few participants (15%) discussed having conversations with friends, but expressed that these conversations tended to be Minimal and Casual.

"Yeah, but [the conversations with friends] are not really heavy. It's just like talking about what would be cool to do. But it doesn't come up very often." (*Participant Four - Minimal & Casual; Friends*)

Finally, a few students (15%) reported not having had any conversations regarding career-related topics at all.

Calling

This domain represents the participants' descriptions of prior exposure to the concept of calling, their thoughts of the definition, and their personal application of calling to their own career goals.

Defining Calling. This category deals the participants' thoughts regarding the definition of the word "calling." The primary themes which emerged when discussing the definition of the word calling were *Destiny* (60%), *Desire & Enjoyment* (40%), *Ability* (35%), and a *Compelling Force* (20%).

In general, participants seemed to conceptualize calling to mean a career that one is meant or destined to do, something one is good at doing, something one wants to do and enjoys doing, or something one is pulled towards doing, by God or another force. The following are example passages of each of these response types respectively:

"Like, it means that's what you're destined to do." (*Participant One - Destiny*)

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"Um, same thing as a career kind of, like what you, like it's calling you to it. It's what you'd be good at....Something you'd be really good at..." (*Participant Two - Ability*)

"It's like your career is your calling, like you say. And when it's your calling it's something that is just pulling you in. It's dragging you, it's what you want to do, you know it, and you feel it in your gut. And it's just the thing that you have fun at." (*Participant Five - Compelling Force and Desire & Enjoyment*)

"Yea, like for me my religion is Christianity to I just say like God brought me here and so that's my calling." (*Participant Eighteen - Compelling Force*)

Some other less common themes also emerged including *Fit* (15%) and *Interests* (10%).

"That is what is made for you and it's what fits you and your personality." (*Participant Four - Fit*)

"[It's] what you find interesting and exciting." (*Participant Sixteen - Interests*)

Finally, there were also a few singular responses, which included aspiration, gaining recognition, and believing in yourself/having others believe in you.

Prior Exposure to Calling. This category includes students' recollection of any prior exposure they may have had to the concept of calling. Participants were asked if they had heard of the word "calling" before and where they thought they first learned about it. The sources where participants indicated they had heard of calling were fairly evenly distributed. The most common responses were Media (25%), Church (20%), Family Members (25%), School (10%), Friends (10%), or a vague response of "Everywhere" or "Around" (15%). Two participants indicated that they had not heard of the term at all, though one of these participants still seemed to have a general idea of its meaning.

Personal Application of Calling. In this category participants were asked if they had ever thought of their own potential career as a calling. Most participants (55%) indicated that they were *Unsure* of whether their career would be their calling, or that

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they had not thought much about it. Several indicated that it is something they will probably start thinking about *Later in Life*.

"I probably will think about it when I'm older, about if I should quit my job for another career" (*Participant Nineteen - Unsure; Later in Life*)

The other 45% of participants expressed that *Yes*, they did think about their future career being a calling. Of these nine participants responses several themes emerged. The most common themes regarding their own careers being a calling were *Desire & Enjoyment* (44%) and *Ability* (33%). The following is an example of a response including both the Desire & Enjoyment and Ability themes:

"If you felt that it was fun to you. And that just when you were out there you enjoyed every minute of it. And that you're good at it 'cause your not going to go do something for the rest of your life that you're not good at and just still be terrible at it everyday. So being good at it is definitely important." (*Participant Nine - Yes; Desire & Enjoyment and Ability*)

Other themes were also suggested by the nine participants who indicated that they thought about their future career being a calling. These included: *Destiny* (22%), *Striving* (22%), and *Fit* (22%). The following are examples of such responses (respectively):

"I wouldn't really know until I find out, but I think it would be something I was meant to do. Something I was put on this earth for." (*Participant Sixteen - Yes; Destiny*)

"I think about what I want to be everyday but I have to strive to get there if I really want it. That's what my parents have told me. You have to strive to get what you want if you really want it." (*Participant Thirteen - Yes; Striving*)

"I'm not sure, just my interests and my skills, everything that I'm good at and that I love to do...that would be mine. [That it matched] as best as it could." (*Participant Twelve - Yes; Fit*)

Finally, there were also some singular responses expressed by the students. These included the following themes: A compelling force (in this case God), fitting with other's expectations, helping others, and financial support.

Purpose and Career

This domain represents students' descriptions of deriving purpose from one's career. They discussed what they thought it might mean, any exposure they've had to this concept, and applied it to their own lives and career goals.

Defining Purpose. This category represents participants' thoughts regarding gaining a sense of purpose from one's career. The primary themes which emerged were *Helping Others*, *Desire & Enjoyment*, and *Reason*. Other less common themes included *Destiny*, *Fit*, *Adding to Purpose in Life*, and *Not Knowing*.

Thirty-five percent of students described Helping Others as being a way of finding purpose in one's career.

> "Like if you had a purpose in your career I feel like you would be helping it a lot, and you'd be very beneficial to it. Being able to help it out a lot.... To me with a career that would have a purpose would mean like helping others. Or keeping people or, like, companies up." (*Participant Two - Helping Others*)

Fifteen percent of participants indicated that they thought Enjoyment or Desire to do your work leads to feeling purposeful in your career.

> "Yeah. [It's] something that you like to do." (*Participant Eleven - Desire & Enjoyment*)

Another 15% of students thought that deriving a sense of purpose from work meant that you feel you have a 'Reason' for being there.

