DISSERTATION

THE MEANING OF WORK FOR FIVE GENERATION Y EMPLOYEES: A HERMENEUTIC

PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Submitted by

Tabitha K. L. Coates

School of Education

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Doctoral Committee:

     Advisor: Susan A. Lynham

     Scott Glick
     Louise Jennings
     Barbara Wallner

ABSTRACT

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Research on Generation Y is inconsistent and incongruent, making it difficult to understand the organizational impact of this cohort in the workforce. This exploratory study sought to provide an in-depth examination of Generation Y to understand some work related patterns and meaning among the cohort at a deeper, more intrinsic level than prior studies. The purpose of the study was to explore and understand how five Generation Y employees perceived and described their notion of the *meaning of work*, based on their lived experience of the phenomenon.

To understand and analyze the constructed meaning of the *meaning of work*, this study was grounded in the interpretive paradigm. The methodology used was that of hermeneutic phenomenology. The findings from this study are representative of the individual, shared, and co-constructions of ten essential themes including: the *meaning of work* is influenced by education; the *meaning of work* is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful; the *meaning of work* is balance; the *meaning of work* is completing tasks and being compensated to meet our basic needs; the *meaning of work* is the importance of social relationships; the *meaning of work* is considering and exploring all opportunities; the *meaning of work* is influenced by our social networks; the *meaning of work* is a reflection of who we are; and the *meaning of work* is working for an organization that functions well; and the *meaning of work* is influenced by the current state of the economy. The essential themes are presented using thick descriptive quotes from the

participants and supporting literature. In addition, the ten essential themes were composed of essential sub-themes and essential sub-sub-themes that provided additional layers of depth in understanding the phenomenon for the five participants.

This study provided a voice for the Generation Y participants, allowing researchers and practitioners to begin to build knowledge about the relationship between this generational cohort and the evolving nature of work. Recommendations are provided for using the findings to inform research, theory, and practice. First, suggestions are made for research regarding accumulating knowledge from diverse prospective, sampling, narrowly defining constructs, and improving methodology. Second, recommendations are provided for future theorizing and theory building. Last, I discuss how the findings of this study will inform practice related to the *meaning of work* phenomenon at the organizational, individual, and generational levels.

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I am incredibly grateful to my family during this journey. To my husband, thank you for your support and encouragement throughout this process. To my parents and grandparents, thank you for always believing in me, and teaching me the value of hard work and determination. And, to my brother and sister, thank you for inspiring me to continuously strive to better myself. It is my hope that as both of you grow up that you will find fulfillment and meaning in whatever you choose to do, as I believe that both of you have such wonderful gifts to offer the world.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"Ask young people about their generation's top life goals and the answer is clear and resounding: They want to be rich and famous" (Jayson, 2007, para. 1). However, this same concept existed in 470-339 B.C., when Socrates stated, "Our youth love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority and disrespect for elders. Children nowadays are tyrants" (as cited in Mash & Wolfe, 2005, p. 142). The youngest working generation, Generation Y (also called the Millennials) is three times the size of Generation X and just short of the size of the Baby Boomers—they are 60 million strong (Allerton, 2001). According to Shaw and Fairhurst (2008) the individuals who make up the Generation Y cohort not only think and act differently, but they also have different values from previous generations. According to Martin (2005), organizations that do not or will not revamp and customize their training, responsibilities, incentives, and other organizational variables of importance to Generation Y will need a wake-up call.

A plethora of research exists on attempting to understand Generation Y with respect to work. The cohort has been studied within varying contexts including: perceptions of career; work attitudes; psychological contracts; work values; career success; learning orientation and organizational commitment; psychological traits; work environment fit; and view on leadership attributes and characteristics (e.g., Broadbridge, Maxwell, & Ogden, 2007; Kowske, Rasch, & Wiley, 2010; Hess & Jepsen 2009; Chen & Choi 2008; Dries, Perpmans, & De Kerpel 2008; D'Amato & Herzfeldt, 2008; Twenge & Campbell 2008; Westerman & Yamamura 2006; Arsenault, 2004; Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, & Brown, 2008). However, the findings on Generation Y are inconsistent and incongruent—creating a gap consisting of non-conclusive results from the

studies listed above. As stated by Deal, Altman, and Rogelberg (2010) "The relative sparse empirical research published on Millennials is confusing at best and contradictory at worst" (p. 191). Thus, a need exists to explore and understand this generation in the workforce.

Chapter One begins by providing the purpose of this study. The remainder of the chapter is divided into 12 sections. These 12 sections include the following: two informing bodies of literature; pilot study; methodological framework; informing theoretical framework; research questions; rationale; researcher's history; ethics; definitions; delimitations and ensuing limitations; assumptions; and conclusion.

Purpose of the Study

Work has changed considerably over the decades—from how work is conducted, to employee work values—making it imperative to fully understand the evolving relationship of the individual to the organization (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009). To examine this relationship, one must understand the *meaning of work* for Generation Y individuals within the current workforce (Chalofsky, 2003). Literature consists of inconclusive findings of the characteristics of Generation Y, which underscores the need for the field of Human Resource Development (HRD), among others, to study and better understand the organizational impact of Generation Y. According to Swanson and Holton (2009), "HRD is a process of developing and unleashing expertise for the purpose of improving individual, team, work process, and organizational system performance" (p. 4). It is difficult to improve the individual and overall performance of Generation Y when inconsistencies underscore inconclusive findings in the literature. Additionally, work plays a central role in our lives; therefore the *meaning of work* to individuals is a central topic to the field of HRD (Ardichvili & Kuchinke, 2009).

A diversity of study designs is needed to provide more reliable and rigorous research, and more knowledgeable and relevant practices in organizations to address components of the *meaning of work* to Generation Y and concomitant relevance to the field of HRD (Gibson & Hanes, 2003). In advancement of this diversity of inquiry I conducted an exploratory, in-depth examination of Generation Y to more fully understand and describe some work-related meaning and patterns among the cohort.

Two Informing Bodies of Literature

Two bodies of literature informed this study. They are Generation Y, and the *meaning of work*. A quick overview of the nature of each and how they informed this study follows.

A strong interest in generations began in the nineteenth century (Jaeger, 1985), especially in the mid-1900s when people believed that the emerging youth culture may be the reason for changing values in society (Bowman, 1977). This re-emphasis on generations triggered re-awareness of Mannheim's theoretical framework of generations (1952/2000). Currently, there are four generations in the workforce informing research that is focusing on whether or not more similarities or differences exist among the generations in respect to work-related constructs, and the implications these findings may have for organizations. More specifically, research is focusing on the newest generation to enter the workforce, Generation Y (also known as the Millennials).

The Generation Y literature informed several components of this study. The first component is the range of birth dates for my sample, and the need for participants who have graduated from college and entered the workforce. For the purpose of this study, the participants must have been born between the years 1981 and 1994 (Arsenault, 2004; Dries et al., 2008; Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008; Howe & Strauss, 1997, 2007; Lamm & Meeks, 2009; Meriac,

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Woehr, & Banister, 2010; Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010; Smith, 2008; and Yu & Miller, 2003) and have had full-time work experience for at least one year. Next, the literature informed the purpose of my study by emphasizing that while there are inconsistencies about characteristics that define Generation Y, there are also patterns within this cohort that needs to be better understood. And, last, the literature explicated the need for a study to be conducted from a hermeneutic phenomenology methodology that stemmed from the interpretivist paradigm. This need was based on the lack thereof of various study designs used to examine the Generation Y construct.

Morse and Weiss (1955) conducted a classic study trying to identify the importance of work among the labor force. In this study work was defined as, "a specific task, duty, function, or assignment often being a part or phase of some larger activity" (work, n.d., para. 1). Over the decades, the *meaning of work* has been changing as the nature of work has changed (Ardichvili & Kuchinke, 2009; MOW International Research Team, 1987). Literature on the *meaning of work* in the early decades focused on the role of the individual. However, as time progressed, the focus of the *meaning of work* evolved to include the individual and the environment. For the purpose of this study, the *meaning of work* was defined as "why people work and what they intend on accomplishing by working" (Brief & Nord, 1990, p. 12).

The *meaning of work* literature informed several components of this study. First, the literature informed my sample by underscoring the need to understand the *meaning of work* for Generation Y. The *meaning of work* had not been studied with individuals from this generational cohort. Next, the literature revealed that the *meaning of work* is an interaction of the individual and the environment. This interaction informed my initial research and interview questions. And, last, several researchers emphasized that the *meaning of work* phenomenon is a complex

structure that needed to be examined from a study stemming from the interpretivist paradigm. This need informed my methodology component.

Chapter Two provides an in-depth review of the literature for Generation Y and the *meaning of work*. It does so by, first, presenting reviewing literature on the origins, theoretical framework, definitions, research supporting and disputing generational differences, and Generation Y will be examined. Next, literature on the *meaning of work* beginning in the 1950s until present day is integrated with literature on the changing nature of work. Also provided are the origins, theoretical frameworks, and definitions of the *meaning of work* are provided. Finally, summaries are provided for each section, along with an overall explication of the need for this study—on The Meaning of Work for Generation Y.

Pilot Study

It is important to note that a pilot study was conducted during the spring semester 2011 for qualitative class project. The study examined the *meaning of work* for three generations of workers: Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y. A phenomenological approach was employed to collect the data from three participants—one from each generation. The project was not being published; therefore IRB approval was not necessary.

The pilot study provided ample opportunity to begin immersing myself into the topics of generations, the *meaning of work*, and phenomenology. This was my first experience in designing interview questions and conducting interviews. I was able to practice being the human instrument, analyzing data, and writing up a final report. The knowledge and skills I gained from this course built a foundation for designing and implementing my dissertation study.

My dissertation topic of interest stemmed from this pilot study, as I decided based on my experience to focus on Generation Y. In addition, I learned that based on the purpose of my

dissertation study that the most appropriate methodological framework to understand the *meaning of work* for Generation Y would be that of hermeneutic phenomenology—grounded in the interpretive paradigm.

Methodological Framework

The study was grounded in the interpretive paradigm in order to understand and analyze the constructed *meaning of work* among participants from the Generation Y cohort. For the purpose of this study, the interpretivist paradigm was equated to the constructivist paradigm of inquiry (Lincoln & Lynham, 2011). The ontology of the interpretive paradigm is that realities are relative and co-constructed; so there are multiple realities in people's minds (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The reality of the *meaning of work* is a construction of the minds (Merriam, 1991) of Generation Y, and cannot be measured but rather is interpreted, as explained by Merriam (1991).

The epistemology of this paradigm of inquiry is subjectivist, so interacting with the participants is the only way to comprehend their individual realities and experiences thereof (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). As stated by Lincoln and Guba (2013),

> that transaction is necessarily highly subjective, mediated by the knower's prior experience and knowledge, by political and social status, by gender, by race, class, sexual orientation, nationality, by personal and cultural values, and by the knower's interpretation (construction) of the contextual surround. (p. 40)

Thus, the *meaning of work* was co-constructed by the Generation Y participants and the researcher.

The axiology of this study is that the values of the researcher and the participants are embedded throughout the design, data collection, analysis, and report of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). It is important to note that this type of methodological framework "rejects the very idea that you can be objective and neutral in research" (Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, 2007, p. 210),

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thus bias inherently exists. However, it is important to be transparent and consciously aware of any judgments and biases (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Moustakas, 1990). My judgments and biases as the researcher are detailed in the Researcher's History section of this Chapter.

Finally, the methodology was hermeneutic and dialectic where "individual constructions are elicited and refined hermeneutically, and compared and contrasted dialectically, with the aim of generating one (or a few) constructions on which there is substantial consensus" (Guba, 1990, p. 27). More specifically, the methodology used was that of hermeneutic phenomenology. This methodology was appropriate since the purpose of the study was to describe the meaning of the participants' lived experiences of work (Creswell, 2007). The methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology falls into the same metaphysical realm (e.g., ontologically, epistemologically, and methodologically) as the interpretive paradigm (Laverty, 2003). This methodology is discussed further and in-depth in Chapter Three.

Informing Theoretical Framework

Researchers studying under the interpretivist paradigm do not approach their research topic deductively, meaning that the data do not fit into a specific theoretical framework where data collection and analysis is used to test theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1991). Rather, the researcher works a posteriori (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1991). Working from an inductive approach in the interpretivist paradigm allows the researcher to account for multiple realities and as a result, for the theory to be co-constructed from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As stated by Van Manen (1990):

> A distinguishing feature of a human science approach to pedagogy is how the notions of theory and research are related to the practice of living. In contrast to the more positivistic and behavioral empirical sciences, human science does not see theory as something that stands before practice in order to "inform it". Rather theory enlightens practice. Practice (or life) always comes first and theory comes later as a result of reflection. (p. 15)

In alignment with the interpretivist paradigm, hermeneutic phenomenology reflects an inductive approach, "the methodology of phenomenology is such that it posits an approach toward research that aims at being presuppositionless; in other words, this is a methodology that tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques, and concepts that would rule-govern the research project" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 29). Thus, for the purpose of this study, a theoretical framework was not explicitly used for testing theory.

Instead, existing theories exploring the *meaning of work* and Generation Y were used to inform the study by providing an initial understanding of what issues within this topic are important. Then I used this understanding to draft initial research questions (Creswell, 2009). These informing theories are introduced and discussed in detail in chapter two. They are further discussed in chapter five, and in relation to the following: how the findings from this study are connected to the informing theories; how the informing theories illuminated what I saw in the findings; and questions, if any, provoked from this examination.

Research Questions

The overall research question guiding this study was: Based on their lived experience in the workplace, how do the five Generation Y employees interviewed in this study perceive and describe the notion of the *meaning of work*, and why so? Additional, sub-protocol questions included the following: What does work mean to them? For what reasons do they say they work? And, how do they describe experiences of meaningful work? The second research question for this study was: How do the findings from this study inform, among others, HRD research, theory, and practice?

Rationale

Human Resource Development needs to expand its recognition of researchers implementing a diversity of methods when studying topics of interest to the field (Gibson & Hanes, 2003). By utilizing a study design stemming from the interpretivist paradigm, this study approached the Generation Y cohort and the *meaning of work* holistically. Based on the literature reviewed, the majority of studies examining Generation Y have been designed with an approach that according to Willis, Jost, and Nilakanta (2007), reduces the topic into smaller elements, and has typically led to inconsistent results and inconclusive findings. Wrzesniewki and Dutton (2001) recommended that individuals are actively involved in crafting their own job and *meaning of work*. Therefore, future research should be focused more on study designs aimed at understanding how people see themselves at work; a notion hard to encompass through survey items that may reduce the topic to simplistic ideas.

Gibson and Hanes (2003) urged the field of HRD to "consider phenomenology as an essential component of HRD research due to its focus on the complexity and wholeness of the human experience, which is an area that has not received significant emphasis in the HRD literature" (p. 182). Thus, research conducted from a phenomenological perspective can assist in providing HRD further clarity and understanding on what is important to individuals in their work experience (McClure & Brown, 2008). This notion was further supported by Dooley and Lynham (2003) who suggest that "HRD is phenomenologically impoverished" (p. 23). They suggested that to apprehend any organization or system requires to first understand the human resources in that system and understanding is well illuminated by the use of phenomenological methodology (Dooley & Lynham, 2003). They recommended that future research in the field of HRD should explore topics in which phenomenology would be an appropriate methodological

approach. Understanding the *meaning of work* for Generation Y employees was an appropriate topic because first we must understand Generation Y before we can make recommendations for this generation in the workforce. Furthermore, according to McClure and Brown (2008), this type of reflection on meaning of work "may improve efforts to make more informed decisions about how precious resources, energy and time are spent in organizations" (p. 3). A hermeneutic phenomenological methodology allowed the participants to be considered co-researchers who disclosed their experience and *meaning of work* to provide a deeper, richer understanding of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). Thus, this study design informed and enhanced a necessary inquiry noted in the Generation Y and HRD literature.

Researcher's History

As previously noted, it is imperative in a phenomenological study for the researcher to be consciously aware of pre-existing biases and pre-judgments (Moustakas, 1990). This section provides a brief history of how I became interested in the topic of Generation Y and the *meaning of work,* and makes explicit the potential biases and prejudgments that I had.

I considered this dissertation study part of a long journey in finding myself. I still remember the day I broke. It was a sunny, warm afternoon sitting in the Dulles airport parking lot in Northern Virginia. I was 24 and held a mid-level management position, that my boss never let me forget was a great opportunity for someone of my age. I was on the phone with my mom that day in the car, getting ready to catch a plane to Savannah, Georgia to go to a conference for the next three days. I was entrenched in my own tears telling my mom that I could not get on that plane because I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. I think I was subconsciously begging my mom to understand how I felt and tell me that it was perfectly okay to not get on that plane, skip the conference, and quit my job. Needless to say, I went to the conference and used

the time to reflect on some important decisions regarding my career. I felt a loss of meaning, purpose, and hope in my given situation, along with a loss of personal control. I went back to Washington D.C., decided to take my control back, and turned in my letter of resignation within a few days of the conference. Given we were in a recession, no one understood what I was doing. All I knew was that I had suffered enough in one position and the toll it had taken on my physical and mental health was not worth it.

Upon handing in my resignation, my boss felt the need to explain to me how I encompassed all the characteristics she had read about my generation. Towards the last few months of working, I admit, my attitude and work ethic towards my job were nothing to be desired. I felt guilty regarding this, however knew that it was due more to the situation than me, individually; because in the previous job I had held, I went above and beyond for my boss. For the past eleven months I had worked with a boss that was a text book micro-manager. Everything the team did, she redid. Our work was never good enough and our ideas were nonexistent. She managed to drain every one of us of our creativity, engagement, and any meaning. She expected us to work nights and weekends. A few months into my job, I remember sitting there and looking at the computer screen. I was running statistics and placing them in reports and thinking about what difference in the world my job was really making. I thought about how I work for a trade association for banks and the only thing I am doing is helping banks make more money and run more efficiently: this realization felt meaningless. Not only that, but I felt all my intellect being sucked out of me, daily. I had no opportunity for advancement, no opportunity for learning, no opportunity for creativity, and no opportunity to make a difference in the world. The atmosphere in our department was toxic. All of our doors to our offices stayed

closed all day, every day. All of us dreaded the knock on our door that could be our boss. We all avoided her at all costs.

Over the next few months I made the decision to move out to Colorado and start a doctoral program. Being in school has helped heal me physically and mentally because I began doing something I found meaningful, which has allowed me to start to find myself again. With this said, I do understand how meaning may not just come from work. I have found meaning in other domains of life such as family, my husband, and hobbies. However, if I can help people find meaning in just one aspect of their lives, such as work, then I feel as though I could possibly make a difference.

By having chosen this topic of study, I hoped to also come to new understandings of myself. I am part of Generation Y, and identify with some (not all) of the characteristics that describe this generation. Having conducted this study and utilizing a phenomenological methodology and interpretive approach to do so, I allowed myself to continue to take this journey into reflecting on the *meaning of work*, as well as helping others reflect on the same to them. At the beginning point in my journey, the *meaning of work* encompassed continuous learning, creativity, and an opportunity to make a difference in the world—even just a small one.

This study was just one step in my overall goal. For those of you who have read Stud Terkel's book, *Working*, I aspire one day to be able to interview individuals across generations, occupations, industries, gender, income, and position. Using these interviews, I want to put together a novel that may one day provide guidance to an individual searching for what to do with the rest of their lives in at least one domain of their overall being—work.

Ethics

As with any research, the ethical issues of conducting this study needed to be anticipated and addressed. Such ethical issues may arise in the following areas: research problem, purpose and research questions, data collection, data analysis, and writing up and disseminating the results of the research (Creswell, 2007, 2009).

First, in the research problem the researcher needs to make sure that the topic of study is important to others and that no individual or group is ostracized as a result of the study (Creswell, 2009). To my knowledge, the need and importance of this study did not ostracize any group or individual; in fact, its intent was just the opposite. The need for the study, addressed by reviewing literature examining Generation Y and the *meaning of work*, revealed clear inconsistencies and gaps, and underscoreed the importance of this study to the field of, among others, HRD.

Second, the researcher needs to clearly explicate the purpose of the study and the research questions likely to be used with participants (Creswell, 2007, 2009). To this end, I provided the participants with a description of the purpose of the study and drafted a protocol of the anticipated research questions. Thus, there was no deception; and there was no sponsorship that might have initiated as much.

Third, several potential points at which ethical issues need to be considered in data collection include: informed consent, risks, disturbance of settings, study benefits, and the process of interviewing (Creswell, 2007, 2009). An informed consent was given to each participant with all the necessary information outlined by the Institutional Review Board at Colorado State University (Appendix A). There were no inherent risks to the participants in the study, and the disturbance of the setting was not applicable since the participant picked a location

and time in which he/she felt comfortable. As noted in my section on the researcher's perspective, it was my intent that both the researcher and the participant benefit from this study—in so much as both reflected on/upon and thereby gained understanding of their own, personal *meaning of work*. Finally, as the researcher and interviewer, it was my duty to understand how some of the research questions that I asked may have initiated dialogue that could have been sensitive for the participant. Interpretations of the interviews represented collaboration between the researcher and the participants. Furthermore, any anticipated consequences for taking part in the study and interviews were highlighted for participant awareness and informed consent.

Fourth, there are also a number of ethical issues pertaining to data analysis that are worth noting: confidentiality, period of keeping data, ownership, and interpretation (Creswell, 2007, 2009). Participant confidentiality was achieved by assigning each individual with an alias of their choice at the beginning of the study. As suggested by Creswell (2009), the ideal time period to keep data is between five to 10 years. Due to the potential cumulative nature of the study related data will be destroyed after 10 years. Ownership of the data is confined to the researcher and my faculty advisor, and the data will not be shared with anyone who was not part of the study. Interpretation of findings was validated with the study participants, and through application of related strategies appropriate to a qualitative research strategy and inquiry (further discussed in chapter three). Of further note is that any information provided during the interview sessions and noted by participant as "off the record" was not included in the data and subsequent analyses.

Finally, ethical issues also need to be addressed in the write-up of the results. First, the write-up does not include or reflect any bias or related language—that favors or disfavors

individuals or group of individuals. Second, I did not engage in any fraudulent practices to meet any needs or expectations of myself or others, as a result the findings will not be misused nor the participants exploited. Lastly, I released the details of the research study appropriate to display requisite ethics and integrity, and can guarantee that this study is neither a duplication nor redundancy of any previous research studies or practice (Creswell, 2007, 2009).

Definitions

This section provides working definitions that were central to the conduct of this study. Included are the constructs of work, *meaning of work*, generations, and Generation Y.

Work

Work is "a specific task, duty, function, or assignment often being a part or phase of some larger activity" (work, n.d., para. 1).

Meaning of Work

Meaning of work is about "why people work and what they intend on accomplishing by working" (Brief & Nord, 1990, p. 12).

Generations

A generation is taken to be a group of individuals that share birth years, age, geographic location, and who have all experienced the same significant life events at certain stages of their life. Generational characteristics are therefore "world-view, values, and attitudes commonly shared by cohorts (often referred to as peer or generational personality)" (Kupperschimidt, 2000, p. 66). According to Howe and Strauss (1997), a generation is defined by the time span of approximately two decades.

Generation Y

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Represents the most recent generation to enter the workforce and are commonly referred to as the Millenials and GenMe (Sessa et al., 2007; Twenge & Campbell, 2008). A person is considered part of the Generation Y cohort if born any time after the previous generation, which differs depending on the specific years authors use to define Generation X (Chen & Choi, 2008). According to Howe and Strauss (1997), a generation is defined by the time span of approximately two decades. Thus, the most common birth years throughout the literature consist of Generation Y individuals being born between the years 1981 to approximately 2001 (Arsenault, 2004; Dries et al., 2008; Gursoy et al., 2008; Howe & Strauss, 1997, 2007; Lamm & Meeks, 2009; Meriac et al., 2010; Ng et al., 2010; Smith, 2008; and Yu & Miller, 2003). For the purpose of this study, the participants must have been part of the Generation Y cohort by being born between the years 1981 and 1994.

Delimitations and Ensuing Limitations

Delimitations elucidate the boundaries of a study that are within the researcher's control (Roberts, 2010). There are several such delimitations to this study. First, the time-span of the conduct of the entire study was bounded to between September 2012 and August 2013, with data collection taking place from September 2012 to April 2013. Second, the location of the study was confined to a site of convenience, e.g., Colorado. And third, the study sample consisted of participants born within the Generation Y cohort (i.e. born between 1981 and 1994), who had to meet the selected criteria for the study that included having an interest in the topic, having at least one year of full-time work experience, and being willing to partake in multiple in-depth interviews and member-checks.

Limitations are parts of a study that the researcher cannot control yet can influence the results of, and the ability to generalize findings (Roberts, 2010). However, generalization is not a

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goal of a hermeneutic phenomenological study grounded in the interpretivist paradigm of inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Instead, the purpose is to provide a local and relevant description and understanding of the lived experience under study (Laverty, 2003; Van Manen, 1990; Willis et al., 2007). Thus, I provided an interpretation of the lived experience of the *meaning of work* among individuals born within the range of birth years defining Generation Y. Member checking occured among the participating individuals to make sure my interpretations were accurate in their eyes (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986). I provided a structural description of the phenomenon of the *meaning of work* that was a synthesis of the data to communicate to the scholarly community (Giorgi, 1997; Van Manen, 1990). Finally, the study met four separate criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity that are necessary in the interpretivist paradigm of inquiry, respectively: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability; and ontological, educative, catalytic, and tactical authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986). These criteria, and how they were met, are discussed further in Chapter Three.

The highlighted delimitations informed a further notable corresponding limitation. While I provided thick descriptions and a well-developed essence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of the *meaning of work* for Generation Y, the delimitations of this study (e.g., time-span, location, and participants having to meet specific criteria) restrict the resulting transferability of the findings.

Assumptions

There are two assumptions that are specific to this study. The first is that the participants in the study answered all interview questions honestly about their individual experience of work and its meaning to them. And the second is that the participants were interested in the need for understanding and reflecting on their own *meaning of work*.

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Conclusion of Chapter One

Research suggests that individuals in the Generation Y cohort are different from previous generations (Shaw & Fairhurst, 2008), and that organizations must respond to these differences (Martin, 2005). Much of the research that exists on identifying work related characteristics among individuals of Generation Y is inconclusive and contradictory, thus underscoring the importance of this study in trying to understand how Generation Y individuals in the workforce describe and perceive their *meaning of work*. Chapter Two presents a review of the existing, informing bodies of research and theoretical frameworks for both Generation Y and the *meaning of work*—further highlighting the gaps in the literature and the need for this type of study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF INFORMING LITERATURE

The review of informing literature consists of three parts. The first part examines the literature on generations and Generation Y. The second part examines the literature on the *meaning of work* and related constructs. The first and second parts consist of four sections each, including: definitions, theoretical frameworks, pertinent research literature, and discussion of the findings for each construct. The final part of the review of literature presents an integrated summary of both Generation Y and the *meaning of work,* and a final conclusion.

Methodology

In conducting the review on the informing bodies of literature for this study, I followed the methodology of an integrative literature review. According to Torraco (2005), "The integrative literature review is a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated" (p. 356). Thus, I reviewed, critiqued, and synthesized the literature on generations and the *meaning of work*. Additionally, the review includes any literature that informs each construct (e.g., generations and work). The methodology addresses the following areas: strategy for selecting the literature; criteria for retaining or discarding the literature obtained by the searches; strategy for reviewing the literature; and identification/categorization of main themes and ideas (Torraco, 2005).

The research process utilized to select the literature included the following electronic databases: Business Source Premier, Academic Source Premier, PsycINFO, and ERIC. Searches included use of the following keywords: generations and organizations; generations and work; generational differences; generational differences and organizations; generational theory;

Generation Y; Millennials; Millennials and work; work values and generations; work values and Generation Y; work values and Millennials; Generation Y and organizations; Millennials and organizations; *meaning of work*; nature of work; and *meaning of work* and Human Resource Development. To reduce the amount of research, limiters were set for articles that were peer-reviewed and included references. A cited reference search was utilized, as well as examining reference lists for sources not appearing in the initial electronic searches, and books.

Literature was then retained if it addressed generations in the context of work. Similarly, literature on the *meaning of work* was retained if the research examined meaning/meaningfulness or the importance of the job/work within the work context. Literature was not included that studied generations in other setting than work (e.g., education); or literature that examined meaning in other factors of life that excluded the work domain as one of them. In reviewing the literature, I scanned articles by their abstract and keywords for the following: generations, Generation Y, Millennials, *meaning of work*, work centrality, and the importance of work/job. If the abstract or keywords included any of these topics, then I proceeded to read and summarize.

Lastly, identification and categorization of main themes and ideas was based on the argument proposed for how and why this study needs to take place. The informing literature on generations was categorized by a brief summary of literature that supported and disputed the idea of generational differences. More specifically, for informing literature on Generation Y, I identified literature that utilized college students as the sample representing the cohort, and then research that used individuals from this generation that have entered the workforce. Thus, the resulting categories for Generation Y literature were an anecdotal picture of Generation Y, and a picture of Generation Y in the workforce.

According to the literature, it is proposed that the *meaning of work* changes as the nature of work changes. The *meaning of work* has evolved over the years to focus more on the role of the environment and the individual, rather than just the individual. Therefore, I categorized the *meaning of work* by decades in a timeline that also briefly explores how the nature of work was simultaneously changing as well.

What are Generations?

Twenge and Campbell (2008) provided a modern explanation, that generations are defined by "the pervasive influence of broad forces such as parents, peers, media, and popular culture, create common value systems among people growing up at a particular time that distinguish them from people who grow up at different times" (p. 863). According to Kupperschmidt (2000) a generation is, "an identifiable group (cohorts) that share birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages (times) divided by five to seven years into first wave, core group, and last wave" (p. 66). Generational characteristics are "world-view, values, and attitudes commonly shared by or descriptive of cohorts (often referred to as peer or generational personality)" (Kupperschimidt, 2000, p. 66). It is important to note that a generation has not always been construed in the same terms. According to Troll (1970) a generation can be defined in five various ways: kinship, age, life-stage, interval of years necessary for social change to occur, and by movements of social changes that take place in society.

Current literature defines generations by names and a range of birth years that vary throughout the literature. There is a lack of agreement and consistency among authors. The oldest generation is the Veterans, which is also commonly referred to as Seniors, Traditionalists, and the Silent Generation. The Baby Boomers are the largest group and abides by only one

name (Gesell, 2010). Thirty-nine percent of the workforce is accounted for by Generation X (Gesell, 2010). The most recent generation to enter the workforce is Generation Y, also commonly referred to as the Millenials and GenMe (Sessa et al., 2007; Twenge & Campbell, 2008). A person is considered part of the Generation Y cohort if born any time after the previous generation, which differs depending on the specific years used to define Generation X (Chen & Choi, 2008). Table 1 below includes all of the birth years of the generational cohorts that were defined by the researchers in studies included in this review of literature.

Table 1

Birth years of generation cohorts

	Birth years			
Source	Silents	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y
Allerton (2001)				1979-1994
Arsenault (2004)	1922-1943	1944-1960	1961-1980	1981-2000
Cennamo and Gardner (2008)		1946-1961	1962-1979	1980-2000
Chen and Choi (2008)		1946-1964	1965-1977	1977- on
Davis, Pawlowski, and Houston (2006)		1946-1962	1963-1981	
Dries, Pepermans, and DeKerpel (2008)	1925-1945	1946-1964	1965-1980	1981-2001
Gursoy, Maier, and Chi (2008)		1943-1960	1961-1980	1981-2000
Hershatter and Epstein (2010)				1982-on
Hess and Jepsen (2009)		1946-1964	1965-1979	1980-1989
Jurkewicz (2000)		1946-1962	1963-1981	
Kowske, Rasch, and Wiley (2010)	1925-1942	1943-1960	1961-1981	1982-2005
Lamm and Meeks (2009)		1942-1960	1961-1980	1981-2000

Table 1

Continued

Source	Birth years			
	Silents	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y
Martin (2005)				1978-1988
Meriac, Woehr, and Banister (2010)		1946-1964	1965-1980	1981-1999
Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons (2010)				1980-on
Parker and Chusmir (1990)	Before 1946	1946-1964		
Smola and Sutton (2002)		1946-1964	1965-1977	
Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, and Mainiero (2009)		1946-1964	1965-1983	
Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, and Lance (2010) and Twenge (2010)	Before 1945	1946-1964	1965-1980	1980-2000
Yrle, Hartman, and Payne (2005)		1945-1964	1960s – 1980s	
Yu and Miller (2003)		1945-1964	1965-1980	1980-on

As shown in Table 1, the Silent generation encompasses the years before 1946. Baby Boomers range from the birth years of 1943 to 1964, and Generation X falls within the years of 1960 to 1983. Lastly, Generation Y falls within the birth years ranging from 1977-on. Kowske, Rasch, and Wiley (2010) included the G.I. generation in their study, encompassing the birth years 1901-1924. An exception to these names and dates is when the generational cohorts are narrowed even further into sub-categories. According to Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, and Brown (2007) the sub-categories are: Mature Generation (1925-1945), the Early Baby Boomers (1946-1954), the Late Baby Boomers (1955-1963), the Early Generation Xers (1964-1976), the Late

Generation Xers (1977-1982), and the Millenials (1983-on). According to D'Amato and Herzfeldt (2008) the breakdown is: Early Baby Boomers (1946-1951), Late Baby Boomers (1952-1959), Early Generation X (1960-1970), and Late Generation X (1971-1980). Deal (2007) categorized the generations as the Silents (1925-1945) Early Baby Boomers (1946-1954), Late Baby Boomers (1955-1963), Early Generation X (1964-1976), and Late Generation X (1977-1986).

Khilji (2004) and Wong, Gardiner, Lang, and Coulon (2008) based generations on age in their studies. Khilji (2004) separated the participants into two generations, age 35 and younger, and over 35. Wong et al. (2008) separated the Baby Boomers into over age 40, Generation X age 24-40, and Generation Y age 23 years and younger.

Li and Nimon (2008) defined generations by being born during certain time periods in China: Social Reform ranges from 1977-present day; Cultural Revolution Reform ranges from 1966-1976; Consolidation falls within 1950-1965; and Pre-Liberation before 1949. Ralston, Egri, Stewart, Terpstra, and Kaicheng (1999) defined generations by political orientation during the participant's youth in China including: Individualism, Collectivism, and Confucianism.

Informing Theoretical Frameworks of Generations

The original meaning of generations is biological-genealogical in nature and has been extended across many different facets, including within historical literature such as the Bible, as well as being incorporated into countries for social order (Jaeger, 1985). A strong interest in generations began in the nineteenth century to study and understand how generations account for the forward progression of historical movement and change (Jaeger, 1985). During the emergence of psychology and sociology as sciences, people became equipped with the tools to

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analyze and better understand the phenomenon of generations (Bengtson, Furlong, & Laufer, 1974).

During the 1950s, Karl Mannheim conceptualized a theory of generations in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (1952/2000). He discussed the construct using a sociological framework. Historically, generations had been approached with a purely biological stance from a positivist perspective. According to the positivist perspective, progress in society is driven by generations based on a biological stance, meaning the birth years and cycles of generations are important because time is quantifiable. Mannheim (1952/2000) described this approach to generations as problematic. The positivist perspective is lacking because the biology of generations must be placed within a social-historical context where time is viewed as subjective. By removing the context of generations and the social interactions that take place, one is left with biological terms that provide no explanation of the concept of generations.

Mannheim (1952/2000) suggested that generations need to be studied from an integration of both perspectives. From a biological perspective, generations are important to understand due to the inherent inevitably of being born, dying, having a life span, and aging. From a social-historical perspective, Mannheim (1952/2000) explained that generations have the following in common: they share the same social location, they must have consciousness of being within a group, and they must stem from the same region. Generations can be viewed as sharing the same age, group, and social class—limiting these individuals to the same type of experiences in their lives. The generations tend to interpret and process knowledge, information, and meaning in the same way, resulting in patterns of similar thinking. Further emphasizing the sociological framework, Mannheim (1952/2000) went further in discussing how generations can create or

modify culture by moving the process of social change forward in a society, and how this context is necessary for a generation to emerge with new ideas and notions.

A similar framework is proposed by Howe and Strauss (1997). Generations are defined by a range of 20-22 years (Howe & Strauss, 1997) and they are "shaped by events or circumstances according to which phase of life its members occupy at a time" (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 42). Howe and Strauss (2007) suggest that characteristics of people are not defined by their age groups, but by the generation that they belong to. The characteristics of a generation are influenced by "how they were raised, what public events they witnessed in adolescence, and social missions they took on as they came of age" (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 42). These similar life experiences result in the development of "similar collective personae and follow similar life trajectories" (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 42). Thus, patterns of generations can be used as measures of predictability.

According to Howe and Strauss (1997, 2007), there are currently six generations in society including: the GI Generation (born 1901-1924); the Silent Generation (born 1925-1942); the Boom Generation (born 1943-1960); Generation X (born 1961-1981); the Millennial generation (born 1982-approximately 2005); and the Homeland Generation (born 2005-2025). In addition, Howe and Strauss also emphasize the importance of the state of society when generations come to age. They state, "It matters very much to the makeup of a generation whether it comes of age during or after a period if national crises, or during or after a period of cultural renewal or awakening" (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 45). Thus, Howe and Strauss (1997, 2007) offer four kinds of archetypes to label the generations including: prophet, nomad, hero, and artist. A prophet generation is born during a time of renewal "after a great war or other crisis" (p. 45). A nomad generation is born "during a cultural renewal" (p. 47). A hero generation

is born "after a spiritual awakening" (p. 47). And, an artist generation is born "during a great war or other crisis" (p. 47). Historically, a generation archetypes repeats itself every fourth generation. The GI Generation is a hero generation and the Silent Generation is an artist generation. The Boom Generation is a prophet generation, and Generation X is a nomad generation. The Homestead Generation will be an artist generation according to the pattern.

The Millennial cohort is considered a hero generation. Being a hero generation, the Millennials are focused on "actions, community, and institutional life" (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 47). With all this said, Millennials encompass some of the following characteristics: civic mindedness; close relationships with their families; and an expectation of constant interaction due to technology. In respect to the workplace, Millennials enter the workforce with high student loan debt, low entry level pay, and a lack of offered benefits. In organizations, they collaborate well and prefer to work in teams. They are "more confident, trusting, and teachable in the workplace" than previous generations (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 50). In addition, Millennials prefer clear work-goals and constant feedback. They also emphasize the importance of job-security and balance between work and life.

Howe and Strauss (2007) warned that if this generation is treated unfairly by employers than they could possibly revive the unionization movement. However, if organizations adjust to the Millennials in the workforce, then they could see a rise in economic productivity. And, in respect to politics, Millennials will become a "political powerhouse" (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 51). This is a result of witnessing the unethical or unjust behavior of individuals in politics as children, and refusing to allow these types of individuals to remain in office when the country is desperately in need of change. The Millennials are "united by memories, language, habits, beliefs, and life lessons" (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 42).

Informing Research on Generations

An interest in Mannheim's (1952/2000) manuscript on generations became heightened during the 1960s when society was trying to understand the sources of countercultures that were being created during this period (Bengtson et al., 1974). Some major themes revolving around the generational phenomenon arose proceeding this era, such as generations affecting varying dimensions of social structure (Bengtson et al., 1974), including work-related contexts. Present date, Mannheim's (1952/2000) theory is being revisited due to four different generations working simultaneously in the workforce. There is an assumption that the four generational cohorts differ significantly in goals, expectations, work values, and work characteristics (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Shaw & Fairhurt, 2008) that affect recruiting, teamwork, dealing with change, managing techniques, and maintaining and increasing productivity (Gesell, 2010).

Differences and Similarities Among Generations

The concept of generational differences or a generation-gap phenomenon stems from these assumed differences among the generations. On the other hand, researchers also state that, "the litany of generalizations, of course, is so sweeping that it raises doubts about the generation-gap phenomenon" (Kunreuther, 2003, p. 452). Thus, research has been conducted that has disputed and supported the idea of a generation gap. Researchers disputing the generation gap conducted studies on work-related constructs and came to the overall conclusion that there were more similarities than differences, and any differences found were insignificant. Whereas, those supporting the generation gap explicated findings that displayed significant differences among generations on work-related constructs.

The work constructs that have been studied are listed below in Table 2 and include: values, psychological contracts, attitudes, motivation, commitment, ethics, environment and

organization fit, and leadership. Many of the findings from these studies contradict one another.

For example, in studying work motivation, Jurkewicz (2000) found learning to be an important

work-related motivational factor for Baby Boomers as compared to Generation X. Yet,

D'Amato and Herzfeldt (2008) found Generation X values learning more than Baby Boomers.

Deal (2007) concluded that learning was an important work value across all generations

including: Silent, Baby Boomers, and Generation X. With this said, the purpose of this study

was to focus on Generation Y; therefore it is beyond the scope of this study to provide a

comprehensive review of literature on all the studies comparing and contrasting generations in

the workforce. Thus, Table 2 provides an overall indication of research on generations that has

been studied, what work-related variables have been studied among the generations, whether or

not findings supported or disputed the generation gap, and that inconsistency exists within this

debate. This inconsistency among findings on whether or not there are more similarities or

differences among generations makes it difficult to make any reliable conclusions.

An Anecdotal Picture of Generation Y

Several studies examining Generation Y have been conducted using college students as

individuals representing the cohort within the workforce. Terjesen, Vinnicomb, and Freeman

(2007) explored the perception of organizational attributes and which attributes attracted

Generation Y. The five most preferred organizational attributes were: "invest heavily in the

training and development of employees, care about their employees as individuals, clear

opportunities for long-term career progression, variety in daily work, and dynamic, forward-

looking approach to their business" (p. 517). Broadbridge, Maxwell, and Ogden (2007) also

studied Generation Y perceptions of graduate careers in retail as well as expectations of

employment.

Table 2

Research studies comparing and contrasting generations on work-related constructs

Study	Study Design	Domain	Generation	Findings Among Generations
Deal (2007)	Survey	Work values	Silent, Baby Boomers, and Generation X	Similar
Cennamo & Gardner (2008)	Survey	Work values	Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y	Similar
Hess & Jepsen (2009)	Survey	Psychological contracts	Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y	Similar
De Meuse, Bergmann, and Lester (2008)	Survey	Psychological contracts	Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y	Similar
Kowske, Rasch, and Wiley (2010)	Survey	Work attitudes	GI, Silent, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y	Similar
Jurkewicz (2000)	Survey	Work motivation	Baby Boomers and Generation X	Similar
Yang & Guy (2006)	Survey	Work motivation	Baby Boomers and Generation X	Similar
Davis, Pawlowski, and Houston (2006)	Survey	Work commitments	Baby Boomers and Generation X	Similar
Yrle, Hartman, and Payne (2005)	Survey	Team work	Baby Boomers and Generation X	Similar

Table 2

Continued

Study	Study Design	Domain	Generation	Findings Among Generations
D'Amato and Herzfeldt(2008)	Survey	Learning orientation, organizational commitment, and leadership development	Baby Boomers and Generation X	Differences
Parker & Chusmir (1990)	Survey	Work values	Silents and Baby Boomers	Differences
Smola & Sutton (2002)	Survey	Work values	Baby Boomers and Gen X	Differences
Twenge and Campbell (2010)	Survey	Work values	Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y	Differences
Meriac, Woehr, and Banister (2010)	Survey	Work ethics	Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y	Differences
Gursoy, Maier, and Chi (2008)	Focus Groups	Work values	Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y	Differences
Chen & Choi (2008)	Survey	Work Values	Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y	Differences
Dries, Pepermans, and De Kerpel (2008)	Survey	Work attitudes	Veteran, Baby Boomer, and Generation Y	Differences

Table 2

Continued

Study	Study Design	Domain	Generation	Findings Among Generations
Ralston, Egri, Stewart, Terpstra, and Kaicheng (1999)	Survey	Work values	Socio-historical generation cohorts	Differences
Khilji (2004)	Interviews & Survey	Work values	Socio-historical generation cohorts	Differences
Li & Nimon (2004)	Interviews	Work values	Socio-historical generation cohorts	Differences
Yu & Miller (2003)	Survey	Work values, expectations, and attitudes	Baby Boomer and Generation X	Differences
Westerman & Yamamura (2006)	Survey	Environmental fit	Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y	Differences
Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, and Brown (2007)	Survey	Leadership	Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y	Differences
Arsenault (2004)	Survey	Leadership	Veterans, Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y	Differences
Wong, Gardiner, Lang, and Coulon (2008)	Survey	Work motivation	Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y	Differences
Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, and Mainiero (2009)	Survey	Work attitudes	Baby Boomers and Generation X	Differences

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The results concluded that individuals in the Generation Y cohort encompass entrepreneurial thinking, they crave opportunity and responsibility, they want open and positive managers who empower them in their positions, they are interested in an organization that invests in their development, and they are concerned over work-life balance. Eisner (2005) examined perception and satisfaction towards work through questionnaires administered over a five year period to undergraduates. Eisner (2005) concluded that generational differences among the workforce need to be treated as a diversity issue in organizations. As a result, managers need to tailor their strategies, such as training, team building, development, and motivational needs to these generational differences, for doing so, for example, will be one of the only ways to retain Generation Y employees, given their high preference for being free agents. Tailoring to Generation Y will be the only way of retaining these individuals in an organization, based on them being like free agents.