> "Purpose can mean like, it gives you a reason to go to work everyday and it's like, that's why you want to cause it makes you feel good inside" (*Participant Four - Reason*)

Ten percent of participants indicated that deriving a sense of purpose from your work means that you meant to do it or that it is your purpose in life, similar to responses regarding calling. The following passage involves this theme of Destiny:

"Um, maybe like, probably like the same as calling sort of.... Yea. Kinda like you were just meant to do it." (*Participant Seven - Destiny*)

An interesting phrase emerged in this section that a sense of purpose from work means that a career is "Meant for you." When the two students (10%) who responded this way began discussing this in more depth, it appeared that this was not intended in the sense of Destiny, but more in the sense of Fit.

"It's to find something that is really good for you and meant for you. And something that you find interesting, exciting, intriguing... Or if you really like it, like man that was fun, but it just doesn't seem right for me. It just motivates you to find something that's meant for you." (*Participant Sixteen - Fit*)

Another 10% indicated that a sense of purpose in career Adds Purpose in Life.

"So it adds purpose to your life and people like it when you're doing that, whatever that career is." (*Participant Seventeen - Adds Purpose in Life*)

Two students (10%) indicated that they just did not know what purpose in a career might be (Not Knowing). Finally, there were also several singular responses for defining purpose. These included the following themes: literal definition of purpose, attitude, adds to purpose in life, and feeling fortunate.

Prior Exposure to Purpose. This category includes the participants' descriptions of exposure to the concept of finding a sense of purpose from one's career. The themes which emerged were *Learning from Family Members*, *Learning from Teachers*, *Never Taught*, and *Learning from Youth Pastor*.

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Half the students indicated having learned about deriving a sense of purpose in careers from a Family Member (parents, uncle, grandparents). Some examples of what they reported learning were: "Never Give Up" on your career goals, and that a career should "Provide and Support".

"My grandfather, my mom, my grandma, my uncle [taught me] to never quit. Everything you do is going to turn in to something else. Once one door closes another door opens." (*Participant Five - Family, Never Give Up*)

"A little [my grandparents and my mom] say to support your family, support everything that you do, be able to basically care for yourself." (*Participant Twelve - Family, Provide and Support*)

Another 25% reported learning about purpose in careers from their Teachers, primarily through example (i.e. learning from their teacher's satisfaction and that helping is important), but also through verbal messages as seen below.

"Some teachers have talked to me about it, like my sixth grade teacher, he always talked about having a purpose ...[I learned] to never give up really. Just to keep pushing towards what you believe in and what you think you can get to." (*Participant Two - Teachers, Never Give Up*)

A large portion of students (25%) indicated that they had not learned about purpose in careers from anyone (*Never Taught*). Finally, two students (10%) indicated that they learned about purpose in careers from their Youth Pastor at church. One of these students indicated that Helping Others was emphasized, the other student expressed that his youth pastor serves a Role Model to him in finding purpose in work.

"My youth pastor, and like, I don't know, we talk about like careers and jobs and like, how that affects what you do with your life and everything, 'cause for a lot of people that is their life." (*Participant Nine - Youth Pastor, Role Model*)

Personal Application of Purpose. This category includes students' responses to being asked to consider their own future career goals and what it would be like if they

derived a sense of purpose from their work. There were numerous themes conjured in this category though some students seem to have some difficulty expressing their thoughts. The two most common themes which emerged were *Enjoyment* and *Helping Others*. Other less common themes included: *Not Knowing*, *Attitude*, *Financial*, *Recognition/Pleasing Others*, and *Fulfillment*.

Thirty-five percent of students discussed Enjoyment in terms of deriving purpose from their own work. The following are example responses involving the theme of Enjoyment. The second passage is also good example of a student having some difficulty discerning his thoughts about the concept of purpose.

> "Umm, I think I would be good, like I think I would be happy most of the days, and just like, have fun. And it's like, some people like teaching, they don't get paid a lot but they love what they do..." (*Participant Eighteen - Enjoyment*)

> "Had purpose...it would just be fun. I can't really think right now."(*Participant Twenty - Enjoyment*)

Thirty percent of participants expressing that Helping Others would be an important source of purpose for them in their future careers.

> "I would like it, I mean if I could help someone out that's just more icing on the cake for you. So helping anyone out when you can." (*Participant Eleven - Helping Others*)

Fifteen percent of students' indicated that they do not know what it would be like for them to gain purpose from their future careers (Not Knowing). However, two of these students did eventually proceed to make conjectures as to what it might be like for them, which were coded accordingly.

Two participants (10%) discussed a sense of purpose as being a product of a positive Attitude towards work.

"I think how you think of it, your mental attitude, definitely. You could think of it as the worst job in the world or you could think of it as you know hey this is a really good opportunity for me." (*Participant Twelve - Attitude*)

Financial Support and getting Recognition & Pleasing Others were both expressed by 10% of participants as sources for a sense of purpose.

"Like paying for bills and stuff [...] so just making you feel comfortable and like you can provide your way." (*Participant Three - Financial Support*)

"I think I would look forward to doing that thing because I would feel like I was doing that right and people would be happy when I did that. And they would enjoy me being there with them and doing that job." (*Participant Seventeen - Recognition & Pleasing Others*)

Another 10% indicated that they would find their career Fulfilling:

"It'd be like fulfilling cause then, you know that you had something and you're there [...]" (*Participant One - Fulfillment*)

Finally, other singular responses included ability (being very good at their job), feeling needed, and progressing faster in their career due to purpose.

Meaning and Career

This domain represents students' descriptions of deriving meaning from one's career. They discussed what they thought it might mean and attempted to apply it to their own lives and career goals.

Defining Meaning. This category encompasses the participants perspectives on definitions for finding meaning in a career. Their responses were fairly varied, and often tended to include the word "meaning" itself. The two most common themes were *Means Something* (20%) and *Helping or Giving Meaning to Others* (20%).

"If a career has meaning then it means something to you." (*Participant Fifteen - Means Something*)

"Um, if it had meaning to you I think you would just like care about it a lot, and be able to be like, if someone was falling behind on work you could help them get back up and help your job. And then if it was like meaningful to others and was like helping them out a lot." (*Participant Two - Helping or Giving Meaning to Others*)

Other themes included *Importance* (15%) and *Desire & Enjoyment* (15%). The following passages are examples of these various response types:

"Like, maybe it's like important to you." (*Participant Ten - Importance*)

"Then it would, like, have to do with what you wanted to do and not having it be boring and having it what you want it to be [...]" (*Participant Twenty - Desire & Enjoyment*)

"Like, you like it and you want to have the job. You're not just bored all the time." (*Participant Fifteen - Desire & Enjoyment*)

Finally, singular responses included: routine (a specific duty each day), identity (it is an important part of your identity), would involve self-improvement/education, meant for you, that it is the purpose of the job, history (passed through family), personal perspective, and that it would add meaning in life.

Personal Application of Meaning. This category deals with the students' perceptions of what it would be like to have a meaningful career. The primary themes which emerged for this topic were *Desire & Enjoyment* and *Helping Others*.

Half of the students (50%) indicated that if they experienced meaning in their careers that this would involve Enjoyment and Desirability.

"I think a meaningful career is like having a good job and being happy with what you have." (*Participant Eighteen - Desire& Enjoyment*)

"I'm not sure on this, but I think it would be what I really want. Like, that's what I think I should do. And when I'm at my career and working, I'll feel good about it. I'll feel headstrong and I won't have any regrets about it." (*Participant Six - Desire & Enjoyment*)

A quarter of students (25%) discussed Helping Others in terms of having a meaningful career:

> "Something that I could have that would be a lot of help for me, and a lot of help for other people..." (*Participant Sixteen - Helping Others*)

Students also mentioned *Importance* (15%), *Reason* (10%), and *Financial Support* (10%) as aspects potentially involved in a meaningful career for them. The following are examples of these responses:

> "It's important because I like want to feel that I'm there for a reason, and that's the meaning of it." (*Participant One - Importance and Reason*)

> "I don't know. Like have meaning, like you need a job. And you get the money that you need to pretty much live." (*Participant Three - Financial Support*)

Finally, singular responses included feeling needed, serving a purpose, and being worthwhile.

Meaning and Purpose

This domain involves the students' attempts to compare and contrast the concepts of meaning and purpose in careers as well as rating the degree to which they believe a career could add to a meaningful or purposeful life.

Differentiating Meaning and Purpose. This category involves the participants comparing the concepts of meaning and purpose in careers. The majority of students seemed to struggle with this task and many changed their minds about their position in the midst of responding.

Many of the students (45%) reported that meaning and purpose are *Similar* but not quite the same; however, the majority of these students experienced significant difficulty when attempting to explain the differences and similarities. A substantial portion of the

students (20%) indicated that meaning and purpose are *Exactly the Same*, and another 15% indicated that they thought they are *Entirely Different*. Two students initially began by stating that the concepts are different, but in attempting to delineate them then decided that they are in fact similar or the same.

One theme which appeared in approximately 20% of student's attempts to differentiate these terms was that purpose is a more *External* or action-oriented aspect to career (what you should or have to do), whereas meaning is more of an *Internal* or thoughts/feelings oriented experience (i.e. 'what a career means to you'). The following is an example of such a response:

> "Um, purpose would be like something you almost have to do, meaning would be like what it means to you, how you think about it. Your opinion basically." (*Participant Twelve - External/Internal*)

However, it is important to note some of the responses coded in this manner required interpretation given that the students' were struggling to express their thoughts. Here is an example of a response which was less obvious, but still coded according to the External/Internal dichotomy:

> " I think that they are same and different. Because purpose is more, I don't know how to word it. Purpose is more like worth something and meaning is sort of personal." (*Participant Six - External/Internal*)

One participant who fell along the External/Internal dichotomy also brought in an additional unique interpretation. She expressed that purpose is *Doing an Enjoyable Task* and that meaning is more about being able to *Find Enjoyment*:

> "Well purpose it's just like that's when you do what you want and its really fun, and meaning it's just like even if the thing that you do each day isn't fun you look forward to the things that are fun in the day.... It's like there's always meaning in purpose but there isn't always purpose in meaning." (*Participant Eighteen - External/Internal and Enjoyable Task/Finding Enjoyment*)

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Other themes of differentiation only appeared in singular responses; however, given the complexity of the question several of these singular responses are worth examining in depth as well.

One unique response involved meaning, purpose, and calling falling along a *Continuum* with purpose on one end, meaning in the middle, and calling at the other end.