Two studies examined the perception of the psychological contract among Generation Y. De Hauw and De Vos (2010) surveyed Millennials graduating in 2006 and 2009 about their expectations towards their career and psychological contract, given the recession taking place in society. There were lower expectations for the opportunity to have work-life balance and for the place of employment to have a vibrant social atmosphere. They had high expectations towards their actual career development, training, and financial rewards. In a study conducted by De Meuse, Bergmann, and Lester (2001) college student's perception on the psychological contract was no different than previous generations.

Twenge and researchers conducted several separate studies on Generation Y (e.g., Twenge & Campbell, 2008; Twenge, 2010; Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010). The first study attempted to understand the underlying psychology of generational differences and

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their impact on the workforce—with a specific focus on the younger generation (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Data were gathered from a wide range of research reported in the related literature, and the resulting sample was made up of college students that had completed behavioral, attitude, or personality scales since the 1930s (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). The findings showed an increase in depression, anxiety, self-esteem, and narcissism among Generation Y. In contrast, Deal et al. (2010) found no evidence of narcissism within the Generation Y population that have entered the workforce, thereby contradicting the related findings by Twenge and Campbell (2008). Twenge and Campbell (2008) also found that younger generations tended to be job-hoppers. This finding was supported by Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons (2010) who surveyed college undergrads to establish career expectations and priorities of Generation Y, the latter who stated that they felt no need to stay with an organization in the long-term. However, these findings on job-hopping were inconsistent with those findings by Dries, Perpmans, and De Kerpel (2008), who examined meaning of career and career success among generations by using a vignette study design. The final sample totaled 750 participants that were either students or employees of a Belgian university, representing all four generations. The Generation Y cohort had the largest amount of participants, compared to the other three generations. They found organizational security to be important to Generation Y students, as compared to the other cohorts in the sample.

Several additional notable findings from Twenge and Campbell (2008) included that the younger generations have an external locus of control, are more informal and relaxed with dress codes, expect fulfillment and meaning in work, and appreciate genuineness in a leader. Twenge and Campbell (2010) offered a number of additional conclusions based on the 2008 study, namely, that women are more assertive, men and women in the cohort are more individualistic,

more confident about future performance, place themselves first, expect different workplaces than previous generations, expertise is not based on age, have high competence, expect work to be engaging, permit different forms of communication, and challenge the status quo. Furthermore, Generation Y has been found to want leaders who challenge the status quo (Arsenault, 2004). In addition to challenging the status quo, Arsenault (2004) determined that they admire determination and ambition in a leader.

A separate review of the extant literature was conducted to examine the empirical evidence of generational differences in work values, and from which she ventured a number of conclusions (Twenge, 2010). The first is that this cohort displayed a weaker work ethic. The second is that work tends to be less central to the lives of Generation Y. A third was that they value leisure. A fourth and fifth, they seek freedom in their work and a work/life balance. A sixth indicated that they are not more concerned with altruistic values than previous generations, a seventh that they are more satisfied with their jobs than previous generations, and lastly they are concerned with job security. In a similar study, Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, and Lance (2010) utilized pre-existing data from a large group of U.S. high school seniors dating back to 1976. They looked at data representing 1976, 1991, and 2006, and respectively, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. In accordance with previous findings, they found the value of leisure had increased, the notion of work as central to people's lives had decreased, and that Generation Y did not favor altruistic values any more so than previous generations. These findings on the decreasing value of work centrality and increasing value of leisure are in accordance with a classic study conducted by Smola and Sutton (2002) comparing and contrasting Generation X and Baby Boomers. In contrast, Meriac, Woehr, and Banister (2010)

did not find any differences among the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y on the value of leisure when examining work ethics.

A Picture of Generation Y in the Workforce

Studies have examined Generation Y individuals who have entered the workforce in comparison to the other generations. Busch, Venkitachalam, and Richards (2008) surveyed information technology employees for examining differences in soft knowledge situations and they combined Generation X and Generation Y into one sample. Findings included: the younger generations felt less of a need for commitment to an organization; they needed recognition for their work; they felt an ownership of their work; were less interested in the status quo; had more positive work attitudes than the older generation; upheld a workplace idealism; felt greater empathy for other workers in lower positions than themselves; did not feel the need to yield to older employees; and were disinclined to have to speak to higher management. Similarly, Westerman and Yamamura (2006) also combined Generation Y and Generation X into one group when examining environmental fit. They found that when compared to the Baby Boomers, the younger generations, preferred goal clarity and expectations within the work environment and these preferences are predictive of work outcomes. Generation X and Generation Y were combined due to lack of "conceptual distinctiveness" between the two generations (Westerman & Yamamura, 2006, p. 158).

Several studies were conducted on work values and generations. Gursoy, Maier, and Chi (2008) found that Millennials value flexibility at work and their relationships with other employees. Gursoy et al. (2008) also found that the Millennals challenge organizational norms, have no loyalty towards an organization, have high self-esteem, and prefer to have mentors in the workplace. Cennamo and Gardner (2008) made the overall conclusion that there were more

similarities than differences among the generations, but likewise to Gursoy et al. (2008) found that Generation Y, in comparison to others, values freedom and (e.g., flexible work schedules), and in addition, found that status is important. Chen and Choi (2008) found that Generation Y values the work environment more than Generation X and Baby Boomers. They also found that Generation Y, along with Generation X and Baby Boomers, ranked way of life and achievement as the most important values along with the relationship with one's supervisor and a balance between life and work.

Other work-related constructs that have been studied in relation to Generation Y individuals in the workforce include: overall work characteristics, work attitudes, psychological contracts, work motivation, and leadership. Martin (2005) conducted interviews with Generation Y individuals and their managers in the workforce and found that they are independent, collaborate well with others, possess entrepreneurial thinking, want more responsibility, do not prefer being micromanaged, and are seeking meaningful work. Two separate studies (Hess & Jepsen, 2009; Kowske et al., 2010) concluded that there were more similarities than differences because the effect sizes were small; however, both researchers discussed the non-significant differences that were explicated. Kowske et al. (2010) examined work attitudes with pre-existing data from full-time employees. Results showed Generation Y workers were more satisfied with the company and job, felt more secure in their position, satisfied with recognition, and more satisfied with career advancement opportunities than the older generations. Hess and Jepsen (2009) explored psychological contracts and found that if there was no balance among relational (e.g., trust) and transactional (e.g., money) contracts from the organization, then Generation Y was more likely to leave the organization as compared to Baby Boomers and Generation X. In addition, two studies found more differences than similarities among the

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generations for work motivation and preferred leadership attributes. Wong et al. (2008)

examined differences in personality and motivation among three generations and Generation Y

scored high on motivational factors such as: achievement, optimism, and organization affiliation.

Generation Y scored lower on the motivational factor of power than the other generations. No

differences were found on immersion, security, and personal growth. Lastly, Sessa et al. (2001)

explored generations in relationship to the construct of leadership. Millennials ranked dedicated

as the most important leadership attribute and credible as the least important attribute in a leader.

The cohort also ranked focus and optimism high, and farsighted low. No differences were found

for: trust, encouragement, experience, dependability, and being candid and honest.

Discussion of Generations

As noted in Chapter One, even the great philosophers (i.e., Socrates) discussed the youth

culture from a negative perspective (as cited in Mash & Wolfe, 2005). In 1977 Bowman

suggested that workers' values were changing as a result of generations. He proposed that

individuals were becoming even more unhappy and dissatisfied with their jobs than in the past

and hypothesized that it was the result of a generation gap with younger employees wanting

more fulfilling work. In respect to the younger employees, Bowman (1977) stated,

> They seek interesting work that will benefit others, will allow young people to express
> their individuality, and will enhance personal growth. Today's young and middle-aged
> executives seem to be less interested in earning a living and more concerned with work as
> an important component in making a life. The organization mar of the 1950's, who
> placed company values ahead of the individual satisfaction, is passing the scene.
> Executives today, especially the younger ones, may willingly pass up promotions, higher
> pay, and transfers for the sake of staying where they like or doing what they want. (p.
> 66)

As explicated by Bowman (1977), differences among generations are not a novice concept.

Current research continues to fuel the debate on whether there are more similarities or

differences among the generations in the workforce. The review of literature reveals four main

points of interest that informed this study. First, inconsistencies exist in the approach researchers use to define the generational cohorts, and in the findings. In respect to birth years for Generation Y, the earliest birth year used to define the cohort is 1977 (Chen & Choi, 2008), and the latest birth year is 1983 (Sessa et al., 2007). The most common birth year used among the studies is 1980-on. In relation to findings, inconsistencies exist not only in work characteristics defining Generation Y, but across all generations in the workforce. Many of the studies could be considered as displaying mixed results because even though differences or similarities were concluded significant or not significant by the researchers, both existed. This problem of inconsistency continues to create knowledge of generations that is contradictory and inconclusive.

Second, while inconsistencies are apparent, there are several points of consistency that do exist and informed the study on possible patterns appearing within the cohort. Generation Y values a work-life balance (Broadbridge et al., 2007; Chen & Choi, 2008; Twenge, 2010), career development (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010; Terjeson, Vinnicomb, & Freeman, 2007), and freedom and flexibility in their work (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008; Twenge, 2010). Generation Y is also more satisfied with their jobs when compared to other generations (Kowske et al., 2010).

Third, it is also important to note that many of the studies' samples are composed of Generation Y individuals who are college students and have not entered the workforce. These samples only provide anecdotal information on their expectations and perceptions of the workforce. Research needs to focus on Generation Y individuals who have entered the workforce.

And, lastly, most of the studies included in the review of literature were approached from a post-positivist framework. Within current society, this concept of generations has been interpreted to claim that generational commonalities and differences are based on a common location of individuals within a socio-historical context socially (at a certain place) and historically (at a certain time) (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgens, 2007; Pilcher, 1994). Mannheim (1952/2000) emphasized the importance of a socio-historical approach due to the nature of the generations construct itself. Thus, generations are a multifaceted construct and the post-positivist framework restricts and limits understanding this level of complexity inherent in a human being (Gibson & Hanes, 2003; Mishler, 1979). Stemming from a post-positivist framework, these studies utilize "context-stripping procedures" (Mishler, 1979, p. 3). Thus, a gap exists, in trying to understand Generation Y from a socio-historical perspective. This gap creates a need to conduct a study with Generation Y, stemming from the interpretive paradigm of inquiry.

In conclusion, this study attempted to start bridging the gap in our knowledge of generations by conducting research that aimed at explicating an understanding of how Generation Y views work and what it means to them. This study included a sample that was composed of individuals from this cohort that have entered the workforce. Furthermore, the changing nature of work-related constructs (e.g. work values) due to the potential influence of generations emphasizes the need to understand the *meaning of work* among Generation Y. This perspective and debate continues into present day, with researchers such as Twenge (2010) and Martin (2005) mentioning that Generation Y is seeking meaning in their work.   Yet, other findings present the idea that the importance of work is declining (Twenge & Campbell, 2008; Twenge, 2010; Twenge et al., 2010). Thus, in order to fully understand the role of Generation Y

in the workforce, the next section of the literature review explores the literature on the *meaning of work* and how it informed this study.

What is work?

It is important to point out the complexities that exist in trying to define the constructs of work and meaning (Brief & Nord, 1990). There is no universal definition of work, since work changes throughout history and societal situations (Brief & Nord, 1990). Work is contextual--defined by a specific location, time, culture, and varies by individual based on current events and needs (Brief & Nord, 1990). All of these factors make it difficult to define the construct for research. The MOW International Research Team (1987) defined work as "paid-employment (including self-employment)" (p. 2). This definition is derived from the economic perspective of work, which tends to be the most prevalent definition throughout the literature (Brief & Nord, 1990). Other researchers, such as Shepherdson (1984) and England (1991) extended the definition of work beyond that stemming from an economic perspective. Shepherdson (1984) utilized the dictionary definition stating that work is generally tasks that need to be completed that do not have to be related to an organization, job, or economic rewards. England (1991) went a step further and asked participants in a study what they considered to be work to examine whether or not perceptions of work had changed over time. For the purpose of this study, work was "a specific task, duty, function, or assignment often being a part or phase of some larger activity" (work, n.d., para. 1).

What is meaning?

Victor Frankl (2006), a psychologist and survivor of the Holocaust, claimed that the number one motivator in a person's life is to find meaning. Baumeister and Vohs (2002) stated that those who do not find meaning are losing out on a critical factor of being human. They

indicated that meaning involves: having a connection to something; providing stability in life; and providing overall satisfaction and fulfillment. Frankl (2006) suggested that there were three ways of discovering meaning. The most relevant way to discover meaning to this study is by creating work, or doing a deed for the purpose of achievement and accomplishment. Similar to work, meaning is contextual and is influenced by individual, social, political, and economic factors (Brief & Nord, 1990). Individually, meaning is created from perceptions, beliefs, values, and attitudes that influence our behavior and motivate us to find meaning in work (Brief & Nord, 1990; Shamir, 1991).

What is the *Meaning of Work*?

The definition of the *meaning of work* has evolved over the decades. In early research, the *meaning of work* focused more on the role of the individual. As time progressed, researchers started expanding the definition to include the role of the environment as well. In 1955, Morse and Weiss concluded that *meaning of work* was not only based on the type of person an individual was, but by the type of the work the individual did. Guion and Landy (1972) described the construct as ambiguous and suggested that the *meaning of work* is a personal issue that stems from the environment and an individual's personal experiences.

Many researchers, to this day, have taken the stance that the *meaning of work* is an interaction between the individual and the environment. Wrzesniewski, McCauley, and Rozin (1997) defined the *meaning of work* as not being purely defined by actual work tasks, but by how individuals view their jobs, the interactions that take place during work, and activities of the work. Isaksen (2000) concluded "meaning in working is considered an intrapsychological phenomenon that emerges in the individuals interactions with his or her work environment" (p.

87). And, Cartwright and Holmes (2006) stated "meaning represents the interrelationship between the internal world of the individual and the external context of the workplace" (p. 202).

The stance on the *meaning of work* being defined by an interaction between the individual and environment is critiqued by researchers who point out the lack of inclusion of other essential variables.   Broadfoot, Carlone, Medved, Aakhus, Gabor, and Taylor (2008) state the necessary role of language, class, gender, society, and culture in influencing the *meaning of work*. The notion and importance of culture is further substantiated and explicated by researchers such as Chalosfky and Krishna (2009), England and Whitley (1991), Harpaz, Honig, and Coetsier (2002), Kuchinke, Ardichvili, Borchert, and Rozanski (2008), Kuchinke, Adichvili, Borchert, Cornachione, Cseh, Kang, Oh, Rolanski, Tynaliev, and Zavjalova (2011), Kuchinke and Conachione (2010), and Mor-Barack (1995).

An additional point of view is defining the *meaning of work* as a component in meaningful work. Pratt and Ashforth (2003) used the term meaningfulness in, and at work. The researchers discriminate between meaning and meaningfulness. Meaning is the act of making sense of something, and attributing meaning does not make necessarily make something meaningful. "Thus, we view meaning (fullness) – making as a subset of sensemaking: it is sensemaking in the service of answering a broader existential question about the purpose of one's existence" (p. 311).

This issue of defining the *meaning of work* has presented researchers with obstacles in operationalization of the construct.   Operationalization has taken various forms, providing several dimensions of the construct including: values, needs, preferences, ethics, and work orientation (Roberson, 1990). The relationship(s) between all these dimensions has not been fully investigated, creating confusion and inconsistency in understanding the components of the

meaning of work (Roberson, 1990). There is also debate on whether the *meaning of work* is static or a changing construct (Kuchinke, 2009). Harpaz and Fu (2002) argued that the *meaning of work* remains stable over time. Kuchinke (2009) stated that work is situated socially, politically, economically, and technologically—all changing variables. If work is located in a changing context, then the *meaning of work* must also be located in a changing context as well (Kuchinke, 2009). For the purpose of this study, the *meaning of work* is defined as "why people work and what they intend on accomplishing by working" (Brief & Nord, 1990, p. 12).

Informing Theoretical Frameworks of the *Meaning of Work*

Even though there is no universal definition of the *meaning of work*, researchers have attempted to provide conceptual models of the construct. Many of the studies conducted have made use of these theoretical frameworks for collecting and analyzing data.

There was an attempt in 1987 to conceptualize the *meaning of work* by the MOW International Research Team. They provided a heuristic of the *meaning of work*, but emphasized that no clear theory of the construct existed. The MOW International Research Team (1987) provides a model of the *meaning of work* that consists of three operationalized constructs: conditional variables (antecedents), central variables to the *meaning of work*, and consequences. The antecedents to the *meaning of work* are based on family and individual situation such as age, birth cohort, sex, and education. The central variables include the three main domains of the construct: work centrality, which is the role and importance work plays in one's life; societal norms about working including expectations about an employer, and obligations one is expected to contribute; and the intrinsic and extrinsic values of work goals and outcomes. Consequences are the expectations and assumptions one holds about work taking place in the future and the

outcomes the individual expects from working. Overall, they suggested that the *meaning of work* is influenced by personal, career, and environmental situations

Two additional frameworks have supported the notion that meaning/meaningfulness of work is an interaction between the environment and the individual. Chalofsky and Krishna (2009) proposed the separate, but interacting notions of *meaning of work* and meaning at work. *Meaning of work* is focused on the individual and intrinsic motivation, and meaning at work is the relationship between the individual and the organization. *Meaning of work* stems from the notion that an individual is completing meaningful work. Chalofsky (2003) suggested that there are three components that combine to form an integrated wholeness. These three separate components are: sense of self, the work itself, and a sense of balance. The sense of self is bringing the mind, body, emotion, and spirit that are all incorporated and necessary to achieve meaning to work; recognizing and developing individual potential, believing that an individual can reach full potential, and knowing an individual's purpose and how to fit work into that purpose. The work itself is comprised of the following: performing; challenge, creativity, learning, and continuous growth; and autonomy and empowerment. Lastly, sense of balance is the balance of work and personal self, work and spiritual self, and the balance of giving to the self and others. These three themes are fully intertwined to produce an integrated self and an emerging construct for the *meaning of work* and balance (Chalofsky, 2003).

Similarly, Steger and Dik (2010) proposed a framework for meaningfulness at work and meaningfulness in work. Meaning is composed of two components, comprehension and purpose. Purpose is long-term and provides structure for what individuals do and participate in. Comprehension involves the notion of person-organization fit theories. Meaningfulness at work is when an individual understands his/her fit within the organization she/he works for.

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Meaningfulness in work is the self-understanding an individual has about his/her own identity. Thus, meaning is derived from work when individuals understand his/her role within the organization's overall purpose.

Last, Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) believed employees can be job crafters of their own work. Employees who craft their own work are capable of changing how they view work, their work identity, and ultimately, the *meaning of work*. Employees can view work as a job, career, or calling (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, & Rozin, 1997; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Employees who consider their work a job seek financial rewards and work out of necessity (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Employees who view their work as a career are focused on advancement and achievement (Bellah et al., 1985; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). And, viewing work as a calling entails employees being focused on fulfillment and usefulness of their work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Wrzesniewski, 2003).

Informing Research on the *Meaning of Work*

The MOW International Research Team (1987) and Ardichvili and Kuchinke (2009) proposed that the *meaning of work* for individuals changes as the nature of work changes. Thus, this section of the literature review will explore the *meaning of work* as it has progressed throughout the decades from the 1950s to present day, within the corresponding work context. Tausky (1995) presented a review of the *meaning of work* literature by separating the research that focuses on the construct on the individual level from the research that focuses on the *meaning of work* on a societal level. According to Tausky (1995), "*Individual level*: Respondents provide attitudinal or behavioral data in surveys or interviews that address the *meaning of work*, or simply include relevant items. The responses are usually aggregated for

analysis and publication" (p. 16). And, "Societal level: Examinations of history, literature, and economic circumstances merge with the analyst's outlook to form a perception of factors that explain what work means among a population" (Tausky, 1995, p. 16). This distinction was apparent in the *meaning of work* definitions, and corresponds to the decades: the 1950s through the 1980s focused on the individual level and in the 1990s researchers began to incorporate the *meaning of work* on a societal level.

Individual Level

      1950s-1960s.

Historically, work itself was not a high priority in comparison to other activities, such as the arts and sciences (Heller, 1991). However, this view of work started evolving over time. Starting in the 1800s and extending throughout the depression and the cold war, Protestants and immigrants influenced values that were prominent in society and these values infiltrated into the idea of work. These values were "achievement, individualism, and rationality" (Bowman, 1977, p. 64). Over time, employees' view of work seemed to change and no longer be in alignment with these Protestant values. Individuals seemed to be becoming more dissatisfied with their jobs.

To explore these new assumptions, researchers started conducting studies on the labor force. Morse and Weiss (1955) conducted a study and found that if individuals inherited a large sum of money, they would not stop working all together. The findings suggested that work served other non-economic means to individuals such as keeping healthy, keeping the mind and body occupied, having an interest, avoiding isolation and loneliness, and providing enjoyment (Morse & Weiss, 1955). The idea that work serves other non-economic means was further substantiated by another study conducted by Tausky (1969) who examined the *meaning of work*

blue-collar working mean. Tausky (1969) utilized measured work orientation and found that participants were attached to their work and would continue working even if they did not have to.

1970s.

During the 1970s the traditional Protestant values of society began to lose influence, and workers were becoming even more dissatisfied with their jobs than in the past decades. Bowman (1977) suggested that the change in work values was the consequence of specific societal conditions including: welfare, unemployment benefits, decline of protestant work values, and the youth culture. Some researchers believed that the decade was defined by individuals who were narcissistic, self-indulgent, and apathetic (Guion & Landing, 1972; Vecchio, 1980). Vecchio (1980) replicated the study by Morse and Weiss (1955) and found that work still served non-economic means to people. Yet, he still suggested that employees seemed to be moving toward a more leisurely-focused lifestyle, and there was an increasing negative view on how people regarded work.

Other researchers were able to provide potential reasons why people were becoming more dissatisfied with their job and had a negative view regarding work. Cooper, Morgan, Foley, and Kaplan (1979) conducted a study that validated that work values were changing. Employers were satisfied with the extrinsic motivations that the organization provided, but not with their actual job. They concluded that employees now sought intrinsic motivations at the workplace. Bowman (1977) also determined from a review of literature on studies examining middle management, and college students who would eventually become middle management, that job expectations were not being met. Both groups wanted intrinsic motivation at work (e.g., having a job that contributed to the greater good of society). Lastly, researchers were also able

to show that meaningful work is motivating (Guion & Landing, 1972) and that organizations can actually redesign employees' jobs to create work that is meaningful, thereby inducing motivation and increasing performance (Hackman & Oldman, 1976). Consequently, these changes resulted in the workforce moving from a vertical to a more horizontal structure, focusing less on rewarding employees with promotions and instead providing opportunities to further enhance skills (Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). Additionally, trade unions were also established during this time period that influenced the changing the role of the individual within the organization from passive to more active (Kardsson, 1990). Bowman (1977) concluded that, "the meaning of the American work ethic has not been destroyed, but has been rediscovered" (p. 68).

1980s.

Workers continued to hope for meaningful and purposeful work into the 1980s (Maccoby, 1980). Brook and Brook (1989) concluded that due to the changing nature of work it was important to figure out how people view work and what it means to them. Individual's view of work and importance of work continued to decline. England (1991) collected data via phone interviews during 1982 and 1989 and found significant differences among the two samples in defining work and work centrality. The sample from 1989 scored significantly lower on work centrality than the sample from 1982. The importance of work centrality had declined, but England (1991) stated that it was not due to the notion of leisure, but to family. He suggested, other factors relevant to the decline include the notion of cohorts and varying expectations occurring at different stages of an individual's life.

The decline in work centrality could have also been attributed to the fact that, as Maccoby (1980) stated, "Today, many Americans have given up hope that work will be fulfilling" (p. 518). He believed that work has the ability to increase (or potentially decrease) the

growth and development of an individual and society. But, since work was not providing any

meaning, employers were forced to seek their main satisfactions outside of work at home and in

leisure activities (Maccoby, 1980). Shepherdson (1984) conducted a review of the literature and

came to the conclusion that workers' focusing on leisure was a trend throughout history and

should not create alarm. He posited that it was alright for workers to have to find satisfaction in

other areas of life rather than work. Two research studies stemmed from this notion of work and

non-work activities, and how important the job was to overall life satisfaction. Schmitt and

Mellon (1980) supported Shepherson's conclusion (1984) by explicating findings from surveying

state civil service workers and found that suggested that when people were satisfied with overall

life, they were satisfied with their jobs; and that the relationship did not work the other way

around. Brook and Brook (1989) contradicted this conclusion with their study by examining

professional and skilled New Zealand employees. Participants made a distinction between work

and non-work activities. Both included extrinsic and intrinsic factors. Work activities were

described as: being structured, having a time constraint, being challenging, providing goal

directed achievement, and being physically active. Non-work activities were described as:

having the involvement of others, being relaxing, having no time constraint, containing variety,

and similar to work, being goal directed, and challenging. Brook and Brook (1989) made the

conclusion that factors of work and non-work satisfaction lead to overall satisfaction and

companies should try and balance work and non-work activities. This conclusion corresponds to

the provocative statement by Maccoby (1980), "to be creative at leisure while feeling

dehumanized at work requires superhuman detachment" (518).

Societal Level

 1990s.

During the 1990s researchers started commenting on how previous research was too focused on the individual. Brief and Nord (1991) stated that researchers make error when they believe they can find universal meaning, when there is no such thing. They further suggest that work and the *meaning of work* need to be based on a framework including the "individual, social, political, and economic factors" (p. 8). Heller (1991) elucidated that the MOW International Research study did not take into account the social-historical factors that influence the *meaning of work*. Heller (1991) recommended that studying work centrality (as so many researchers have done) is limiting in understanding a construct such as work ethic, and that it needed to be studied in a more holistic context. Wolfe (1997) discussed work in relation to moral worth and a state that no matter what an individual's background is, work can provide individual development. But, due to societal level factors, such as the state of society and the demands of organizations, this component of development was absent.

England and Whitley (1991) believed there was several reasons why studying the *meaning of work* was more important than ever due to changes taking place on a societal level: international competition; changes in technology; diversity and education levels; levels of productivity; change in work ethics; and a lack of meaning in the workplace. They conducted a cross-national study of the *meaning of work* in six countries (Belgium, West Germany, Israel, Japan, Netherlands, and the United States), measuring work centrality, work goals, and obligation and entitlement indices, and collected other data relevant to obtaining participants holistic work experiences. England and Whitley (1991) concluded that there were major pattern differences in the *meaning of work* across the six countries and this could be a result of varying

human resource policies and work socialization processes being implemented around the world. They made an observation that the most frequent reasons for working were economic, and that work is the required and expected thing to do. This finding is contradictory to previous studies, stating that people found non-economic benefits from working.

Since England and Whitley (1991) found dissimilarities in the *meaning of work* among different countries, it is fair to make the assumption that culture is beheld as a factor that likewise influences this construct. This postulation is substantiated by Mor-Barack (1995) who studied the *meaning of work* among older adults searching for employment. Findings suggested that the construct may vary based on culture and age.

2000s to present day.

The nature of work continued to change considerably over the decades. It has been suggested that the *meaning of work* changes with the nature of work, thus, it is important to make note of some of these major changes. Especially, since studies are starting to take into consideration the societal level factors that are influencing the *meaning of work*. The notion of long-term employment began to dissolve during this time period, resulting in the termination of the traditional career and the rise of boundaryless careers, protean careers, and kaleidoscope careers (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). All three career types are characterized by the career locus of control shifting from the boundaries of the organization to the control of the individual (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). Over the decades, not only has the notion of career changed, but the idea of where work is conducted has evolved outside of the walls of an organization to alternative workplaces in the form of free-lancing, telecommuting, and virtual organizations (Apgar, 1998; Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.; Peirperl & Baruch, 1997).

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Similarly, how work is conducted and the rate of which change has to take place has changed over time. Work is now downsizing, outsourcing, globalization, utilization of technological advancements, and individuals opting out of organizations to participate in entrepreneurship opportunities (Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). The tempo at which organizations are supposed to enact change has also considerably increased over the decades. In order to stay competitive, organizations must be prepared to be able to change on a continuous basis (Cummings & Worley, 2009). For example, transformational change only occurred periodically in the past. This type of change is a large magnitude change in which organizations "are concerned with fundamentally altering the prevailing assumptions about how the organization functions and relates to its environment" (Cummings & Worley, 2009, p. 506). However, today, not only are organizations expected to change continuously, but on a transformational level as well (Swanson & Holton, 2009).

This current workforce is placing demands on employees that affect their overall health and morale, emphasizing the need to understand individuals' *meaning of work* (Brook & Brook, 1989; Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). Not only is the nature of work changing rapidly, but understanding the *meaning of work* is becoming regarded as significant due to issues taking place in the workforce, such as an increase in: mistrust, cynicism, abusive supervision, repetitive work; and a lack of organizations with moral worth (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Harris, Kacmar, & Ziunuska, 2007; Isaksen, 2000; Michaelson, 2009). Thus, this section is further divided into three sections for this current time period: environmental factors influencing the *meaning of work*; cross-cultural comparisons influencing the *meaning of work*; and practice influencing the *meaning of work*.

Environmental factors influencing the meaning of work. Cartwright and Holmes (2006), concluded via a review of the literature that due to increased levels of mistrust and cynicism in the labor market that changes need to take place in order for employees to find meaning in work, such as: organizations need to allow for the social dimension of work to take place; there has to be an alignment between the organization and personal values; there needs to be trust in leadership and management; and a balance of work and life needs to exist. In relation to mistrust and cynicism, is the prevalent amount of abusive supervision and lack of moral worth taking place in the workforce. Harris, Kacmur, and Ziunuska (2007) distributed a survey to participants from the automotive industry and found that the *meaning of work* does have a moderating effect on the relationship. For those with high levels of *meaning of work*, there was a negative relationship between abuse and supervision, and those with low levels of *meaning of work*, the impact of supervision and performance does not exist. Abusive supervision affects the performance of employees who find higher levels of meaning in their jobs because these are the employees who invest more in it. Thus, the assumption can be made that leadership also influences the *meaning of work*.

In accordance with Wzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) conceptual model of individuals creating their own meaning, Isaksen (2000) sought to understand how individuals construct meaning in work that is repetitive. Categories that were mentioned the most included: attachment to the workplace; social engagement; work in a larger, more meaningful context; and the notion of meaningless. Meaningless was derived from bad working conditions, lack of fit between the individual and organization, and helplessness in which individuals believed they could not create any meaning.

And, in relation to organizations needing moral purposes, Michaelson (2009) stated there is an association between the *meaning of work* and moral worth. He interviewed three participants to identify meaningful work, work motivation, and the relationship between life and work. There was interaction among objective, subjective, and moral worth factors including: working conditions, compensation; quality of work, job design, attitude and stress, job satisfaction, etc.; and duty-based obligation. Michaelson (2009) concluded that "*meaning of work* is meaningful and doing meaningful work provides a meaningful life" (p. 42).

For those entering the new workforce, the *meaning of work* is influenced by socialization in the organization (Harpaz, Honig, & Coetsier, 2002) job demands, and resources (Clausen & Borg, 2011), and the ability to be able to construct you own meaning out of work (Isaksen, 2000). Two of these studies were longitudinal studies, measuring the sample over time. Harpaz, et al. (2002) conducted a cross-cultural longitudinal analysis of the *meaning of work* and the socialization process of young adults. At the beginning of employment there were no indications of any variables that related to the *meaning of work*. Then, after the second year of employment, findings explicated the existence of extrinsic and intrinsic orientated variables, and obligation and entitlement norms. And lastly, after employees had been on the job longer than two years, extrinsic orientation decreased while intrinsic orientation increased. The researchers concluded that work centrality may be slow to surface and varies by culture. This poses the idea that meaning can be based on individual's career stage, as well as culture, age, and location. The second longitudinal study examined the relationship among the *meaning of work* and psychosocial factors such as job demands and resources, conducted by Clausen and Borg (2011). They concluded though that the relationship is even stronger among the *meaning of work* and the individual perceptions of the job demands and resources (Clausen & Borg, 2011).

Additionally, Dale, Albin, Kapolka-Ullom, Lange, McCan, Quaderer, and Shaffer (2004) examined the *meaning of work* by interviewing and observing two Latino immigrants working in the U.S., in which the *meaning of work* differed between the participants, possibly based on being originally from two separate locations further supporting the notion of cultural differences.

Cross-cultural comparisons influencing the meaning of work. Substantiating the concept of cultural influence on the *meaning of work*, Martin (2009) stated that meaning making needs to be situated and interpreted in a cultural context. Kuchinke et al. (2008) surveyed employees with at least five years of work experience in Germany, Poland, and Russia. Differences were found among all three countries on work centrality, work outcomes, how individuals identify with their work roles, and levels of overall satisfaction with their job and work. Consistent in all three countries was the prevalence of family involvement being ranked as the highest of importance, followed by work. The organization where the participants worked was rated of low importance. Family involvement was also ranked more important than work in a similar study that examined the *meaning of work* among midlevel managers in Brazil and the United States (U.S.), by Kuchinke and Conachione (2010). Both countries acknowledged the importance of intrinsic factors of working. Organizational commitment was once again rated of lower importance than job and career satisfaction.

Kuchinke et al. (2011) conducted a follow up study to MOW studies conducted over the decades utilizing the theoretical framework from the MOW International Research study with the purpose of focuses on intrinsic and extrinsic work goals and answering the questions on whether or not work centrality was high, or if based on the current economy, individuals were findings meaning in domains that were non-work related. The survey-based study was conducted on five clusters of countries (Germany; Brazil; South Korea; USA; Russia, Poland, and Hungary). The

researchers concluded that work centrality was still high and the only factor of more importance was family. The researchers also used the lottery question (Morse & Weiss, 1955) and found that in all countries, the majority of participants would continue to work. They concluded that the *meaning of work* remains stable, even though changes in society are taking place; this is contradictory to the notion that the *meaning of work* changes with the nature of work.

  Practice influencing the meaning of work. Boyatzis, McKee, and Goleman (2002) provided advice on how employees can find their own meaning in work at the individual level. Recommendations included the following: call a time out; create a time and space to self-reflect; work with a coach to provide an outside perspective; and make small adjustments to find new meaning in new areas. The researchers emphasized several points. The first is the importance of understanding that many people work to live, rather than live to work. The second point is that employees work so many hours that there is little time to take part in fulfilling activities outside of work. Third, individuals that stick with miserable jobs have an increase in developing stress-related illnesses. Lastly, individuals need to reconnect with their own dreams, to create more energy and a sense of commitment.

  At the organizational level, Flesher (2009) suggested recommendations based on examining the *meaning of work* from a practical and applied perspective that reinforces an alignment of management understanding an individual's *meaning of work* and the needs of the organization. Similar recommendations were made by Kuchinke and Cornachione (2010) and Bassuk and Goldsmith (2009). Kuchinke and Cornachione (2010) recommended that in practice, organizations needs to balance extrinsic and intrinsic employee rewards. Bassuk and Goldsmith (2009) recommended that organizations need to utilize abilities and personal development for

young employees and to provide opportunity for achievement, accomplishment, and rewards for middle level employees

Discussion of the *Meaning of Work* Literature

The review of literature on the *meaning of work* informed my study in four specific ways. First, there appears to be a relationship among the *meaning of work* and the changing nature of work. There seems to be a continuous pattern throughout the decades of increasing dissatisfaction with one's job because the job is not meeting the intrinsic needs of the individual. Therefore, based on the current state of society, one could deem that it is more important than ever to understand the *meaning of work* among the newest generation to enter the current workforce.

Second, previous research taking place before the 1990s placed more emphasis on the individual role in understanding the *meaning of work*. Conceptual models and more current research explicate findings that deem the importance of societal level factors for understanding the construct from a holistic point of view. The *meaning of work* is influenced by an interaction between the individual and the environment, and culture (Broadfoot, Carlone, Medved, Aakhus, Gabor, & Taylor, 2008; Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009; England & Whitley, 1991; Harpaz et al., 2002; Isaksen, 2000; Kuchinke & Conachione, 2010; Kuchinke et al., 2008, 2011; Mor-Barak, 1995; Steger & Dik, 2010; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997) . Some important environmental factors that were found include socialization, leadership, job resources and demands, and the place of moral worth within the organization (Clausen & Borg, 2011; Harris, Kacmur, & Ziunuska, 2007; Harpaz et al., 2002; Michaelson, 2009). Furthermore, previous research has made the distinction between work and non-work related activities; and meaning and meaningless activities (Brook & Brook, 1989; Isaksen, 2000). Distinguishing

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among these variables is useful in determining how participants view work, verses non-work, and activities in the workforce that could be considered to influence meaningless as well as meaning.

Third, similar to research on generations, the majority of the studies included within this review of literature stem from a post-positivist perspective. This point is explicated in Table 3. Fineman (2003) suggested that a general survey is not the optimal approach to study the *meaning of work* because it cannot capture the breadth of the subject matter. He stated that "it does not take much introspection to realize that work meanings can be subtle, complex, and often incoherent. An interpretive theory and method that captures this, in its expressive and developmental form, must surely merit more than a passing glance" (Fineman, 2003, p. 172). This point explicates the need for the *meaning of work* to be studied from more diverse perspectives, such as research stemming from the interpretive paradigm.

Lastly, none of the studies focused specifically on generations. I was interested in determining what generation(s) the participants from the studies included in the review of literature would be considered, based on their year of birth. Presented in Table 3 are the studies that included the necessary demographics to make this determination. There was only one study that took place that included any Generation Y individuals, conducted by Isaksen (2000). All the other studies were based on participants from the Silent, Baby Boomer, and Generation X generations. Thus, there is a need for more studies on the *meaning of work* to focus on generations, and more specifically, to focus on Generation Y.

Summary of Generation Y and the *Meaning of Work*

It is important to study Generation Y in the context of work because it is a central component of identity to individuals—defining the self and personality (Maccoby, 1980).

Table 3

Generations of participants in the meaning of work studies

Meaning of work studies	Method	Generation of participants
Morse and Weiss (1955)	Exploratory study	Silent
Tausky (1969)	Survey	Silent and Baby Boomer
Guion and Landing (1972)	Survey	Baby Boomer
Hackman and Oldman (1979)	Survey	Silent and Baby Boomer
Bowman (1977)	Review of literature on students & managers	Baby Boomers
Cooper, Morgan, Foley, and Kaplan (1979)	Survey methodology	Silent and Baby Boomer
Vecchio (1980)	Survey	Silent and Baby Boomer
Brook and Brook (1989)	Survey	Silent, Baby Boomer, and Generation X
England (1991)	Survey	Silent, Baby Boomer, and Generation X
Mor-Barack (1995)	Survey	Silent
Isaksen (2000)	Hermeneutic phenomenology	Silent, Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y
Harris, Kacmar, and Ziunuska (2007)	Survey	Generation X
Kuchinke, Ardichvili, Borchert, and Rozanski (2008)	Survey	Baby Boomer and Generation X
Kuchinke and Cochiane (2010)	Survey	Baby Boomer and Generation X
Kuchinke, Ardichvili, Borchert, Cochiane, Kang, Oh, Polanski, Cseh, Tynaliev, and Zavjalova (2011)	Survey	Baby Boomer and Generation X

Work plays such an extensive role in each of our lives that it has the capability and opportunity to increase or decrease our individual and societal potential for growth and development (Bassuk & Goldsmith, 2009; Maccoby, 1980). Based on the notion that work has such a fundamental relevance in our lives, it is imperative to understand how people view work and what it means to them (Brook & Brook, 1989). In addition, work meanings influence important factors to an organization such as individual work motivation and performance (Roberson, 1990). Even though Generation Y has been extensively studied and a large amount of related research exists, findings tend to be incongruent—making it difficult to understand how Generation Y views work and what it means to them. As stated by Deal et al. (2010): "The relative sparse empirical research published on Millennials is confusing at best and contradictory at worst" (p. 191). The lack of consistency makes it necessary to examine the *meaning of work* for Generation Y.

Conclusion of Chapter Two

In conclusion, the *meaning of work* has been studied amongst employees over the past decades that have differed across genders, ethnicity, industries, and employment levels, highlighting how important it is for organizations and society to understand the role and influence the construct plays for individuals and on an organizational level. To my knowledge, an in-depth examination of the *meaning of work* has not been conducted with employees from Generation Y—from the perspective of a Generation Y researcher. Research suggests that the *meaning of work* is not a static construct; therefore since the nature of work is changing so rapidly (Ardichvili & Kuchinke, 2009) along with the entry of Generation Y into the workforce, the *meaning of work* for this cohort should be examined. This study was conducted using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, grounded in the interpretive paradigm for the purpose of identifying meaning and patterns among the cohort, which is further detailed in Chapter

Three. The findings from this study provide idiographic data that future studies can build upon, and represent a pivotal beginning to understanding Generation Y individuals in the workforce and addressing the inconsistent and contradictory research that is present in the existing literature.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the *meaning of work* for Generation Y. This study therefore attempted to explicate any work meanings and related patterns typified by the Generation Y cohort, and examined Generation Y at a deeper, more intrinsic level than prior studies, utilizing a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology to do so. The overall research question posed was the following: Based on their lived experience in the workplace, how do the five Generation Y employees interviewed in this study perceive and describe the notion of the *meaning of work*, and why so? Additional, tentative sub-protocol questions included the following: What does work mean to them? For what reasons do they say they work? And, how do they describe experiences of meaningful work? The second research question was: How do the findings from this study inform, among others, HRD research, theory, and practice?

For the purpose of describing the methodology of this study, Chapter Three is divided into 12 sections. The 12 sections include: methodological framework; phenomenology; structure of the study; participant selection; description of participants; saturation of participants; data collection; data analysis; brief introduction for the hermeneutic spectrum; establishing trustworthiness; limitations; and conclusion.

Methodological Framework

In order to understand and analyze the constructed meaning of the phenomenon under study this study was grounded in the interpretive paradigm. According to Merriam (1991):

> interpretive research assumes that there are multiple realities. In this paradigm, reality is not an object that can be discovered and measured but rather a construction of the human mind. The world is a highly subjective phenomenon that is interpreted rather than measured. In this view, beliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception. (p. 48)

The meaning of work is a socially constructed phenomenon. As noted by Kuchinke (2009), "work meaning, thus, is constructed and expressed at the individual level but is also reflective of specific moments in time that provide points of reference and orientations with respect to how work activities are experienced and what meanings are assigned [to them]" (p. 170). Individuals are therefore actively involved in a process of meaning making. In further support of the paradigmatic location of the study, Pilcher (1994) explained how the construct of generations is inherently lived and qualitative in nature—underscoring that in order to understand a generation one must understand their concomitant lived experiences. Research models based on the traditional model of science have therefore been critiqued for assuming a too restrictive focus for this topic (Mishler, 2002).