> "I think meaning is in between purpose and calling... So purpose, it fulfills you, it makes you satisfied to do something, it gives you reason to keep going. Calling is like you are destined to do that, that's what you're supposed to do. And then meaning is like you're meant to do something but it makes you happy." (*Participant Four - Continuum*)

Another student described purpose in terms of *Action*, and meaning in terms of *Completing* or accomplishing your purpose:

> "Purpose is like, I have a purpose to do it and its helping someone out. So, but meaning is just like getting it done I guess." (*Participant Eleven - Action/Completion*)

Another response involved purpose being the *Reason* behind what one does, and meaning being the *Impact* of those actions:

> " I think they're kind of different, I think purposes more like why you do something...and meaning is like showing like what it does to you." (*Participant Seven - Reason/Impact*)

One other singular response described how meaning and purpose may *Conflict* with one another in a specific example:

> "Well meaning and purpose would be like, your purpose here would be to help people, I mean meaning is a job to help people. But if your purpose is to create things that hurt people, but your meaning is to help them, then that would be a difference... Like if you're a grad in science or biochemistry the government would probably find you and have you build them weapons to have them hurt the people that they'd want to hurt, but you don't want to hurt people you'd rather try and find things to help cure cancer and stuff like that." (*Participant Nineteen - Conflict*)

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Finally, one student indicated that he did not know if meaning and purpose were different and had nothing further to say about the topic.

Meaningful and Purposeful Life Scale. This category involves a quantitative response, on a scale of 1-10, how much participants believed a career could add to a meaningful and purposeful life. The mean of the students' responses was 8.2, with a range of 5-10.

When asked to explain their response, many students indicated that they thought a career would add to a meaning and purposeful life through *Financial Support* (45%) and *Enjoyment* (35%).

> "Just like make you happy and being able to support you and your family and getting you to places you want to be." (*Participant Eighteen - Enjoyment and Financial Support*)

A quarter of students (25%) felt that *Helping Others* was the primary way a career would add to a meaningful and purposeful life.

> "Cause it helps the community and it helps you cheer up being with other people and finding solutions. Stuff like that. Helping people like not have murderers running around." (*Participant Twenty - Helping Others*)

15% of students suggested that *Balance* was key, and that career was only one aspect of life (along with family, friends, hobbies, etc.) that would add to a meaningful and purposeful life; these students tended to put their scale score more towards the center of the scale compensate for the other areas of life which could provide meaning and purpose.

> "Well, 'cause, if you still have a really good family this could even bring it down just a little bit more, but if you have like a really great family and everything, and like a really great wife and all that then your jobs not going to, well it's still going to matter of course, because you go and work there, but it's going to be like you get to come home to them and whatever, but then if it's not, you don't have that, that brings it up, too. Because then you're probably focused more around jobs and friends,

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you know?... But, so I think it depends on beyond your career." (*Participant Six - Balance*)

Other singular responses involved meeting friends, having something to do, being successful, providing opportunities, and meaning coming when you retire and can enjoy your free time.

Overview

Calling. Overall, most participants reported having heard of the concept of finding a "calling" for their occupation. They discussed many ideas for what this concept means, with the most central being the themes of Destiny, Desire & Enjoyment, and Ability. Other themes included Compelling Force, Interests, and Fit. Over half of the students indicated that they had not put much thought into their future careers being their calling, but most of them indicated that this is something they will likely think about at some point in their lives. Nearly half of the students indicated that they have thought about their future careers being a calling. When the students hypothetically considered their careers being callings, the central themes they discussed were Desire & Enjoyment and Ability. Other themes included Destiny, Strivings, and Fit.

Meaning and Purpose. When asked about deriving a sense of purpose from work, the primary themes which emerged were Helping Others, Desire & Enjoyment, and Reason. Other less common themes included Destiny, Fit, Adding to Purpose in Life, and Not Knowing. Many students indicated that they had learned about purpose in careers from their parents, other family members, youth pastors and teachers, but some stated that no one had taught them about this concept. When students were asked about their own hypothetical careers giving them a sense of purpose the most common themes they discussed were Enjoyment and Helping Others. Other less common themes included Not Knowing, Attitude, Financial, Recognition/Pleasing Others, and Fulfillment.

Meaning seemed to be somewhat more challenging for the students to define. Their responses tended to be more vague, and several included the word "meaning" itself. The two most common themes students discussed were Means Something and Helping or Giving Meaning to Others. Other themes included Importance and Desire & Enjoyment. When discussing a personal application of meaning to their own hypothetical careers, the primary themes they discussed for this topic were Desire & Enjoyment and Helping Others. Other themes included Importance, Reason, and Financial Support.

Participants seemed to struggle to differentiate between meaning and purpose. This was an interesting finding given that the themes which emerged in discussions of each concept separately were almost entirely unique from one another. Most of the students indicated that they felt the two concepts are similar to one another, but not exactly the same. Several interesting themes emerged in students attempts to compare meaning and purpose - these included External/Internal, Continuum, Reason/Impact, Action/Completion, and Conflict.

Common Themes. This section involves examining these three concepts (calling, meaning, and purpose) to determine the themes which emerged in all three. The primary theme which emerged as being in common across the definitions of these three concepts was Enjoyment (ranging from 10-40%). The primary common themes in discussing their personal applications of each of these concepts were Enjoyment (20-35%) and Helping Others (5% to 30%). Of note, the theme of Enjoyment (common across calling, purpose and meaning) was also the dominant theme in the students' discussions of good careers (80%) and a prominent theme in the defining of the term career itself (25%).