The ensuing study design was therefore based on the phenomenological methodology that helped best address the research questions and study purpose. This methodological approach was thought to be the most appropriate for understanding participant description of their lived experience of the *meaning of work* (Creswell, 2007). As clarified by Willis et al. (2007), phenomenology is a supportive theory (and methodology) of the interpretive paradigm and used to guide and inform the studying individuals' perceptions to explicate meaning that is implicit in human nature. Thus, it provided an invaluable framework to understand and analyze the constructed *meaning of work* among the participants (Guba, 1990). More specifically, hermeneutic phenomenology is the type of phenomenological methodology that was utilized for this study—as it allowed for the researcher to be intertwined with the phenomenon, beliefs of multiple truths, and a holistic analysis (Mishler, 2002). Being so intertwined further supports the interpretive stance that the researcher cannot separate him/herself from the data (Creswell, 2007).

Hermeneutic phenomenological methodology aligns closely—ontologically epistemologically, and methodologically—with the interpretive paradigm (Laverty, 2003). The ontology (what makes for reality) of the interpretive paradigm is that realities are relative and co-constructed, so there are multiple realities in peoples' minds (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The epistemology (what makes for knowledge of reality) is subjective, so interacting with the participants is taken to be the only way to comprehend their individual realities and experiences and meaning making thereof (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The methodology (how knowledge is acquired and accumulated) itself is both hermeneutic and dialect, meaning "individual constructions are elicited and refined hermeneutically, and compared and contrasted dialectically, with the aim of generating one (or a few) constructions on which there is substantial consensus" (Guba, 1990, p. 27). Additionally, inquiry is not value free, but is shaped by the interaction of the researcher and the co-researchers (Guba, 1990). Pre-understandings are valuable guides to inquiry (Lopez & Willis, 2004), and the voice of the researcher is essentially as a passionate participant (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Table 4 below offers a brief explication of this alignment between the interpretive paradigm and hermeneutic phenomenological methodology.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the "study of people's perception of the world (as opposed to trying to learn what "really is" in the world)"; phenomenology is the study of the lived human experience (Laverty, 2003; Van Manen, 1990; Willis et al., 2007, p. 105). Van Manen (1990) stated,

> Phenomenology appeals to our immediate common experience in order to conduct a structural analysis of what is most common, most familiar, most self-evident to us. The aim is to construct an animating, evocative description (text) of human actions, behaviors, intentions, and experiences as we meet them in the life world. (p. 19).

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Table 4

Alignment between the interpretive paradigm and hermeneutic phenomenological methodology

Selected Metaphysical Components of Paradigms	Interpretive Paradigm	Hermeneutic Phenomenological Methodology
Ontology (what makes for reality)	Realities are relative and co-constructed, so there are multiple realities in people's minds (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 2005).	Allows for the beliefs of multiple truths (Laverty, 2003; Mishler, 2002). The Generation Y cohort's realities of work are multiple mental constructions. The meaning of work is a socially constructed phenomenon, and individuals are actively involved in the meaning-making process.
Epistemology (what makes for knowledge of reality)	Subjectivist and co-created findings (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 2005).	Co-created findings between the researcher and the participants. The researcher is intertwined with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Laverty, 2003).
Methodology (how knowledge is acquired and accumulated)	Hermeneutic and dialectic; consensus on a few constructions (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 2005).	Hermeneutic and dialectic; hermeneutic circle of going back and forth to develop understanding and meaning; meanings agreed upon via dialectics (Laverty, 2003; Van Manen, 1990; Willis et al., 2007).

According to Stewart and Mickunas (as cited in Creswell, 2007), there are four philosophical perspectives in phenomenology including: "a return to the traditional tasks of philosophy; a philosophy without presuppositions; the intentionality of consciousness; and, the refusal of the subject-object dichotomy" (pp. 58-59).

Historically, phenomenology stems from the work of Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher (Laverty, 2003; Willis et al., 2007). Husserl was influenced by Brentano, who used the term phenomenology in the late 1800s and believed philosophy should be an "exact science," which is in alignment with the notion of the natural sciences of the time (Moran, 2000, p. 23). Brentano was one of the founding fathers, along with William Wundt, of scientific experimental

psychology (Cohen, 2010). Brentano was influenced by Comte and positivism, and believed that the only way to understand human nature was by using the methods of the natural sciences (Cohen 2010; Moran, 2000).   He believed in empiricism, meaning that the only direct access to reality (we do not know the world as it exists) was through humans' senses and that laws could be derived from studying inner perception with methods from the natural sciences (Cohen, 2010; Moran, 2000). Brentano sustained two prominent ideas that influenced Husserl: consciousness and intentionality (Moran, 2000). Brentano influenced Husserl to adhere to the notion of Descartes's Cartesian duality, meaning the mind and the body are separate entities (Cohen, 2010; Moran, 2000), and thus consciousness was to be divided into the physical and mental worlds. The second influential point was intentionality where every act of the mind is thought to be related to some object that is either real or not—a notion stemming from Aristotelian beliefs (Moran, 2000).

Husserl separated himself from the natural sciences and positivism, declaring that the objective and subjective world cannot be separated, and proclaiming that the subjective world exists within the objective world (Moran, 2000). He believed that with the utilization of phenomenology he had overcome this inherent issue of dualism. Husserl was also influenced by Kant's proposal that humans' perceptions and thoughts shape reality--rather than reality existing out there and separate from these thoughts (Cohen, 2010; Moran, 2000). Husserl thus believed phenomenology to be a new rigorous approach to philosophy, focusing on description of the lived human experience, and not cause and effect (Moran, 2000).   He emphasized the "study of phenomena as they appeared through consciousness" (Moran, 2000, p. 23), and that consciousness is intertwined with the world, the only access that humans have to the world (Moran, 2000; Van Manen, 1990). According to Moran (2000), "Husserl wants phenomenology

to address the given, the phenomena, the things themselves, in the sense of whatever immediately appears to consciousness in the manner that it so appears" (p. 108). Husserl did not restrict phenomenology solely to the study of the consciousness and objects, but extended the methodology into the transcendental realm permitting the capability of reaching pure consciousness; thereby also influencing the methods he created to measure this concept (Moran, 2000).

Phenomenology starts with the belief that our intuition is where all knowledge begins and understanding takes place (Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994). The intuitive experience is what is reflected on during the study of the pure consciousness (Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994), which is an understanding of our experiences before being processed in our consciousness. Individuals describe phenomena via their intuition, which is defined as "our ordinary perceptual acts" (Moran, 2000, p. 128). In comparison to our emotions, which can perpetually change, our perception never vanishes, diminishes, or changes—resulting in the revelation of truths within our consciousness. However, a person's consciousness can be distorted by previous experiences and influenced by our natural attitude, which encompasses our biases, judgments, and assumptions. In order to compensate for this inherent limitation and measure our pure consciousness, Husserl created the notion of intentionality and the method of reduction (Moran, 2000).

Intentionality measures our consciousness, and is based on Husserl's conviction that separation cannot exist between the objective and subjective world (Moran, 2000). It is the internal experience of consciousness (e.g., the perception of an object) (Moustakas, 1994) and is separated into the noetic and noematic structures. These structures of our consciousness are then integrated together for the purpose of understanding the essences of experience that provide

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meaning (Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994). Noetic is the structure that does the "grasping" of an object—it is the act of thinking; and the noematic structure is putting meaning to the object that is "grasped" by the noetic structure (Moran, 2000, p. 159). This noetic and noematic process is accomplished through the notion of transcendental reflection that focuses on that which is grasped and not our natural attitudes.

Reduction allows access to the pure experience (Moustakas, 1994). Reduction is "that methodology which allows us to move from natural reflection to phenomenological reflection" (Moran, 2000, p. 96). Therefore, we have suspension of our natural attitudes through the act of reduction. There are two processes that compose the method of reduction: imaginative variation and bracketing. Imaginative variation is when individuals stay in the realm of imagination/fantasy, so as not to allow the natural attitude to creep back in. Bracketing is part of the reduction where we are isolating ourselves from the objective world through suspending our natural attitude (Moran, 2000). Bracketing, also referred to as "epoche" by Moustakas (1994), involves setting aside of biases so that an individual is free of suppositions and has a neutral attitude about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Laverty, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). Reduction is when we no longer seek the external world criteria to understand our experiences, but we seek the essential structures/essences of our experiences—our acts of consciousness. This change is a return to the transcendental realm of existence where the essences of an experience are allowed to manifest——and the notion of pure consciousness is obtained (Moran, 2000).

These methods, originating from Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, can be argued to be influenced by the scientific paradigm of positivism (Laverty, 2003). Heidegger (as cited in Laverty, 2003) argues that the notion of bracketing is impossible. Heidegger was a student of Husserl and eventually split ways with Husserl's phenomenological philosophy, to pursue

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hermeneutic phenomenology (Laverty, 2003). Heidegger believed that Husserl was too influenced by Cartesian Duality, and thus rejected the use of the terms consciousness and intentionality (Moran, 2000). In fact, Heidegger differed with Husserl on three main points:

- Heidegger believed phenomenology must incorporate the notion of relativism (Moran, 2000) because there are no universal truths and because truths are relative to culture (Cohen, 2010). In support of relativism, Packer (1985) states, "to attempt analytically to do away with this background and treat human acts as though they are object-like entities is a methodological error, because it would remove the conditions for genuine comprehension of the phenomena being studied" (p. 108).

- Heidegger believed that description involves interpretation, and therefore rejected the notion of Husserl's pure description (Moran, 2000). Further substantiating this point, Van Manen (1990) states, "it is important to realize as well that consciousness itself cannot be described directly (such description would reduce human science to study of consciousness or ideas, the fallacy of idealism)" (p. 9).

- Husserl believed phenomenology to be "a priori transcendental science of pure consciousness" (Moran, 2000, p. 2). Heidegger rejected the notion of transcendental idealism because he discarded the idea that individuals are capable of successfully completing the method of a complete reduction. He believed that we can only consciously think back to our being in this world, and to try to go past that into a transcendental realm is not possible.

Moustakas (1994) makes the distinction between the two methodologies by noting that hermeneutic phenomenology is based on a historical perspective and a reflective interpretation of

phenomena, whereas Husserl's transcendental phenomenology utilizes the methods mentioned above (intentionality and reduction) and focuses more on description of the experience (Creswell, 2007). In fact, "strict followers of Husserl's transcendental method would insist that phenomenological research is pure description and that interpretation (hermeneutics) falls outside the bounds of phenomenological research" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 27). The two types of phenomenology focus on the same idea of studying the lived experience; however the approaches are distinct in their "ontological, epistemological, and methodological" views (Laverty, 2003, p. 26). Table 5 following the proceeding section attempts to provide a comparison of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and that of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The hermeneutic phenomenological approach falls into the same realm ontologically, epistemologically, and methodologically as the interpretive paradigm (Laverty, 2003). Heidegger (as cited in Laverty, 2003) believed there could be no division between the individual and the experienced phenomenon; therefore there could be no possibility of bracketing any pre-understandings or biases of the experience, which accordingly the interpretive paradigm views that the only way to understand reality, which is within an individual's mind, is to subjectively interact with him/her to understand his/her experience (Guba, 1990) of that reality. According to Laverty (2003), "hermeneutic phenomenology is interpretive and concentrated on historical meanings of experience and their developmental and cumulative effects on individual and social levels" (p. 27). This approach is not only descriptive, but it is interpretive of the meaning of the phenomena (Creswell, 2007).

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Hermeneutics involves an emphasis on language and the historical context (Willis et al., 2007). The method entails going back and forth to develop understanding or meaning, which is referred to as the hermeneutic circle (Willis et al., 2007). Within the hermeneutic circle, there are two interpretations, the methodological and the ontological (Schwandt, 2007). The methodological (how knowledge is acquired and accumulated) is based on the process of whole-part-whole interpretations--meaning the whole text and the individual parts of the texts are always interdependent of one another. The ontological (what makes for reality) is that the circle of interpretation takes place in coming to know by interacting and sharing—not by coming to an agreement on what is the truth (Dreyfus, 1980). Interpreting and understanding is relative among the tradition (background), interpreter, and the object (Dreyfus, 1980; Schwandt, 2007). As further explained by Parker (1985), "The structure of a hermeneutic characterization is a semantic one, not a logical or causal one: Its relationships are meaningful ones, sensible and necessary, but only in terms of the particular historical and cultural phenomenon under investigation" (1089). According to Heidegger, the purpose of hermeneutics is not to find out what is correct and incorrect, as that would be the nature of positivism, but to interpret as best we can (Dreyfus, 1980; Packer, 1985). Both ontological and methodological interpretations are reflected in the six necessary research activities for conducting hermeneutic phenomenology and are further explained later in this chapter.

Within this methodological approach the researcher is completely immersed in the notion of self-reflection and including his/her biases and assumptions in the entire interpretive process (Laverty, 2003). Values of the researcher are embedded in the hermeneutic phenomenology approach, which is in alignment with the interpretive paradigm (Laverty, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Values are entrenched in the researcher's choice of study topic,

approach to the study design, data collection methods, and data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

With this acknowledgement, meanings can be derived that are interpreted and agreed upon by all

individual perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, hermeneutics and dialects are

also methods in the interpretative paradigm to the extent that, "individual constructions are

elicited and refined hermeneutically, and compared and contrasted dialectically, with the aim of

generating one (or a few) constructions on which there is substantial consensus" (Guba, 1990, p.

27).

Table 5

A comparison of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and that of hermeneutic phenomenology

Husserl's Transcendental Phenomenology	Hermeneutic Phenomenology
The study of phenomena as they appeared through consciousness (Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994).	Knowing is based on relationships and occurs in historical context (we can't sit aside prejudices, objectives) (Laverty, 2003; Moran, 2000).
Description of experience (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990).	Historical perspective and reflective interpretation (Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990)
Influenced by positivism (notion of objectivity and neutrality embedded in philosophy) (Laverty, 2003; Moran, 2000).	Suspending belief of intersubjectivity impossible (Laverty, 2003).
Methods: Intentionality (become consciously aware); reduction (into essences of meaning) bracketing (epoche) (setting aside of biases; suspending belief of intersubjectivity) and imaginative variation. (Laverty, 2003; Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994).	Methods: hermeneutic circle to develop understanding and meaning; researcher immersed in self-reflection; bracketing to confess prejudgments and assumptions (not to suspend them) because values are embedded; meanings agreed upon via dialectics (Dreyfus, 1980; Packer, 1985; Willis et al., 2007).

Based on the above descriptions and contrasts, hermeneutic phenomenology was posited

as the most appropriate methodology for studying the *meaning of work* for Generation Y—the

focus and intent central to this study. Furthermore, Van Manen (1990) asserts that there is not

just one specific method to phenomenology; however there are guidelines and recommendations.

Therefore, this study utilized the six research activities proposed by Van Manen (1990) for

hermeneutic phenomenology, while incorporating the five basic steps of qualitative research

according to Giorgi (1997), to guide the inquiry process and concomitant methods choices.

Structure of the Study

Van Manen (1990) recommended six research activities to incorporate into a hermeneutic

phenomenological study. These six research activities are:

> Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
> investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; reflecting on the
> essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; describing the phenomenon
> through the art of writing and rewriting; maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical
> relation to the phenomenon; and balancing the research context by considering parts and
> whole. (Van Manen, 1990, pp. 30-31)

The five basic steps of qualitative research that were integrated and used in conjunction with

these six research activities—to guide the conduct of the study are:

> collection of verbal data; reading of the data; breaking of the data into some kind of parts;
> organization and expression of the data from a disciplinary perspective; and synthesis or
> summary of the data for purposes of communication to the scholarly community. (Giorgi,
> 1997, p. 235)

Table 6 illustrates the integration of these five basic steps and six necessary research activities

central to the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology and accompanying methods choices

that were used in this inquiry.

The Six Necessary Research Activities

Turning to the nature of the lived experience. This activity involves taking the time to

give reflection to the researcher's conscious experiences and emphasizes that the topic being

explored must be one of personal interest to the researcher – one the researcher is committed to

(Van Manen, 1990). The researcher is recommended to explicate any pre-assumptions and pre-understandings of the phenomena being studied to come to terms with them (Van Manen, 1990). Therefore, I spent time reflecting on my own experience of work, the pre-assumptions and pre-understandings I have about what the *meaning of work* is for Generation Y employees. To this end, I kept a reflexive journal identifying and explicating these reflections.

Investigating experience as we live it. Investigating experience as we live it involves examining actual experience as we live it versus the concepts we have formed about an experience, or how we conceptualize it (Van Manen, 1990). I interviewed Generation Y participants who have experienced the phenomena of work in order to understand the original, natural state in work experiences through reflection. As a result, I engaged in phenomenological literature to try and understand the experience (Van Manen, 1990).

Reflecting on essential themes. This activity is composed of hermeneutic phenomenological reflection. "Insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 77). According to Van Manen (1990) meaning is not one dimensional; it can only be communicated through the reflective activity of creating a text, which is accomplished through analyzing the essential themes that make up the experience. This activity, therefore, involved isolating and constructing themes to understand the *meaning of work* for Generation Y participants in this study. A thematic analysis is discussed in the data analysis section.

Writing and rewriting as an art. Writing allows the researcher to put language and thought to the phenomenon of work (Van Manen, 1990). Doing so allows the essential and natural structure of the experience to come forth. Writing also allows the researcher to develop a

deeper understanding of the work experience by having to describe each theme, revise the usage of language in the description, all from while using the texts of the participants' interviews. As a result, feedback was obtained from the participants and I continually revisited the literature to help assist in gaining clarity and depth of understanding of the *meaning of work* for Generation Y (Van Manen, 1990).

Maintaining a strong and oriented relation. The researcher must maintain a strong and oriented relation to the phenomena being studied, meaning the researcher will remain involved and engrossed with the study of the topic (Van Manen, 1990). This stance is important so that the researcher does not aimlessly wonder and become sidetracked, resulting in a disinterest in the topic, and leading to inaccurate interpretations and findings of the *meaning of work* for Generation Y participants in this study (Van Manen, 1990). Therefore, I immersed myself in the *meaning of work* phenomenon for these five participants for the entire year it took to complete the study. I maintained a high level of focus and engagement with the data during this time period.

Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. Balancing the research context by considering the parts and whole forces the researcher to constantly compare how the parts correspond to the overall design of the research study and focus to form the "textural structure" of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990, p. 33). During the study, I constantly took time to reflect on how all the parts of the data contributed to providing a rich, thick description of the *meaning of work* phenomenon for the five Generation Y participants.

Participation Selection

Purposeful sampling is a strategy used in qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2007). More specifically, the type of purposeful sampling used in this study was that of snowball sampling

Table 6

The five basic steps of qualitative inquiry and the six necessary research activities of hermeneutic phenomenology inquiry: A comparative integration

Five Basic Steps of Qualitative Strategy (Giorgi, 1997)	Six Necessary Research Activities of Hermeneutic Phenomenology Inquiry (Van Manen, 1990)	Integration of the Five Basic Steps of Qualitative Strategy & Hermeneutic Phenomenology Inquiry
	Turning to the nature of the lived experience	I took the time to explore and reflect on my own conscious experiences of work and what works means to me.
Collection of verbal data	Investigating experience as we live it	I interviewed Generation Y participants who have experienced the phenomenon of full-time work using open-ended questions, while digitally recording the interview.
Reading of the data	Reflecting on essential themes	I read the data using a holistic approach and then broke it into meaning parts that emerge and make up the experience of the *meaning of work*. This process is the methodological interpretation of the hermeneutic circle.
Breaking the data into some kind of parts		
Organization and expression of the data from a disciplinary perspective	Writing and re-writing as an art	Writing forced me to develop a deeper understanding of the work experience by having to explicate and describe the meaning units (themes). I remained involved and engrossed in the study throughout this process.
	Maintaining a strong and oriented relation	
Synthesis or summary of the data for purposes of communication to the scholarly community	Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole	By considering the balance of the parts and the whole of the research context, I created a structural description of the phenomenon of the meaning of work. This is the synthesis of the data to communicate to the scholarly community. This process is the ontological interpretation of the hermeneutic circle.

which was thought to be the most appropriate strategy for participant selection in order to meet

the overall objective of the study: to understand the *meaning of work* for Generation Y while

using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to do so (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Individuals were recommended by people who considered them "information rich" (Creswell,

2007, p. 127). The individuals met four separate criteria. First, the participants must have

experienced the phenomenon of working full-time, at least 32 hours per week (Colorado

Department of Labor and Employment, n.d.) for at least one year. One year is in alignment with

the time period necessary for the stabilization of behaviors to take place at work (Harpaz et al.,

2002). According to Howe and Strauss (1997), a generation is defined by the time span of

approximately two decades. Thus, the most common birth years throughout the literature consist

of Generation Y individuals being born between the years 1981 to approximately 2001

(Arsenault, 2004; Dries et al., 2008; Gursoy et al., 2008; Lamm & Meeks, 2009; Meriac et al.,

2010; Ng et al., 2010; Smith, 2008; and Yu & Miller, 2003). Second, for the purpose of this

study, the participants must have been part of the Generation Y cohort by being born between the

years 1981 and 1994. This criterion eliminated any minors (under 18) with prior full-time work

experience for at least a year from being included in the study. Based on this being a

phenomenological study, there were two additional criteria that needed to be met (Moustakas,

1994). Third, the participants had to have an interest in the topic being examined, and they had

to be willing do multiple in-depth interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Last, participants had to be

willing to partake in member checking. Member checking with the participants is one criterion

for establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which is explained in detail later in this

chapter.

Participant Selection Appropriateness

Given the nature of my topic, it is important to discuss the choice of strategy used for sampling participant Generation Y individuals in this specific study. The supporting evidence for the appropriateness of this strategy stems from the selected paradigm, methodology, and research and informing theoretical frameworks. How each of these areas informed the suitability of the snowball sampling strategy is discussed below.

Paradigm.

The study was grounded in the interpretive paradigm in order to understand and analyze the constructed *meaning of work* among participants from the Generation Y cohort. The ontology of the interpretive paradigm is that realities are relative and co-constructed, so there are multiple realities in people's minds (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). We are not capable of determining these realities in advance of the co-interaction between the researcher and the participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These multiple realities are local, specific, and are dependent upon those who hold them (Guba, 1990). The multiple realities are shaped by context—local values that can vary from place to place (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, the data for my study was time and context bound, and the participants' reality of their notion of the *meaning of work* cannot be separated from their context. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend utilizing purposeful sampling because the researcher can strive to achieve the ultimate goal of maximum variation. Maximum variation is the notion of tapping into as many of the multiple realities of an experienced phenomenon as the researcher possibly can.

An additional characteristic of the interpretivist paradigm is emergent design. This type of design allows the study to emerge rather than being pre-determined (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The notion that the *meaning of work* for Generation Y may vary based on culturally and socially

accepted ideas (e.g., class, culture, gender) present an element of pre-determinism to the study design, thus negating the integrity of sustaining the existence of multiple realities. Thus, no stratification criteria were used to determine the sample, other than the necessary ones above to define the Generation Y cohort. Stratifying the sample is for the purpose of generalization, which actually "suppresses deviant cases" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 40). Generalization is not a goal of a hermeneutic phenomenological study that is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm of inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The specific type of purposeful sampling used for this study was snowball sampling, which allows for recruiting people that would be considered "information rich" (Creswell, 2007, p. 127) and that can provide a deep, rich, and thick description of the *meaning of work* from their perspective as an individual who belongs to the Generation Y cohort. This rich description helped create a well-developed essence of their nature of the *meaning of work*, which is in alignment with the interpretive paradigm.

Methodology.

Phenomenology is interested in the "essentially human experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 62). An example is stated by Van Manen (1990) in studying what it is to be a parent:

> from a phenomenological point of view we are not primarily interested in the subjective experiences of our so called subjects or informants, for the sake of being able to report on how something is seen from their particular view, perspective, or vantage point. (p. 62)

Van Manen (1990) continued to reinforce the following, "However, the deeper goal, which is always the thrust of phenomenological research, remains oriented to asking the question of what is the nature of this phenomenon (parenting) as an essentially human experience" (p. 62). Similarly, the purpose of this study was to begin to understand the nature of the essential human experience of the *meaning of work* for the Generation Y participants—across social class,

culture, occupation, and gender. The noted characteristics of the participants in this study included gender, education, year of birth, industry, position, number of jobs, and geographic location. The characteristics of the sample were provided to describe the context of the study for the purpose of possible transferability of the findings.

In the write-up of the findings even though similar characteristics were shared across several (if not all) of the participants I did not explicate the use of any such lens or category. Instead, the findings were presented in a manner that appropriately represented the methodological stance for the purpose of understanding the nature of the *meaning of work* phenomenon among the five Generation Y employees interviewed. For example, since there was one male and four females in the study, I did not explicitly link the alias to the corresponding participant number. Instead, the participant numbers are identifiable only in the descriptive quotes. And, instead of using he/she or him/her I used gender neutral words such as they, them, the participant, the person, and the individual.

In addition, I did not purposefully describe the five participants as college educated Generation Y employees even though this characteristic was shared among them all. This decision was made for the purpose of preventing the audience from reading the findings with a gender or education specific lens.

Research and theoretical frameworks.

The research provided in the review of literature did not provide enough evidence to stratify the sample for this research design. The research on Generation Y was purposefully divided into anecdotal verses non-anecdotal research to suggest that more studies need to be designed using participants from this generation that have actually had work experience and not college students. Attending to this gap was one of the noted purposes of this study. It is

important to note that Mannheim (1952/2000) conceptualized a theory of generations from a sociological framework that poses the notion that generations have the following in common: they share the same social location, they must have consciousness of being within a group, and they must stem from the same region. It can be insinuated that these individuals also share the same social class. However, since this study design utilized an inductive approach, the research was able to account for multiple realities and indicated that theory is constructed from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, the data does not fit into a specific theoretical framework where data collection and analysis is used to test theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1991). Mannheim's conception of generations (1952/2000) was used to inform the data analysis, but not to drive the design.

Description of Participants

Participants were contacted by email and provided with a letter describing the study (Appendix B). They received a consent form that was approved by the Colorado State University (CSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) to be signed before data collection began. The participants' identities are kept confidential based on the sensitivity of the data being collected, as is that of any others they discussed. They chose pseudonyms that were used during the data analysis and in presenting the results. In addition, the participants' places of employment were kept confidential. To maintain confidentiality the names, places of work, and any other identifying information were replaced with "XXX" within the descriptive quotes in Chapter Four.   The five individuals that participated in this study were from diverse occupations and employers throughout the state of Colorado—offering a variation of perspectives on the *meaning of work* to them. Table 7 below presents a snapshot of the participants, illuminating some of their similar and dissimilar characteristics. A pen sketch of each participant is shared in

chapter four, providing a deeper contextual description of their individual and shared lived

experiences of the phenomenon the *meaning of work*.

Table 7

A snapshot of the characteristics of the five Generation Y study participants

				Characteristics of the five Generation Y study participants		
Participant	Level of Education	Gender	Year of birth	Current Position	Current Industry	Total jobs since entering the workforce
Margarita	Four-year degree	Female	1983	Sales	Retail	3
Jack	Four-year degree	Male	1985	Business founder/owner	Entrepreneur	7
Rapunzel	Four-year degree/graduate school in progress	Female	1989	Project coordinator	Telecommunications	6
Katie	Four-year degree	Female	1986	Technician	Human services	8
Jennifer	Four-year degree in progress	Female	1987	Contract position, student, & part-time employee at a Resource Center	Human services	11

Saturation of Participants

The number of participants recommended by Creswell and Morse (as cited in Guest et al.,

2006) is recommended to be at least five to six, at which point saturation is estimated to occur in

a phenomenological study. A phenomenological study is designed to conduct in-depth, multiple

interviews with participants that are "information rich" (Creswell, 2007, p. 127). Patton (1990)

discusses the issue of "seeking breadth" or "seeking depth" with participants (p. 184). He

recommends that "in-depth information from a small number of people can be very valuable,

especially if the cases are information-rich" (Patton, 1990, p. 184). By interviewing the five

selected participants, I was able to partake in deep hermeneutic conversations and collect data

that provided thick description of the phenomenon, thus permitting an in-depth understanding of

the essence of the *meaning of work* to them. In addition, by the time I interviewed the fifth

participant, the information had reached a point of redundancy, when "no new information is

forthcoming from newly sampled units" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202).

Data Collection

Data were collected from one to two separate interviews with each individual participant,

from September 2012 to April 2013. The total interview time was approximately 60-120

minutes for each participant. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions that had been

created via conducting an in-depth review of the literature, and an expert panel of reviewers in a

proposal development course. The interview questions were created to be appropriate for a

hermeneutic phenomenological study and fit to the research questions. As noted by Van Manen

(1990) it is important when conducting hermeneutic interviews to keep the overall question of

the meaning of work open, but keep the participants oriented to the topic. Thus, probes were

prepared as a follow-up to the overall open-ended questions (Willis et al., 2007). Additionally,

the interview questions were revisited and if necessary, revised, after each interview. This

ensured that I addressed any questions that were confusing, repetitive, or needed to be added to

provide deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Each interview was recorded using a digital

recorder.

Location/Setting

The location and time of the interviews was in a setting that was mutually agreed upon by

the interviewee and myself, the researcher. The chosen location was an area where the

participant felt comfortable and safe in providing responses to the interview questions—not their

place of work.

Data Analysis

The data analysis included the following main steps: transcription of the interviews and preliminary data analysis; unitizing and categorizing the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); member checking the data; and creation of the final output depicting the constructed textural description of the meaning of work for these five Generation Y participants.

After the first interview with each participant, I transcribed the conversations. I listened to the interview recording for each participant twice while reading back through the transcripts produced from the first session, thereby increasing the precision of the data set. Once the interviews had been transcribed, I constructed some preliminary themes (Van Manen, 1990). As I read through each transcript I conducted a high level analysis of coding, highlighting, organizing, and making notes on some topics of importance I felt were reflective of the data. I used Saldana (2013) as a supplementary resource to my preliminary analysis. According to Saldana (2013), "a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 3). Coding is the first step before an in-depth analysis of the data takes place, and can lead to the eventual development of themes (Saldana, 2013). Saldana (2013) states the notion of "pre-coding" (p. 19) encompasses notes for possible future-decision making.

After all the first interviews had been conducted and transcribed, I unitized and categorized the data within each individual interview (within-case analysis). This process helped figure out where I needed to probe deeper and areas that needed clarification. Next, I conducted an entire analysis across all five cases (cross-case analysis) to shape the whole story of the participants' shared lived experience of the *meaning of work*. In doing this, I utilized Lincoln and

Guba's (1985) notion of a unit, which is composed of two characteristics. The first characteristic

encompasses that a unit is a heuristic, "aimed at some understanding or some action that the

inquirer needs to have to take" (p. 345). The second characteristic of a unit is that, "it must be

the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself, that is, it must be

interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the

context in which the inquiry is carried out" (p. 345). During the unitization of the data, I

constantly reflected on the notion of constructing the *meaning of work* for these five Generation

Y participants by asking myself the following questions:

- How is this experience of the meaning of work lived for the participant/s?

- Is this what the experience is really like for the participant/s?

- Does this unit get at the significance of work for the participant/s?

The units that were being developed would eventually serve as the foundation for

creating the essential themes for this study. Thus, these questions were developed based on the

idea that a "theme is the means to get at the notion" of the *meaning of work* (Van Manen, 1990,

p. 88). I wanted to make sure that I was considering how all the parts were contributing to the

whole to create the essence of this phenomenon, and to be able to answer the overall research

question of this study. Once the units were developed, I followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985)

steps for categorizing the cards into groups that seemed related, and constantly compared and

contrasted the categories. This process is in alignment with Van Manen's (1990) advice to keep

"evolving part-whole relation" of the study throughout the process (p. 167). In developing the

themes from the related categories, I revisited the literature to further understand a theme in a

hermeneutic phenomenological study. According to Van Manen (1990), a theme consist of four

qualities: "theme is the experience of focus, of meaning, of point; theme formulation is at best a

simplification; themes are not objects one encounters at certain points or moments in a text; theme is the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand" (p. 87). Thus, a theme will directly relate to the *meaning of work*, and to the phenomenon under study (Van Manen, 1990), by: getting to the meaning of work for Generation Y participants in this study; explicating the concept of the meaning of work; describing the substance of the meaning of work; and existing as a reduction of the meaning of work. To explicate the essential themes, I differentiated between incidental and essential themes by the process of imaginative variation. Essential themes are those identified to understand the essence of the meaning of work and if an essential theme is deleted then the phenomenon is not the same without it. An incidental theme is a theme which incurred casually in conjunction with the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). It is also important to note that during this time of analysis I recognized that while the participants shared some essential themes, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes, there were descriptions of these essentials that fell along a spectrum. A spectrum is a result of the hermeneutic circle and adds rich description, depth, and range to the themes. Thus, this notion is referred to as the hermeneutic spectrum. The hermeneutic spectrum is explained in further detail later in this chapter.

The next phase of data analysis included taking the themes back to the participants and engaging in hermeneutic conversations (Van Manen, 1990). Four of the five participants were able to partake in a second interview. The one participant who was not able to meet a second time was able to still engage in member-checking through e-mail. Two purposes needed to be fulfilled in going back to the participants: 1) to clarify points for deeper meaning made in the first interview, and 2) to present the first round of themes for member checking. Van Manen (1990) refers to this process as, "interpretation through conversation" (p. 97) and the

"hermeneutic thrust" (p. 98). The second interviews took place between March 2013 and April 2013. These interpretive conversations involved member checking among the participating individuals to reflect on the developed themes from the first interviews and to make sure my interpretations were accurate in their eyes (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986). We came to an understanding of the nature of the participants' work experience and the meaning of work for him/her. During these phases, I continuously engaged in writing and re-writing of the analysis. According to Van Manen (1990):

> Writing creates the reflective cognitive stance that generally characterizes the theoretic attitude in the social sciences. The object of human science research is essentially a linguistic project: to make some aspect of our lived world, of our lived experience, reflectively understandable and intelligible. (pp. 125-126)

Thus, the process is dialectical—going back and forth among the topic, the texts, and the researcher's own understanding of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990; Willis et al., 2007). I transcribed all of the second interviews and engaged in the process of unitizing and categorizing again. Ten essential themes were constructed. These ten essential themes are composed of essential sub-themes and essential sub-sub-themes. All of the essential themes are embedded within the given context that is bounded by the five participants. This final output was a strong, rich, and deep constructed textural description of the phenomenon. The text is a reflective engagement and a careful balance of the parts and the whole that are intertwined to provide meaning and understanding of the *meaning of work* for the five Generation Y participants in this study (Van Manen, 1990).

Brief Introduction to the Concept of the Hermeneutic Spectrum

In order to understand the notion of hermeneutic spectrum, a concept constructed with my advisor during peer-checking of the essential themes, sub-themes, and sub-sub-themes highlighted in this study (Lynham, personal communication, May 28, 2013). It is important to

revisit differences in the post-positivist and interpretivist paradigms. Post-positivism upholds the notion that there is one single reality. Phenomena are free from time and context, thus allowing for the idea of generalization and objectivity. There, too, is the dismissal of mutual causality— the post-positivist belief that rather than the existence of mutual shaping elements, cause and effect is plausible. In order to achieve generalization and objectivity, the design of a study is a-priori and deterministic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Furthermore, it is taken to be implausible to be able to accurately predict phenomena; thus predictability was replaced with plausibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Probability "give[s] us some idea of how likely a given score is to occur" (Field, 2005, p. 11). This notion of normal distribution is known as a theoretical distribution (Urdan, 2005), meaning that researchers will rarely collect data that result in a perfect normal distribution. Rather collected data are distributed (or not) within a bell curve. The normal distribution (bell curve) is used to inform the probabilities (Urdan, 2005), in turn leading to the a-priori research design and the need for a sample that adequately represents the population (Urdan, 2005), and the ability to control variables of the phenomenon under study.

Consequently, the findings that are produced are then generalizable to the population. This approach could result in losing meaning in an attempt to reduce the phenomena to a "set of laws" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 27) for the purpose of testing already existing theories (Merriam. 1989). Trying to generalize findings also has the potential to create labels and perpetuate stereotypes. It is difficult to be precise with phenomena that are mutually influenced and shaped by our individual experiences in life—thus, the notion of hermeneutic spectrum is not the interpretivist equivalent of the bell curve—as it encapsulates individual and shared experiences rather than trying to generalize them.

When data are collected via a survey, the meaning of these constructions can be lost in the predetermined design. Once surveys are filled out by participants, there are no "negotiated outcomes" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 211). There is generally no confirmation of the "meaning" of the survey responses. For example, a participant may respond that they believe helping people is doing meaningful work, but they are not capable of describing for the researcher what they mean by "helping people." Post-positivism cannot account for the deep, descriptive individual, shared, and co-constructions that form the essence of a phenomenon because the goal of post-postivist research is to be precise and report findings within parameters (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1989), as reflected in, among other, the notion of the bell curve.

With this said, the purpose of a hermeneutic phenomenological research design is to understand the essence of the shared experience of the participants. However, it is also important to understand that the essence of a phenomenon is co-created by the individual, shared, and co-constructions. The notion of hermeneutic spectrum illuminates spread and the level of rich descriptiveness of the combination of these individual, shared, and co-constructed findings. The hermeneutic spectrum is thus represented by a) a spread (range of spread) for each essential theme, and its corresponding essential sub-themes and essential sub-sub-themes, and b) a corresponding depth (levels) of interpretations. The multiple constructed realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) are represented on the spectrum by the spread and depth/level of the range of variation of that is shared among the participants, and essences of the phenomenon under study. The spectrum range/spread and depth/level are informed by the context of the study—the environmental and social interactions of the participants that construct these boundaries. The

hermeneutic spectrum is further discussed in Chapter Four, along with visual representations thereof.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness criteria are used to establish whether a study grounded in the interpretive paradigm produces findings that are worth acknowledging due to the level of rigor implemented within the study design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There are four types of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986). The study utilized criteria for establishing trustworthiness in each of these areas. These criteria are intertwined with Creswell's (2007) criteria that have been established to judge the quality of a phenomenological study. First, six criteria were used regarding trustworthiness for credibility of the findings and the interpretation of the findings: prolonged engagement with the participants; clarifying the researcher's pre-assumptions or understandings on the topic; peer debriefing; triangulation; negative case analysis; and member checking with the participants (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986).

The period of prolonged engagement occurred over at least two in-depth interviews with four out of the five participants. This period provided the participants the opportunity to gain and build trust with the researcher (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher's pre-assumptions and pre-understandings are explicitly stated in Chapter One and are required from and during the study to be divulged due to the nature of the phenomenological method being utilized (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). Any additional assumptions and understandings that emerged throughout the study are recorded in a reflexive journal.

Peer debriefing is an external check throughout the process of the study to the final end product. The peer debriefing was conducted with an individual that was disinterested in the

study, but had an overall understanding of the topic and the methodological study design. This individual probed research biases, interpretations, concluded meanings; provided input on the study design; and provided emotional debriefing, if necessary (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My advisor engaged in peer-checking my essential themes, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes. I also had lengthy conversations with her regarding any concerns over the processes of the study design and my findings. It was these conversations which lead to us developing the notion of the hermeneutic spectrum.

In addition, I presented my preliminary themes to a research seminar class and gained invaluable inquiries and feedback before moving forward to the next steps in the data analysis process. Some of the inquiries included such questions as why I chose the label for the essential theme/s that I did, and how I categorized some of the corresponding essential sub-theme/s beneath the essential theme/s.

Triangulation involves "cross-checking of data" (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 77). The ten essential themes, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes are presented in Chapter Four by triangulating the findings with supporting literature and theoretical frameworks. Negative cases analysis is "the active search for negative instances relating to developing insights and adjusting the latter continuously until no further negative instances are found" (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 77). There were four main negative cases that were uncovered after the second interview with participants and round two of categorizing. These negative cases stemmed from concern over the applicability of specific essential themes, essential sub-themes, and/or essential sub-sub-themes to individual participant's lived experience of the meaning of work during member-checking. Thus, these essential themes, sub-themes, and sub-sub-themes were adjusted and refined accordingly to encompass all of the cases so that no negative instances

existed among the data. An example of a negative case analysis was the original essential sub-sub-theme of the importance of family under the essential sub-theme of balance of work and non-work priorities. One participant made it clear that the essential sub-theme was not relevant to them since the individual had lived away from home since they were 18. Thus, the essential sub-sub-theme was adjusted and expanded to the importance of family and friends.

Member checking with the participants "is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). The member checking took place with all of the participants who were interviewed. One participant was not able to meet for a second interview, thus we engaged in member checking via e-mail. Member checking allows: the participants to check and if necessary, correct the data for errors in the findings or interpretation of the results; allows the participants to provide additional information that informs the findings or interpretation of the results; puts the participants on record if they were to one day dispute the findings and interpretations; provides the researcher an opportunity to summarize data and assess intentions of why certain information was provided or not provided; and lastly, allows alignment of the whole and the individual parts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I composed a table of the findings, along with a few corresponding thick descriptive quotes from the participants and presented it to them during the second interview. I gave the participants as much time as they needed to read over the findings. I then proceeded to ask them several questions including:

- On a scale from 1-5 (1 being not resonating at all with the story of your lived experience of the meaning of work and 5 being exactly describes your story of the lived experience of the meaning of work), how well do these themes resonate with your story of the lived experience of the meaning of work?

- What is missing?

- What needs to be added?

- If you don't agree with the label of an essential theme/s, what descriptive would you use instead?

In addition to presenting the findings to the participants, I engaged in member checking during the interviews as well. Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that notions of emerging categories can be member checked during interviews with participants. Thus, when one participant talked about the significance of a specific topic on their meaning of work, I would then ask another participant during their interview if the same topic was relevant to their lived experience of the meaning of work. For example, one participant mentioned the importance of finding a job that was in alignment with who they were as an individual. During a second interview with another participant I asked whether or not this statement resonated with them and their own description of the *meaning of work*.

For transferability, I provided thick descriptions and a well-developed essence of the phenomenon, which are a necessary output of phenomenological research and a requirement for possible transferability of the findings (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lastly, for dependability and confirmability, I created an external audit trail of the entire study throughout the process and the end product. I accomplished this by keeping meticulous notes and research memos on the processes, changes, additions, and concerns that took place during the study. Dependability is concerned with the dependability of the inquiry process, whereas confirmability precedes dependability and verifies that the findings and conclusions are grounded in the data, and are not based on the researcher's personal constructions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986). This trail was audited by my advisor. The audit trail includes the following: notes and recorded interviews; write-up of field notes, concepts, and any working hypotheses; write-up and

categorization of the data, findings, and conclusions; methodological notes and trustworthiness criteria; personal notes on biases and expectations; and write-up of the preliminary schedules of interviews that will take place (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These notes and write-ups were kept in a reflexive and methodological journal, and related research memos.

In conclusion, satisfaction of these criteria of trustworthiness was attended to throughout the study. In part they were also enacted through simultaneous engagement in the hermeneutic conversations during the data analysis phase, and by being continuously reflexive (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Van Manen, 1990).

Limitations

Generalization is not a goal of a hermeneutic phenomenological study grounded in the interpretive paradigm of inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Instead, the purpose is to provide a local and relevant description and understanding of the lived experience under study (Laverty, 2003; Van Manen, 1990; Willis et al., 2007). I provided thick descriptions and a well-developed essence of the lived experiences of *meaning of work* for these five Generation Y participants for possible transferability of the findings in the future (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, it should be noted that transferability by virtue of the paradigm, in which the study is located, is limited by context and the necessary criteria used to select the Generation Y participants in this study.

Conclusion of Chapter Three

Chapter Three detailed the methodology of this study. Chapter Four presents the ten essential themes, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes that were constructed and co-constructed by the participants and the researcher. These ten essential themes, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes provide a thick description of the essence of the *meaning*

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of work. These descriptions reflect the depth and complexity of the *meaning of work*

phenomenon for these five Generation Y individuals.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SHARED STORIES OF FIVE GENERATION Y EMPLOYEE'S
MEANING OF WORK

The purpose of this chapter is to present the essential themes that were co-constructed from the data and that form a structural description of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990) of the *meaning of work* for these five Generation Y participants. These essential themes were constructed from a dialectical process of going back and forth among the topic, the participant's texts, peer checking and my own understanding of the phenomenon (Schwandt, 2007; Van Manen, 1990; Willis et al., 2007). I also engaged in continuous writing and re-writing of the analysis and presented the essential themes back to the participants, through hermeneutic conversations (Van Manen, 1990), for the purpose of developing deeper understanding or meaning (Willis et al., 2007). This process is the ontological interpretation (as opposed to the methodological) of the hermeneutic circle where such interpretation takes place in coming to know by interacting and sharing—not by coming to an agreement on what is the truth (Dreyfus, 1980).