Unique Themes. Interestingly, each concept also included themes which were unique to that concept. Defining the concept of calling seemed to provoke students to discuss being "pulled in" to a career by an Compelling Force (20%), and discuss their Interests (10%). Defining the concept of finding a sense of purpose in a career seemed to

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conjure thoughts of having a "Reason" for your work for 15% of participants. Finally, defining the concept of meaning in work encouraged a few students (15%) to discuss Importance.

When it came to discussing the personal applications of each of these concepts, discussing a Compelling Force (in this case God) was again unique to the concept of calling, but only in a singular response. Attitude (10%) was specific to purpose, and finally Importance (15%) was again specific to meaning.

General Conclusions. The participants in this study seemed able to develop interesting and unique ideas about the definitions and applications of the concepts of calling, meaning, and purpose. It appeared that many of them had at least considered these concepts, but most had not thought extensively about them prior to this interview. The interview seemed to provoke their thinking about these topics, and as the questions progressed, the participants seemed become more confident in their ability to think critically and respond to the questions. There clearly seemed to be variation in terms of individual participant ability to think abstractly about these concepts, with some students appearing more advanced than others.

Discussion

The results of this study broaden the understanding of adolescents' perceptions of the roles of meaning and purpose in work, as well as some of the more foundational aspects of adolescent career development. The discussion will begin with examining some of the more general and foundational findings, and will then explore the findings regarding meaning and purpose in careers more specifically.

Childhood Career Developmental Theories

Consistent with literature on career development in childhood (Havighurst, 1964; Case-Smith, 2005; Wiseman et al., 2005; Humphrey, 2002) the responses of several students suggested that exposure to and experience with work activities and opportunities (e.g. working on cars and building houses) has been significant to them in their career development. Several responses also indicated an awareness and consideration of their own abilities to succeed in certain areas. These findings seem to provide support to the centrality of innate abilities interacting with exposure to work activities in career development theory (Humphrey, 2002; Case-Smith, 2005; Wiseman et al., 2005).

The results also provide additional support to all of the concepts in Super's (1990) life-span, life-space approach to childhood career development. The participants discussed access to Career Information (through the career assignment they completed), conversations and experiences with Key Figures (e.g. parents and youth pastors), Interests, Planfulness (e.g. planning for education and financial support), Self-Concept (e.g. fit and abilities), Time-Perspective (e.g. investment and commitment), Locus of Control (e.g. effort, striving, ability, and compelling forces) as well as the expression of Curiosity and benefitting from Exploration in career assignments and conversations.

Role of Parents

The importance of the role of parents to childhood and adolescent career goals (Hartung et al., 2005; Dusek, 1991; Bryant et al., 2006) also seemed at least partially supported by the participants descriptions of their conversations and experiences with parents about careers. However, the students' responses also included important conversations with other key figures, such as youth pastors, teachers, or other family members. This may indicate that adolescence is a time of branching out and attending to other important individuals' work experiences and guidance. Given Erikson's (1968)

theory regarding adolescents working to develop their identities, this movement towards attending to others may be an aspect of identity exploration. Additionally, the participants did not seem to place much emphasis on their conversations with friends. This may suggest that for the adolescent students in this sample, it was still too early for that level of conversing with peers; therefore, the participants looked to other adults for guidance, information, and inspiration.

Additionally, this study provides some moderate support to considerations of the negative impacts of conflict with parents about career goals (Young et al., 2001). The students who discussed having had conflictual conversations with parents seemed distressed about it during the interview. Though the interviews did not go into depth on this topic, the participants' frustration was evident in the content and context of their responses. For instance, one student described the conflict as "stressful" and stated that she needed "room to breathe."

Knowledge and Perceptions

Blackhurst, Auger, and Wahl (2003) suggested that children often house inaccuracies in their perceptions of career requirements. While this finding was not specifically tackled in this study, one finding may provide indirect support. The vast majority of the students in this sample expressed that they benefitted from a career assignment which focused on learning more about certain career options. Given that the students were positively impacted by gaining more specific information about these careers, it may be reasonable to conjecture that the students likely either lacked some information, or were housing inaccurate information. In fact, this was evidenced by one student's description of learning (through the career assignment) that he had grossly underestimated the levels of education needed to be a coach of a sports team.

The study conducted by Borgen and Young (1982) found that children grades 5-7

tended to describe occupations primarily in terms of activities and behaviors. The sample of 7th grade students also described careers in these terms; however, they additionally discussed the importance of salary, enjoyment, interests, helping others, abilities, etc. This data may suggest that 7th grade students are beginning to move beyond the relatively simplistic description of occupations found in Borgen and Young (1982). It also may suggest that while the students at that age may not spontaneously offer this more sophisticated descriptions, when prompted or questioned, they are aware and capable of considering them. Finally, it also is possible that the career assignment all of the students in this sample completed encouraged a more in-depth thought process about careers.

Meaning and Purpose

In general, the participants in this study provided numerous thoughts and opinions regarding the roles of meaning and purpose in careers. Interestingly, the levels of thought and sophistication of responses to these concepts seemed to vary fairly significantly across the sample.

The participants' discussion of the meaning and purpose of careers provides support to the theme of "Conceptions of Work" offered by Schultheiss, Palma, and Manzi (2005) in addition to the other eight concepts offered by Super (1990) in his life-space, life-span approach. This support should be understood with the caveat that the students were specifically asked about these concepts; however, given that the students did have unique and reasonably sophisticated thoughts about these concepts, it seems likely that they had considered them on some level prior to the interview. And yet, given the difficulty many of them experienced discussing these themes, it appears that adolescents may still be in the early stages of understanding these concepts.

The findings of this research seem to contrast with the comments of Inhelder and Piaget (1958) regarding adolescents' grandiose aspirations being interpreted as a sign of

egocentrism, and are more in alignment with Damon et al's (2003) explanation that grandiose beliefs may be a sign of children (or in this case adolescents) expressing purpose by way of helping others in some way. The theme of Helping Others was common across multiple topics (including purpose) and finding a career that helped community was expressed to be at least somewhat important by all twenty participants. This finding may suggest that Inhelder and Piaget misinterpreted this aspect of adolescent career goals, or it could simply be indicative of something that has changed in the aspirations of adolescents over the past 50 years. Generational differences in career attitudes and perceptions have indeed been suggested by researchers, such as in the work of Strauss and Howe (1991). According to these researchers, an individual's career approach is effected by their Zeitgeist (e.g. the "Silents" generation tending to be focused primarily on job security due to experiencing the Great Depression).

The students' definitions of meaning and purpose hit on many of the themes in the existing literature. Responses indicating that meaning and purpose are exactly the same seemed to support Ryff and Singer's (1988) tactic of using the terms meaning and purpose interchangeably. Other responses of explaining meaning and purpose in terms of an Internal/External dichotomy seemed to fit with aspects of the definitions offered by Damon, Menon, and Bronk (2003); Kosine, Steger, and Duncan (2008); Steger and Dik (2010). The theme of Attitude which emerged in discussions of meaning fit well with the definition of meaning offered by Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz (1997) which suggested that meaningfulness, with respect to work, is less about what an individual does, and more about their own perceptions of what they do. This definition also could arguably relate to the internal aspect of the Internal/External dichotomy theme (which described meaning as one's perception of or attitude toward their work), and with one students' explanation of meaning being about finding the enjoyment in one's work. Interestingly, (Kosine et al., 2008) suggested that it is becoming increasingly important for

individual's to search for a "reason" for doing the work that they do, and the theme of Reason was unique to the students' discussion of purpose. However, some students' really struggled to describe these terms, which likely suggests that this level of abstract thinking may be difficult at this developmental level. Additionally, some students' responses seemed to represent new and unique themes not present in the current literature, such as the Continuum (which incorporated calling), Action/Completion, and Reason/Impact themes for explaining meaning and purpose.

The students' descriptions of a calling also seemed to fit well overall with existing ideas in the literature. The themes of Destiny, Compelling Force, and Helping Others were all quite consistent with the definitions of Dik and Duffy (2009). Additionally, while the participants did not spontaneously discuss meaningfulness or purposefulness when defining calling, when the topics of meaning and purpose were later addressed, several participants related them back to the definition of a calling. Most students did not identify the theme of Compelling Force, or a transcendent summons, which may suggest that this is only a factor for some of the participants (consistent with the thoughts of Hall and Chandler, 2005). Finally, as with meaning and purpose, students' also discussed multiple other themes which were not specifically present in Dik and Duffy's definition of a calling - such as enjoyment, desire, ability, interests, and fit. It is arguable that these concepts are inherent in the idea of meaningfulness included in Dik and Duffy's definition, but they are not explicitly stated.

In conclusion, this sample of adolescents definitely seemed capable of formulating relatively complex and abstract ideas about the definitions of the concepts of calling, meaning, and purpose in work. Some of the students seemed more advanced than others in this realm, which is to be expected with any group of individuals, especially one in developmental flux. Additionally, some participants even suggested interesting and insightful ideas regarding these concepts that had not been addressed specifically in the

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literature. It appears that these concepts tend to be highly personalized, and while there certainly seems to be some level of general agreement about their meanings, some paradigms are naturally going to fit better with a person's individualized ideas than others.

Limitations

While this study yielded important and relevant results, it is not without several limitations which are important to acknowledge. First, as with any qualitative study, the sample size was small and mostly homogeneous, and therefore transferability may be limited. Given this, the results of this study may not be applicable to individuals with a divergent set of cultural norms due to race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, geographical location, or other factors. It is also important to acknowledge the consideration of cohort or generational effects upon career attitudes and perceptions. Given that generational factors certainly play a role in our belief systems, it follows that the opinions expressed by the sample in this study is similarly effected by their own cultural and temporal realities. Additionally, all data was collected via one data source - an interview - and was not cross-referenced nor double-checked against any other source. The time limit of each of the twenty interviews was constrained to 30 minutes, which did not allow for much flexibility in the structure of the interviews, or time to go into more depth for any of the topics.

There was potential for bias in both the process of data collection as well as data analysis. Though the interviewer strove to ask interview questions in an open and balanced manner, given that most follow-up questions were developed on an ongoing basis during the interview process, the interviewer may have biased participant responses by the specific topics addressed in follow-up questions. Additionally, it is possible that the interviewer may have biased participants in more subtle manners, such as with non-verbal

cues of encouragement or discouragement. It is also possible that students may have attempted to offer socially desirable responses to the interview questions - particularly given the dynamic of being interviewed by an adult in a school setting. In regard to data analysis, the abstract and challenging nature of some of the questions (especially for the sample in question) yielded responses which were, at times, somewhat difficult to interpret. The researcher may have been biased in her interpretation and organization of the material into themes. The use of peer review, the offering of rich and thick descriptions of participant responses, and the author's attempt to establish and describe her own potential for bias were all utilized to attempt to minimize these effects during data analysis (Creswell, 2007).