In order to convey these findings, this chapter presents the ten essential themes that were provide deeper understanding of the essence of the *meaning of work* for the Generation Y participants. Together these essential themes address the posed research question that guided this hermeneutic phenomenological study: *Based on their lived experience in the workplace, how do the five Generation Y employees in this study describe the notion of the meaning of work, and why so?* These ten essential themes include: the *meaning of work* is influenced by education; the *meaning of work* is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful; the *meaning of work* is balance; the *meaning of work* is completing tasks and being compensated to meet our basic needs; the *meaning of work* is the importance of social relationships; the *meaning of work* is

considering and exploring all opportunities; the *meaning of work* is influenced by our social

networks; the *meaning of work* is a reflection of who we are; the *meaning of work* is working for

an organization that functions well; and, the *meaning of work* is influenced by the current state of

the economy. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the ten essential themes.

All ten essential themes are comprised of essential sub-themes. In addition, five of the

essential sub-themes are comprised of another layer of essential sub-sub-themes. These five

essential themes include: the *meaning of work* is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful;

the *meaning of work* is balance; the *meaning of work* is working for an organization that

functions well; the *meaning of work* is completing tasks and being compensated to meet our

basic needs; and the *meaning of work* is a reflection of who we are. Table 8 presents the ten

essential themes, corresponding essential sub-themes, and corresponding essential sub-sub-

themes in a table format.

While these findings are "the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon

commonly experienced," (Patton, 1990, p.70) it is also important to note that the essence of a

phenomenon is created by the individual, shared, and co-constructions that are interpreted during

the hermeneutic process. The essential sub-themes and essential sub-sub-themes represent the

layers of descriptive interpretation of the studied phenomenon, which is visually depicted in

Figure 2. Layers of descriptive interpretation are also referred to as "levels of analysis" in the

literature that "reflects different analytical levels, ranging from dealing with the concrete in

simple description to high-level abstractions in theory construction" (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). For

the purpose of this study, the first layer of interpretation is the essential theme. The second layer

is the essential sub-theme(s), and the third layer is the essential sub-sub-theme(s).

The *meaning of work* is influenced by education

The *meaning of work* is a reflection of who we are

The *meaning of work* is working for an organization that functions well

The *meaning of work* is influenced by our social networks

The *meaning of work* is influenced by the state of the economy

The ten essential themes that describe the *meaning of work* for the five Generation Y participants

The *meaning of work* is considering and exploring all opportunities

The *meaning of work* is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful

The *meaning of work* is the importance of social relationships

The *meaning of work* is balance

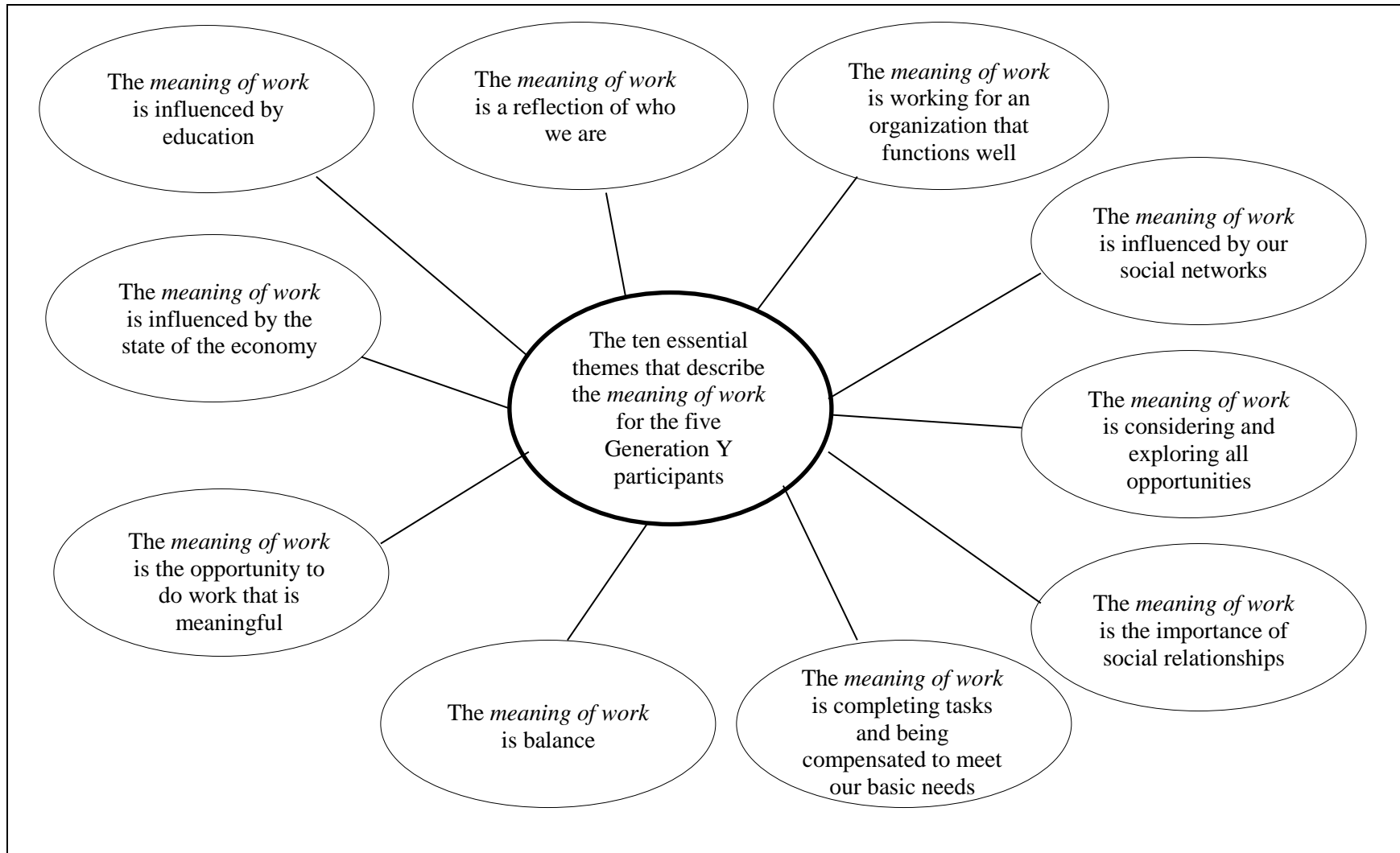The *meaning of work* is completing tasks and being compensated to meet our basic needs

Figure 1: A visual representation of the ten essential themes that describe the *meaning of work* for the five Generation Y participants

Table 8

The 10 essential themes and corresponding sub-themes and sub-sub-themes of the meaning of work for the five Generation Y participants

Essential themes	Essential sub-themes	Essential sub-sub-themes
The *meaning of work* is influenced by education	Choice of major	
	Paying off student loan debt	
	A degree is no guarantee of anything	
	College is the only way	
The *meaning of work* is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful	The meaning of meaningful work	• We enjoy the work • We are engaged in the work • We are fulfilled and enriched by the work • We feel passionate about the work • The work is important to us
	Experiences of meaningful work	• Work that challenges us • Helping people make their lives better • Changing society for the better • Being involved in the process and feeling ownership
The *meaning of work* is working for an organization that functions well	Not feeling like property	
	Management that treats people well	
	Treated with respect	• Position • Age
	Being trusted and given autonomy	
	Working for an organization that has evolved	
	Being rewarded for hard work	

Table 8

Continued

Essential themes	Essential sub-themes	Essential sub-sub-themes
The *meaning of work* is balance	Balance of work priorities	• Balance of meeting basic needs and doing meaningful work • Importance of balance at work
	Balance of work and non-work priorities	• The importance of mental and physical health • The importance of education • The importance of family and friends • The importance of activities and hobbies we enjoy
	Picture of lack of balance	
	How to achieve balance	• Having flexibility at work • Choosing purposeful career paths • Strategically investing our time • Creating boundaries between work and life
The *meaning of work* is influenced by the current state of the economy	Graduating into a recession	
	Increased competition	
	Lack of jobs	
The *meaning of work* is completing tasks and being compensated to meet our basic needs	Provides benefits	
	Provides money	• Helps us pay the bills • Creates stability • Provides money to do things we enjoy

Table 8

Continued

Essential themes	Essential sub-themes	Essential sub-sub-themes
The *meaning of work* is a reflection of who we are	The role of values	
	The belief in working hard	• The need to be a productive member of society • We believe in paying our dues • Work as a form of self-validation
The *meaning of work* is the importance of social relationships	Relationships with co-workers	
	Relationships with customers and clients	
The *meaning of work* is influenced by our social networks	Influence of family	
	Influence of individuals outside of the family	
The *meaning of work* is considering and exploring all opportunities	Opportunities to broaden our skills	
	Opportunities to test the waters	
	Opportunities that were never there before	
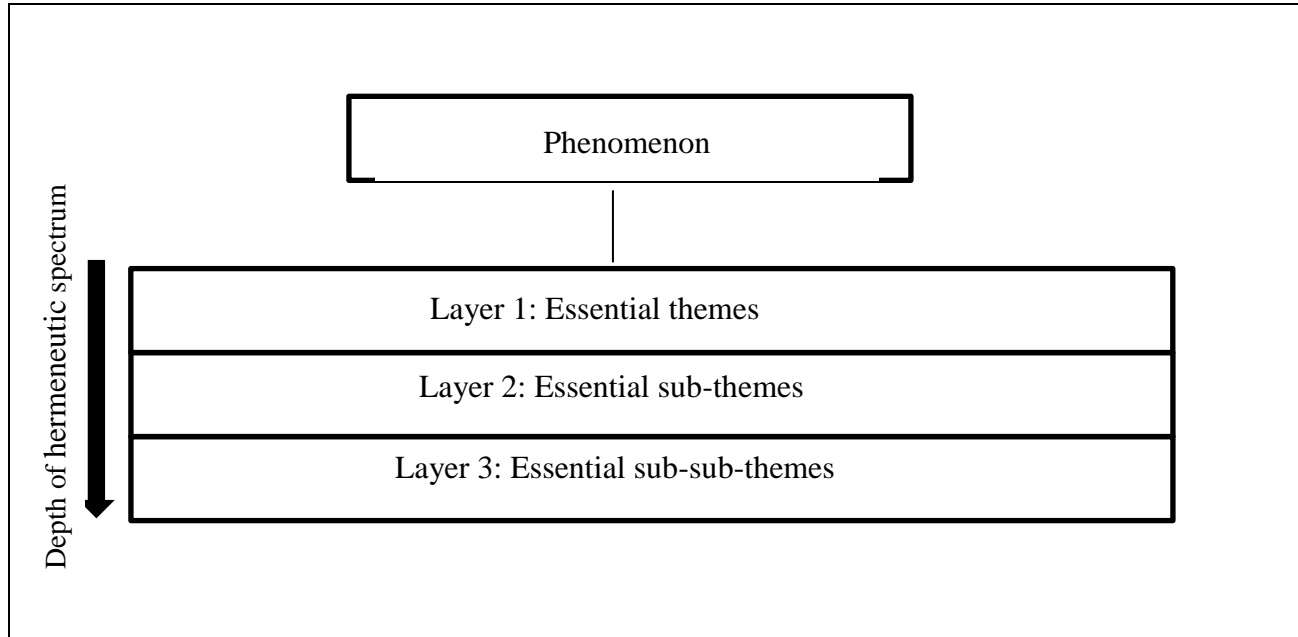
Figure 2. Layers (depth) of descriptive interpretation of the studied phenomenon

These layers of interpretation are a result of the rich descriptiveness that results from continuous engagement in the hermeneutic circle process and also informs the hermeneutic spectrum. This spectrum represents a spread and depth of meaning that describes and thereby illuminates the depth, spread, and specificity of the individual, shared, and co-constructed essences of (in the form of essential themes, essential sub-themes, etc.) a complex phenomenon such as the *meaning of work*—located within contextual boundaries. The spectrum is composed of a spread and depth of descriptive interpretations, which in turn represent the specific participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon focused on in this study. The participants' historical and social contexts (individual and shared) inform the boundaries of this descriptive, hermeneutic spectrum for each essential theme, emphasizing the localness, or specificness, of this study.

An example of this descriptive notion of layering is the essential theme of "the *meaning of work* is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful," where participants shared and confirmed the essential sub-themes of "the meaning of meaningful work" and "experiences of meaningful work." However, how they described their individual constructions of each of these essential sub-themes varied throughout the interviews. More layers of descriptive interpretation equate to an increased spread of the individual constructions for an essential theme. This, what we have called the hermeneutic spectrum is a descriptive spread and depth of meaning is discussed for each of the ten essential themes. It is important to include this element of hermeneutic spectrum for each finding because the purpose of this study is to examine these five Generation Y participants at a deeper, more intrinsic level than prior studies.

Each essential theme is depicted on a spectrum of hermeneutic variation across a narrow, moderate, and broad descriptive spread. A narrow spread is when individual constructions vary

less and represent fewer layers of descriptive interpretation, suggesting a higher degree of

similarity of the shared lived experience (see Figure 3). None of the essential themes from this

study have an exclusively narrow spread of hermeneutic description because each finding is

composed of at least two layers of descriptive interpretation. A moderate hermeneutic spread is

where the constructions and layers of interpretation fall between broad and narrow (see Figure

4). A moderate hermeneutic spread for this study is essentially composed of two layers of

descriptive interpretations. And, a broad spread is when individual constructions vary more for

an essential theme, and has multiple layers of descriptive interpretation (see Figure 5). Broad

spread essential themes have greater depth, spread and specificity compared to narrow and

middle spread constructions. A broad spread of hermeneutic description for this study is

composed of at least three layers of descriptive interpretation.

However, many of these essential themes are described on the spectrum as narrow to

moderate, or moderate to broad because it is difficult to make them exclusive to one or the other

based on the participant responses and the descriptive variation in the number of layers of

descriptive interpretation, hence the notion of a spectrum. For example, for the essential theme

The Meaning of work is Working for an Organization that Functions Well, there are six essential

sub-themes, but only one of those essential sub-themes is composed of essential sub-sub-themes.

Thus, the essential theme is not broad, but it's not completely moderate either. Whereas, *The

Meaning of Meaningful Work is the Opportunity to do Work that is Meaningful* is composed of

two sub-essential themes and a total of nine essential sub-sub-themes, making the spread of the

hermeneutic description broad. In summary, the hermeneutic spectrum represents the structural

complexity of the phenomenon of the *meaning of work*. It is based on the interpretation of the

researcher and the shared, individual, and co-constructions of the participants.
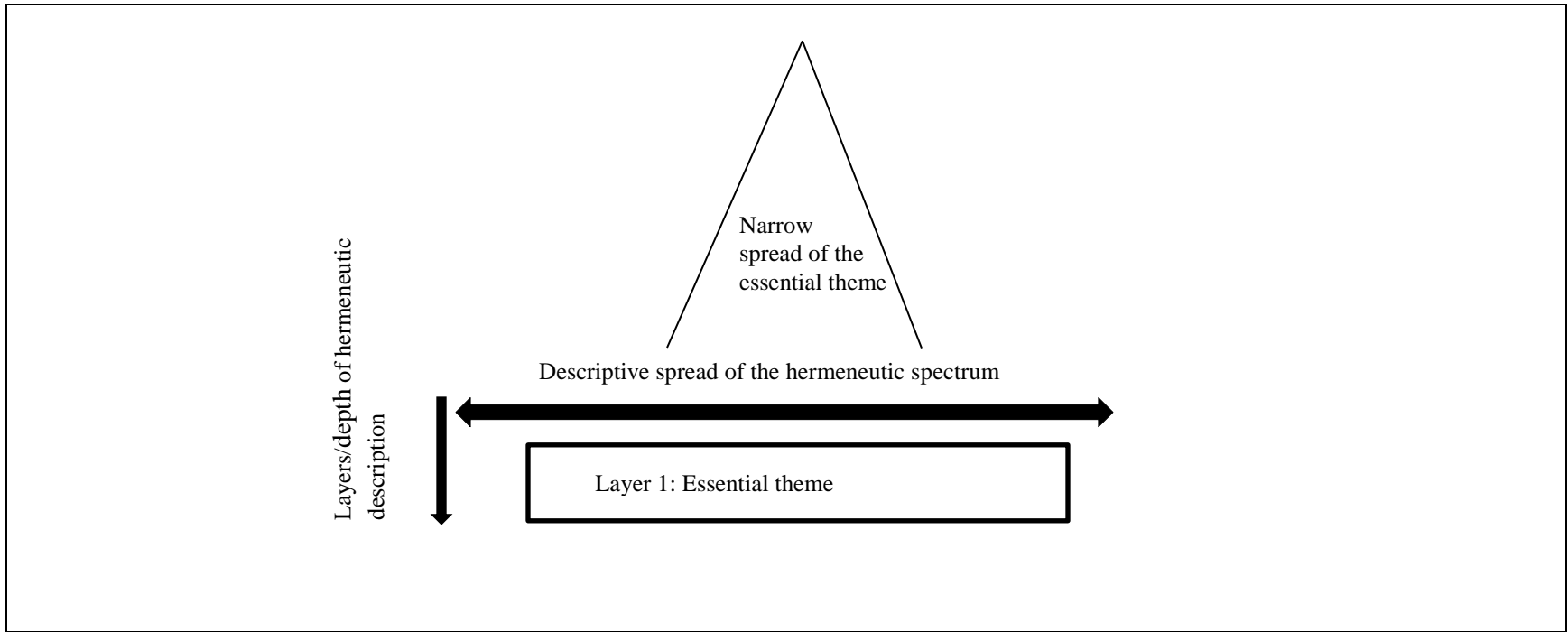
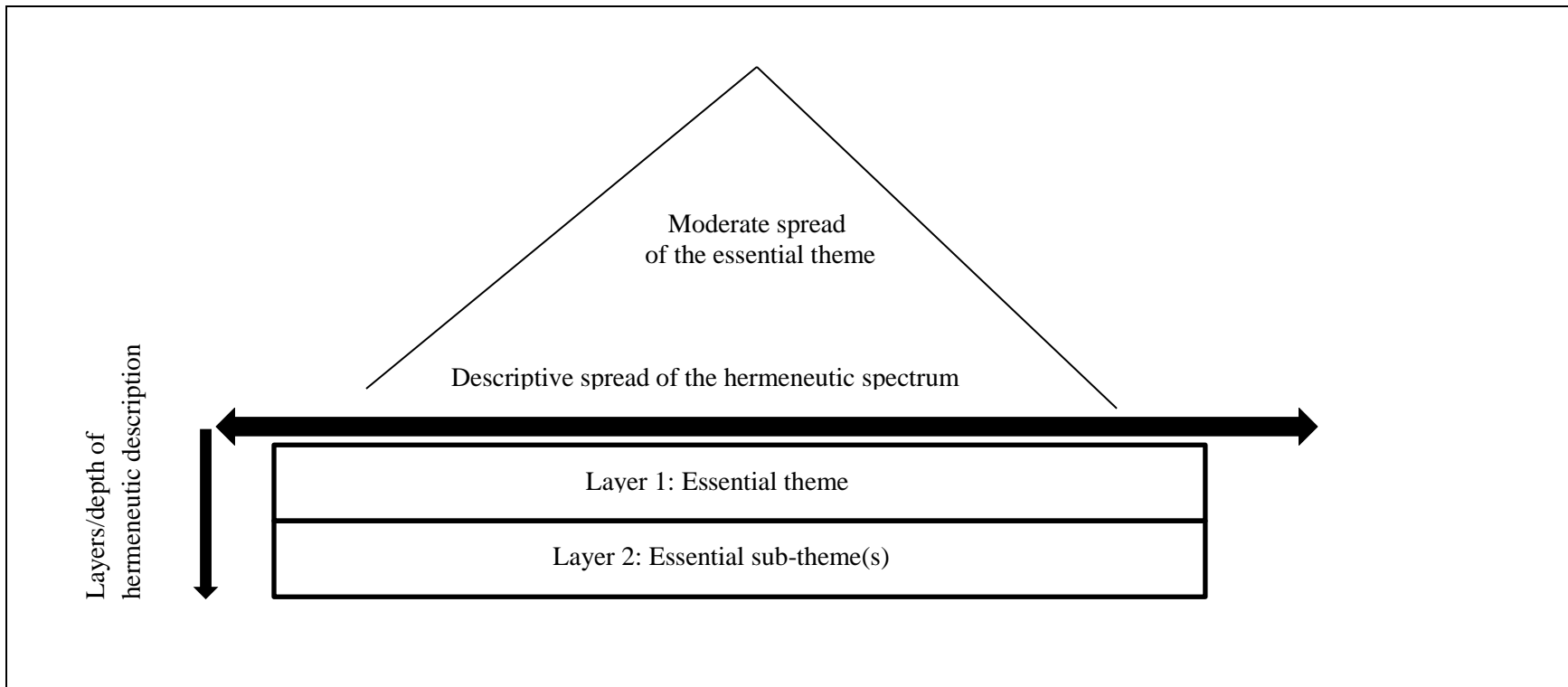*Figure 3.* Narrow descriptive spread of the hermeneutic spectrum

Figure 4. Moderate descriptive spread of the hermeneutic spectrum
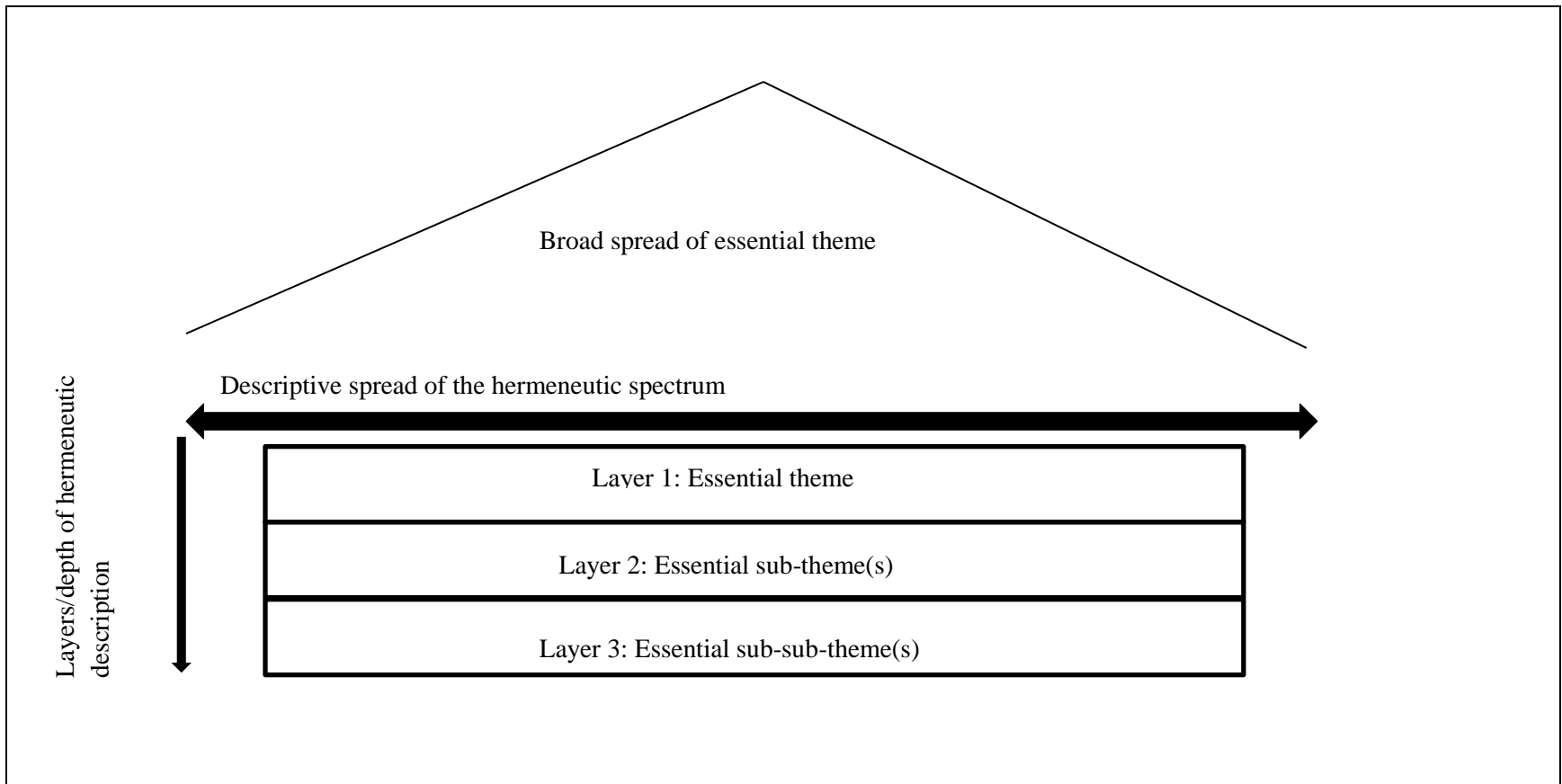
Figure 5. Broad descriptive spread of the hermeneutic spectrum

In presenting the findings, the chapter is divided into three parts. Part 1 will provide a pen sketch of the participants. This sketch gives access into the five participant's individual lived experience and situates the phenomenon in its historical and social context for this study. Part II of this chapter reports the essence of the *meaning of work* for these five Generation Y participants. The essence of this phenomenon is the shared, individual, and co-constructed ten essential themes, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes from this study. A visual representation in the form of a mind map is provided for each essential theme, graphically depicting its structure composed of essential sub-theme(s), and if applicable, essential sub-sub-theme(s). The essential themes are presented using thick descriptive quotes from the participants, along with my own interpretations and supporting literature. Each essential theme is concluded by reflecting on two corresponding aspects: 1) the spread of hermeneutic description on the hermeneutic spectrum 2) A table that summarizes key points from the participants' description of the essential theme, essential sub-theme(s), and essential sub-sub-theme(s), along with any supporting literature. Part III concludes Chapter Four and provides a brief overview of the presentation structure of Chapter Five.

Part I: Pen Sketches of the Five Generation Y Participants

Given the importance of context in a hermeneutic phenomenological study, it is necessary to provide the five participant's stories of their lived experience of the *meaning of work*. According to Lincoln and Guba (1989): "phenomena can be understood only within the context in which they are studied" (p. 45), and "constructions held by people are born out of their experience with and interaction with their contexts" (p. 60). Heidegger also believed that there are no universal truths because truths are relative to culture (Cohen, 2010) and hermeneutics involves an emphasis on language and the historical context (Willis et al., 2007). In alignment

with the importance of this phenomenon being context-bound, a story of each individual participant is provided with the intent of illuminating their experiences and interactions with their life-world. The pen sketches are shared in the following order: Jack, Katie, Margarita, Jennifer, and Rapunzel.

Jack

Jack was born in 1985. He has worked approximately seven jobs since entering the workforce. Jack graduated from college with a bachelor's degree. After graduating from college he worked as an analyst on a managing/consulting team at an investment bank. Jack described this position as "very much on the intense side" (IPX, 2012, p. 3). It was during this point in our conversation where I realized that describing his previous work environment as intense seemed like an understatement because Jack continued to share with me that it was in this position that he "learned that there are 168 hours in a week" (IPX, 2012, p. 3). He proceeded to explain, "I think my crowning achievement in one week I worked 130 hours. Not really a goal that is worth shooting for" (IPX, 2012, p. 3).

He then had the opportunity to move into another area of the same company where he described it as "nice because they weren't as crazy intense. They were still busy people and worked really hard, but it was I don't know…..a more reasonable atmosphere of balancing work with life and just trying to be productive as opposed to busy" (IPX, 2012, p. 4). Jack described his time at the investment bank as great experience; however he also noted that, "it also wasn't my life's work" (IPX, 2012, p. 4). The company eventually went under and Jack moved on to new experiences. He explained that he and a friend he went to school with had always discussed possible business ideas. Thus, with the support of his wife and family, he and his friend decided to make the jump and enter the realm of entrepreneurship.

Jack described the process to me of starting a business. They built the business up with funding, and recruited team members. He said that the first twelve months were spent building products that, "didn't have much traction in the market" (IPX, 2012, p. 5), thus it forced them to figure out what was working and what was not working. Like several of the other participants, Jack brought up the notion of failure. However, his notion of failure differed slightly, which could be due to the uniqueness of him being an entrepreneur. In contrast to the other participants, he explained that his idea of failure had changed over the course of his work experiences. Jack described failure as:

> as long as you learn from the mistakes that are made and evolve through those, and you make small mistakes quickly and often that you know, previously I would've thought that was horrible, but now I see that as an important part of the process. (IPX, 2012, p. 12)

They ended up making deals with other companies and creating new products. Presently, they build these products on a major social media site and are a profitable business. He describes the company as small with just a few co-founders, and along with the participant Jennifer, was one of the few participants to describe his work environment as cool. Jack and the other co-founders work in a co-working space with other entrepreneurs. Similarly, Jennifer's work environment is also not working in an actual organization, but working from home. When I asked Jack why he chose his current type of work he responded, "I think just the excitement around it—the newness. We really kind of walked into the social realm of the internet, social gaming…partially because it was just a hot industry at the time" (IPX, 2012, p. 8).

Similar to the participant Margarita, Jack believes that work is intertwined with his identity. He said, "It's fair to say it plays a large part into my identity" (IPX, 2012, p. 2). He described work as, "ideally means vocation" (IPX, 2012, p. 10). Jack was one of the only participants to express the idea of work being also connected to the meaning of life. He described

building products as interesting and exciting and believes that it is important to be connected

with what you're doing, believing in it, and making an impact. When contrasting his current

work with his position in the corporate world, he stated:

> I think the last two years have been really good. It went from being challenging and just
> the breadth of what you have to figure out, but also just feeling ownership and building
> something—dedication to it and really believing in it. I think before when I was more in
> the corporate world… it was always interesting and sometimes there were good days that
> went well but, really it was just sort of managing the stress level of it. (IPX, 2012, p. 6)

I noticed that when Jack talked about his previous work experience in investment banking, there

existed a level of dissociation of himself from his work. This dissociation is reflected in the

following statement:

> The good news for me is that I was so early in my career both in the investment banking
> side where those whole markets were going to hell and on the mergers…..I was a
> junior….it's not like anyone ever associated the poor results of all that with me. (IPX,
> 2012, p. 4)

Yet when he talked about his current position, there was no dissociation—he seemed passionate,

inspired, and motivated. I believe that this lack of dissociation with his current work exhibits his

belief of work being intertwined with his identity. This connection was apparent when he

discussed the role of his values in the work that he does. He described meaningful work as,

"aligning with my values and creating an impact in the world that I want to see" (IPX, 2012, p.

10). The distinct comparison between the two positions was made clearer when I asked Jack to

tell me about some bad work experiences. Jack said:

> I think it just really comes from a lack of balance…so too much work being one factor—
> although I have to say in comparative to the days of working crazy hours in the corporate
> world versus….I still work a ton of hours now, but it doesn't really bother me….I just
> feel motivated because of having to get in the game and wanting to succeed and seeing
> that my effort is directly correlated to that result…so those are two very different
> feelings. (IPX, 2012, p. 7)

Jack went on to describe why his current position provided such motivating work. He said that aside from a salary that the following motivated all three co-founders, "having an equity stake in the company, but also believing in the vision, feeling responsible to shareholders, and various other pressures that definitely fall more under the founder, entrepreneur principle category versus just being an employee category" (IPX, 2012, pp. 15-16).

In reflecting on this interview with Jack, I found that he inspired me. I've been struggling for the past few years to move out of jobs that felt meaningless to me and into work that I believe in and that really motivates me. If someone was to ask me about my previous job as a research analyst in the banking industry, I would respond with a level of dissociation because I did not believe in what I was doing—it wasn't my life's work. When I hear someone like Jack talk about his current work, it inspires me because he is so passionate. I think fear of the unknown holds us back sometimes, and here was this participant that had taken a leap into the unknown and with hard work, had succeeded. I think he summed up his idea of the *meaning of work* strikingly with the following metaphor:

> And, the *meaning of work* for me is the difference between being on an assembly line cutting the same cut of wood time over time, and doing that versus getting to build a beautiful piece of furniture that you can think of as a piece of art. It's the same skills to some degree, but one is just being a part of something that then…you know a small part that gets consolidated into a piece of furniture down the assembly line versus you getting to put your heart and soul into something that you think is beautiful and an expression of who you are and it's the combination of what you do. (IPX, 2012, p. 19)

Katie

Katie was born in 1986. She entered the workforce as a teenager and her first position was as an administrative assistant. Katie described it as a really nice job because it was a small office and she said, "That was a really neat work environment because I got to do lots of different things that I would later use" (IPX, 2012, p. 3). She has had a total of eight jobs since

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she entered the workforce. Some of these jobs have included: desk work, clerk work, and multiple positions in the service industry. Katie's jobs in the service industry were in coffee shops, restaurants, and within the hotel business. Her tenure in all of these positions was approximately less than a year. In regards to these positions she said, "They're not things you want to do for the rest of your life" (IPX, 2012, p. 3). These experiences taught Katie that she is "not a huge fan of corporate business styles" (IPX, 2012, p. 3). She said this was because, "I really don't like how currently corporate industry treats its employees and I don't like how it treats customers either (IPX, 2012, p. 3). Katie went on to say, "I don't like that employees are treated like property" (IPX, 2012, p. 3).

Katie graduated from college in 2009 with a bachelor's degree. She said, "I graduated in 2009, so I graduated straight into the recession" (IPX, 2012, p. 8). She is currently a technician in the field of Human Services. It is a database entry job where she goes through and approves cases for a specific program. At the time of data collection, Katie had been in this position for the last seven months. She works in an office environment in a cubicle where she does not have to meet with customers face to face, but handles mail-in applications and communicates with them via phone calls. I asked Katie why she chose her current type of employment and she said, "I had been looking for jobs for a while, so I was going to take the first one that was offered" (IPX, 2012, p. 6), which seems to reflect the issue with much of our generation of not being able to find employment quickly out of college.

Katie discussed being the youngest person in her office by at least twenty years. She said, "The social aspect is very different than any other job I've had. I pretty much don't talk to any of my co-workers. They're friendly, very formal, but we don't have a whole lot to talk about (IPX, 2012, p. 2). Later in the conversation I realized why this was an important point for Katie to

bring up because when I asked her to tell me about some good experiences of work she described why she enjoyed the social aspect. She said, "I have really enjoyed making relationships with people" (IPX, 2013, p. 4). Katie said that when she described some work experiences as fun, she defined fun as, "I think the fun jobs were jobs where I was doing my work while working with others and enjoying that like relational aspect" (IPX, 2013, p. 4). When I asked her in the second interview why the social aspect of work was important to her, she responded, "I live by myself and I do a lot of things by myself, so I have my personal time by myself…so I like having relationships that… I like having much more of my social life within work" (IPX, 2013, p. 3). Social relationships at work were also important to the participant Margarita. Her reasoning was similar, as she talked about how we spend more time at work than we do at home, so having positive relationships at work was important.

Being the youngest person in the office was also one of the reasons Katie decided to participate in the study, which was the same reason the participant Rapunzel decided to participate as well. Katie said she had witnessed some behavior at work that bothered her, but she had not thought about it as a generational issue until she saw the email invitation to participate in my study. She explained, "I get really frustrated with a lot of ways that people, like my coworkers, will stereotype our clients" (IPX, 2012, p. 2). Katie went on to explain that her co-workers made comments about some of their clients based on age. She said, "We have quite a few elderly clients and there's this stereotype that the elderly clients are very honest and we should try everything in our power to help them, but it's the younger people who are trying to rip off the system" (IPX, 2012, p. 2).

I asked Katie why she worked and she responded, "I work to pay my bills. That's pretty much the whole reason for me to work. If I didn't have to, then I definitely wouldn't…or at least

I wouldn't do it in the jobs that I've had" (IP5, 2012, p. 3). She added that work means this, "set

aside time that I become almost someone else's property" (IPX, 2012, p. 7). Katie said that work

was satisfying when she:

> completed something that is important to me inside of a job that is built by someone else.
> So, the things that are important to me are usually relationships or helping someone or
> seeing like some of the bigger philosophical problems and knowing that I'm making a
> difference in those. So, I guess making a difference. (IPX, 2012, p. 9)

She told me that she enjoys her current position because she is doing something that

benefits other people. When I asked Katie to elaborate she said she enjoys it because she is

"feeling like I am doing something bigger than myself" (IPX, 2013, p. 4). Katie believed that

when she worked in the service industry that the work tasks that she completed were just a

transaction between her and the customers, and she did not find the work satisfying. When I

asked to describe what she considered a transaction, she responded:

> I think it's the difference between, "I've sold you this like room for the night," which I'm
> sure is a nice memory….as opposed to knowing that I helped something towards society
> because the transaction is just the immediate and right then and there and has no…
> besides maybe making a slight impact in the person who stayed that night…things
> like…I guess bigger concepts like working towards changing something in society. (IPX,
> 2013, p. 10)

Katie and I discussed the influence that her parents had on her growing up. She talked

about growing up in a small town and was told by her parents that she could be whatever she

wanted to be, and the key to doing that was education. She said she:

> watched my Dad not be able to be whatever he wanted to be—he had to stay in mines.
> And, still works there because he can't take retirement till later and kind of watched that
> hard work didn't get him terribly far…and he always told me it was because of school,
> but then going to school didn't get me…I mean it did get me far, but it didn't get me
> everything we were told as a child. (IPX, 2012, pp. 6-7)

She talked about how as a young child she was "told that college would solve problems" (IPX,

2012, p. 6) and now that she has graduated she reflected on her education as

realizing that it was a good thing, but it wasn't the good thing we thought it would be" (IPX, 2012, p. 13).   This could be a direct consequence of graduating into one of the worst recessions since the Great Depression and this reflection resonated with me well. Education is greatly valued in my family, and while I too believe that it is important, I find myself wondering if going into a large amount of debt for my master's degree and doctorate degree is going to be worth it in the end.

I asked Katie what her future work plans or goals were and she said, "I would someday really like to open up a business" (IPX, 2012, p. 9). She also mentioned the possibility of going to graduate school. These options made complete sense to me as we continued the interview because when she talked about working for other people she described it as becoming someone else's property. However, when we talked about opening her own business she said, "I would be doing my own things, which might look like work to other people but it wouldn't feel like work to me" (IPX, 2012, p. 11). When I asked why it wouldn't feel like work, she responded, "I guess because it wouldn't be someone else's job. It would be me, independently doing something (IPX, 2012, p. 11). I thought this notion was similar to how the participant Jack was dissociated from his previous work position in the investment banking industry, but passionate about being an entrepreneur and owning his own business.

The interviews with Katie were a great opportunity because she brought a different perspective to this study. She emphasized the importance of wanting to do work that was meaningful because it would bring her more satisfaction, but the work itself was not intertwined with her identity to the degree it is with other participants.   Katie created clear boundaries between her work and her life outside of work, and she is the only participant to do this. When I asked her why she set such strong boundaries she said:

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Because work isn't as important to me as the benefit of….what work ends up being for me is that paycheck, and that paycheck is for me to go out with my friends, for me to have a nice couch in my apartment…to be able to pay that bill. (IPX, 2013, p. 11)

And, these boundaries are not a representation of her not being a hard worker or that she doesn't enjoy her job—as many people assume when boundaries are strongly set—but it's because she holds things outside of work as a priority. I found that idea refreshing, as I know many of us still struggle to find that balance. In fact, I think her *meaning of work* was summed up nicely when I asked for a metaphor and she said, "I guess work to live, not live to work" (IPX, 2012, p. 17).

Margarita

Margarita was born in 1983 and is the oldest of the study participants. She has a bachelor's degree. Margarita has been working since she was 16. I asked how many jobs Margarita has had total and she responded, "I've only actually had three jobs in my whole life, which most people think that's not many at all" (IPX, 2012, p. 1). In comparison to the four other study participants, three was by far the fewest number of jobs possessed by any of the individuals over their entire lifetime.

Margarita's first job was working at a vet clinic for four years. Her second job was working in the retail industry at a major corporation. It was during our conversation regarding that specific retail experience that she exclaimed the following about her management style preference, "I don't like managers who breathe down my neck. I hate being micromanaged" (IPX, 2012, p. 14). This notion was shared by several of the participants.

Margarita's third and current position is also in the retail industry as a sales person. She has been in this position for six years. When I asked Margarita why she chose her present job, she responded, "Honestly I walked in and I applied and I never thought I would be there for as long as I have" (IPX, 2012, p. 7) and how she "kind of just stumbled upon it" (IPX, 2012, p. 7).

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It is important to note that like many of the other study participants, Margarita went to school full-time and worked as an intern, all while working full-time in this position. I believe that working full-time and going to school full-time exemplifies the strong work ethic and financial independence that these participant's strive for and encompass.

During our first interview, Margarita told me that she had just been promoted that day to an acting store manager for a period of 30 to 90 days at a different location. I asked her if she was looking forward to her promotion and she said, "So, I got like a week's notice and I'm terrified," (IPX, 2012, p. 7). She described her reason for being terrified as, "I feel like I'm going to fail. You know I've never managed people…ever" (IPX, 2012, p. 12). I then asked her why she was excited about the promotion and she mentioned a shorter commute and more money. She also said, "For me it's like I have to get out of my comfort zone someday (IPX, 2012, p. 13) and, "I'll probably learn a lot from it too" (IPX, 2012, p. 13).

I asked Margarita to describe for me some good experiences of work and she said, "The one thing that I really like about my job now is my customers and the people" (IPX, 2012, p. 2). She discussed the importance of building relationships with her customers. Due to her unique position of being a sales person, Margarita discussed the importance of honesty. She believed that having a strong work ethic helped her establish strong relationships with the customers because they respected her for it. It was during this part of the conversation that it was visible to me how strong of a work ethic Margarita possesses because she went on to say, "I struggle with people who don't care about their jobs. And, I struggle with the people who do the minimum to get by" (IPX, 2012, p. 2). She said that her problem was that sometimes she cared too much about her work, but she said, "For me it's a matter of pride of how I do my job and how I work"

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(IPX, 2012, p. 8). When I asked her what made work satisfying for her she responded, "Just feeling like I've accomplished a lot" (IPX, 2012, p. 8).

In regards to her work environment, she talked about her relationships with her co-workers as a family. She said, "I mean they're kind of like a family there, so it's kind of nice to have that support system (IPX, 2012, p. 10). She talked about her current manager and how he trusts her and how that "it makes me feel good about myself (IPX, 2012, p. 13), and how that was great in comparison to a previous manager who made her feel "like I was insignificant and stupid" (IPX, 2012, p. 14) due to the lack of trust and micromanagement.

The second interview with Margarita took place several months after the first. She had completed her promotion as an acting manager at this point, so I asked her to describe for me that experience. She said:

> It was really good for me to be taken out of somewhere I felt really comfortable and be forced into somewhere new. It taught me a lot about responsibility and you know just trying to learn how to manage other people. (IPX, 2013, p. 4)

Additionally, she described why the promotion eventually turned into a bad experience. She said:
> Once they hired a new manager it was a really horrible experience for me because they kind of just were like…it's temporary for me and when they hire somebody else I'll have to work under them and she ended up driving a lot of people out of the store." (IPX, 2013, pp. 4-5)

Reflecting on our interview, I think that what drives Margarita to have such a strong work ethic is that she does not separate who she is from her work, which is similar to the participant Jack. This was evident when she said: "work for me is a very personal thing" (IPX, 2012, p. 4) and, "I feel like it's a reflection of who I am" (IPX, 2012, p. 4). When I asked her to explain to me what she meant by work being a reflection of who she is, she said, "So for me I try to do my best because I want it to show that I'm a good person and that I work hard, and that I take pride in what I do" (IPX, 2013, p. 4). She said, "The *meaning of work* to me is who I am as a person"

(IPX, 2012, p. 10). She said, "I try to be an overachiever at work too just because that's what I feel I expect of myself—I can't be a failure, I can't be lazy, I can't be unproductive" (IPX, 2013, p. 6).