There was also potential for priming effects with the ordering of the interview questions. Specifically, given that the questions "Can you think of any job or careers which help society or community in some way?" and "Do you think it is important that a career or job help community or society in some way" preceded questions regarding purpose, meaning, and calling, participants may have been primed to discuss themes such as "Helping Others" in their responses.

Directions for Research and Practice

The findings of this investigation point to several important directions for future research. To start, a study could be designed overcome some of the aforementioned limitations of the current study. Perhaps replicating the study in a focus group format might allow for a larger and more transferable sample. It might also be interesting to investigate between-group differences in a larger sample size, such as investigating differences in gender, ethnicity, or religiosity. A less-structured interview with more time to delve into details, or a survey method, may also yield additional rich data. Research on meaning and purpose also could be conducted in a more longitudinal, or cross-sectional,

fashion in order to gain a more eloquent understanding of the process individuals may go through as they embark on their career paths. Given the influential role of parents in adolescent career goals, a study could be designed which examines the relationship between parental meaning and purpose in regard to career, and the roles of these concepts in their children's career goals.

Given the research support for the importance of developing a sense of meaning and purpose in one's career, developing career interventions which address this, and measuring the efficacy of such an intervention, would be an exciting option in future research. Perhaps the data from this study could be utilized to inform an outcome measure developed to target this topic on a developmental level appropriate for adolescents. This measure could incorporate the findings to develop items that explore topics such as the extent to which participants have thought about meaning, purpose, and calling, their confidence in understanding what these terms mean, or the extent of their desire to experience meaning and purpose or find their calling. This type of outcome measure could then be utilized to investigate the effectiveness of both clinical and educational interventions designed to emphasize meaning, purpose, and calling.

Brown et al. (2003) suggests that there are five critical ingredients that have a significant impact upon the effectiveness of career interventions. These ingredients include written activities, modeling, individualized feedback and interpretation, attention to building support for choices (such as social support and being aware of potential barriers), and world of work information. Using the findings from the current study along with these five critical ingredients as a guide, the following suggestions for meaning-and-purpose-infused interventions are offered.

A meaning-and-purpose-infused career intervention could be in a group setting, such as a workshop or in a classroom, or a one-on-one basis such as with a career counselor or a parent. It could be as simple as specifically broaching the topic of meaning and purpose in

careers, or as complex as a structured workshop or educational curriculum involving activities and assignments. Either way, given the individualized nature of the student's definitions and descriptions of the concepts of meaning, purpose, and calling in the current study, it would likely be most beneficial to address these topics in a way that encourages clients or participants to discuss their own thoughts and beliefs about these concepts prior to exposure to concrete definitions. Potential definitions for the concepts could be offered after a discussion, but not imposed upon the clients or participants. Given the complexity of these definitions, in interventions with adolescents they would likely be best understood if explained by way of examples and anecdotes. In both an individual or group setting it will be helpful to emphasize the importance of finding meaning and purpose in one's career. Clinicians and facilitators should discuss why meaning and purpose matter, and the potential positive benefits that tend to coincide with finding a sense of meaning and purpose from one's work.

Written activities or games which encourage participants or clients to consider meaning, purpose, and calling would be recommended (and would additionally fulfill the critical ingredient of written exercises). In a clinical setting, this could be something that is completed as part of a session; in a workshop setting, activities could be homework assignments, or participants could complete activities and then discuss them with the group. A potential assignment requesting participants or clients to interview an influential person in their lives about that person's own career process (with an emphasis on meaning, purpose, and calling) could provide an important modeling experience for adolescent participants. This type of assignment could also encourage parental figures to engage in discussions about these topics with their adolescent children. Another option for modeling might be for counselors or facilitators to discuss personal experiences with meaning and purpose, or to incorporate guest speakers into workshops. In a clinical setting, counselors could offer feedback to clients regarding any activities, assignments, or discussions of

meaning and purpose. In a workshop setting, facilitators could attempt to spend time interacting individually with students during the intervention, and give them individual feedback on any written activities, in order to provide individualized attention and feedback to the participants regarding their thoughts about meaning, purpose, and calling.

Currently, there is no published research on the efficacy of such a curriculum or treatment intervention with children, adolescents, or teenagers. However, a research project is underway investigating the impacts of a purpose-based educational game designed for use with adolescent students (Dik, Steger, & Peisner, 2010, August). The game was designed to encourage students to think about the pro-social functions of occupations. Their research thus far has yielded results which suggest that the game was effective in improving students' general career development (e.g. sense of direction, understanding of interests, feeling prepared for the future), but not specifically calling-related beliefs and attitudes. The authors have suggested that perhaps the purpose-based interventions in the game were not delivered at a sufficient depth, or that the curriculum may lay a foundation for a sense of purpose or calling which emerges later in life.

Given the research available which suggests that finding meaning and purpose in work has major positive impacts on work and life satisfaction, it makes sense that teachers and career counselors should strive to incorporate these topics into their work with students and clients alike. In addition, it would also be beneficial for parents and other family members to engage in conversations about meaning and purpose in careers with their adolescent children. The findings of the current study provide strong support that adolescents are at a place in their lives and development in which discussions and interventions focused on the topic of meaning and purpose in careers would very likely be significantly impactful in a positive way for their career development, career choices, and future career satisfaction.