In relation to the topic of work being a reflection of who she is, Margarita brought up the notion of failure. It seemed as though fear of failure also played a role in having a strong work ethic. She said, "I take failure on a very personal level. I'm definitely my own worst critic, so when I do something wrong at work I internalize it and I take it really hard" (IPX, 2013, p. 4). Additionally, she talked about how her family environment influenced her *meaning of work*. She said, "almost everyone is my family is like…they're overachievers (IPX, 2012, p. 6) and how they, "also influenced me to not want to be a failure" (IPX, 2012, p. 6).

These two interviews with Margarita were great opportunities. While the interviews were not relatively long, the answers that Margarita gave to me felt honest and forthcoming. In many instances during these two interviews I found myself being forced to reflect on my own *meaning of work*. I spent time thinking about what role work plays or should play in my life. It also highlighted the idea for me that individuals can vary on how much they separate their work lives from their personal lives, and how that level of separation can possibly have significant influences on each individual's *meaning of work*. Listening to Margarita talk about the significance of work in her life and how she strives to have such a strong work ethic—it reminded me of the importance of working hard in my life no matter my position or the task at hand.

Jennifer

Jennifer was born in 1987. She is a junior in college working towards her bachelor's degree. Jennifer entered the workforce when she was 16. Her first job was a position in the retail

industry. Other experiences have included working in: restaurants, coffee shops, as a banquet server, at a community college testing center, an internship with a non-profit, and at a nursing home where she worked with patients with Alzheimer's disease. Jennifer has had approximately eleven jobs since she entered the workforce. She talked about working a lot of different jobs and she shared that:

> I think for me it was you know when you're first starting out you just kind of have to pay your dues and work those jobs that are not so great. And eventually you know I think a lot of work is finding out what you don't want to do first, and so you know you kind of have to experiment and see what's out there and then each job whether it was good or bad was a definite learning experience. (IPX, 2013, p. 14)

> During the interviews, Jennifer was very honest and open. From our conversations, I learned that many of Jennifer's earlier experiences in life have contributed to the person she is today, and what she is working towards accomplishing in school and her career. Jennifer talked about her experiences beginning in high school. She shared the following:

> I had a lot of difficulties in high school. I dropped out at one point. I just didn't fit in. I was kind of picked on. I eventually just dropped out and did my degree from internet classes. And so I never thought I would be a college student. (IPX, 2012, p. 12)

She talked a lot about her experiences working in minimum wage jobs. She shared the same view as the participant Katie about working in the service industry. She said, "There were times when, 'you just feel like you're a number and it could…you're very much replaceable'" (IPX, 2012, p. 8). Jennifer said that while working in restaurants she "experienced a lot of sexual harassment by a lot of different guys" (IPX, 2012, p. 10), and while working in the hotel industry:

> there were so many managers and people working there that they took no time to even try to get to know you. You're working events with 100 people, like they don't have time to do that. So, that impersonal environment…I just can't do that… that type of work. (IPX, 2012, p. 11)

Jennifer shared that managers were rude, uptight, and could have cared less how she was doing as an individual. In comparison, she preferred managers that actually cared about her as an individual and ones that gave her autonomy because the more freedom she was given in a position she said, "The more empowered I feel in a job" (IPX, 2013, p. 9).

In recounting some of her experiences working in minimum wage jobs, she was the only participant who used the term demeaning in the sense that in these positions she, "felt like I was treated like I was dumb, like I had no potential" (IPX, 2012, p. 17). She said that she saw these types of positions as, "a complete dead end" (IPX, 2012, p. 12) and that "working in the restaurant where you're just trying to make money for people or a corporation was so just…I just thought I can't do this with my life, I'm just not that type of person" (IPX, 2012, p. 12). Jennifer explained that she gained no fulfillment in these types of positions, even though she was making money. She said "it just felt meaningless to work in those jobs because I felt like I wasn't helping anybody" (IPX, 2012, p. 13). She described meaningful work as being in a position to help other people. She defined it as:

> feeling like I'm impacting something in someone's' lives that is going to be beyond that interaction of 5 or 10 minutes is meaningful to me. I guess that's how I would define it is having beyond our interaction is going to affect something later down the line for them and having a part in that even if it's a very minor part. (IPX, 2012, pp. 15-16)

Jennifer decided to go back to school because she said the bad experiences at work:

> pushed me to go back to college, so that I could actually learn the skills to then be in a helping profession. And, I saw that college was the only way… the only shot I was going to have to do that. (IPX, 2012, p. 13)

During the first interview, Jennifer was working part-time at a resource center, while attending school. The center provides resources to women who are in need of their services, such as victims of sexual assault or domestic abuse. She had also been volunteering her time to sit on counsels that deal with "juvenile justice, mental health issues, gendered issues with girls" (IPX,

2012, p. 5) to talk about her own personal experiences that she had gone through as a youth. She shared that she, "just went through a lot of hard things during my teenage years so I get to kind of tell my story and give an opinion, which is really cool" (IPX, 2012, p. 5). When I asked Jennifer what she wanted to do with her college degree she talked about wanting to work with high risk youths and adolescents. She said

> I'm not sure specifically if I want to do the XXX department or juvenile justice, but I know particularly for me women's rights issues are very important, but also high risk youths so kind of combining that is like…I would love to do something with a nonprofit that maybe mentors adolescent youth, particularly with young girls just because I think you're at that stage when you're younger and you need solid role models to look up to and I feel like a lot of women that end up in like the prison system have been victimized…just suffered domestic violence or drug abuse, and so if you can plant those solid roots in women's lives when they are younger you can make a big impact when they get older. (IPX, 2012, p. 6)

We talked about some of Jennifer's fears as a college student getting ready to graduate. She discussed the idea that the master's degree was now the new bachelor's degree, making it difficult to compete for jobs with people with their graduate degree and years of experience. In regards to the issue of student loans, she said, "it's really disheartening to be go into a lot of debt with student loans and then just be like there are no jobs for me" (IPX, 2012, p. 30). Jennifer was also the only participant to mention the notion of burnout. She described some instances where she had simultaneously been working two to three jobs, while attending school full-time. Specific examples of the consequences of her burn-out included: missing meetings; being physically, but not mentally present; and her grades at school were suffering. At one point during the previous summer she quit her job because she said she needed to re-prioritize what was important to her. Her lesson learned, "is you can have a lot of things going on but sometimes you spread yourself thin so you're not doing any of them well" (IPX, 2012, p. 20). She talked about the importance of self-care and how sometimes the extra money is not worth it. In regards

to the extra money, she said, "It's not worth your sanity; it's not worth your relationship suffering from it…you have to reach a point where you say, 'is this worth it'" (IPX, 2012, p. 21)? Jennifer shared that her paychecks were now half of what they used to be, but that she was much happier because she had more time to focus on things that she enjoyed in life outside of work. She said she is now, "so much more at peace" (IPX, 2012, p. 21).

The second interview with Jennifer took place several months after the first. She was still working at a resource center; however she had acquired a new position. All of her hard work serving on the councils had paid off and she was offered a contract position with the purpose of helping to improve the behavioral health system. During our conversation she told me that she is the most fulfilled she has ever been in her work because "it's something that I really care about and I'm really passionate about" (IPX, 2013, p. 11). When I asked Jennifer to tell me about her new position she explained to me that she now gets to take the ideas that were created during the council meetings she was volunteering her time on during the first interview, and actually implement them into the community. The position is for a certain amount of hours over a nine month period. I asked her to tell me about the work environment for this position and she said she is, "almost entirely on my own doing this, which is really, really nice" (IPX, 2013, p. 14). Jennifer said she when she's not working out in the field, she works from home. She has a few mandatory meetings a month, and weekly meetings with a mentor. Her responsibilities in her new position include: sending out surveys, making phone calls, and conducting site visits to counties and groups around the state to create dialogue of how to improve the behavioral health system—with the purpose of giving others a voice in the matter. She said she will be expected to compile the data results and present it back to the state to discuss solutions and changes that need to be made.

Jennifer shared with me that she is trying to push the idea of peer advocacy in the behavioral health system. I asked her to explain to me what she means by peer advocacy. She said,

> The idea of peer advocacy is someone that's been through the mental health system or behavioral health system, but they're trained on how to provide resources and they're really there for the youth or for the family. And so they're not coming in as a social worker, anyone that has an agenda as far as the state or these facilities and they come in and say, "What are you needs?" You know, "How can I help you navigate these systems that are so confusing to get through?" And so they really come in with the person in mind. (IPX, 2013, p. 6)

I asked Jennifer a very personal question about why she found advocacy so attractive and meaningful. She said,

> I think for me it was that I was in a position, I've been in positions in my life where I've had advocates and that made all the difference in the world for me as far as recovery. And then I've also had situations where I didn't have advocates and I desperately needed it (IPX, 2013, p. 5).

At the end of our second interview, Jennifer explicitly made the point that she had decided when she went back to college that money would not be the most important driving force for choosing a career. She said the feeling of knowing that she was helping people in her career was worth more than making money would ever be to her.

In reflecting on our conversations, I think that Jennifer was extremely articulate in explaining her *meaning of work* to me. I perceived her as extremely wise, and I believe that it had to do with her ability to learn from all of her experiences throughout her life—thus far. I was lucky that she was willing to share these experiences, as it brought an extremely personal perspective to the study. Her desire to do work that served to help others resonated well with my own perspective on what I would like work to be. And, her passion was inspirational to me, as it was a reminder to persevere in working towards the things in life that we truly believe in no matter how hard life gets.

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Rapunzel

Rapunzel was born in 1989. She is the youngest of the participants. She has a bachelor's degree and is currently pursuing a graduate degree. Rapunzel is the only participant who entered the workforce when she was 14. She has worked six total positions. Her first job was at a dog kennel, and the other positions included: service industry, retail, and a campus position working at a testing center. Several of her positions have overlapped with one another over the years. Most of the positions were held for at least a year and a half, with the longest one being four years. Similar to Jennifer, Rapunzel explained to me that, "there's a lot of good aspects of situations or a lot of good learning experiences I've had through work. Just like learning what I like and what I don't like" (IPX, 2012, p. 6).

Rapunzel currently works at a company in the telecommunications industry as a project coordinator. Rapunzel manages the sub-recruiter group making sure that they submit candidates in a correct manner for positions. She describes her job as, "basically I'm a paper-pusher (IPX, 2012, p. 1)." Her tasks include setting up procedures, keeping track of documents, writing procedures, supporting the recruiting department, and doing "everything else in the office that no one else wants to do" (IPX, 2012, p. 1). She has been with the company since 2011.

Rapunzel works in a cubicle space with three other individuals in one room in the basement of the office. She called it an improvement from her previous location in the building when she was the administrative assistant. She explained, "I at least have this nice, big window behind me so that I get natural light more so than when I was upstairs at the front desk (IPX, 2012, p. 2). She described the culture of the company as "team building and we're going away from that" (IPX, 2012, p. 3). She explained to me that a new CEO is taking over the company and a lot of management changes were taking place, however leadership is not elaborating on the

new direction they are taking—thus, resulting in making her question her own job security. She said there was presently a lot of "instability" (IPX, 2012, p. 3) at work. I asked Rapunzel why she chose her current work and she said, "I was absolutely done working two jobs and working 50 to 60 hours a week and not quitting" (IPX, 2012, p. 11). She elaborated that she was barely able to make ends meet before taking the administrative position at the consulting company, even though she was working so many hours. This was reflected in the following, "literally I had just enough money for like maybe 100 bucks to eat every two weeks…that was it, period. Nothing else could go into my budget" (IPX, 2012, p. 11).

Rapunzel shared with me her experiences of being stigmatized at work. She explained that this was the reason for her participating in my study. I asked her to describe for me what she meant by being stigmatized and she said, "The young one….definitely the young one. Especially because in most of my jobs I seem to be the youngest one" (IPX, 2012, p. 8). She explained that other employees would make comments to her such as, "oh well, you're young" (IP4, 2012, p. 8) and, "I'm the baby of the group" (IPX, 2012, p. 9). She said that she had also had instances where either her work was demoted, or she was expected to know how to do certain tasks, based on her age. She said that being stigmatized made her feel, "frustrated…a lot" (IPX, 2012, p. 9). And that even though she was doings her job well, it felt as though her age was used as an excuse and it was, "like an instant step down" (IPX, 2012, p. 9). It makes her feel, "very undermined" (IPX, 2012, p. 10) and she said has to, "just keep reminding myself that it's just their opinion" (IPX, 2012, p. 10).

As the conversation continued, Rapunzel revealed that presently she believed in what she said is the very basic *meaning of work*, which "is a task or set of tasks and responsibilities that you fulfill and that you are compensated for it" (IPX, 2012, p. 11). I asked Rapunzel what work

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meant to her, and she responded, "It really means stability and being held accountable for everything and it should be a source of joy in my life, but it currently is not" (IPX, 2012, p. 13). Even though she does not find enjoyment in current position she said that she is working there for the support and to figure out what she is good at doing. She said she is "trying to figure out what way I really want to go and what I enjoy, so I'm really kind of like testing the waters to see what fits my personality best (IPX, 2012, p. 4). She added, "I'm determined to hold out to the two year mark even though I'm not ecstatic about working here, but because the benefits are good and the pay is good (IPX, 2012, p. 12).

She explained to me that she desires to be completely opposite of her mother because she, "cannot keep a job seriously longer than nine months. I think that's why I'm determined to hold a job for more than a year before I'm willing to even consider a different position (IPX, 2012, p. 12). In accordance with this, Rapunzel said she really wants work to mean stability, which stems from the unstable environment that she was raised in. I asked to her to explain to me what she means by stability and she said, "Stability means….for me personally it means having that savings fund or having that rainy day fund" (IPX, 2013, p. 10)

We talked about how she is not passionate about her current type of work. I asked her to explain to me within the work context what she is passionate about and she said "organizing" (IPX, 2013, p. 14). She went on to say, "I love sitting there and just like planning out a project on a piece of paper and putting all the deadlines to it and then like keeping all my stuff organized (IPX, 2013, p. 15). However, this makes sense as she did admit in the first interview to being an OCD perfectionist. She also described for me how she finds purpose in her work by being involved. She described being involved as being, "integrated into the creative process and the

end vision (IPX, 2013, p. 10) and, "having that type of input into what the final project is" (IPX, 2013, p. 10).

Rapunzel later shared with me her ideal perspective on what she wants work to mean. She said, "I kind of want work to be is something that I enjoy, that I feel passionate about, that I want to help people and like… just happen to get compensated reasonably. That would be my preferred, ideal *meaning of work* (IPX, 2012, p. 10). She described her ideal position as one in which, "I was helping someone and…was making someone's life better versus only doing the task and just getting paid for it and just doing it" (IPX, 2012, p. 10). When I asked Rapunzel what made work satisfying for her, she said "helping people" (IPX, 2012, p. 20), which is similar to Jennifer and Katie's idea of meaningful work. I asked Rapunzel to explain to me why helping people was meaningful to her and she said, "Bringing benefit to somebody else's life. Improving their quality of life I think is really what is the best part of it is because you see instant gratification and you know their overall life quality is better" (IPX, 2013, p. 8).

Rapunzel spoke strongly about findings a career path that she can settle into. When I asked Rapunzel her future work plans or goals, she listed four career paths she was thinking about pursuing, including: opening a meadery, psychologist, chiropractor, or group fitness instructor. In describing the meadery she said she, "would like to turn that into like an actual business where we make 25 gallon batches of honey mead and then sell it professionally…I would love to do that" (IPX, 2012, p. 17). She explained to me she would consider becoming a chiropractor, but two factors were holding her back from doing that. One being her mother had talked about going into the same profession, and two, she didn't want to move. Additionally, she had also contemplated working towards her doctorate in psychology and going into research and teaching. And, lastly, she talked about being a group fitness or yoga instructor where she would,

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"probably do special needs or specialty…people who are recovering from injuries or older people with disabilities…helping them become mobile and exercising again (IPX, 2012, p. 18). Rapunzel talked about how going to graduate school for her master's degree would be, "a good jump towards any of those careers (IPX, 2012, p. 19). She talked about the importance of having balance in life and she said, "I think I've done a good job by choosing this certain career paths that offer a balanced life style. All of those career paths really really promote having a balanced life and doing what you like and also being responsible at the same time (IPX, 2012, p. 30).

It was a great opportunity to be able to interview Rapunzel because she brought a different perspective to the study, as she is currently in the process of trying to create a career path in alignment with her *meaning of work*. She was able to articulate her lack of enjoyment in her current position, while expressing her plans for achieving her goals of being in a career where she was helping people. It was obvious that this was a topic she had reflected on. I resonated with this participant on a level of trying to figure out what I was going to do career wise. I am in the same position of going through several different career options/paths that I can take and I find myself having the same conversation with myself that I had with her. And I resonated with her on striving to find balance in my overall life by choosing a career that I find meaningful, and thus balance at work helps stabilize the overall balance in life.

Conclusion

A pen sketch of each individual reveals the experiences and interactions of each participant with their life-world. These individual and shared experiences shape and bound the context of this study for their constructed *meaning of work*. The ten essential themes and corresponding essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes that are presented in the next part of this chapter, Part II, are situated within these contextual stories.

Part II: The Essence of the *Meaning of Work* for the Five Generation Y Participants

The 10 essential themes of this study describe the *meaning of work* for these five Generation Y participants, and encapsulate their individual, shared, and co-constructions. The 10 essential themes include: the *meaning of work* is influenced by education; the *meaning of work* is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful; the *meaning of work* is balance; the *meaning of work* is completing tasks and being compensated to meet our basic needs; the *meaning of work* is the importance of social relationships; the *meaning of work* is considering and exploring all opportunities; the *meaning of work* is influenced by our social networks; the *meaning of work* is a reflection of who we are; the *meaning of work* is working for an organization that functions well; and, the *meaning of work* is influenced by the current state of the economy.

The essential sub-themes and essential sub-sub-themes, if applicable, are presented with each corresponding essential theme. A mind map is provided for each individual essential theme. Additionally, each essential theme is concluded by reflecting on two corresponding aspects: 1) the spread of hermeneutic description on the hermeneutic spectrum 2) a table that summarizes key points from the participants' descriptions of the essential theme, essential sub-theme(s), and essential sub-sub-theme(s), along with any supporting literature.

The *Meaning of Work* is Influenced by Education

All of the study participants acknowledged the influence of education on their constructed *meaning of work* to them. This essential theme should come of no surprise considering that at least 54% of individuals in this cohort have had at least some college education. According to the literature, Generation Y is on track to become the most educated generation in the history of the United States (Taylor & Keeter, 2010). As such, all five participants in this study have a bachelor's degree, and one participant is currently pursuing a

master's degree. This essential theme is composed of four essential sub-themes and no essential sub-sub-themes. The essential sub-themes include: choice of major; paying off student loan debt; a degree is no guarantee of anything; and college is the only way. A visual representation of this essential theme and essential sub-themes is displayed in Figure 6.

Choice of major.

Participants pointed out how their choice of major influenced the type of work they were interested in pursuing when they entered the workforce. One participant said, "I was applying for more like humanitarian and human service jobs because my major was global studies" (IP5, 2013, p. 6). Another participant mentioned that the influence was not solely limited to their major, but included the additional aspects of specific school attended and fellow peers within their degree cohort:

> Going to school where I did and being an economics major and Spanish major, but really my focus of getting a job right out of school is related more to the economics track and cohort. Everyone was just trying to become management consultants and investment bankers. So, I kind of just followed that…I guess I'm a product of my environment….as much as I want to believe that I'm an individual. (IP3, 2012, p. 9)

According to the literature, the type of degree major has enormous consequences on an individual's employment opportunities upon entering the workforce. A graduate's choice of major affects their income level and rate of unemployment. The Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University, reported that STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) majors have the highest employment rates and income levels. In comparison, non-technical majors have higher unemployment rates (Carnevale, Cheah, & Strohl, 2013).

The circles contain the following text:

- A degree is no guarantee of anything
- Choice of major
- The *meaning of work* is influenced by education
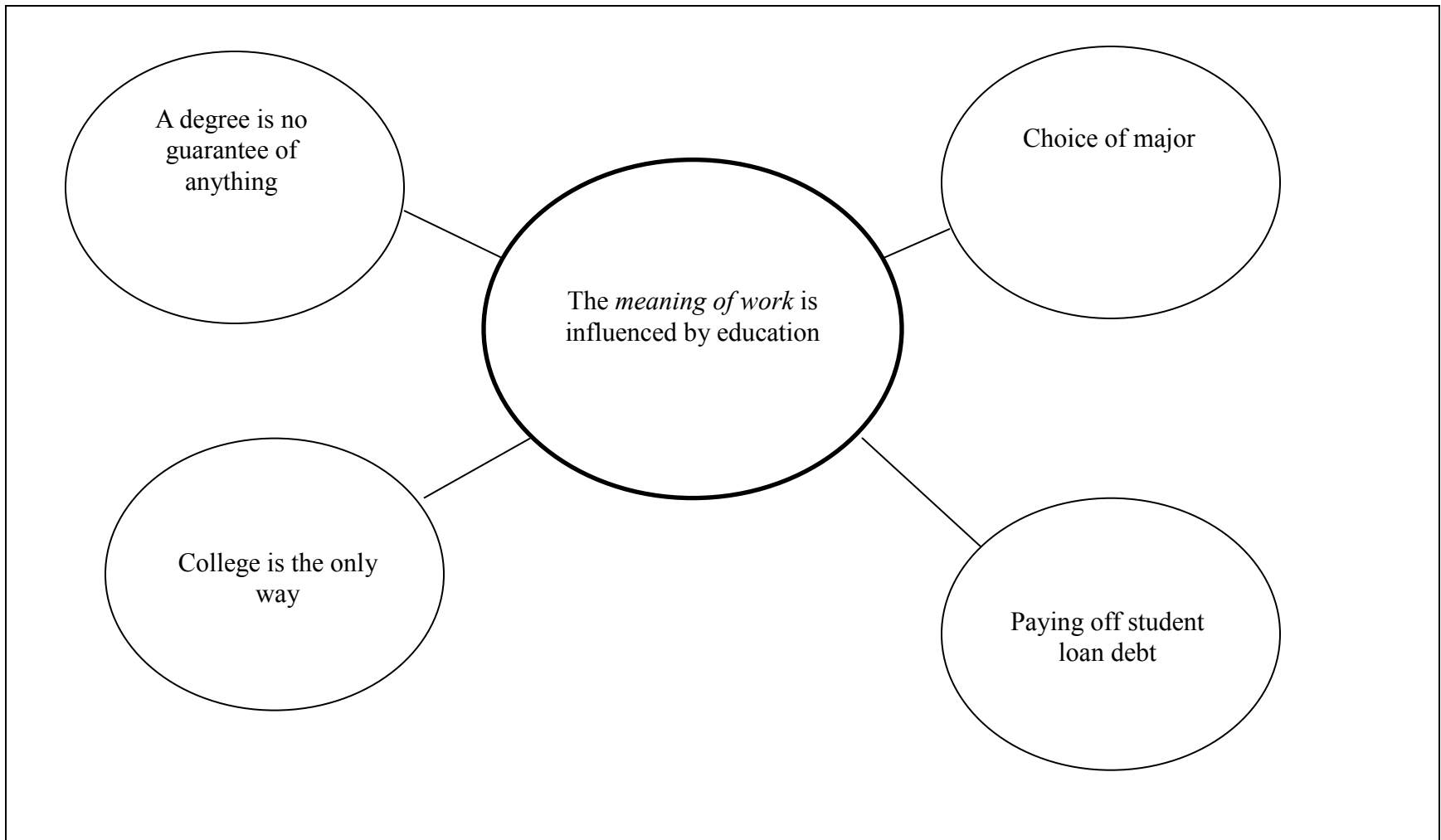- College is the only way
- Paying off student loan debt

Figure 6. A visual representation of the *meaning of work* is influenced by education

Paying off student loan debt.

Student loan debt has become arguably one of the most important political, social, and economic issues for Generation Y. Student loan debt has tripled between the years 2004 and 2012 (Lee, 2013). As of the fourth quarter in 2012, student loan debt totaled 966 billion dollars (Lee, 2013). Individuals under the age of 30 are reported as having the largest amount of debt ("Student Loan Debt", 2013). There has been an increase of 70% of borrowers and a 70% increase in the average balance per person (Lee, 2013). Lee (2013) broke down these percentages as followings: 40% owe less than $10,000; 29.8% owe $10,000 to $25,000; 17.7% owe $25,000 to $50,000; and 3.7% owe more than $100,000. Nearly one in five U.S. households (19%) owed money on student loans in 2010, which is more than double the proportion from 1989 (Fry, 2012).

In alignment with these statistics, participants discussed their concern over paying off their student loan debt. One participant is currently finishing their undergraduate degree and is contemplating applying to graduate school. However, the participant shared their hesitation of pursuing another degree based on the following, "I see so many of my friends going to get a master's simply because they have no way of paying off their debt from their bachelor's, and then their going into that much more debt" (IP1, 2012, p. 26). The fear of debt is so concerning that one participant explained that their choice of undergraduate schools to attend was driven by the prospective amount their degree would cost in comparison to the average salary paid in their chosen career field. They said:

> I think a lot of people are like…our generation, especially, is in so much debt with
> very little hope that you're going to be able to pay it off… and that's a really scary
> thing and I think that's something that has changed too is how you view education. A
> lot of people are going to state universities now. It's like you're going to be a social
> worker…I'm not going to go to DU and spend 50,000 dollars because there's no way I
> can pay for that. That's why I go to a state school. I would love to go to a university,

but I'm not going into a field that's going to pay me a lot of money… so yeah I'm going to go to a state school where I pay a tenth of what I would pay at another school per semester. (IP1, 2012, pp. 26-27)

During my first interview with one participant, I asked them if student loan debt was a factor that influenced their work experiences and they responded:

I'm one of those people who like went to school for like 10 years, so college debt to me is like nothing…it's like, "oh, it's just another bill." I've been paying it for 10 years so, what's the difference for me? I'll never be out of debt—whatever, that's fine. So, you know that doesn't really affect me as much. (IP2, 2012, p. 14)

However, by the second interview, the participant had started paying back their student loans and mentioned the following: "And now my student loan debt is coming up so now I'm paying it, so now I would probably say it's more of a drive, and I don't think it was when I first talked to you" (IP2, 2013, tp. 2).

According to Vedder (2012), "Tuition fees have risen at well over double the rate of inflation, and adjusting for inflation, tuition charges are over double what they were a generation ago" (para. 2). This fact is supported by the data reported from the department of education. The trends in cost of a college education was provided for the 2010-2011 academic year and broken down by type of institution. The average undergraduate tuition costs (including tuition, room, and board) were the following for each: public ($13,600), private not-for-profit ($36,300) and private for-profit ($23,500). Since the 2000-2001 academic term, these data represent a 42% increase for public schools, 31% increase for private not-for-profit, and a 5% increase for private for-profit schools ("Fast Facts," 2012). More specific to Colorado, the tuition costs in the state were the following for the 2012-2013 academic terms for resident undergraduates: University of Colorado Boulder totaled $8,056, which is a 36% increase from the 2008-2009 academic year. And, Colorado State University totaled $6,876, which is a 55.4% increase from the 2008-2009 academic year ("Tuition and Fees Report," 2013).

A degree is no guarantee of anything.

"The unspoken assumption is that possessing a college degree is a ticket to a comfortable middle class life—if not better. That assumption historically was largely true, but it is increasingly not the case. We are turning out far more college graduates than the sum total of jobs in the relatively high paying managerial, technical and professional vocations that historically were where college graduates took jobs" (Vedder, 2012, p. 4). Vedder (2012) reported that, "Altogether, there are, as of 2008, some 17 million college graduates in jobs that the U.S. Department of Labor tells us require less than a college education" (p. 4).

Since they were young, participants were pushed towards pursuing a college degree out of necessity because it would solve the problems their parents and grandparents generations had encountered in the workforce. In current society the reality of obtaining a college degree is that it no longer guarantees young adults the same benefits it did for previous generations. In fact, it seems as though a college degree simply offers you access into the workforce. One participant shared the following example, "I have so many friends that were outstanding students that are working in coffee shops. And they have bachelors and they're like, 'I shouldn't of even gotten the degree' and that's horrible…that's a horrible feeling" (IP1, 2012, p. 26). While reflecting on their own situation, the same participant added:

> That's something that's really scary to me is I think there are a lot of people too going, "that didn't even pay off …so why did I even get the degree, I'm now working in the same place that I am," and feeling really disheartened about that. (IP1, 2012, p. 26)

In March 2013, the Wall Street Journal reported that 284,000 Americans in 2012 with college degrees were working in minimum wage jobs (Casselman, 2013). According to this report, "That's down from a peak of 327,000 in 2010, but double the number in 2007 and up 70% from a decade earlier" (Casselman, 2013, para. 2). This generational difference in the benefits of

possessing a degree is encapsulated in the following quote from a participant reflecting on a conversation with their grandfather:

> Talking to my grandpa "if you just worked hard you know, it'll pay off and with a bachelor's degree you'll be set." And so I'm telling him and trying to explain this to him and he's just totally not hearing it like, "you don't know what you're talking about because I went into the military and I got a bachelor's and now I'm set for life" and that's… I think it's changed because now degrees are no guarantee of anything—and that's really scary. (IP1, 2012, p. 25)

This generational difference was reinforced by another participant:

> I grew up in a small town and my Dad worked for a mining company his whole life and kind of watched the…like grew up being told, "You can be whatever you want to be," and watched my Dad not be able to be whatever he wanted to be—he had to stay in mines. And, still works there because he can't take retirement till later and kind of watched that hard work didn't get him terribly far…and he always told me it was because of school, but then going to school didn't get me…I mean it did get me far, but it didn't get me everything we were told as a child. (IP5, 2013, pp. 13-14)

The same participant elaborated on the experience of being pushed to go to college and the disillusionment of the benefits of a degree:

> I think there was a huge push to go to college and even like looking at dropout rates and graduation rates and who goes to college—most of Generation Y has spent some time in college, but I think we've grown with that notion that that's going to solve your problems. That if you go to college you won't have to flip burgers and you get out of college and you have to flip burgers and you have a generation telling you like, "well you should…you have to work up to it." "Well, I just spent a whole lot of money so I wouldn't have to and now I can't pay off that." So yeah, definitely this disillusionment that being told with wanting….being told that college would solve problems and realizing that it was a good thing, but it wasn't the good thing we thought it would be. (IP5, 2013, p.13)

College is the only way.

While the value of a degree in society is a major concern for these five participants, they also realized that college is still the only way to pursue their ideal career choices—as the alternative is being forced to work in minimum wage positions for the rest of their lives. The reported statistics reflect this finding. In 2010, the median salary for a college graduate was

$45,000, while the median income for a high school graduate was $29,000 ("Fast Facts," 2012).

Additionally, the unemployment rate for those with a college degree is 3.7% as compared to

those with only a high school diploma with a rate of 8.7% (Rampell, 2013). This difference of

salary and unemployment rates is in alignment with Becker's Human Capital Theory (1964) that

states that education is one of the most important investments in human capital. One participant

shared their reason for why going to college became a necessity:

> Working a retail job and working in restaurants pushed me to go back to college, so that I could actually learn the skills to then be in a helping profession. And, I saw that college was the only way… the only shot I was going to have to do that. So, those earlier jobs really pushed me to get a degree. (IP1, 2012, p.13)

The same participant elaborated on their experience of working in a minimum wage job:

> When I was 18 I moved out on my own and I sought out restaurant jobs even though they're really crappy because it's like… I'm barely making my rent. I remember using change to get on the bus to go to work and not having money for food a lot of times, and so very much that was an initiative for me to go back to college because you know I'm like…even now I know I'm not going to make a lot of money, but to be in some of those minimum wage jobs and struggling through that for a long time…that was a huge initiative for me to try to go back to college and actually be taken seriously in my work. (IP1, 2012, p.17)

For another participant, going to graduate school provides them the opportunity to pursue

a career in a field that they find more interesting than their current work. They said:

> I would also like to go back to school and get a Master's and do something more with psychology instead of my original bachelor's degree. So, yeah… all over the place. To go back to school, I think it's conversations like when I'm talking about something psychology and those kinds of studies usually are far more exciting to me than anything I've done—so that's definitely a drive. (IP5, 2013, p. 9)

The participant currently pursuing a graduate degree said: "I'm going back for my

Masters in Organized Leadership which is basically psychology for your Masters and you

can do anything with it you want: (IP4, 2012, pp.14-15). This same person discussed how

their graduate degree is beneficial for all four different career paths that they were

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contemplating pursuing. They said, "I think my Master's degree would be a good jump towards any of those careers" (IP4, 2012, p. 19).

The idea that attainment of a college degree is necessary to be successful is not without controversy. Poppin, (2013) made an astounding report that in the state of Colorado two year degree graduates in applied science majors earned $7,000 more than four-year college graduates. Additionally, Pilon (2010) reported that the methodology behind the findings that college graduates make a higher income than non-college educated workers has come into question. These methodologies do not take into account student loan debt, deduction from income taxes, or breaks in employment, thus providing inaccurate data.

Summary of essential theme.

First, the spread of the hermeneutic spectrum is provided *for The Meaning of work is Influenced by Education*, along with a visual representation. Subsequently, a summary is provided for the essential theme and its corresponding essential sub-themes in a table format displaying key points from the participants and supporting literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum.

In respect to the hermeneutic spectrum, this essential theme has a narrow to moderate spread of description, with two levels of descriptive interpretation (i.e., essential and sub-essential themes), representing a moderate depth of interpretative description. Within these two levels of descriptive interpretation, there was little descriptive variation in the individual constructions for this essential theme, which could be the direct reflection of all five participants having attended, or presently attending, a four year college, thus resulting in a more similar lived

experience of their education. The spread of hermeneutic description for this essential theme is presented in Figure 7.
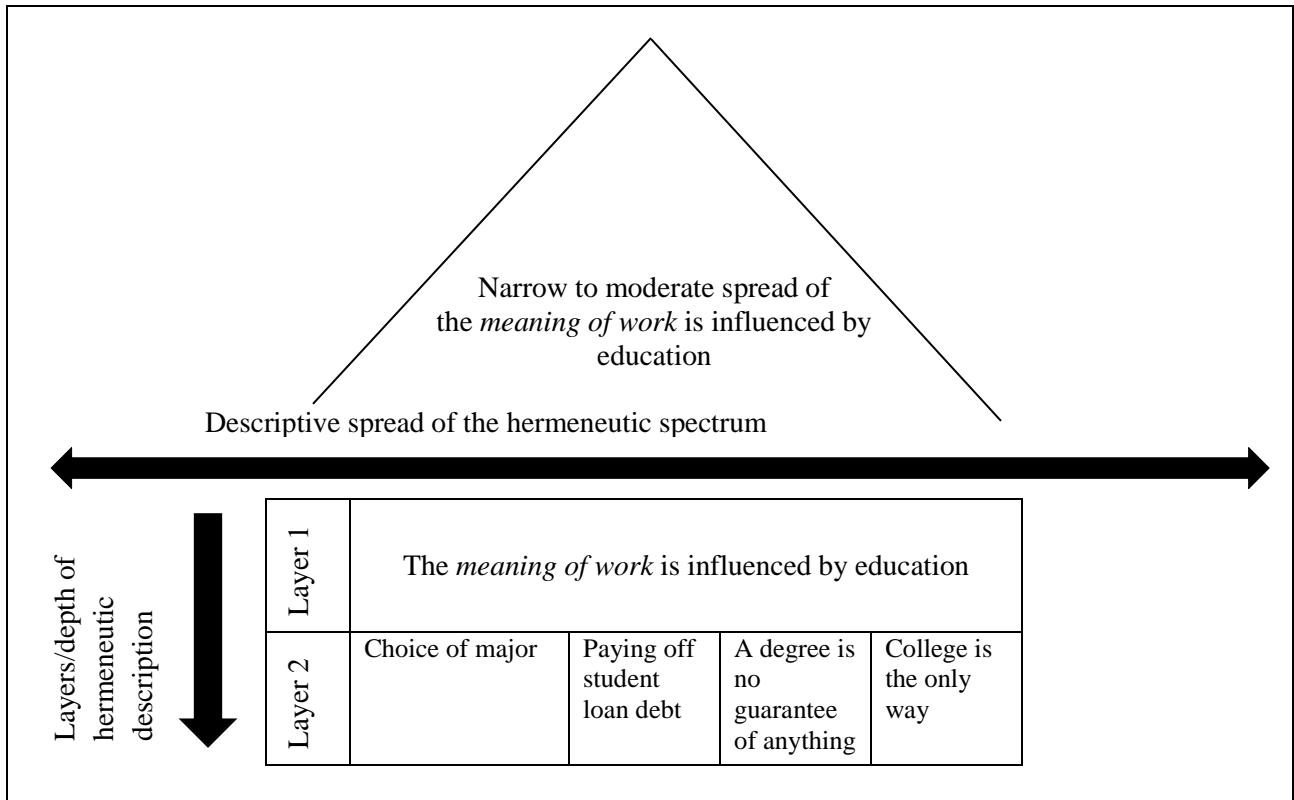

The diagram shows a triangle at top labeled "Narrow to moderate spread of the *meaning of work* is influenced by education." Below is a horizontal double-headed arrow labeled "Descriptive spread of the hermeneutic spectrum." A vertical downward arrow on the left is labeled "Layers/depth of hermeneutic description." A table shows:

Layer 1	The *meaning of work* is influenced by education			
Layer 2	Choice of major	Paying off student loan debt	A degree is no guarantee of anything	College is the only way

Figure 7. A narrow to moderate spread of hermeneutic description for the *meaning of work* is influenced by education

It is important to note that some of these findings such as *paying off student loan debt* and *a degree is no guarantee of anything* is highly related to, and influenced by, the essential theme of *The Meaning of work is Influenced by the Current State of the Economy*. This interrelatedness of essential themes and sub-essential themes further illuminates the context of this study for these five participants, and is reflective of systems theory (1969). Ruona (1998) describes this interrelationship as a relationship among parts, wholes, and the organization. This relationship is further influenced by "its larger surrounding system or environment" (Swanson & Holton, 2009, p. 18).

Key points from participants and supporting literature.

For these five study participants, the *meaning of work* is influenced by their education. This influence is in alignment with the MOW International Research Team's (1987) finding that family is an antecedent to the *meaning of work* construct. The influence of education is composed of the participants choice of major; student loan debt; the concern over a degree being no guarantee of anything in the workforce; and the inevitable realism that college is the only way to pursue their ideal career paths. These four sub-essential themes describe and illuminate the essence of the influence of education. Table 9 summarizes the sub-essential themes by providing key points from the participants, along with supporting literature.

Table 9

Key points from the essential sub-themes of the meaning of work is influenced by education

Essential sub-themes	Key points From participants	Key points from supporting literature
Choice of major	- Influences choice of jobs - Influences job opportunities - Influenced by college attended - Influenced by fellow peers	- Influences income levels - Influences unemployment rates (Carnevale, Cheah, & Strohl, 2013).
Paying off student loan debt	- Influences decision for attending graduate school. - The amount of debt is scary. - Influences choice of colleges to attend based on future career plans and expected income.	- Tuition fees increased 42% at public schools since the 2000-2001 academic term ("Fast Facts," 2012). - People under the age of 30 have the highest amount of debt (Lee, 2013).

Table 9

Continued

Essential sub-themes	Key points From participants	Key points from supporting literature
A degree is no guarantee of anything	• Disillusionment exists within previous generations about a degree being the answer to life's problems. • We are disheartened that individuals are working in the same positions as before they graduated college.	• College graduates are working in minimum wage jobs and as of 2008, 17 million are working in positions that do not require a four year degree (Vedder, 2008).
College is the only way	• College and graduate school helps build a foundation for being able to pursue ideal career paths. • Provides the opportunity to not have to work in minimum wage jobs.	• Having a college degree increases income levels and decreases unemployment rates (Poppin, 2013). • Becker's (1964) human capital theory states that education is one of the most important investments in human capital.

The *Meaning of Work* is the Opportunity to do Work that is Meaningful

Chalofsky and Krishna (2009) propose that the *meaning of work* stems from an individual completing meaningful work. This notion was affirmed by all five participants, as they conveyed that doing meaningful work is an important element in describing their *meaning of work*. One participant said, "I think I would be more satisfied with meaningful work" (IP5, 2013, p. 17). Many researchers have linked meaningful work to overall life satisfaction (Schmitt & Melon, 1980; Shepherdson, 1984) and job satisfaction (Steger, n.d.,para. 1). Michaelson (2009) and Steger and Dik (2010) have found that work is an important factor in people's overall meaning of life. Likewise, one participant said, "So, that's what I would like

for it to mean...to have like a meaning in my life…for it to really mean something to me" (IP4, 2012, p.13). Another participant reflected on the topic, saying, "I guess for my mentality too is it's more about doing something meaningful" (IP1, 2012, p. 29). These findings are in alignment with literature stating that Generation Y individuals are seeking out meaningful work (Martin, 2005).

In presenting this essential theme, the section is divided into the two corresponding essential sub-themes: the meaning of meaningful work and the experiences of meaningful work. For the first essential sub-theme, participants describe what meaningful work means to them. This essential sub-theme is divided into five essential sub-sub-themes including: we enjoy the work, we are engaged in the work, we are fulfilled and enriched by the work, we feel passionate about the work, and the work is important to us. The second essential sub-theme describes how the participants experience meaningful work. This essential sub-theme includes: work that challenges us; helping people make their lives better; changing society for the better; and being involved in the process and feeling ownership. A visual representation of this essential theme, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes is displayed in Figure 8.

The meaning of meaningful work.

The meaning of meaningful work is described by the five participants as: we enjoy the work, we are engaged in the work, we are fulfilled and enriched by the work, we feel passionate about the work, and the work is important to us. These essential sub-sub-themes are presented and described below.

We enjoy the work.

Morse and Weiss (1955) provided some of the first notable findings that suggested that work may serve more than just an economic role in our lives. They found that work provided a
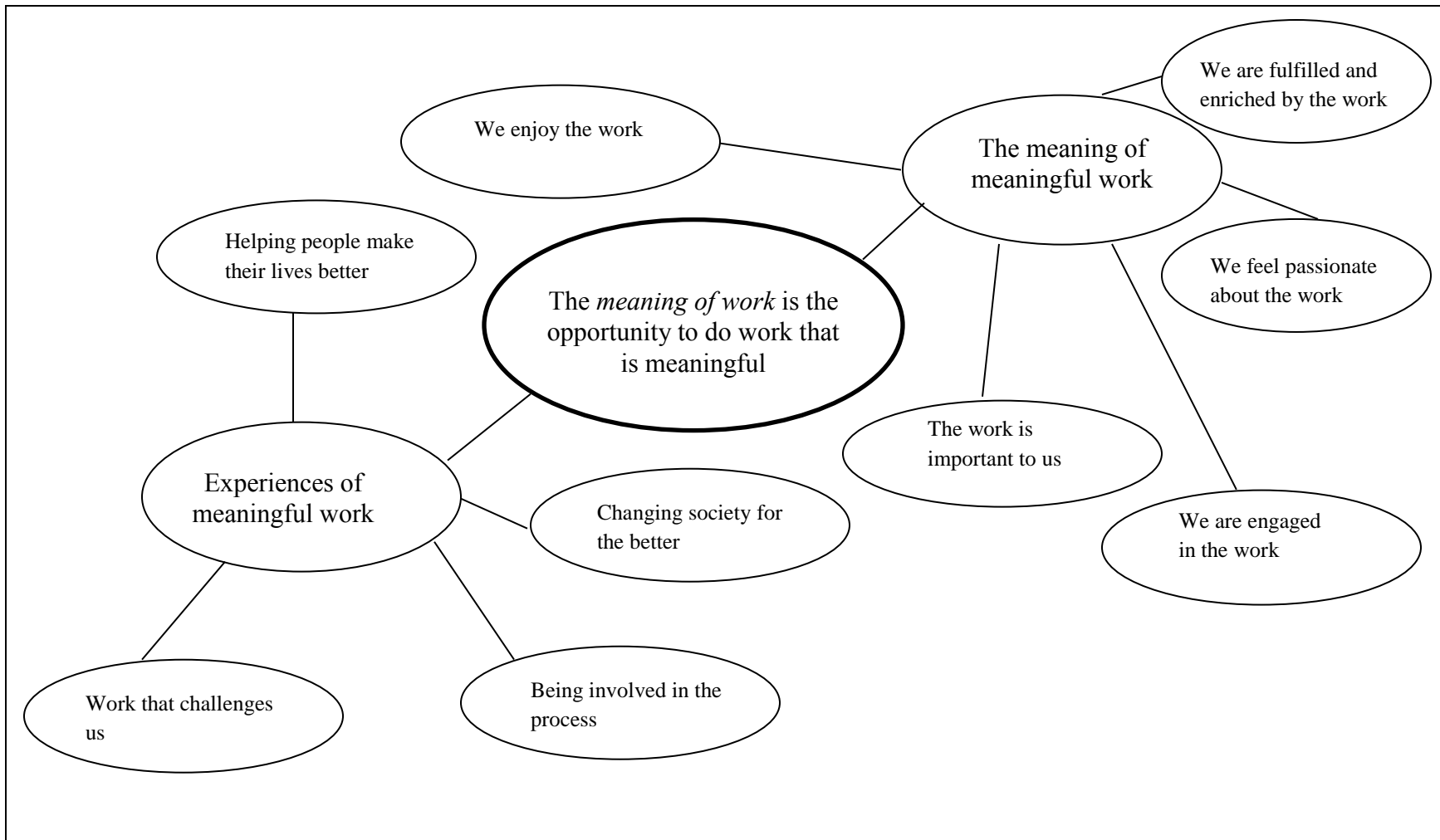
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Figure 8. A visual representation of the *meaning of work* is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful

source of enjoyment. One participant echoed this idea by sharing that there was no source of joy in their current work position. They discussed that even though the position provided a source of income for basic necessities that, "the other side of work for me that I kind of want work to be is something that I enjoy" (IP4, 2012, p.10). The participant went on to give an example of their job tasks that they do not currently find enjoyable: "just to find a place where I enjoy going to work and not like, "I have to do a training today, I have to talk to somebody, I have to call someone I don't know, I have to make a sales pitch towards someone" (IP4, 2012, p. 4). Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) posited that work tasks and activities influenced the *meaning of work*, as iterated by this participant.

We are engaged in the work.

Twenge and Campbell (2010) found that Generation Y individuals expect work to be engaging. Several of the participants wanted work to be engaging, but did not necessary expect it to be that way. One participant said, "My ideal reason why I would want to work is because I love what I'm doing and I'm engaged in it" (IP4, 2012, p. 4). One way in which being engaged in the work was communicated was by describing the link between being active at work and being engaged. When asked to elaborate, the individual explained:

> Active…I mean engaged. And not…you're wanting to do the work that you're doing, you're wanting to do that task, you're wanting to do that process. Not just, "Oh" …I don't want to say it's like retroactive, but I guess by active I mean being proactive. You want to do those tasks and you want to do those things. You take the initiative to do those things before it's, "Oh, okay, now I have to do it" or it has to or I have to do it. I think that's kind of what I meant by being active and engaged in the work and then also not just sitting there on Pinterest for half the day at your desk. (IP4, 2013, p. 9)

A second way of being engaged in the work was described as follows:

> We really kind of walked into the social realm of the internet, social gaming…partially because it was just a hot industry at the time, but I think what interests me about it and keeps me engaged in it is that I've always just kind of loved the psychology and sociology disciplines and understanding how people interact, why they interact, what

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drives them, what motivates them, and sort of that interpersonal exchange that's really interesting to me. (IP3, 2012, pp. 8-9)

We are fulfilled and enriched by the work.

Twenge and Campbell (2008) reported that Generation Y individuals expect fulfillment from their work. One participant emphasized the importance of being fulfilled from your work. They had previously worked in several minimum wage jobs and said, "There reached a point where you know I was working all these jobs where yeah I was getting paid and some I was making more money than others, but I was not fulfilled in any way, shape, or form" (IP1, 2013, p. 15). Those minimum wage job experiences pushed the participant to work towards pursuing a career that provided them fulfillment. In reflection of those experiences, they said, "and so I think that's the biggest thing is money isn't everything and fulfillment comes from a lot of different places when it comes to work" (IP1, 2013, p. 16). Another participant referred to fulfillment and enrichment having the same meaning to them. They reinforced the notion that work should be "something that enriches your life" (IP4, 2012, p. 10). Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) and Wrzesniewski (2003) reported that being focused on fulfillment within one's work is referred to as a calling.

We feel passionate about the work.

The famous American writer, Tennessee Williams, once said, "When I stop working the rest of the day is posthumous. I'm only really alive when I'm writing." This quote encapsulates the notion that passion is a "personal connection" to one's work (Gubman, 2004, p. 46). Several of the participants below describe the importance of this personal connection to their work. One participant explained that they are fulfilled in their current positions because they feel a sense of passion towards the work that they do:

I would say actually where I'm at with my jobs I think I feel the most fulfilled I ever had as far as my profession so I'm working at the Women's Resource Center, I've done women's studies classes…it's something that I really care about and I'm really passionate about. (IP1, 2013, p. 11)

The same participant works a second job in the field of behavioral health. I asked the participant to elaborate on why they felt passionate about working in both positions. They responded:

So, on other side the reason I'm so passionate about women's studies and giving resources is because I've been on the end of being a victim…I've been through that several times. And so I've been in a position where I've been where these women are. I've walked into offices needing resources. It's a very vulnerable and terrifying feeling. And then on my mental health end where I'm working for the XXX I'm not someone that is walking into this profession as, "well, I just got a four year degree in counseling and now I know what you guys need." I was institutionalized. I was depressed constantly for ten plus years. I went through a lot of things in these institutions that were very harmful to me and so to now be on the other side. (IP1, 2013, p.11)

Another participant described having no passion towards a position as a reason for leaving the corporate world:

And also, while it was cool and it was good experience, at some point there were interesting projects and interesting transactions and there was a lot of like giving revolver loans….basically hundred million dollar credit cards to companies that were in the forestry sector, which basically meant you're giving them a ton of money to go cut down more trees, which we all use paper…I can't hate it….but it also wasn't my life's work, so I transitioned out of. (IP3, 2012, pp. 3-4)

This participant went on to further explain how their current work experience provides passion for them:

There are people that are waiters and that is their profession and they look at it that way and they love to serve food to people. Personally if I was a waiter it would be more of just a job. Just because it's just not something that personally excites me….I have other passions. So, for me doing stuff like what I do in my job like building digital products and building the stuff that we do… that's very interesting to me. The opportunity for algoms and helping millions of people interact with it is really exciting. (IP3, 2012, p. 2)

This idea of feeling passionate towards work is further illuminated by another participant that said: "The other side of work for me that I kind of want work to be is something that I enjoy,

that I feel passionate about" (IP4, 2012, p.10). The same participant elaborated on what passion would look like in their current position, but how they don't feel it. They said:

> Passion would be you know, "I want to hire people for this job." "I want to give people jobs" versus you know… kind of what I'm currently doing is it's a fulfilling and it's an enriching job, but I'm not passionate about giving people jobs. It's unfortunate that I'm not just a recruiter that…it just doesn't give me a good tingly feeling inside every time we hire someone new. I'm just like "yay, cool" we brought somebody on…you know it's fulfilling in a way, I'm like "yeah we hired somebody else, we're helping them out and got them a job and all that good stuff" but I'm not passionate about just doing this. (IP4, 2013, p. 13)

The work is important to us.

One of the participants mentioned that doing something important in a job made work satisfying for them. They said:

> Satisfying is….knowing that I've completed something that is important to me inside of a job that is built by someone else. So, the things that are important to me are usually relationships or helping someone or seeing like some of the bigger philosophical problems and knowing that I'm making a difference in those. So, I guess making a difference. (IP5, 2013, p. 9)

When asked to elaborate on what the individual considers important, the following was provided: "I consider something that influences society for the positive…the importance, so kind of big picture ideas are important to me and progressing society into something better than it was is what's important to me" (IP5, 2013, p. 2). This idea is highly related to Steger and Dik and Duffy's (2012) assertion that work is meaningful when it has a specific purpose or point to it.

Experiences of meaningful work.

The essential sub-theme the experiences of meaningful work is described by the five participants as: work that challenges us; helping people make their lives better; changing society for the better; and being involved in the process and feeling ownership (also see figure 8). These essential sub-sub-themes are presented and described below.

Work that challenges us.

Generation Y employees prefer to have variation in their work activities (Terjesen et al.,

2007), thus highlighting the need for organizations to decrease monotonous, non-challenging

work. Chalofsky (2003) proposed the link between having work that challenges us and

meaningful work. He proposed that meaningful work is composed of three separate constructs:

the "work itself", "sense of self", and "sense of balance" (p. 77). The "work itself" includes,

"challenge, creativity, learning, and continuous growth" (Chalofsky, 2003, p. 77). In alignment

with the "work itself" the participants discussed their comfort zone and continuous learning. One

person worked at a nonprofit as an intern and described it as a great experience for the following

reason:

> They gave me opportunities and kind of challenged me like, "have you ever written a
> newsletter?" "Like why don't you try it?" So, having room to grow and explore new
> things and kind of being challenged into things outside of my comfort zone was really
> good, so that was another good experience. (IP1, 2012, p. 9)

A second participant had just been promoted to a management position in a new location for 30

to 90 days and described mixed feeling of terror and excitement. I asked the participant to

elaborate on their reason for being excited and they discussed their comfort zone as well. They

said:

> I'm excited to….for me it's like I have to get out of my comfort zone someday…I like
> my comfort zone…and I think it's good for anybody to be like, "okay, you have
> to…you have to grow up now…you have to grow some wings and fly." And, I think
> it'll help me mature a little bit more and I'll probably learn a lot from it too. So, that's
> why I'm excited. (IP2, 2012, p. 4)

During the follow-up interview a few months later, the same person elaborated on the

experience of being the manager:

> So it was really good for me to be taken out of somewhere I felt really comfortable and
> be forced into somewhere new. It taught me a lot about responsibility and you know
> just trying to learn how to manage other people…I've never been trained how to do it

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and they were like "here" and they kind of threw me into the you know…into the mess and didn't really teach me how to do anything. So it was a good learning experience. (IP2, 2013, p. 4)

Another participant discussed the welcomed challenges inherent in owning one's own business, which is in alignment with the goal-setting theory of motivation. This theory states that "specific and difficult goals, with feedback, lead to higher performance" (Robbins & Judge, 2007, p. 197). In business ownership the feedback itself is how well your business is doing. This individual said:

> Now being a principle of the business, the highs are a lot higher and the lows are a lot lower, but if you are willing to embrace that ride it's a more interesting one. I also really enjoy having new challenges every day and…..people say that all the time….but in the owning your own business sort of world it's everything from dealing with taxes one day to legal docs the next to trying to sell the next client the day after that so it really is most days doing something I've never done before or figuring out a part of it for the first time. (IP3, 2012, p. 7)

Helping people make their lives better.

Several of the participants described helping people as part of the experiences of doing meaningful work. This essential sub-theme could be connected to Steger's (n.d.) description of the three components of meaningful work. One of the components is the "desire to make a strong contribution to the greater good" (Steger, n.d., para. 4). As reflected below, the participants had varied notions of how they wanted to help people—but they all took a strong position on the final outcome of their work resulting in making other peoples' lives better. One person reflected on just doing a task versus the importance of helping people:

> The other side of work for me that I kind of want work to be is something that I enjoy, that I feel passionate about, that I want to help people and like… just happen to get compensated reasonably. That would be my preferred, ideal *meaning of work* is to…heck if I was a freaken yoga teacher you know for 40 or 60 hours a week, but I'm helping people and making them feel better. If I was a disability like physical therapist or something like….I mean I'm sure that's a lot of work, that's a lot of task, that's a lot of job but it wouldn't feel so bad if like that if I was helping someone and…was making

someone's life better versus only doing the task and just getting paid for it and just doing it. (IP4, 2012, p.10)

This person went on to further explain what they meant by helping people:

> Bringing benefit to somebody else's life…improving their quality of life I think is really what is the best part of it is because you see instant gratification and you know their overall life quality is better…you helped them walk again; you taught them a new social skill; you told them a really funny joke that they couldn't stop laughing about for 10 minutes and you know that their endorphins are going crazy…like I feel it's definitely that…I think it's that process of doing it. I don't think it's just the end result because I could just go out and hand out a five dollar bill and you know I kind of feel better about myself, but if you don't have to work for it then is it just as meaningful if you did have to work for it? (IP4I2, 2013, p. 8)

> One participant discussed the difference between meaningful and meaningless work.

Isaksen (2000) studied the notion of meaningless work and determined it was derived from bad working conditions, lack of fit, and the inability for an individual to create meaning in the workplace. This participant perceived not helping people as meaningless work. In comparison, they described meaningful work as:

> For me personally helping people…there is a big difference between feeling like I'm helping this person actually change their life versus I'm serving this person and I'm getting them food for this very temporary need, and it doesn't matter if it was me helping them or the next person down the line. (IP1, 2012, p. 15)

When asked to elaborate on what they specifically meant by helping people, the participant went on to say:

> I think that the thing that I think of most is a lot of times when we think about helping, a lot of people do what they think is helpful instead of really assessing the needs of the people that they're serving. I noticed particularly in you know helping professions, especially now that I'm working for the state and people coming in and professionals because they have the education or the experience or the knowledge and saying, "well here's what I've seen that works, so this is the best technique and the best way that I can serve you." And I think the best way to help somebody is asking, "What do you think you need?" And so I think there's a very different approach and a very different feeling to that. So I think it needs to be based off of the simple question of the person saying what they need and then finding a way to connect people with those services, but really coming with intention of asking the person that's going to be affected. (IP1, 2013, p. 7)

Another person made the distinction between serving people and being a part of changing someone else's life for the better:

> And, then my current job…I think it's been really fulfilling to be able to be working…it's my first job that hasn't been product base, so it's been really nice to instead of, "I'm working to sell you a coffee, or to sell you your dinner, or whatever it was I was selling" instead now I'm working to help you get a benefit.   And, there's kind of like a satisfaction in that, "you needed it and I was the one to help you receive that." (IP5, 2013, p. 5)

And when asked to explain what the participant meant by helping people, the individual elaborated:

> I guess social work is a kind of a good place to like make it more concrete…is taking situations and being able to help people out of those situations or even if there's not a terrible situation, but being able to improve life is helping somebody. So whether it's like directly like kind of like that…kind of like where I'm doing in XXX it's direct financial benefit or yeah working in a conscious for profit that is just like helping people to better their own lives by allowing them to have their free time or flexibility or whatever it is they need. (IP5, 2013, p. 2)

Changing society for the better.

Changing society for the better is another notion connected to Steger 's (n.d.) component of meaningful work: that we have a "desire to make a positive contribution to the greater good" (para. 4). In respect to the importance of work that benefits society, the distinction between serving others and doing something meaningful was described in the following quote:

> I think it's the difference between, "I've sold you this like room for the night," which I'm sure is a nice memory….as opposed to knowing that I helped something towards society because the transaction is just the immediate and right then and there and has no… besides maybe making a slight impact in the person who stayed that night…things like…I guess bigger concepts like working towards changing something in society. (IP5, 2013, p. 10)

This participant discussed how doing work that benefits society is not strictly limited to certain professions, but can be a goal of all types of industries and businesses. This notion is in alignment with corporate social responsibility in which organizations are expected to abide by

certain ethics that make them socially, economically, and environmentally responsible

("Corporate Social Responsibility," 2008). The individual said:

> I think kind of like social work is one of those things that is directly helping someone and a lot of non-profit work or like even conscious businesses—businesses that are still doing like a profit, but are being conscious of, "what is my environmental impact?" What is…being like conscious towards their employees, so like having outlets for them, so that's what I think is beneficial. Yeah I'm kind of bad about being more specific than that because I feel like there's so many things and I can think of more negative things than I can positive things. I don't want….I mean yeah…I just don't really want transactions and treating people like property. Those are things that I think are like the opposite of what I want. Anything that is not that is changing society for the better. (IP5, 2013, p. 2)

I asked the same participant to explain to me why doing something that benefits society is so

appealing to them, and they offered the following reason:

> I think because it's not so selfish. It makes you feel like you're a part of something bigger. Yeah, it's just easy to get stuck just doing your own thing, being like yourself, and so you feel just better about life when you are part of these bigger pictures and you're part of something so much bigger than yourself. (IP5, 2013, p. 3)

Another participant talked about making an impact in society by working with youth:

> I would love to do something with a nonprofit that maybe mentors adolescent youth, particularly with young girls just because I think you're at that stage when you're younger and you need solid role models to look up to and I feel like a lot of women that end up in like the prison system have been victimized…just suffered domestic violence or drug abuse, and so if you can plant those solid roots in women's lives when they are younger you can make a big impact when they get older. (IP1, 2012, p. 7)

And when I asked the participant to elaborate on what they meant by impact, they said:

> And so feeling like I'm impacting something in someone's' lives that is going to be beyond that interaction of 5 or 10 minutes is meaningful to me. I guess that's how I would define it is having beyond our interaction is going to affect something later down the line for them and having a part in that even if it's a very minor part. (IP1, 2012, pp.15-16)

One person mentioned the importance of believing in the impact you are making. They said:

> I think it's just connecting with what you're doing and believing what you're doing as a job actual function rather it's the activity of doing it or the result of doing it provides an impact in that you believe in. (IP3, 2012, p. 3)

Being involved in the process and feeling ownership.

Several researchers have found that Generation Y individuals possess entrepreneurial

thinking (Broadbridge et al. 2007; Martin, 2005), and want to feel ownership over their work

(Busch et al., 2008).   For one participant, being involved meant executing an idea to make it

real:

> So, it's sort of your choice if you want work to be work or if you want work to be more
> sort of vocation, so for me work ideally means vocation, it means building…the things
> that I think I really enjoy is building teams and taking ideas and building them to make
> them real and that they have impact. (IP3, 2012, p. 10)

The same participant discussed the feeling of being involved as the following, "but also just

feeling ownership and building something—dedication to it and really believing in it" (IP3,

2012, p. 6). This individual's perspective was further illuminated when I asked them to provide

a metaphor for their *meaning of work*. They responded:

> The *meaning of work* for me…is for some reason I'm thinking of back when I was in
> high school I took a wood working class and loved it. And, the *meaning of work* for me
> is the difference between being on an assembly line cutting the same cut of wood time
> over time, and doing that versus getting to build a beautiful piece of furniture that you
> can think of as a piece of art. It's the same skills to some degree, but one is just being a
> part of something that then…you know a small part that gets consolidated into a piece
> of furniture down the assembly line versus you getting to put your heart and soul into
> something that you think is beautiful and an expression of who you are and it's the
> combination of what you do. (IP3, 2012, p.19)

Achieving ownership through owning your own business was discussed by two other

participants. One participant stated:

> I would someday really like to open up a business because that would just be not
> something to work towards this second, but kind of in the back of my head….just some
> ideas that I think would be fun to do someday. (IP5, 2013, p. 9)

This individual went on to say:

> And, then the opening a business is being on one side of it and just like curiosity about
> the other side, so that drives what you see. Far less solid…like I want to do this…it's
> more of a, "oh, that sounds neat….I've done this side of it, it would be interesting to see

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the other side as well…the ownership of the business and the books, and all that." (IP5, 2013, p.10)

The second participant said that they had a future goal of owning a meadery:

> One thing that I definitely want to do, but it's more of a side thing is me and my boyfriend really want to open up our own meadery. Meadery—it's honey wine. There's a couple meaderys here in town. It's a very low key …not very many people know about it. But, it's delicious and amazing. There's hundreds of different kinds of meads….it's what honey wine is called. It's very sweeter than traditional wine, but you can make small batches just for yourself at home and it's legal…you can't sell it of course. But, really, really would like to turn that into like an actual business where we make 25 gallon batches of honey mead and then sell it professionally. I would love to do that. It's not really a full time job kind of thing for me; it would be more on the side. But, that's one thing I definitely want to do in the future no matter what else I choose to do. (IP4, 2012, p.17)

Another perspective on being involved and feeling ownership is being able to "interact with multiple parts of an organization, and also contribute to multiple directions" (IP3, 2012, p. 18). This perspective was reinforced by another participant that described being able to feel a sense of ownership by being involved in the entire work process from the beginning to the final product. They said:

> Integrated into the creative process and the end vision…so the overall company's mission is to do Y or do X or something. Your job is a little top stick on the X…I don't know I'm trying to think of an example. And being involved is having that type of input into what the final project is. So maybe you're like X's are doing really good, but you know sales have kind of dropped so why don't we just do a Y. It's cheaper and you have one less little sticky off of the X. And then having that type of input into what the CEO and some of the people higher up…I mean not even that type of corporate level, but just that you're manager above you, like "hey this process isn't working, you know maybe we should change this up a little bit." Being involved is having an effect on the processes just above you or even just below you, like yeah contributing to that type of… being productive and not just beating the dead horse because it's dead. It's like "hey maybe we should just stop this and bury the horse." (IP4, 2013, pp. 10-11)

When I asked the participant if seeing the end result is important, they responded, "Yeah, I do like to see that…that the effort I'm putting in is having some kind of outcome" (IP4, 2013, p. 11). The participant further expanded on this idea, saying:

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I think it kind of goes back to seeing the end result and being involved in that process even if you don't physically see the end result but you hear that it's happening….you hear that something else is happening. You don't see the actual X when it gets to the end of the factory, but you know that at the end they say, "hey this X is really good." So I think that's…like if you're…they're like just stick this here, and it's like it just goes there…like there's no….they don't explain the reasoning behind why you put that there…I think that's what really has no meaning. Because there's like a couple processes where they're like "okay so you do it in this way." I'm like "why, does accounting need it? Why do you need these? Do you just want these records to be kept for the future or statistics? I would like to know the purpose behind this action or this function and then if they don't tell me that, then that action or function has no purpose to me. I'm like, "I'm not going to do it." (IP4, 2013, p. 12)

Summary of the essential theme.

First, the spread of the hermeneutic spectrum is provided for *The Meaning of work is the Opportunity to do Work that is Meaningful*, along with a visual representation. Subsequently, a summary is provided for the essential theme and its corresponding essential sub-themes and essential sub-sub-themes in a table format displaying key points from the participants and supporting literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum.

This essential theme reflects a broad spread of hermeneutic description. There was large descriptive variation in the individual constructions for the essential sub-themes and their corresponding essential sub-sub-themes, resulting in three levels of descriptive interpretation (i.e., essential, sub-essential, and sub-sub-essential themes). While they all shared that the opportunity to do meaningful work is important to their *meaning of work*, there was notable descriptive variation among the participants on what they meant by meaningful work and their experiences of meaningful work. This variation could be reflective of a spread of individual diversity of the participant's lived experiences. For example, one participant shared that their passion for their work was driven by the personal experience of being in that same position before in their own life. Another example is that one participant found ownership and being

involved as meaningful work through being an entrepreneur, while others found the same experience through being involved in the processes at their organizations. This level of variation underscores the importance of context specificity for this phenomenon to gain a deep understanding of how individuals construct and develop their *meaning of work*. The spread of hermeneutic description for this essential theme is presented in Figure 9.
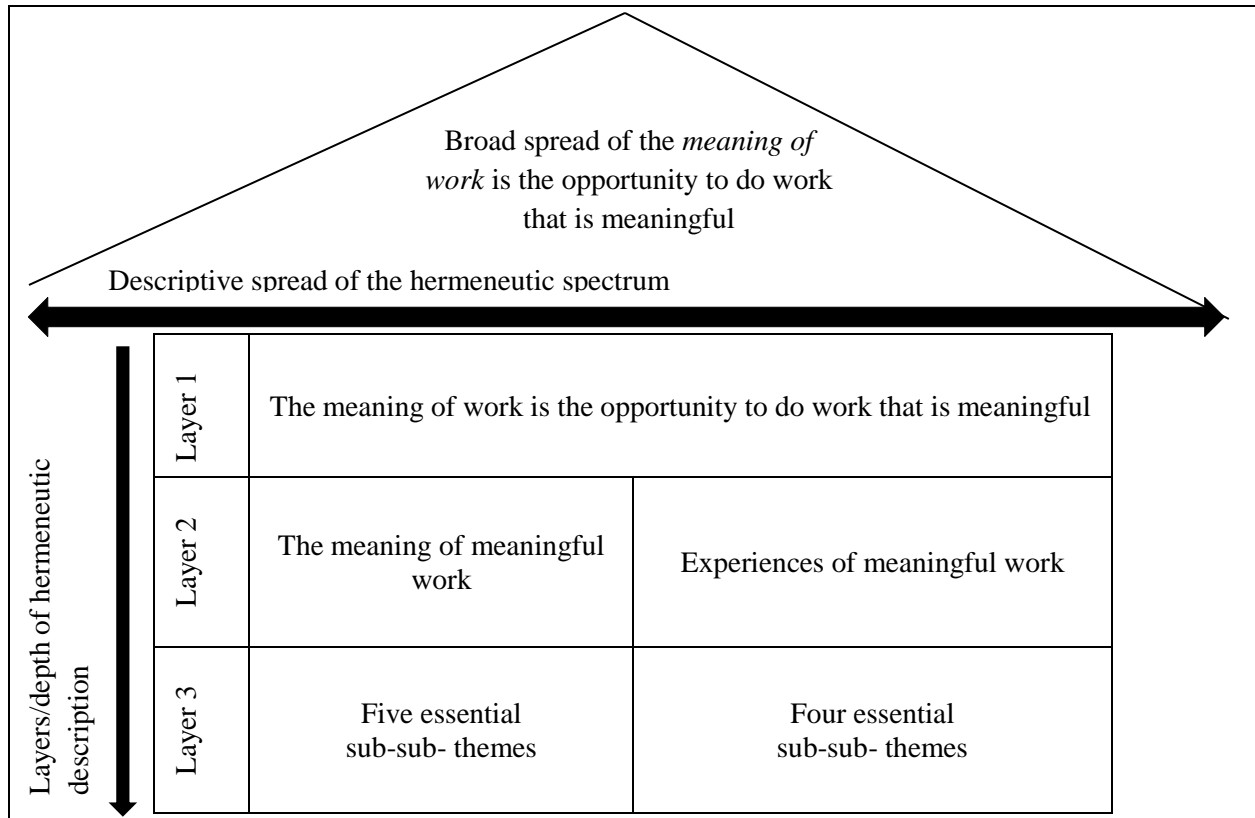
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Broad spread of the meaning of
work is the opportunity to do work
that is meaningful

Descriptive spread of the hermeneutic spectrum

Layers/depth of hermeneutic description

| Layer 1 | The meaning of work is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful |
| Layer 2 | The meaning of meaningful work | Experiences of meaningful work |
| Layer 3 | Five essential sub-sub- themes | Four essential sub-sub- themes |
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Figure 9. A broad spread of hermeneutic description for the *meaning of work* is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful

Key points from participants and supporting literature.

In summary, for these five study participants, the *meaning of work* is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful. The meaning of meaningful work includes: we enjoy the work; we are engaged in the work; we are fulfilled and enriched by the work; we feel passionate about the work; and the work is important to us. Experiences of meaningful work include: work that

challenges us; helping people make their lives better; changing society for the better; and being

involved in the process and feeling ownership. Table 10 summarizes the essential sub- themes

and essential sub-sub-themes by providing key points from the participants, along with

supporting literature.

Table 10

Key points from the essential sub-themes and corresponding essential sub-sub-themes of the meaning of work is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful

Essential sub-themes	Essential sub-sub-themes	Key points from participants	Key points from supporting literature
The meaning of meaningful work	We enjoy the work	• We desire to enjoy going to work and doing our job.	• Work provides a source of enjoyment to employees (Morse & Weiss, 1955).
	We are engaged in the work	• Being active at work is important. • Staying engaged in our chosen work due our passion in trying to understand people and their interpersonal exchanges.	• Generation Y expects their work to be engaging (Twenge & Campbell, 2010).
	We are fulfilled and enriched by the work	• Money does not equate to fulfillment. • Work should enrich our lives.	• A career that is a calling provides fulfillment (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Wrzesniewski, 2003) • Generation Y individuals expect fulfillment from their work (Twenge & Campbell, 2008).
	We feel passionate about the work	• Passion towards work stems from our personal experiences in life. • The lack of passion for our work can drive us to quit our jobs and find, or, create employment that we are passionate about.	• Passion is a personal connection one's work (Gubman, 2004).
	The work is important to us	• Makes work satisfying.	• Work is meaningful when there is a purpose or point to it (Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012).

Table 10

Continued

Essential sub-themes	Essential sub-sub-themes	Key points from participants	Key points from supporting literature
Experiences of meaningful work	Work that challenges us	• Challenges our comfort zone. • Continuous learning is important. • Teaches us responsibility. • The process itself of figuring things out is desirable.	• Generation Y prefers to have variety in their work (Terjesen et al., 2007). • The work itself ("challenge, creativity, learning, and continuous growth", p. 77) is an important component of meaningful work (Chalofsky, 2003)
	Helping people make their lives better	• Helping people change their lives. • Helping people make their lives better. • Improving someone's life. • Helping people feel better. • Asking people what they need.	• The desire to do work that contributes to the greater good is a component of meaningful work (Steger, n.d., para. 4).
	Changing society for the better	• Making a long-term impact is important. • Businesses and organizations being conscious of their employees and the environment is important. • It's not selfish because you are part of something bigger than yourself. • Working with youth. • Making an impact we believe in.	• The desire to do work that contributes to the greater good is a component of meaningful work (Steger, n.d.). • Corporate Social Responsibility ("Corporate Social Responsibility," 2008).
	Being involved in the process and feeling ownership	• Building and executing our ideas. • We want to feel ownership of our work. • Owning our own businesses is desirable. • Being part of the entire process of creating a product and seeing the end-result is important. • Interacting and contributing to several areas at work is important.	• Generation Y individuals possess entrepreneurial thinking (Broadbridge et al. 2007; Martin, 2005). • Generation Y individuals want to feel ownership over their work (Busch et al., 2008).

The *Meaning of Work* is Working for an Organization that Functions Well

This (third) essential theme is composed of six essential sub-themes. One essential sub-theme is composed of essential sub-sub-themes. The essential sub-themes include: not feeling like property; management that treats people well; treated with respect; being trusted and given autonomy; working for an organization that evolved; and being rewarded for hard work. Treated with respect is composed of two essential sub-sub-themes including, age and position. A visual representation of this essential theme, essential sub-themes, and where applicable essential sub-sub-themes is displayed in Figure 10. [

Not feeling like property.

Some of the participant's bad work experiences revolved around being an employee at organizations in which they described, provocatively, as making them feel like they were expendable, someone else's property, and were nothing more than just a number. The descriptions below align with critical theory, illuminating the social injustice issues that can take place in the workforce and marginalize employees (Willis, et al., 2007). One participant discussed these specific experiences while working in a corporate industry. They said:

> And, then I worked in the hotel industry and learned that I am not a huge fan of corporate business styles and that I like the idea of good customer service a lot and I kind of want to continue with that, but I really don't like how currently corporate industry treats its employees and I don't like how it treats customers either. I don't like that employees are treated like property. They're like, "if you don't complete this, you can just leave…we'll find someone to replace you." So, it's a constant pressure for people to go above and beyond without getting any compensation for that. (IP5, 203, pp. 3-4)

The same participant provided a deeper description of their feelings when they were treated in this manner: "just feeling kind of like I'm not worth what they want me—I'm just an expendable employee" (IP5, 2013, p. 6).
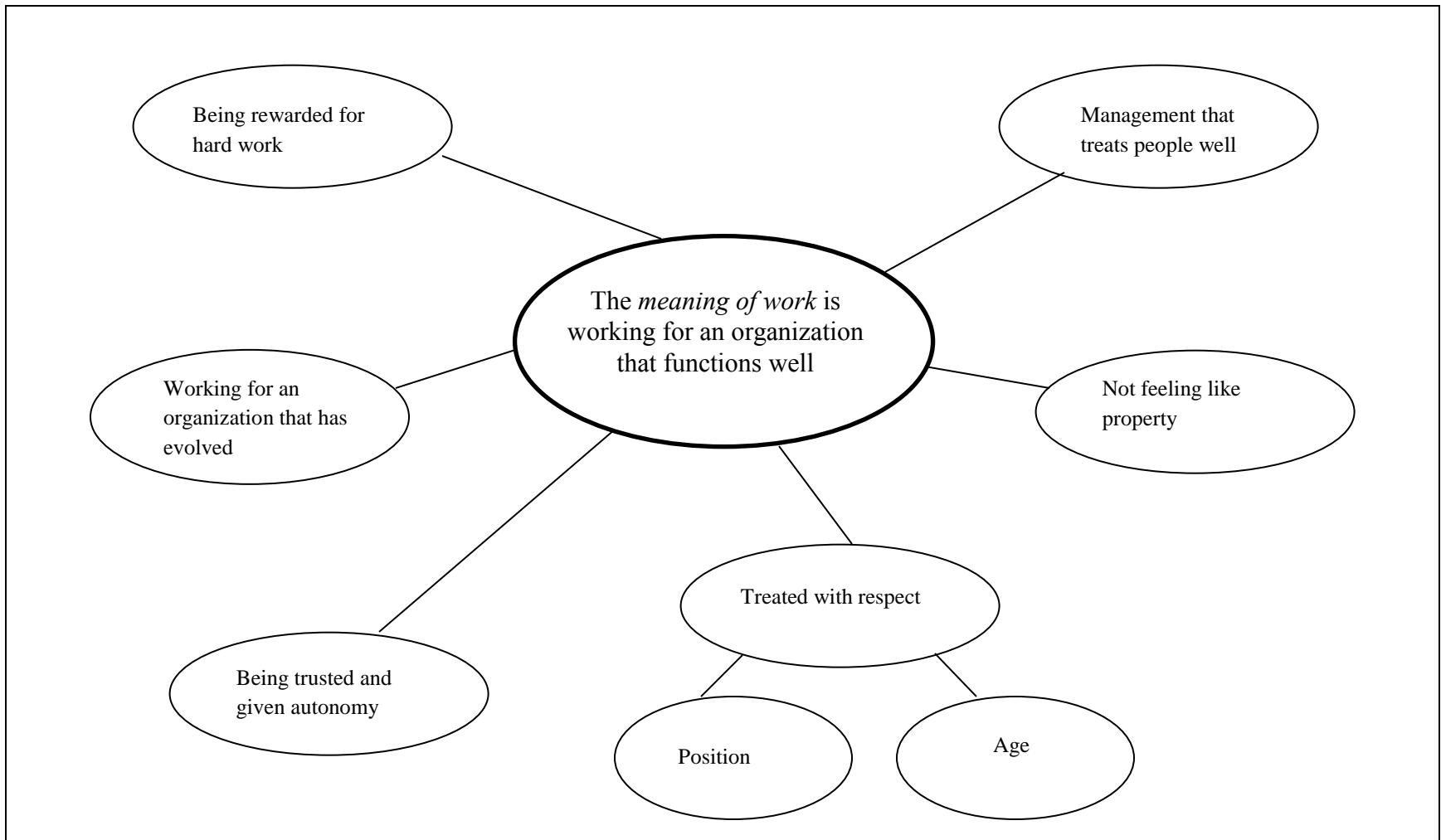
Figure 10. A visual representation of the *meaning of work* is working for an organization that functions well.

Another participant pointed out what it means to be just a number:

> Whereas the other jobs, it just felt like I'm putting…you know…food down for you or I'm trying to push you to buy something because I'm pushing this corporate agenda on you, and I'm just a number in this big corporation…like that means nothing to me. (IP1, 2012, p. 16)

Management that treats people well.

Researchers have found that Generation Y employees want managers that empower

them and are open and positive (Broadbridge et al., 2007). In addition, Twenge and Campbell

(2008) found that this generation appreciates genuineness in a leader. Thus, it makes sense that

when none of these characteristics are present in a manager, that these individuals would

experience bad circumstances within the workplace. In relation to bad circumstances, one

participant explained the connection between management and demeaning work:

> In some of those other jobs… I felt like I was treated like I was dumb, like I had no potential, just very I guess…that's what I mean by demeaning work. Just having managers that treat you like that is just a really awful experience and I think that's what makes you dread going into work. (IP1, 2012, p. 17)

A bad experience with management was discussed by another participant in terms of

management not stepping in to help out employees in lower positions when they were most

needed. The individual said:

> The other part was being frustrated that even though I'm probably the lowest on this totem pole of work it was still my job to handle it rather than calling a manager when I felt that in these situations I don't…I usually don't get paid enough to have to deal with explaining policies that I don't even agree with half the time or explaining a mistake when I'm the one who made it and therefore you don't want to listen to me. But, none of my jobs have ever had anyone who will step in and kind of manage over that. It was always, "this is your job to do that." (IP5, 2013, p. 5)

Participants discussed good experiences of work in terms of being treated well by their

managers. One person said, "You've got to treat people well" (IP5, 2013, p. 4). And in

alignment with this idea, another person discussed the importance of having management that

cares: "So, just genuinely feeling like they care about me beyond just the job and in a very

genuine way has been really good" (IP1, 2012, p. 9). The same participant further explains how

having management that cares makes a difference at work. They said, "I think that's

something that's made a difference in the jobs that I've worked at is feeling like my boss

actually cares if I'm having a rough day or like is going to ask me about it" (IP1, 2012, p. 25).

An example provided by this same participant is expressed in the following quote:

> I think for me, too, as opposed to other jobs in the past, they were concerned about if I was overwhelmed in my personal life, pulling me aside and saying look like, "do you need a day off…seems like you're really overwhelmed." Whereas almost every other job I worked they could have cared less…. quite frankly, especially in the restaurant business and you just feel like you're a number and it could…you're very much replaceable. (IP1, 2012, p. 8)

Another participant pointed out the following: "working for a corporation I know the

corporation doesn't care, so for me it's more of the management and the people on my level

versus the people above me who don't care" (IP2, 2013, p. 1). This statement is in alignment

with Chen and Choi's (2008) finding that Generation Y values the relationship they have with

their supervisor. These desired characteristics of management described by the participants

embody the idea of transformational leaders, which includes: "they pay attention to the

concerns and developmental needs of individual followers"; they are concerned with gaining

"respect and trust"; they give "personal attention"; "promote intelligence"; and "treats each

employee individually" (Robbins & Judge, 2007, p. 437).

On the other hand, one participant provided a different perspective. They said:

"management that genuinely cares….genuinely cares…I feel like that's fluff. I don't know

that's just me and I mean there's people in my office that who I think would care for me if I

got hit by a bus tomorrow but, overall like…I'm like it's not like they need to get to know me"

(IP4, 2013, tp. 4). This view in more in alignment with transactional leadership, which focuses

more on "leaders who guide or motivate their followers in the direction of established goals by clarifying role and task requirements" (Robbins & Judge, 2007, p. 437).

Treated with respect.

One participant mentioned that bad experiences of work have stemmed from several areas, one being "respect" (IP3, 2012, p. 7). Several of the participants had experienced some form of what could be considered discrimination based on their position in an organization and being a young employee. Critical theory is applicable to these findings (Willis et al., 2007), as being treated without respect due to your position or age is a social issue that increases the marginalization of employees. There exists a plethora of literature that discusses discrimination based on race, gender, and aging workers, however less that focuses on position level and being a younger employee in the workforce. In fact, some of the literature on ageism reports that age discrimination is more existent among people towards the older employees in the workforce (Dennis & Thomas, 2007). This issue should be addressed by organizations since according to Minnotte (2012), "Discrimination in the workplace is one of the most distressing negative workplace behaviors that workers can encounter" (p. 190). Thus, the participants believed that being treated with respect, regardless of position or age, was an important factor for an organization that functions well.

Position.

Participants expressed the importance of respect for people regardless of an individual's level of position. One participant said: "and then also just people treating you with respect for your time even if you are a junior or so on and so forth" (IP3, 2012, p. 7).

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Age.

One person spent several months sitting on councils as a youth representative. This

person provides an example of how it felt to not have a voice as a youth, even in this position:

> And you know because a lot of my experience on these councils was I did not feel
> taken very seriously, I was not paid for this. You know it kind of felt like they required
> youth and so I sat there and there would be six hour meetings where I wouldn't say a
> word. And so the idea that we have youth involvement it's like well, you know do you
> really mean that? Just because the youth is physically present are you really listening to
> the youths and families or is it just you trying to make this group look good? (IP1,
> 2013, p. 4)

For another person, the experience of not being shown respect manifested itself through

comments from work colleagues at meetings. This individual said:

> When I was working at XXX I'd show up at meetings and people would say stuff like,
> "I have grandkids older than you" and I was like, "okay, well this meeting's off to a
> good start." So, you know one of the things it goes back to about why that works, is
> that it goes back to what I said about having respect in the workplace. (IP3, 2012, p. 16)

Another person shared the same experience of receiving what felt like disrespectful comments

at work based on age. The person provided the following example:

> I keep doing things well and they're like "well…she's young,"….it's like a notch down
> so like they said…this person's doing really, really well and oh this person did really,
> really well but they're young …it's like an instant step down. (IP4, 2014, p. 9)

Another participant observed stereotyping at the workplace, as expressed in the following

quote:

> I get really frustrated with a lot of ways that people, like my coworkers, will stereotype
> our clients because it's all client-based and when you're doing that you obviously talk
> about your cases and you don't talk about the people specifically but just kind of…you
> vent to one another, you make jokes to get through the day and one of the biggest
> stereotypes that I hear on a daily basis that I just…I constantly try to combat and kind
> of get the like, "oh, sweetheart" response is we have quite a few elderly clients and
> there's this stereotype that the elderly clients are very honest and we should try
> everything in our power to help them, but it's the younger people who are trying to rip
> off the system. And, I haven't seen that at all. I've seen about 50/50—there is
> definitely people who aren't honest and there are definitely people who are just

struggling, and I haven't seen it with age and yet I get told every single day that it has to do with age. (IP5, 2013, p. 2)

Being trusted and given autonomy.

Participants discussed the importance of being trusted by your manager and the disdain of dealing with managers that micromanage. Martin (2005) reported that Generation Y employees prefer not to be micromanaged. In alignment with that finding, one participant described their experience with their current manager and compared them to a previous one that micromanaged:

> My manager now is like…he trusts me 110% so I do a lot of stuff that most other people probably don't know how to do, so I feel like he gives me a lot of freedom as far as what I can and you know what I can't do which is very minimal compared to what I can do and it makes me feel good about myself that he like if he leaves the store and has to go somewhere then I'm in charge and he trusts me enough to do that. I like bosses that can give you freedom because they've trained you well enough that they know that you're capable, whereas like I remember when I worked at Target I had a manager who was constantly checking up on you, and like nose in your business all the time and it was terrible…because we had walkie talkies and he'd be like, "XXX, where are you?" "I need to come and yell at you." And I'd be like "I'm very far away and I can't find you right now." So, that was horrible because I felt like I was insignificant and stupid and just….like you don't trust me to do it so why are you having me do it…why don't you just do it yourself? That's kind of how I felt… like why are you wasting my time? Why am I wasting your time? So, I don't like managers who breathe down my neck. I hate being micromanaged. (IP2, 2012, pp. 13-14)

Likewise, another participant discussed their experiences with micromanagement and how it made them feel. Additionally, this participant pointed out the importance of being given freedom in completing their work, which is in accordance with Twenge's (2010) assertion that Generation Y individuals seek freedom in their work. The participant provided the following reflection:

> I think some of the worst experiences that I've had as far as jobs has been micromanagement. I think it sends a few messages to the people that you're working with a) you're incompetent, you need to be constantly watched…I think it just sets a very tense work environment. I think it feels like you're not trusted to do what you need to do, and so I think for me the more independence you're given as far as here's

the task that I'm giving you some level of room to however you want to get this done effectively as long as you're getting your work done. I think that's much more empowering to the person that's working to have a say and kind of….I think there's a level of saying I respect you and trust you enough to get this done and maybe the way that one person might do it you know might now be the other…you know…I think sometimes people get so caught up in micromanaging that there's so much effort just in policing people and watching them and making sure they're doing it, and that creates a really tense work environment to me. Those have been the times where it's just like you know you're being watched or you're constantly being told what to do and that's not a very good thing. And some people may want those jobs where they're told what to do in that, but I think in my jobs whereever there's more room for creativity and a little more level of getting to decide how I want to do it, the more empowered I feel in a job. (IP1, 2013, pp. 8-9)

Researchers have found that Generation Y individuals desire responsibility (Broadbridge et al., 2007; Martin, 2005). A participant provided an example of how it made them feel to not be extended responsibility or trust by management:

I would have to say that it also….a responsibility thing of being given responsibility and being trusted to do stuff or not, has led to experiences where you just feel like you are pushing numbers around on a spreadsheet versus actually participating and leading the direction of something. (IP3, 2012, p. 7)

Working for an organization that has evolved.