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Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant #	Age	Sex	Race/Ethnicity	Religion
1	13	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	None
2	12	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	Christian
3	13	Male	Hispanic	Catholic
4	13	Female	African American & White/Non-Hispanic	Christian
5	13	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Christian
6	13	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	Christian
7	13	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	Christian
8	12	Female	White/Non-Hispanic & Hispanic	Christian
9	12	Female	White/Non-Hispanic & Hispanic	Christian
10	13	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Christian
11	13	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Christian
12	13	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	Christian
13	13	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	Christian
14	13	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Christian
15	12	Male	Hispanic & Pacific Islander/Greek	Christian
16	12	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Christian
17	13	Female	White/Non-Hispanic	Christian
18	12	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Christian
19	13	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Christian
20	13	Male	White/Non-Hispanic	Christian

Table 2

Junior High Student Body Race/Ethnicity Statistics - Fall 2008

Race/Ethnicity	Number of Students	Percentage of Student Body
American Indian or Alaskan Native	3	0.80%
Asian or Pacific Islander	2	0.50%
Black (Not Hispanic)	7	1.80%
Hispanic	69	18%
White (Not Hispanic)	300	79%
Total	381	100%

Table 3

Junior High Student Body Free and Reduced Lunch Statistics - Fall 2008

Reduction Status	Number of Students	Percentage of Student Body
Total Students in School	381	100%
Eligible for Free Lunch	96	25.20%
Eligible for Reduced Lunch	36	9.45%
Total Eligible for Free or Reduced	132	34.65%
Total Not Eligible for any Reductions	249	65.35%

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Warm-up Questions

- Tell me a little about yourself. For example, do you like sports, music, science, art?

- What do you do really well?

- What makes you feel happy or satisfied?

- What matters to you? What do you care about?

General Career

- What did you want to be when you were five years old? How about now?

- What do you think the word "career" means?

- What kind of job or career do you think might be exciting to you? Why?

- What kind of job or career would be boring for you? How come?

- Are there any jobs or careers you can think of that help the community or society?

- Do you think it is important to have a job or career that does that? Why or why not?

- What would you say is the main purpose of having a career?

- What does having a good career mean to you?

- What kinds of schoolwork have you done, or conversations have you had (with teachers, family, friends, etc.) about jobs or careers?

Calling and Career

- Have you ever heard of the word 'calling'? Maybe from your parents, school, or a religious/spiritual organization like church or synagogue?

- In your opinion, what do you think the word 'calling' as in, 'My career is my calling' means?

- Have you ever thought of your future job or career possibly being a 'calling'? If so, what would this be like for you? If not, do you think you ever will?

Purpose and Career

- What do you think the word 'purpose' means, as in my career gives me a sense of purpose?

- Is there anyone important to you (like your mom, dad, teacher, etc.) who has taught you about finding purpose in careers? If so, what did they teach you?

- What do you think it would look like if your future job or career gave you a sense of purpose?

- Do you feel like you have purpose right now in your life?

- Do you think your future job or career could add purpose to your life? If so, how? If not, why not?

Meaning and Career

- Lets talk about another word, 'meaning'. If a career or job had meaning what do you think would that be like?

- Do you feel like meaning and purpose are the same or different? Can you explain how?

- Do you feel like you have meaning in your life right now?

- What do you think it would be like for you if you have a meaningful job or career in the future?

- On a scale of 1-10, how much do you think your job or career can add to a meaningful or purposeful life? In what ways?

Appendix B

Personal Experience with Phenomena

I am a graduate student in Counseling Psychology at Colorado State University. I have experience with career counseling, and encourage clients to find work which fits with their interests, abilities, personality, and values. I have been exposed to a substantial amount of research which supports the importance of these factors, as well as meaning and purpose, in overall career satisfaction. I believe that they are all vitally important in determining the fit of a career.

I believe that deriving a sense of purpose and meaning from one's work is incredibly important in terms of career and life satisfaction. I see "meaning" in careers as being one's attitude towards or personal fulfillment from their work. I would describe "purpose" as being the larger role the occupation plays in benefitting others and society. I am currently completing my training in a helping field, and am likely predisposed to see helping others as an important aspect of career goals. However, I believe that there are numerous different ways in which various careers can be pro-social, and that this can largely be a factor of attitude and perception.

I would personally define "calling" in terms of ability, a sense of fulfillment (likely stemming from meaning and purpose) and having a positive impact on society. The concept of transcendant summons is not central to my perceptions of the concept of calling. Given that I am still in training and have not officially entered into my chosen profession, I currently feel uncertain as to whether I have found my personal calling. Finding a niche within psychology that I consider to be my calling is certainly a goal for me.

I have experience working with adolescents as a care-giver, and feel that they are developmentally capable of responding to the topics involved in this study. My conjecture is that many of the participants will not have thought extensively about the concepts of

meaning, purpose, and calling prior to this study, but these concepts will likely not be entirely foreign to them. I expect that they will be able to consider their thoughts about the concepts and formulate opinions about them when queried during the interview. However, their opinions and definitions may prove to be fairly simplistic or vague given the limited level of critical thought they are likely to have given these topics at this point in their lives.