One of the most preferred organizational attributes by Generation Y is working for a company that has a "dynamic, forward looking approach to their business" (Terjesen et al. 2007, p. 517). Twenge and Campbell (2010) found that Generation Y expects different workplaces than previous generations. In relation to these findings, the participants reflected on how they prefer to work for organizations that have evolved over the decades. One participant discussed how some organizations are still modeled after the industrial revolution, and the consequences of them not evolving with modern times. The individual stated:

There's obviously a need out there to rethink how people work. So much of what we see as the standard culture of large corporations that employ a huge segment of the population is modeled after the industrial revolution. Cubicles really are an extension of assembly lines. So…understanding that that really isn't a very productive way to do intellectual work is something that I think is tough because what it means is that they

are embracing systems that are not completely predictable, which I think is very tough given the age group and lack of patience of most executives at companies. So, understanding that some of those at some point…while they're necessary for corporate environments, modifying them would be very beneficial and then in the end just like any business, it's about competition and competition for labor is no different. And, while some people do seek their stable shell of nine to five sort of stuff of corporations, more and more people in my generation are saying, "Wow, doing different stuff every day or being in a dynamic environment sounds interesting and fun and I would rather go after that than have the stability." And, if they don't embrace that and understand how to harness that they're going to lose out on some of the most productive resources of our generation. (IP3, 2012, pp. 17-18)

Not only do organizations need to rethink how people work, but another participant mentioned the importance of changing the traditional work structures that still exist in organizations. The participant said:

I think that…my generation is flexible…that we don't really want those nine to five jobs and that we need to learn to structure things probably a little different. That we are going to start kind of thinking a little differently and so to add that into any kind of work structure—it can't be as rigid. (IP5, 2013, p.12)

Instead of organizations being productive with their time, one participant mentioned an experience of working in the corporate industry where, "it was just sort of work for the sake of work a lot of the time… a lot of inefficiency and just process for the sake of process" (IP3, 2012, p. 3). It was a good experience when this individual switched departments because the people were, "just trying to be productive as opposed to busy" (IP3, 2012, p. 4). In addition to changing the notion of rigid work structure and how we work, several of the participants discussed the role of technology in shifting work. One person suggested:

I think it's just kind of like natural…just how evolution works—we just have evolved. I think technology is a big part of it. We don't have the need for like factory workers as much and we don't have the need for a lot of labors because we have technology that will do that. (IP5, 2013, p. 16)

Not only has technology helped shift the way work is done, but it has changed where work takes place. One person mentioned the following: "I think it's very desirable for people to

think about working from home and working online" (IP1, 2012, p. 28). This person offered

the following example:

> I mean even with my internships I was the communications intern and it was all online. I was posting things on Facebook….their blog and that was how people were finding out about the organization was going on the blog and posting stuff. And, so they didn't even have a base office and people worked in this space and you don't even have an office that you're going to. I think that's really interesting too. I think that the biggest thing is that role of technology has completely changed work. (IP1, 2012, pp. 28-29)

> Hall (2013) reported several benefits to working from home including: reduced

turnover; longer hours of productivity; mentally and physically healthier workers; feeling more

connected to your work; environment friendliness; and it requires a level of trust and autonomy

between the employee and management. Noonan and Glass (2012) reported that 24% of the

population works from a home a couple hours a week. However, it is not without controversy

as it has been a highly debated issue since CEO Marissa Meyers banned telecommuting from

Yahoo. Furthermore, another participant pointed out that one way organizations have not

evolved over the generations is that employees are still not being paid reasonably for the job

they do. The individual said:

> And, I think even for my grandmother, trying to get the pay raise that she really earned versus what she's really getting paid is a struggle. They're constantly underpaying people and making them do ridiculous things while they're not really compensating them equally, and I think that's something that hasn't changed. (IP4, 2012, p. 28).

This participant goes on to say that currently, "you're struggling and constantly trying to make

ends meet and you're constantly struggling and trying to be compensated for the things that you

do at an appropriate level" (IP4, 2012, pp. 27-28). This notion is similar to distributive justice in

the workplace, which is the "perceived fairness of the amount and allocation of rewards among

individuals," (Robbins & Judge, 2007, p. 205) and is one component of organizational justice

(Robbins & Judge, 2007).

Being rewarded for hard work.

Busch et al. (2008) found that younger generations wanted recognition for their work. One participant previously had worked really hard at their job and was promoted to a management position. The participant described this experience as the following:

> I just started at the bottom, but worked really hard. I think I actually cared about the job a lot more than the average student. Most of the students lasted there a couple months because of the stress level, but I stuck it out and I was rewarded for that and so that made a huge difference for me in kind of boosting my self-esteem and thinking…okay, I can actually really work well in this job and feeling it was a really cool experience to actually be promoted up to manager ….that was…that made me want to work that much harder because I saw that I was actually being rewarded for the hard work. (IP1, 2012, p.14)

The same participant reflected on the feeling of not being rewarded for hard work:

> And, so the other thing is knowing that if I worked hard I have the potential to work up into a management position because otherwise, it's a dead end and you think why am I even trying because it doesn't matter. (IP1, 2012, p. 8)

In examining the literature, the importance of being rewarded for hard work can be explained by Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory. Robbins and Judge (2007) provide the following description of this contemporary theory of motivation:

> Expectancy theory says that employees will be motivated to exert a high level of effort when they believe that effort will lead to a good performance appraisal; that a good performance appraisal will lead to organizational rewards such as a bonus, a salary increase, or a promotion; and that the rewards will satisfy the employee's personal goals. (p. 208)

Summary of the essential theme.

First, the spread of the hermeneutic spectrum is provided for *The Meaning of work is Working for an Organization that Functions Well*, along with a visual representation. Subsequently, a summary is provided for the essential theme and its corresponding essential sub-themes and essential sub-sub-themes in a table format displaying key points from the participants and supporting literature.

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Hermeneutic spectrum.

In respect to the hermeneutic spread, this essential theme has a moderate to broad spread of description. There was limited descriptive variation in the individual constructions for the essential sub-themes and their corresponding essential sub-sub-themes, thus resulting in two levels of descriptive interpretation (i.e., essential themes and sub-essential themes) with the exception of *treated with respect*, which had three levels of descriptives interpretation (i.e., essential theme, essential sub-theme, and essential sub-sub-themes). The spread of descriptive variation could be the direct reflection of all five participants having similar lived experiences that influenced their beliefs on what makes an organization function well. Furthermore, these lived-experiences of all five participants have taken place within approximately the same time period, thus the progressive nature of society and work itself in this knowledge era may have contributed to this limited descriptive variation—resulting in a similar notions of how organizations should function in the context of the modern workforce. The spread of hermeneutic description for this essential theme is presented in Figure 11.

Key points from participants and supporting literature.

In summary, for these five study participants, the *meaning of work* is working for an organization that functions well. An organization that functions well is composed of the following essential sub-themes: not feeling like property; management that treats people well; treated with respect; being trusted and given autonomy; working for an organization that has evolved; and being rewarded for hard work. Additionally, the essential sub-theme of treated with respect is composed of the two essential sub-sub-themes of position and age. This essential theme is one structural component that forms the construct of the *meaning of work.*
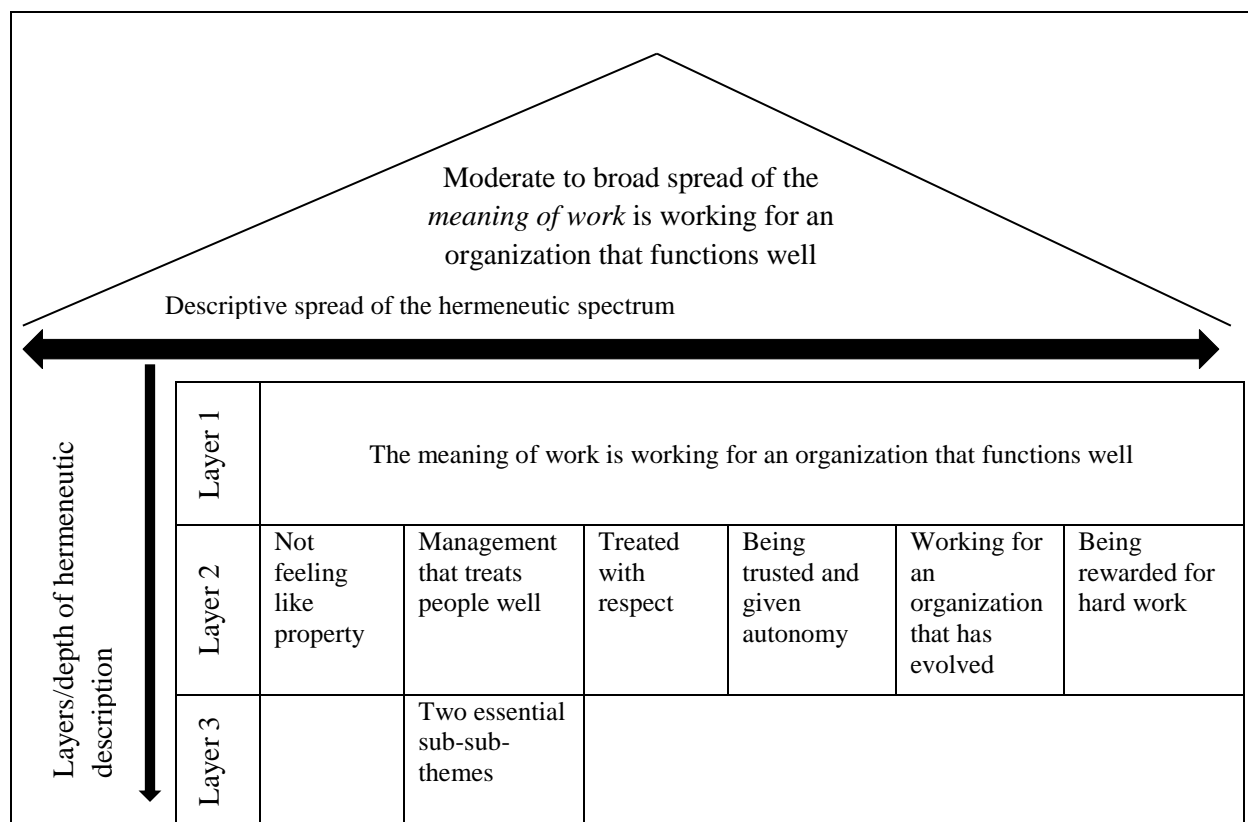
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Moderate to broad spread of the *meaning of work* is working for an organization that functions well

Descriptive spread of the hermeneutic spectrum

Layers/depth of hermeneutic description

Layer 1	The meaning of work is working for an organization that functions well				
Layer 2	Not feeling like property	Management that treats people well	Treated with respect	Being trusted and given autonomy	Working for an organization that has evolved	Being rewarded for hard work
Layer 3		Two essential sub-sub-themes				

Figure 11. A moderate to broad spread of hermeneutic description for the *meaning of work* is working for an organization that functions well

Table 11 summarizes the essential sub- themes and essential sub-sub-themes by providing key points from the participants, along with supporting literature.

Table 11

Key points from the essential sub-themes and corresponding essential sub-sub themes of the meaning of work is working for an organization that functions well

Essential sub-themes	Essential sub-sub-themes	Key points from participants	Key points from supporting literature
Not feeling like property		• We don't want to feel expendable. • We don't want to be treated like property. • Being just a number in an organization has no meaning.	• Critical theory (Willis et al., 2007).

Table 11

Continued

Essential sub-themes	Essential sub-sub-themes	Key points from participants	Key points from supporting literature
Management that treats people well		• Bad managers can make work feel demeaning. • Managers not doing their job can cause bad work experiences. • Management that genuinely cares is important. • Management needs to treat employees well.	• Generation Y values their relationship with their supervisor (Chen & Choi, 2008). • Generation Y desires authenticity in their leaders (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). • Transformational and transactional leadership styles (Robbins & Judge, 2007).
Treated with respect	Position Age	• Employees in entry level positions should be treated with respect. • There is discrimination of employees based on just being young in age.	• Critical theory (Willis et al., 2007). • Critical theory (Willis et al., 2007).
Being trusted and given autonomy		• Micromanagement is not desired and creates a tense environment. • Freedom is empowering. • Being trusted by management is important because we want more responsibility.	• Generation Y does not prefer micromanagement (Martin, 2005). • Generation Y wants freedom at work (Twenge, 2010). • Generation Y desires responsibility (Broadbridge et al., 2007; Martin, 2005).
Working for an organization that has evolved		• We need to re-think how people work. • We want flexibility and not the standard nine to five. • Cubicles are extensions of assembly lines. • We want to be productive and not just busy. • Technology is important. • Working from home is desirable. • Underpaying people for their hard work is still an existing problem.	• Generation Y expects different workplaces than previous generations (Twenge & Campbell, 2010). • Generation Y wants to work for forward thinking and dynamic organizations (Terjesen et al., 2007). • Distributive justice is important in organizations (Robbins & Judge, 2007).
Being rewarded for hard work		• We want to be recognized for hard work. • Being rewarded motivates us to work harder.	• Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory.

The *Meaning of Work* is Balance

> *A master in the art of living draws no sharp distinction between his work and his play, his labour and his leisure, his mind and his body, his education and his recreation. He hardly knows which is which. He simply pursues his vision of excellence through whatever he is doing and leaves others to determine whether he is working or playing. To himself he always seems to be doing both.*
>
> *– Lawrence Pearsall Jacks*

Several researchers have concluded that Generation Y values a balance between work and life (Broadbrigde et al., 2007; Chen & Choi, 2008; Twenge, 2010). While these five participants consistency emphasized the importance of balance, their descriptions of the construct do not completely depict the "traditional image" (Friedman & Lobel, 2003, p. 88) of work/life balance that is rampant throughout the literature. This depiction is in alignment with Friedman and Lobel's (2003) statement that "unfortunately, a one-size-fits-all notion of "work/life" balance has emerged" (pp. 88-89) in our society. Participants provide insightful reflections, but varied notions on what balance means to each of them. As stated by the OECD (2013), the work/life balance is difficult to measure as the cut off points for what people consider balance is based on individual preference.

In presenting these findings, the essential theme "the *meaning of work* is balance" is composed of four essential sub-themes including: balance of work priorities; balance of work and non-work priorities; a picture of lack of balance; and how to achieve balance. With the exception of "a picture of lack of balance," all of the remaining three essential sub-themes have essential sub-sub-themes. Balance of work priorities is composed of balance of meeting basic needs and doing meaningful work, and importance of balance at work. Balance of work and non-work priorities includes: the importance of mental and physical health; the importance of education; the importance of family and friends; and the importance of activities and hobbies we

enjoy. Finally, how to achieve balance is composed of the following: having flexibility at work; choosing purposeful career paths; strategically investing your time; and creating boundaries between work and life. A visual representation of this essential theme, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes is displayed in Figure 12.

Balance of work priorities.

Balance of work priorities is described by the five participants as balance of meeting basic needs, and doing meaningful work. These essential sub-sub-themes are presented and described below.

Balance of meeting basic needs and doing meaningful work.

Balance of work priorities encompass the idea that there is a balance that occurs within work itself. One participant discussed balance as the, "opportunity for you to meet your basic necessities, but then to actively choose something that you believe in" (IP3, 2012, p.10). The same participant reflected on the notion of balance being influenced by whether or not they were doing meaningless versus meaningful work. The participant described the feeling of a meaningless experience in the corporate world where they felt a lack of balance. However, in their current position they are doing meaningful work, so balance is no longer an issue. It could be suggested that doing meaningful work, itself, provides a sense of balance for people, as reflected in the following quote:

> I think it just really comes from a lack of balance…so too much work being one factor—although I have to say in comparative to the days of working crazy hours in the corporate world versus….I still work a ton of hours now, but it doesn't really bother me….I just feel motivated because of having to get in the game and wanting to succeed and seeing that my effort is directly correlated to that result…so those are two very different feelings. (IP3, 2012, p.7)

The balance of being able to meet your basic necessities and do something meaningful was reinforced by another participant.
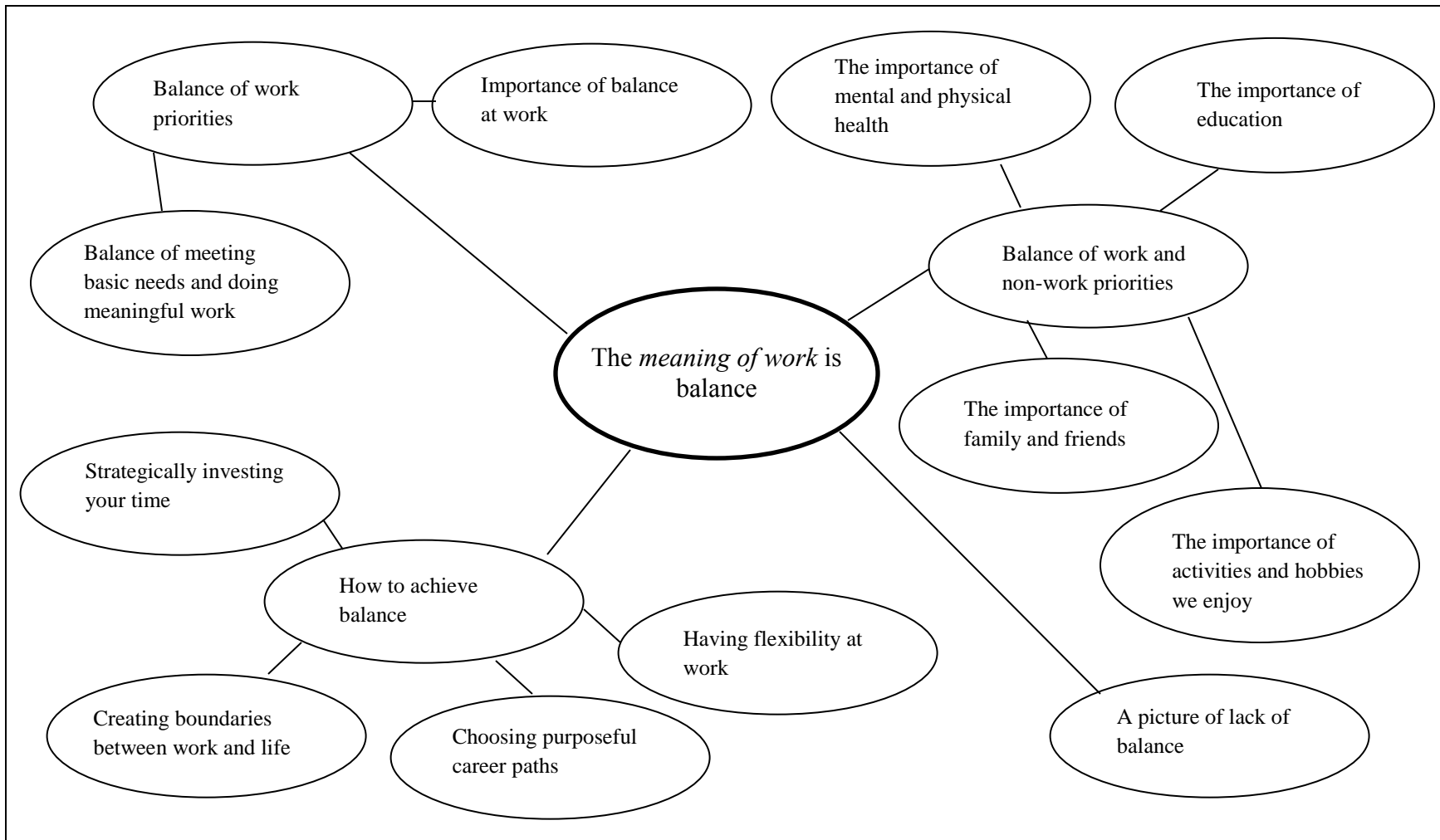
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The importance of mental and physical health

The importance of education

Balance of work priorities

Importance of balance at work

Balance of meeting basic needs and doing meaningful work

Balance of work and non-work priorities

The *meaning of work* is balance

The importance of family and friends

Strategically investing your time

The importance of activities and hobbies we enjoy

How to achieve balance

Having flexibility at work

Creating boundaries between work and life

Choosing purposeful career paths

A picture of lack of balance

Figure 12. A visual representation of the *meaning of work* is balance

This participant discussed the *meaning of work* as, "tapping into your passion and your

calling…and finding a way to support yourself" (IP1, 2012, p. 22). The participant further

explained that while making money to make ends meet was important, it was not the biggest

priority. They said:

> And, I've never had the mentality of its most important for me in a job, for me to make as much money as possible. It's pretty much if I can pay my bills and you know support myself, but I'm doing meaningful work and I feel like I'm helping people…that's at the core of what I want to do with my career. (IP1, 2012, pp. 12-13)

One person pointed out that even within doing meaningful work there is a balance between

helping people and the intensity level of the job itself. They said:

> Instead of being like an individual therapist I want to work more on the policies at state government level…that's where I found I think I can do the most meaningful work…kind of going back to your question, but that's been a good thing I think for because it's really intense to think about working on an individual level with clients and so this is a good balance for me of having rewarding work, but feeling like I'm making a bigger impact on a policy level and kind of overseeing things. (IP1, 2012, p. 7)

This balance within doing meaningful work is in accordance with Chalofsky's (2003)

model of meaningful work. One of the components of meaningful work is the "sense of

balance" (Chalofsky, 2003, p. 78). The "sense of balance" encompasses the notion that there is

a balance of giving to oneself and giving to others. This same participant explains well how this

idea of balance, or lack thereof, would express itself within the helping professions. They said:

> That burnout, especially within the helping profession, I think so many people in helping professions walk away really jaded, really burned out, and they don't ever want to go back because they were giving so much to the people that they were helping that they forgot that they need the same thing. (IP1, 2013, pp. 10-11)

Importance of balance at work.

One participant discussed the importance of having balance at work because of the

significant effect it has on their overall life balance. This idea disputes literature suggesting that

when people were satisfied with overall life, they were satisfied with their jobs, however that

relationship did not work the other way around (Schmitt & Mellon, 1980). The participant said:

> The balance between doing the task that you get paid for and the balance between helping people I guess…the other thing I really want to do and I want work to be. And, the balance between those versus…if you're really really heavy on the task, you're not going to be happy. If you're really really heavy on the helping people, you're not going to make ends meet because I believe if that aspect of my balance, my work is balanced, then the rest of my life will be balanced…staying in contact with friends, being fit and healthy physically, as well as mentally. And, then I guess in my head being able to balance those two aspects of my work philosophies hopefully will mirror onto my personal life—that's separate from that. You know, big piece of pie and half is half, and half is half. I feel like if I can balance these aspects, then balance the rest of my life, then this'll be a lot easier. You know, it's like having one shoe that weighs heavier than the other, it's never going to be good…you're always going to be lopsided. So, I feel like if I can get this sorted then I feel like my personal life will kind of work its way around it and it'll be balanced—happy and designating time to everything that I enjoy and everything that I want to do. (IP4, 2012, p. 30)

The same participant provided an example of their ideal position that they believed

provided this type of balance at work:

> If I was a disability like physical therapist or something like….I mean I'm sure that's a lot of work, that's a lot of task, that's a lot of job but it wouldn't feel so bad if like that if I was helping someone and…was making someone's life better versus only doing the task and just getting paid for it and just doing it. I guess it's kind of the very typical…the line most people straddle is do a task that you do well and get paid well, or do something that you enjoy that doesn't pay as well. (IP4, 2012. pp. 10-11)

The link between balance of work and balance of life is similar to Chalofky's (2003)

notion of "sense of balance" (p. 80), which includes: "the balance of work self and personal

self", "the balance of spiritual self and work self," and "the balance of giving to oneself and

giving to others" (p. 78). Another characteristic of balance of work priorities is expressed by a

participant discussing the relevance of working with customers and working individually. This

person also underscores the important role that individual personality plays in the notion of

balance. They said:

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It has a balance that I've never had in another job of working with customers and working by myself. So I've never…so I've really enjoyed that and realized that I like doing that just because of my own personality. Where I usually am just in front of customers all day long, talking all day long so then I feel exhausted and then want to be by myself when I go home. So having a balance at work makes it easier for me to have also balance in my personal life, people and self-time. (IP5, 2013, p. 4)

Balance of work and non-work priorities.

Balance of work and non-work priorities is an essential theme with essential sub-themes including: mental and physical health, family and friends, and education. This essential sub-sub-theme is the most similar finding to the construct of work/life balance, which can be defined as "a term used to describe a state of equilibrium between an individual's work and personal life" ("Work-life Balance," 2009, para. 1). Cartwright and Holmes (2006) suggested that a balance of work and life needs to exist in studying environmental factors that influence the *meaning of work*. The OECD (2011) reported that this balance is important for society and our communities, as it provides time to socialize and be an active participant. Similarly, the importance of balancing work and non-work priorities is explicitly reflected by two participants. One participant explained why they set strong boundaries between life and work, saying, "Because I guess because I want to have balance. I want to be able to balance my life and I don't want work to be my priority…I just want it to be part of my whole life" (IP5, 2013, pp. 3-4). The second participant described their varying experiences in two distinct departments within the same organization. They highlight an important point that people can work hard and still find balance. The participant said:

I transitioned out of that and opportunistically jumped into another part of XXX to be on the management/consulting team that worked on the mergers of XXX and XXX. Which, was nice because they weren't as crazy intense. They were still busy people and worked really hard, but it was I don't know…..a more reasonable atmosphere of balancing work with life. (IP3, 2012, p. 4)

The importance of mental and physical health.

Participants mentioned burnout and dealing with high stress levels. The American

Psychological Association reported in 2007 that three quarters of Americans listed work as a

significant factor of stress and half of those people said that it seriously affected their

productivity levels at work ("Overwhelmed by Workplace," 2013). One participant said,

"Looking back I think I realize sometimes the extra money isn't worth it…it's not worth your

sanity" (IP1, 2012, p. 21). The same participant described their experience of burn-out:

> I think it was actually over the summer that I hit major burnout. I mean I literally one
> day just said, "I can't go to work anymore." I literally just put in my two weeks and I
> said, "I'm sorry" and I was so broke over the summer…I was waiting patiently for my
> student loans, but ended up getting a job that I have autonomy and it is meaningful work
> to me. I get to work with women on campus and I'm not working as many hours, I'm not
> in a management position anymore, and so I realized that it was going to be more
> important for me to take that time for mental health because otherwise the money isn't
> going to replace that and so you know with being a college senior you know I'm working
> two jobs and I'm volunteering…I'm really having to be very conscious to build it into my
> schedule like anything else. (IP1, 2013, p. 10)

Another participant described their experience of working several jobs simultaneously, and the

affect it had on them:

> I was absolutely done working two jobs and working 50 to 60 hours a week and not
> quitting. That's what really made me take the administrative position at XXX because I
> was like "I just can't keep doing this, I'm just running myself raw." (IP4, 2012, p. 11).

Similarly, another person described the experience of dealing with stress in a position in the

corporate world:

> I think before when I was more in the corporate world… it was always interesting and
> sometimes there were good days that went well but, really it was just sort of managing
> the stress level of it…..that was the MO. (IP3, 2012, pp. 6-7)

Two of the participants explained proactive measures they take to prevent stress and burnout.

The first participant said, "but I mean I build time in, you know going working out is non-

negotiable" (IP1, 2013, p. 10). The other participant mentioned, "I plan days off and I plan

mental health" (IP5, 2013, p.10).

The importance of education.

Several of the participants worked full-time while they attended college full-time. One person

discussed sacrificing money for the purpose of going back to school as a full-time student. The

person said:

> But…so, you know, economically…I'm trying to think… for a while I chose to… there
> were two years after I lived on my own for a little while, my mom offered to have me
> move back in so that I could focus on school full time, and so as much as it sucked to be
> that broke you know I had…I had a place to live, food, and that was about it. It was
> totally worth the sacrifice because it gave me a year of college under my belt. So, that
> too… it was worth it to take the time off even though I was incredibly broke…the
> tradeoff was it, it was worth it to go back to college and to focus on that full-time. (IP1,
> 2012, p. 18)

The same person discussed the importance of working for an organization that acknowledges the

priorities of a student trying to balance work and school:

> And also being understanding that I am a student. That was a big reason why I quit my
> testing center job is my direct boss was pretty understanding, but getting time off was
> next to impossible and being a student and working a campus job where they're not
> understanding of that. (IP1, 2012, p. 9)

And another person went on to explain the unrealistic expectations that society holds for

Generation Y individuals:

> Just because we're expected to go to school, hold a full-time job, and go to school full-
> time and be able to squeeze in all the extra curricula and anything leisure, we feel like
> fun, somehow into a seven day week that we're supposed to live a complete and full life.
> (IP4, 2012, pp. 23-24)

The importance of family and friends.

England (1991) reported that work centrality was declining in society due to the

inclining importance of family. Several research studies conducted across multiple countries,

including the U.S., have found that family involvement was the only factor more important

than work (Kuchinke et al., 2008; Kuchinke & Conachione, 2010; Kuchinke et al., 2011).

One participant mentioned that work is important because it provides a paycheck to be able

to partake in enjoyable activities with friends:

> What work ends up being for me is that paycheck, and that paycheck is for me to go out with my friends, for me to have a nice couch in my apartment…to be able to pay that bill. And, then outside of that are the things that I want to do…those are the things that I've planned and think about…you know when I'm going to bed at night I don't think about work I think about, "oh, I would like to take a trip this summer…I would like to call my friend who I haven't seen in a while." So, I guess it's just priority. (IP5, 2013, pp. 10-11)

One participant's prior relationship had ended based on both of them being busy. This

person reflected on that experience and shared the following: "it's not worth your relationship

suffering from it…you have to reach a point where you say, 'is this worth it'?" (IP1, 2012, p.

21). In alignment with this idea, two other participants discussed the importance of spending

time with their family:

> Like on my days off I try to go visit my mom and I try to visit my sister because I live in Denver and they live in Loveland, so I…you know…I try to set it up so like, "okay, I'm coming over at this time, are you going to be home?" And, things like that because they are the two most important people in my family aside from my husband and we try and go see his family too. You know if my husband and I have a day off together we try to do something together. I have a dog and he's like my child, so I try and take him on walks and I try to spend time with him because he makes me happy when I'm at home. You just have to schedule in extra time for everything else when you have a hectic life. (IP2, 2012, p. 9)

> To be honest I think that what I do is…the main things are work….sort of…time with my immediate family—being my wife—time with my greater family or time with my friends, and then my personal time. Usually I try to prioritize to spend time with my wife; get all the work done that needs to be done, which sometimes that's a lot or a little so that sort of flexes up and down; maintain family commitments; and see friends. (IP3, 2012, p. 11)

The importance of activities and hobbies we enjoy.

One person mentioned the importance of doing activities for personal pleasure during their free time. Literature has shown that leisure time, such as hobbies we enjoy, is important for our well-being ("Work-life Balance," n.d.). This participant said:

> I mean like I basically just squeeze everything else I enjoy and into the little free time that I have. I love to paint, I love to draw, I love to write, I love…I'm truly a creative individual but I'm not confident enough in my skills to actually do that as a form of work . So, that's something I definitely do on the side just for personal pleasure and just because…whenever I feel the urge to paint, I paint. Whenever I feel the urge to draw, I draw. Whenever I feel the urge to write something, then I write. (IP4, 2012, p. 21)

However, the difficulty of having that free time was expressed in the following quote:

> So….like….I just squeeze those things into my spare time whenever it strikes me I guess. You know I'll paint one evening, I'll draw the next, I'll just read a book one night, or I'll just lay on the couch and I'll drink a soda or an alcoholic beverage to just un-wind. So, yeah I just kind of squeeze it in, I don't …work comes first unfortunately. (IP4, 2012, p. 22)

A picture of lack of balance.

While balance is important to the participants' *meaning of work*, several of the participants described their experiences with a lack of balance. Lack of balance has been linked to health issues and increased stress levels (OECD, n.d.). Factors contributing to a lack of balance include: globalization; technology; and longer hours (Robbins & Judge, 2007). One participant admitted the following, "currently I would like to say I'm a workaholic" (IP4, 2012, p. 21). Another participant discussed the physical effects of not having balance as, "I can't just go home from work and just leave it behind….I'm always stressed about something, which is not good for my health" (IP2, 2012. p. 4). This same participant went on to say:

> I hope I can maybe learn to let things go sometimes. I mean I'm always stressed out… I always have headaches, I always have neck aches, so it's just like I can't let it go and I hope that someday it will get to that point where I'm just like, "nope…I'm not going to worry about it." (IP2, 2012, p. 12)

Reiterating this same idea, another participant discussed the experience of taking emotional

baggage home from work:

> And so she pulled me aside one day because I was like super overwhelmed and there
> was this woman with dementia and I was really depressed about it and she said, "you
> know, if you wake up and you don't feel like you love coming to this job and love
> doing this and you can't separate yourself from that you're probably are not going to
> survive." And I thought you're right, I'm not going to survive because I'm taking this
> baggage home. (IP1, 2012, pp. 4-5)

For one participant, a lack of balance started affecting other work obligations:

> I went for two or three years where I had at least two jobs—at least. And so, and then I
> started volunteering on councils and I had meetings and so what I've learned now is
> you can have a lot of things going on but sometimes you spread yourself thin so you're
> not doing any of them well. And, that was a huge lesson that I learned as I found that I
> was missing meetings and I would be burned out so I would be physically there, but not
> be doing well and so what I learned through that is it's better to choose one or two
> things and learn how to say no and do them well. (IP1, 2012, p. 20)

Two other participants described their reasons for their shortage of free time. One

person explained, "I mean when I was in school I was working full-time, going to school full-

time, and doing an internship at the same time so I'm used to having no time, so my free time

is non-existent, basically" (IP2, 2012, p. 1). The other person described how much they

worked in a previous position in the following quote:

> I worked in investment banking at XXX and XXX, which definitely fell on the more
> traditional corporate side of the spectrum I think. And, it was also very much on the
> intense side. It was crazy ridiculous hours where I learned that there are 168 hours in
> a week. I think my crowning achievement in one week I worked 130 hours. Not
> really a goal that is worth shooting for. I think at hour 129 I hopefully came to that
> realization. (IP3, 2012, p. 3)

How to achieve balance.

Anderson (2013) suggests that to find balance we should take time for ourselves,

schedule down time, and cut out things that don't add value to our lives. Likewise, workplaces

are offering flexible schedules, job-sharing, and part-time work to help people out with work-

life conflicts (Robbins & Judge, 2007). The participants reflect on four ways of achieving

balance including: having flexibility at work; choosing purposeful career paths; strategically

investing our time; and creating boundaries between work and life.

Having flexibility at work.

Researchers have proposed that Generation Y individuals value flexibility at work

(Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Gursoy et al., 2008). One participant supported this finding, as

they believed the following: "I think for my generation you want flexibility" (IP1, 2012, p.

25). They used the following example of their Mother's situation of working from home to

elaborate on this point:

> I think that the big thing too is…you know I think going back to the flexibility part…
> it's really desirable to have a job, like my Mom teaches internet classes and she works
> from home so she jokes about being in her pajamas and like walking in and like being
> a mess when my dad or my stepdad comes home because she's in her sweats so
> ….but, then it gives her a chance to do other things that she likes and not a lot of…
> other people don't have that chance…they work the 9 to 5, and so our generation is
> seeing that and that's very desirable to work from home. (IP1, 2012, p. 29)

The same person discussed how sometimes it is necessary to sacrifice other things in life to

achieve a sense of balance:

> I had to learn to just live on very little income, but I'm so much happier even though…
> I mean my paychecks now are half of what they were, but I am so much more at
> peace….I have more time off, I have the weekends off… and to me and it makes a
> huge difference for me to now do things that I enjoy… and having that flexibility for
> me is key. (IP1, 2012, p. 21)

Choosing purposeful career paths.

Another participant discussed achieving balance by career choice. This participant

said:

> I think I've done a good job by choosing this certain career paths that offer a balanced
> life style. Like, all of those career paths really really promote having a balanced life
> and doing what you like and also being responsible at the same time. (IP4, 2012, p.
> 30)

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Strategically investing our time.

Being strategic about what an individual decides to invest time in was another way to achieve balance, as expressed in the following quote:

> And also being strategic about the jobs that I'm investing my time in. Because you can be doing a lot of…a lot of different jobs, but if it's not going to really get you to where you need to go…then why are you doing this? And so, that's something that's been really good for me is learning how to say "no" even if there are opportunities that are coming my way and job offers…thinking about, you know is this going to be worth my time investment because otherwise I'm just going to hit burnout. (IP1, 2012, p. 20)

Creating boundaries between work and life.

Creating strong boundaries between work and life was another approach in establishing balance. One participant said:

> I set really strong boundaries on work. I will…I don't work overtime unless…unless there's nothing going on that week and I need the money, but even if I don't…like I don't' feel like I need the money I will not work overtime. I will set schedules….I have never …unless it's been like emergencies I've always been very strict on, "you can't call me on my day off and ask me to come to work." (IP5, 2013, p. 10)

This same participant went on to explain the boundaries: "I'm also very much once I leave work, it's left there…like I don't really think about work when I'm not there, I don't worry about did something get finished—I leave it at the door" (IP5, 2013, p. 10). The person also explained how having flexibility at work is important because it allows the opportunity for balance in their life:

> Having flexibility allows me to have that balance where I can choose to work this different shift and have my mornings to myself or I can have instead of weekends off, I can go take off in the middle of the day and those sorts of things. (IP5, 2013, p. 4)

Instead of creating strong boundaries on work and life, one person pointed out that there really is no precise equation that exists:

In reality it's just kind of all in flex. I don't know, I don't have an equation—there's no like…I'm not a person who is like, "well, I need to go on a run every day"…even though I sort of wish I was but I don't walk out an hour and I'm like "you won't be able to reach me"…I don't do that. And, I'm also not someone who is like well "I'm going to stop answering emails on Friday"-I don't not check my mail- I don't do that. (IP3, 2012, pp. 11-12)

Summary of the essential theme.

First, the spread of the hermeneutic spectrum is provided for *The Meaning of work is Balance*, along with a visual representation. Subsequently, a summary is provided for the essential theme and its corresponding essential sub-themes and essential sub-sub-themes in a table format displaying key points from the participants and supporting literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum.

In respect to the spread of the hermeneutic spectrum, this essential theme has a broad descriptive spread. There was a decent amount of descriptive variation in the individual constructions for the essential sub-themes and their corresponding essential sub-sub-themes, thus resulting in three levels of descriptive interpretation (i.e., essential, sub-essential, and sub-sub-essential themes). While they all shared that balance is important to their *meaning of work*, there was variation among the participants on what they mean by balance and how they achieve balance. For example, one participant believed that their balance was all in flex, while another participant created strong boundaries between life and work. This variation could be the reflection of the spread of individual diversity of the participant's lived experiences and what each individual prioritizes in their lives. This level of variation underscores the importance of context specificity for this phenomenon to gain a deep understanding of how individuals construct and develop their *meaning of work*. The spread of hermeneutic description for this essential theme is presented in Figure 13.
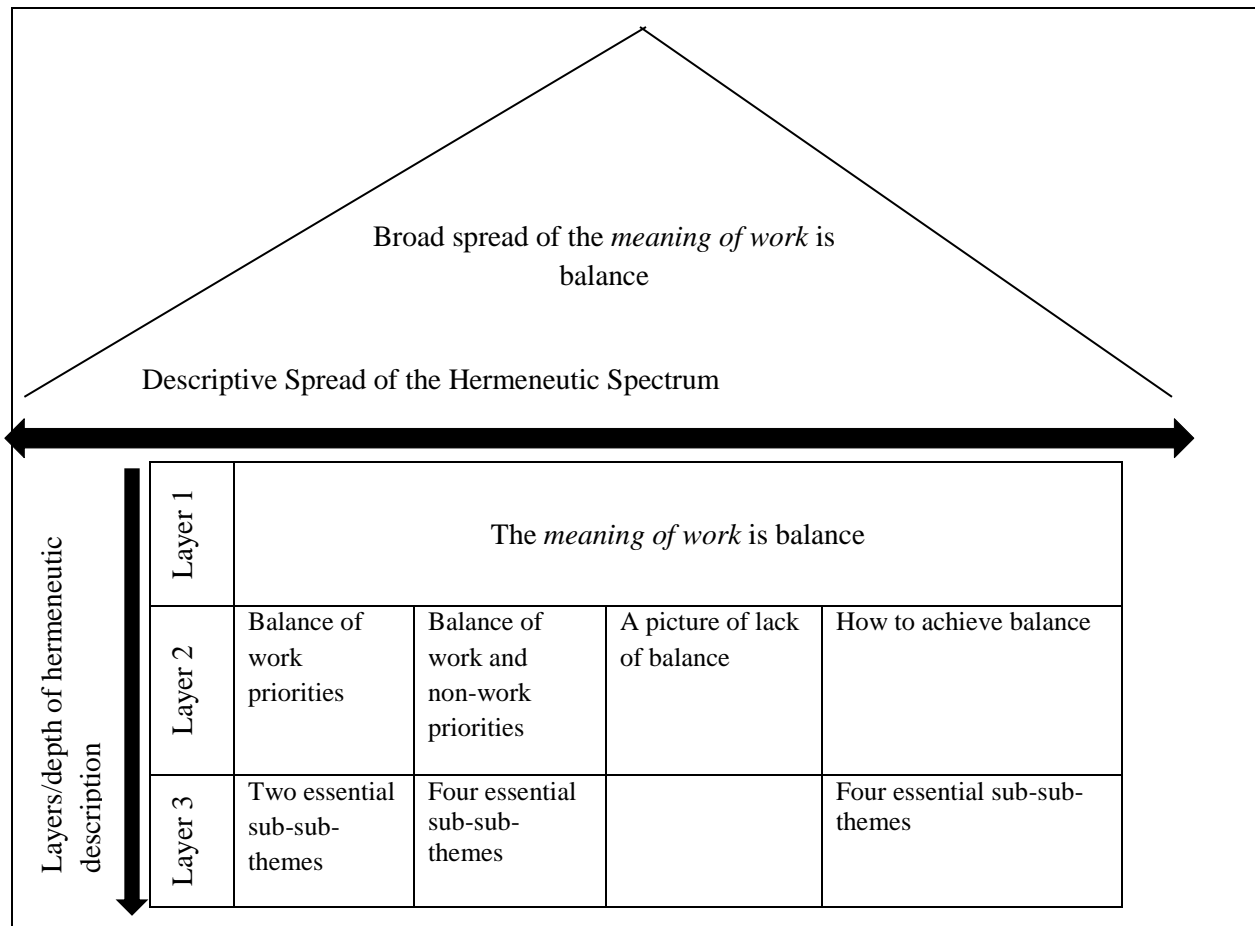
Figure 13. A broad spread of the hermeneutic description for the *meaning of work* is balance

Key points from participants and supporting literature.

In summary, for these five study participants, one essence of the *meaning of work* is

balance. This essential theme is composed of four essential sub-themes including: balance of

work priorities; balance of work and non-work priorities; a picture of lack of balance; and how to

achieve balance. With the exception of "a picture of lack of balance," all of the remaining three

essential sub-themes have essential sub-sub-themes. Balance of work priorities is composed of

balance of meeting basic needs and doing meaningful work, and importance of balance at work.

Balance of work and non-work priorities includes: the importance of mental and physical health;

the importance of education; the importance of family and friends; and the importance of

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activities and hobbies we enjoy. Finally, how to achieve balance is composed of the following:

having flexibility at work; choosing purposeful career paths; strategically investing your time;

and creating boundaries between work and life. Table 12 summarizes the essential sub- themes

and essential sub-sub-themes by providing key points from the participants, along with

supporting literature.

Table 12

Key points from the essential sub-themes and corresponding essential sub-sub themes of the meaning of work is balance

Essential sub-themes	Essential sub-sub-Themes	Key points from participants	Key points from supporting literature
Balance of work priorities	Balance of meeting basic needs and doing meaningful work	• Money is not the most important factor, as long as we are doing meaningful work. • Balance looks different when we are doing meaningful work versus meaningless work. • There is a balance in meaningful work between helping people and taking care of ourselves.	• Chalofsky's (2003) model of meaningful work.
	Importance of balance at work	• Balance in our work creates balance in our lives. • What we consider balance at work is based on our individual personalities. • There is a balance between working with customers and working individually.	• These findings dispute Schmitt and Melon's (1980) suggestion that work satisfaction does not lead to life satisfaction. • Chalofsky's (2003) model of meaningful work.
Balance of work and non-work priorities	The importance of mental and physical health	• Burnout. • Managing stress.	• Balance is an important factor in the meaning of work (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). • The APA (2007) found that 75% of Americans consider work as a significant source of stress and influences productivity levels ("Overwhelmed by workplace," 2013)

Table 12

Continued

Essential sub-themes	Essential sub-sub-Themes	Key points from participants	Key points from supporting literature
	The importance of education	• Sacrifice income to go to school full-time • Unrealistic expectations of Generation Y • Difficulty in finding employment that respects school being a priority	• Work and non-work priorities need to be in a state of equilibrium ("Work-Life Balance," n.d.). •
	The importance of family and friends	• Work is not worth making relationships suffer • Money is not worth sacrificing time with friends and family • Schedule in time with friends and family on days off • Make family and friends a priority	• Family is more important than work (England, 1991; Kuchinke et al., 2008; Kuchinke & Conachione, 2011; Kuchinke et al., 2010). • Balance of work and non-work activities is important to society and our communities (OECD, 2011).
	The importance of hobbies and activities we enjoy	• Squeeze in these activities during free-time since work is the priority	• Having time for hobbies is important to people's well-being ("Work-Life," n.d.).
A picture of lack of balance		• Always stressed and suffering mental and physical effects • Carrying emotional baggage home • Missing other work obligations • Working 130 hours a week • Working full-time, going to school full-time, and completing an internship	• Lack of balance is linked to increased stress levels and health issues (OECD, 2011). • Factors contributing to lack of balance in modern society (Robbins & Judge, 2007).
How to achieve balance	Having flexibility at work	• Working from home.	• Generation Y values flexibility at work (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Gursoy et al., 2008). • Workplaces are offering flexible options to reduce work-life conflict (Robbins & Judge, 2007).

Table 12

Continued

Essential sub-themes	Essential sub-sub-Themes	Key points from participants	Key points from supporting literature
	Choosing purposeful career paths	• Choosing careers that we find meaningful and help provide balance in our lives.	• Balance is an important factor in the meaning of work (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). • Chalofsky's (2003) model of meaningful work.
	Strategically investing our time	• Learn to say "no" to opportunities that do not benefit us in our overall goals.	• Investing our time appropriately is one way to creating balance (Anderson, 2013).
	Creating boundaries between work and life	• No overtime. • No communication on days off or after work hours. • No boundaries created, as it's all in flex.	• Lobel's (2003) notion that there is no one size fits all package for society on achieving balance. • Balance is hard to measure as it's based on individual preference (OECD, 2013).

The *Meaning of Work* is Influenced by the Current State of the Economy

One participant underscored the concern of the economy as expressed in the following quote: "where the economy is at is very scary right now" (IP1, 2012, p. 31). This essential theme is composed of three essential sub-themes and no sub-sub-essential themes. The essential sub-themes include: graduating into a recession; increased competition; and lack of jobs. A visual representation of this essential theme and essential sub-themes is displayed in Figure 14.

Graduating into a recession.

The great recession began in December 2007 and officially ended in June 2009. It was the longest recession to take place since before WWII ("Business Cycle Dating," 2010).
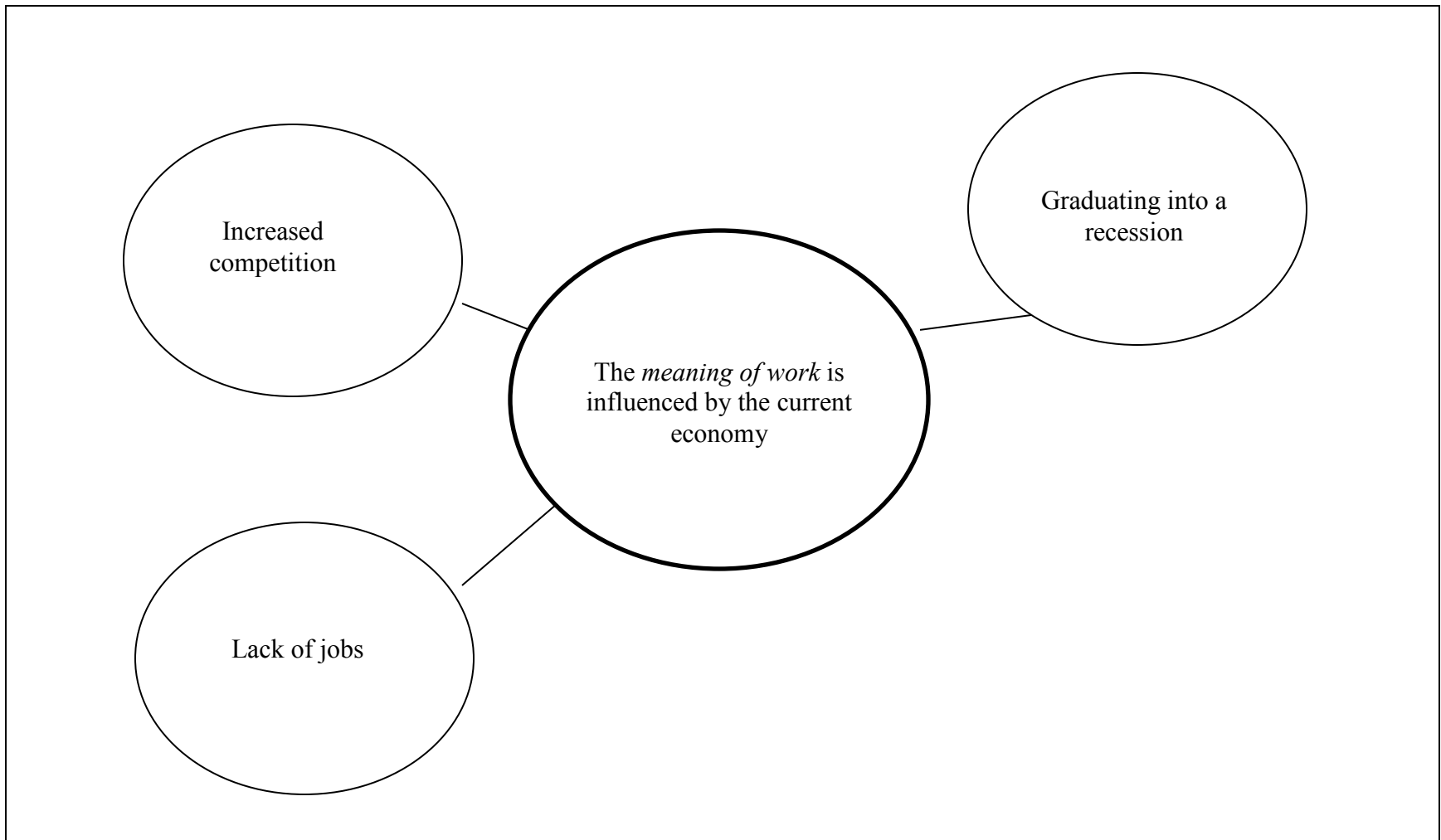
Figure 14. A visual representation of the *meaning of work* is influenced by the current state of the economy

In addition, it was the worst recession since the Great Depression (Willis, 2009) in respect to

the number of job losses (Rampell, 2010). One person discussed the gap between being told

hopeful things as a child about the benefits of attending college, and then the reality of

graduating into the recession. The participant said:

> Being told these very wonderful things and then graduating straight into….I graduated
> in 2009, so I graduated straight into the recession. And, so I think that changed a lot of
> my ideas because I saw such a difference between what it was growing up…between
> that and what I experienced. (IP5, 2013, p. 8)

This person went on to elaborate about the effects of the recession for a recent college

graduate:

> The recession…that the advertising of the recession…just being drilled in and
> constantly on the media being told that it's a recession, all these bad things so hearing
> that constantly being bombarded by it while we're excited to go…we're graduating,
> we're at this very beginning or we're at the beginning of our careers and so being this
> barrage of negative talk about it at our beginning. And, then I also think it's a lot with
> what we grew up with in kind of the 90's of growing up being told, "You can be
> whatever you want to be." These very like hopeful things. (IP5, 2013, p. 13)

> Literature reports that, "graduating in a bad economy has long-lasting economic

consequences" (Shierholz, Sabadish, & Finio, 2013, p. 3). With the aftermath effects of the

recession still lingering, the measure of success has been altered for Generation Y individuals

because everyone is just struggling to make it. This idea was expressed in the following

quote:

> And, then for my parents I think it was a measure of success and so if you had this
> great job then you were looked at well and you were kind of put up more on scales.
> But, with Generation Y we all understand that like it doesn't necessarily mean that you
> aren't…you didn't go to college or you're not that smart or you're not doing well in
> life if you have this like restaurant job or if you have this like office job. I don't think
> that judgment can be there because we're all kind of there. (IP5, 2013, p. 14)

> While the recovery still seems grim, according to Carnevale, Jayasundera, and Cheah

(2012) college graduates have fared better than high school graduates with no college degree

during the recession. Unemployment rates for college graduates were never higher than 6.3%, in comparison to high school graduates with rates of 13.4%. New college graduates during the recession had an unemployment rate of 11.1% in 2011, but it decreased to 6.8% in 2012. Additionally, more than half of the jobs that have been created during the recovery are for individuals with a college degree or higher (Carnevale, Jayasundera, & Cheah, 2012). On the other hand, incomes of college graduates have decreased 8.5% since 2000 (Shierholz, 2013), and have yet to return to the same level as before the recession (Kurtz, 2013).

Increased competition.

Participants discussed the competition that exists when applying for positions. Not only are people taking any job they can get, but they are staying in the workforce longer and everyone seems to be working towards a higher degree. One participant encapsulated this idea in the following quote:

> I'm competing against so many people and I think the bachelors…the masters has become the new bachelors. And it's almost like you feel like you're not…you feel like you pretty much have to get your Masters. And, so that's really stressful. (IP1, 2012, p. 26)

There is also the conundrum that even though young adults possess a degree, their experience is lacking so organizations will not hire them. The unemployment rate is twice as high for young college graduates because, "young workers are relatively new to the labor market—often looking for their first or second job—and they may be passed over in hiring decisions due to lack of experience" (Shierholz et al., 2013, p. 3). One participant reflected on the feeling of not having experience: "It's really scary for our generation because it's kind of the feeling is like how do I compete with someone that's been in a field for 25 or 30 years…like I'm just not going to make it" (IP1, 2012, p. 30). This idea was reiterated by another participant, "there is a lot a lot of competition where people are just trying to make

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ends meet and they are willing to take any job at any pay there is" (IP4, 2012, p. 24). The

same participant elaborated on why young adults with little experience should be hired by

organizations:

> And it's like, "yeah, you're going to hire that person who seems to have more qualification, but in reality you know they don't have the potential, they're maxed out." Like, where we may not have all the qualifications, but we have the basics and we have a huge field to grow. You can take us and run with us in whatever direction you want whether versus that person who….that's it…that's the maximum capacity…if that's the one you want for this position "okay, take that older person who is willing to take a pay cut." If you really want someone to be effective on the job then hire younger people in your office. (IP4, 2012, p. 24)

Lack of jobs.

Kurtz (2013) reported that while the recession was officially over, the job market has

not recovered. There were 8.8 million jobs lost between January 2008 and February 2009, and

only 6.2 million of those jobs have been recovered (Kurtz, 2013). One of the major issues of

Generation Y is the large amount of student loan debt and the inability to be able to pay it off

due to the lack of jobs that exists. Shierholz et al., (2013) stated that,

> In taking on these loans, students often do not realize that upon graduation they may not find a job providing the income needed to repay the loans. And although most student loans have a grace period of six months before payments are expected, recent graduates who do not find a stable income source may be forced to miss a payment or default altogether on their loans. Default can ruin young workers' credit scores and set them back years when it comes to saving for a house or a car. (p. 19)

One participant explained, "It's really disheartening to be going into a lot of debt with student

loans and then just be like there are no jobs for me" (IP1, 2012, p. 30). The same participant

went on to say:

> So, I would just emphasize that that is such a huge issue right now because that is something that I even struggle with is like, "what am I going to do when I graduate, like holy shit this is really scary" and I think that people are more willing to relocate now simply because there are a lot of jobs offshore and more and more people are getting bachelor's degrees and feeling like it is not enough. It's really a big strain and it's really stressful. (IP1, 2012, p. 31)

This notion was reinforced by another participant mentioning how we graduate from college and, "the momentum through like we get up and it's time to get jobs and there just aren't that many" (IP5, 2013, p. 13). Rothstein (2009) reported that one of the factors that contribute to the lack of jobs is the supply and demand in the workforce—there are too many college graduates and not enough jobs that require a degree.

Summary of the essential theme.

First, the spread of the hermeneutic spectrum is provided for *The Meaning of Work is Influenced by the Current State of the Economy*, along with a visual representation. Subsequently, a summary is provided for the essential theme and its corresponding essential sub-themes in a table format displaying key points from the participants and supporting literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum.

In respect to the hermeneutic spectrum, this essential theme reflects a narrow to moderate spread of hermeneutic description. Furthermore, there were two levels of hermeneutic interpretation (i.e., essential and sub-essential themes), informing a moderate spread of hermeneutic description. However, even within these two levels of descriptive interpretation, there was little variation in the individual constructions for this essential theme. The level of descriptive variation could be the direct reflection of all five participants having attended, or presently attending, a four year college. Even if a participant graduated from their undergraduate degree before 2007, it is likely that they still experienced the effects of the recession on trying to find a job with little experience, keeping a job, or income levels—they have all experienced this contextual factor of the study similarly. These experiences result in an

analogous lived experience of the influence of the economy on their *meaning of work*. The

spread of hermeneutic description for this essential theme is presented in Figure 15.
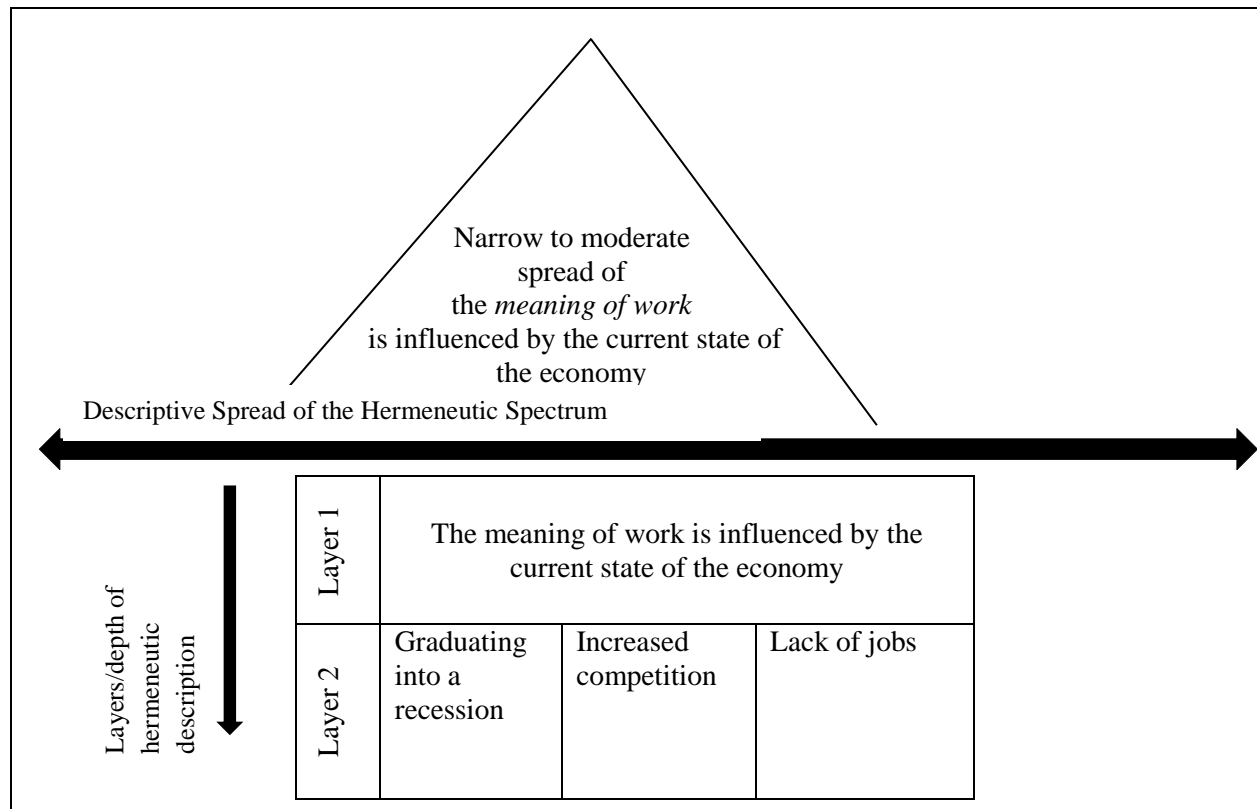

Figure 15. A narrow to moderate spread of hermeneutic spectrum for the *meaning of work* is influenced by the current state of the economy

Key points from participants and supporting literature.

As mentioned in the summary of *The Meaning of work is Influenced by Education*, the

influence of the current state of the economy is also highly related to the sub-essential themes of:

paying off student loan debt, *a degree is no guarantee of anything*, *college is the only way*, and

choice of major. Generation Y individuals face the issue that they have to go to college to pursue

their ideal careers, but the demand of jobs that require a college degree is lower than the number

of students graduating from college. As a result, just to make ends meet to pay off their high

student loan debt, they take any job they can find, thus resulting in questioning the value of their

education. Choice of major also influences their ability to gain employment, as some industries are hiring more than others in this recovery period. This interrelatedness of essential themes and sub-essential themes further illuminates the context of this study for these five participants. In summary, for these five study participants, *the meaning of work is influenced by the current state of the economy*. Table 13 summarizes the essential sub- themes by providing key points from the participants, along with supporting literature.

Table 13

Key points from the essential sub themes of the meaning of work is influenced by the current state of the economy

Essential sub-themes	Key points from participants	Key points from supporting literature
Graduating into a recession	• There is a disparity between our expectations of having a college degree and entering the workforce, and the effects of the recession on finding employment. • Having a great job is no longer a measure of success for Generation Y because everyone is struggling.	• College graduates had an advantage over high school graduates for employment during the recession (Carnevale, Jayasundera, & Cheah, 2012). • Income levels of college graduates had decreased 8.5% since 2000 (Shierholz, 2013). • Graduating in a recession has long-term consequences (Shierholz, Sabadish, & Finio, 2013). • It was the worst recession since the Great Depression (Willis, 2009) in respect to the number of job losses (Rampell, 2010).
Increased competition	• The master's degree is the new bachelor's degree in the workforce. • People are trying to make ends meet, so they are willing to take any job regardless of pay. • Organizations should hire young workers even though we lack experience because you can mold us.	• Lack of experience can affect the chances of new college graduates gaining employment (Shierholz et al., 2013).
Lack of jobs	• It's disheartening to go into debt knowing there are few job opportunities. • A bachelor's degree is not enough to compete in the workforce. • We are excited to enter the workforce, but there just aren't that many jobs.	• There is a disproportionate supply and demand of jobs requiring a college degree (Rothstein, 2009). • There were 8.8 million jobs lost between January 2008 and February 2009, and only 6.2 of those jobs have been recovered (Kurtz, 2013). • College students take out loans that they may not be able to pay off once they enter the workforce (Shierholz et al., 2013).

The *Meaning of Work* is Completing Tasks and Being Compensated to Meet Our Basic Needs

One participant associated the importance of meeting our basic needs with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1970). They said, "You know…it's sort of the Maslow Hierarchy….everyone works to fulfill that bottom layer of the pyramid and there's not many people that have the luxury or are willing to sacrifice a lot to not have a job that does that" (IP3, 2012, p. 15). And, while the theory itself does not have a lot of support throughout the research literature (Robbins & Judge, 2007), in this study it addresses the notion that our first priority is to work to be able to satisfy our basic needs and then we can focus on satisfying higher level needs, such as pursuing meaningful work.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1970) there are five stages of needs from lowest to highest: physiological, safety, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization (Myers, 2008). Physiological needs (basic needs) are needs to satisfy basic biological necessities such as hunger and thirst (Maslow, 1943; Myers, 2008). The goal of people's motivated behavior is to reach homeostasis and when these basic needs are satisfied, people move on and progress to higher needs (Maslow, 1943). In the context of work, individuals must be able to make enough pay to meet their basic needs in order to progress to higher order needs (Robbins & Judge, 2007). Thus, an individual's behavior is influenced by the motivation to fulfill external basic needs to reach the ultimate goal of satisfying internal needs such as of self-actualization (Maslow, 1943; Myers, 2008).

In alignment with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1970), one person stated their reason for working as, "that opportunity for you to meet your basic necessities" (IP3, 2012, p. 10). Several participants stated that working to meet their necessities is their basic *meaning of work*, as suggested by this person's following statement, "My overall *meaning of work* is a

task or set of tasks and responsibilities that you fulfill and that you are compensated for it—

it's the very basic *meaning of work* for me" (IP4, 2012, p. 11). Boyatzis et al. (2002) stated

that many people work to live rather than live to work. Reflective of that notion, one person

pointed out that work means the following, "I guess just getting paid to do what somebody

needs you to do" (IP5, 2013, p. 6). The role of work in this participant's life was captured in

the following statement:

> I guess work to live, not live to work and so kind of realizing that this is just the way it
> is and you just get through it and you focus on other things you want it to benefit. (IP5,
> 2013, p. 17)

Thus, this essential theme, is composed of two essential sub-themes including, provides

benefits and provides money. The essential sub-theme of "provides money" is composed of

three essential sub-sub-themes including: helps us pay the bills, creates stability, and provides

money to do things we enjoy. A visual representation of this essential theme and essential

sub-themes is displayed in Figure 16.

Provides benefits.

One participant mentioned the importance of having benefits:

> I think now it's almost worth it to take a job that pays less where you have health
> insurance because I have never had a job that gave me benefits—ever. And, that's
> really sad and it's really scary. That's a reality of like…I can be on my Mom's health
> insurance for one more year and then I'm on my own and I've thought about
> that…like I better get everything done in the next year (laughing). I'm like thinking
> what type of surgery may I possibly need, going to the dentist a couple of times, and
> like what can I get done…you know? But it's…it's a really scary thing for almost all
> my friends. The biggest reason why a lot of us are in debt is because it's like you go
> to the dentist and you have a cavity and then 500 dollars later….and that's really
> stressful. (IP1, 2012, pp. 24-25)

Another participant highlighted benefits as one of the reasons for staying in their current

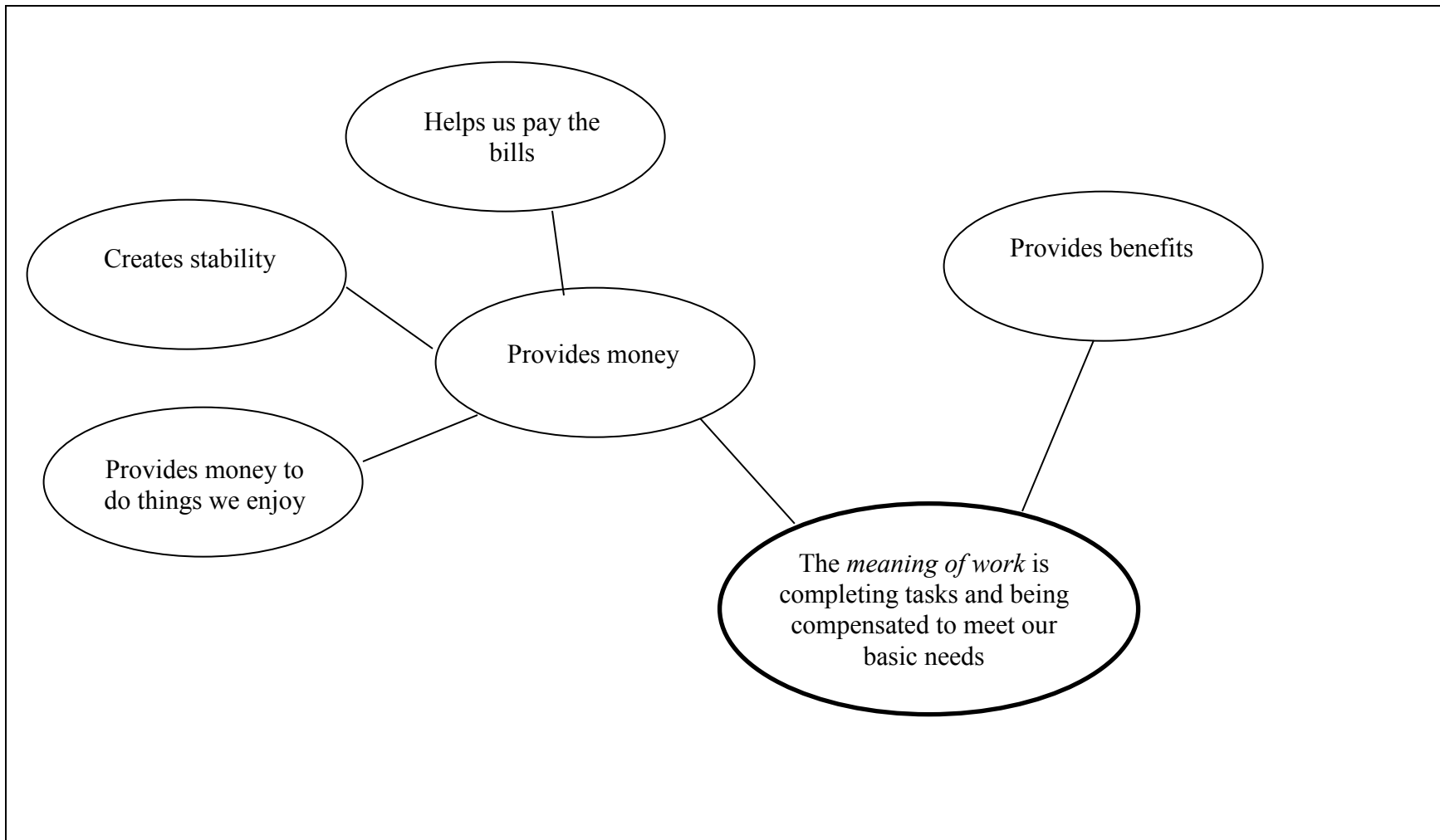position, further underscoring the importance of a job that provides insurance.

Figure 16. A visual representation of the *meaning of work* is completing tasks and being compensated to meet our basic needs

They said:

> This is my first truly professional desk job I want to say and I'm determined to hold out to the two year mark even though I'm not ecstatic about working here, but because the benefits are good and the pay is good and everything else is good. (IP4, 2012, p. 12)

Shierholz et al. (2013) reported that recent graduates are increasingly unlikely to receive benefits such as health insurance and pensions. They found that between 1989 and 2011, the amount of recent graduates who received health insurance through their employer decreased from 60.1% to 31.1%. In addition, between 2001 and 2011, the amount of recent graduates who received pension decreased from 41.5% to 27.2%. Thus, participants have a right to be concerned over this issue, and it understandably influences their constructions of the *meaning of work* to them.

Provides money.

Money as a motivator is downplayed by the literature, but is a critical incentive for working, and component of the construction of the *meaning of work*. This component is in alignment with both reinforcement and expectancy theory (Robbins & Judge, 2007). According to reinforcement theory, if pay is based on performance, then workers will perform better (Robbins & Judge, 2007). In accordance with expectancy theory, money will motivate individuals as long as it satisfies their personal goals, such as being able to pay bills, and is based on levels of performance. Other personal goals may include the essential sub-themes below as well, including saving money for financial stability and having money to do things we enjoy. Several researchers have included extrinsic factors as an important component in understanding employees *meaning of work* in the workforce (Brook & Brook, 1989; Cooper et al., 1979; Harpaz et al., 2002; Kuchinke et al., 2011; & MOW International Research Team,

1987). These five participants discussed the importance of money as the following means:

helps us pay the bills, creates stability, and provides money to do things we enjoy.

Helps us pay the bills.

One participant described work as:

> Something that helps you pay the bills and you know you go in and you do a specific task, or a certain set of tasks for so many hours, for so many days, for so many years and you get compensated for your time and for being able to get that task done well. (IP4, 2012, p. 10)

> The importance of being able to pay their bills was reinforced by all the participants.

Another participant mentioned their reason for working as, "to fulfill the needs to live, to

make money, to pay bills—all those sorts of things" (IP3, 2012, p 2). Likewise, this reason for

working was reiterated by two other participants. One participant said, "I work to pay my

bills (IP5, 2012, p. 3). And the second participant stated, "I have to pay bills" (IP2, 2012, p.

1). One person pointed out that being able to pay their bills was the most important purpose of

working: "the most important part is just yeah, paying my bills" (IP5, 2013, p. 4).

Creates stability.

For one person, creating stability in life was important:

> In my life it means finances and stability and not so much as being able to afford stuff, but being able to be safe for the emergencies. Like my car was always constantly breaking down and finally because of work I'm able to have a vehicle that is reliable. It really means stability and being held accountable for everything. (IP4, 2012, p. 13)

I asked the participant to describe for me what they meant by stability. They explained the

following:

> Stability means….for me personally it means having that savings fund or having that rainy day fund. I think that my ultimate goal is to be like if I broke my leg tomorrow and I couldn't work for a month that I would be able to pay my bills and make my responsibilities. Still fulfill my responsibilities and obligations until I could recover and get back up on my feet. I think that's what I mean by being stable because I mean

yeah, we'd spend a little more extra money here and there, but overall I'd still have that nice, I guess nest egg. (IP4, 2013, p. 10)

The importance of stability for this person was further illuminated by the following quote:

I know right now I can't afford to be passionate because my number one rule of stability has not been met. And I think my secondary stuff would be finding meaningful work that I'm passionate about. (IP4, 2013, p. 17)

Similarly, while it is important to note that Generation Y individuals want to create financial stability, it could be extremely difficult to attain since many individuals are in more student loan debt than they are capable of paying off. Additionally, in relation to future savings for this generation, pensions being offered by places of employment are decreasing (Shierholz et al., 2013) and according to AXA Equitable, "Social Security may represent a much smaller percentage of retirement income" ("Social Security," 2013, para. 1) in the future—if it even exists.

Provides money to do things we enjoy.

Researchers have found that the most frequent reason to work was economic (England & Whitley, 1991). Money not only allows us to be able to pay our bills, but it also provides financial opportunities for us to do activities we enjoy outside of work. One participant said, "what work ends up being for me is that paycheck, and that paycheck is for me to go out with my friends, for me to have a nice couch in my apartment" (IP5, 2013, p. 10).

Summary of the essential theme.

First, the spread of the hermeneutic spectrum is provided for *The Meaning of work is Completing Tasks and Being Compensated to Meet Our Basic Needs*, along with a visual representation. Subsequently, a summary is provided for the essential theme and its corresponding essential sub-themes and essential sub-sub-themes in a table format displaying key points from the participants and supporting literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum.

The essential theme of, *The Meaning of work is Completing Tasks and Being Compensated to Meet Our Basic Needs*, has a moderate to broad spread of hermeneutic description. There was little descriptive variation in the essential sub-theme, *provides benefits*. Thus, we can draw the assumption that all five participants share the belief that having benefits offered by their place of employment is important, and considered a basic necessity. There was descriptive variation in the individual constructions for the essential sub-theme of "provides money," thus resulting in three levels of descriptive interpretation (i.e., essential theme, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes). This variation could be the reflection of while money is an important factor to all the participants, how they utilize their money differs on an individual level. All five participants mentioned the importance of being able to pay their bills, however others further mentioned the priority of stability and being able to enjoy activities outside of work. The spread of hermeneutic description for this essential theme is presented in Figure 17.

Key points from participants and supporting literature.

In summary, for these five study participants, the *meaning of work* is completing tasks and being compensated to meet our basic needs. Working provides benefits and money. Additionally, money helps us pay the bills, creates stability, and allows us to be able to do things we enjoy outside of work. Several of the participants describe this essential theme as their basic *meaning of work*. Several researchers suggest that individuals who seek financial rewards and work out of necessity consider their work a job, versus a career or calling (Wrzesniewski et al, 1997; Wrzesniewski, 2003).
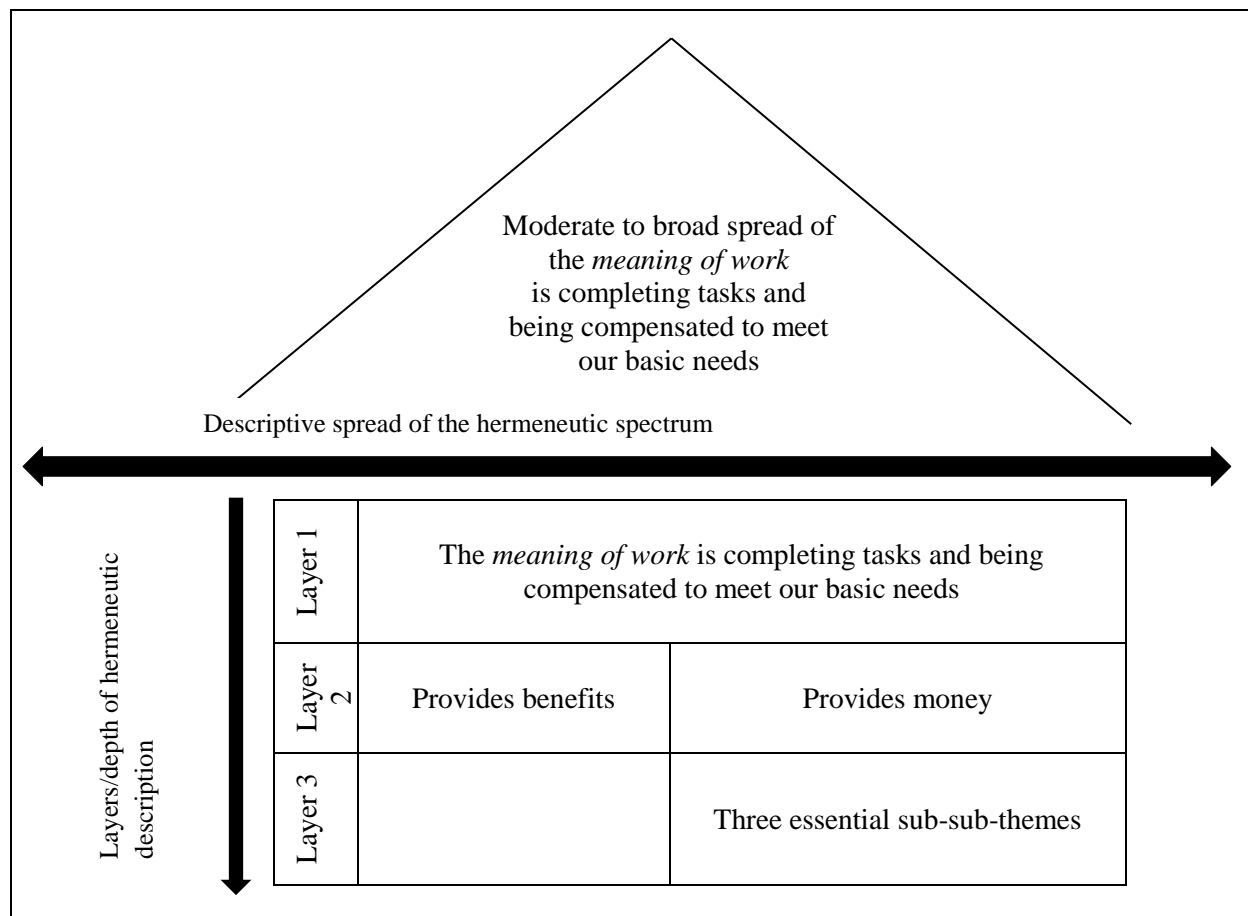
Figure 17. A moderate to broad spread of hermeneutic description for the *meaning of work* is completing tasks and being compensated to meet our basic needs

However, according to these findings that suggestion is not so straight forward. When viewing this phenomenon holistically, it seems that even though some of these participants have stated that they consider their work a career or a calling, they still possess a certain degree of working out of necessity for the purpose of financial benefits. This finding illuminates that the *meaning of work* is not composed of just one component, but has a complex structure with several layers of meanings. Table 14 summarizes the corresponding essential sub- themes and essential sub-sub-themes by providing key points from the participants, along with supporting literature.

Table 14

Key Points from the essential sub-themes and corresponding essential sub-sub-themes of the meaning of work is completing tasks and being compensated to meet our basic needs

Essential sub-themes	Essential sub-sub-themes	Key points from participants	Key points from supporting literature
Provides benefits		• It's worth having a job that provides benefits, even if it pays less money than other jobs or you don't enjoy the work. • Having no insurance is one factor that contributes to being in debt because of having to pay for medical emergencies out of pocket.	• The number of recent graduates that are likely to receive health insurance and pensions through their employer is decreasing (Shierholz, 2013).
Provides money	Helps us pay the bills	• Being able to pay our bills is one of the most important reasons for working. •	• Working provides extrinsic rewards, which is an important factor in employee's meaning of work (Brook & Brook, 1989; Cooper et al., 1979; Harpaz et al., 2002; Kuchinke et al., 2011; & MOW International Research Team, 1987)
	Creates stability	• Being able to have a "nest egg" prepares us for any emergencies. •	• Reinforcement and expectancy theory (Robbins & Judge, 2007).
	Provides money to do things we enjoy	• Having money helps us enjoy activities outside of work.	• Some people work to live, rather than live to work (Boyatzis et al., 2002).

The *Meaning of Work* is a Reflection of Who We Are

Participants discussed the *meaning of work* as being a reflection of who they are. One participant stated, "the work that I do is a reflection on me as a person….that's what work means to me I think" (IP2, 2012. p. 5). And, another characteristic of that notion was expressed by a second participant in the following statement, "also it's fair to say it plays a large part into my identity" (IP3, 2012, p. 2). Steger and Dik (2010) suggest that meaningfulness in work is the self-

understanding an individual has about his/her own identity. For several of these participants, their identity is difficult to separate from the work that they do. This notion is also a reflection of identity theory (Stryker, 1980) where there is a "reciprocal relationship between an individual and the larger social structure (society)" (Wiggins, Wiggins, & Vander Zanden, 1994, p. 14). With that said, this essential theme is composed of two essential sub-themes including, the role of values and the belief in working hard. Additionally, the essential sub-theme of "the belief in working hard" is composed of three essential sub-sub-themes. These three essential sub-sub-themes include: the need to be a productive member of society; the belief in paying our dues; and work as a form of self-validation. A visual representation of this essential theme, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes is displayed in Figure 18.

The role of values.

Values are important because they "influence our attitudes and behavior" (Robbins & Judge, 2007, p. 121) in the workplace. Several participants discussed the role that values play in work. One person suggested that the role of values in work is different from prior generations, which is consistent with findings from several researchers (Chen & Choi, 2008; Gursoy et al., 2008; Twenge & Campbell, 2010). The person said, "I think too… for my generation…I think we have different values of what we want out of jobs" (IP1, 2012, p. 25). Another person elaborated on this notion:

> And, even just the alignment of values and priorities with the *meaning of work* is something that I think is newer. It used to be you change a job because a) it was available and b) you thought it was going to be long-term stable. And, now we're much more meaning driven. (IP3, 2012, p. 14)
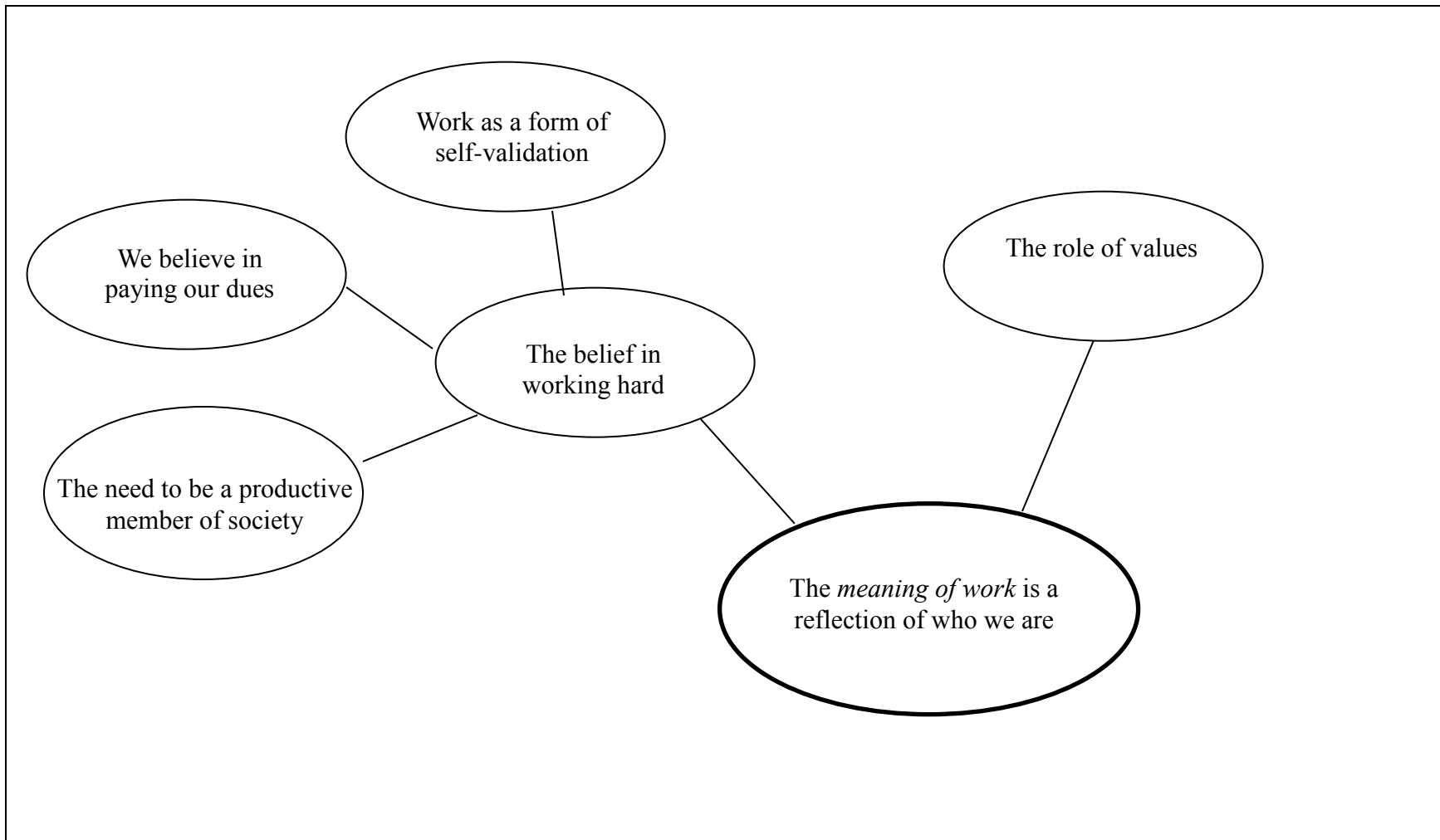
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Figure 18. A visual representation of the *meaning of work* is a reflection of who we are

Robbins and Judge (2007) and Twenge and Campbell (2008) described Generation Y as valuing

finding meaning in work. The same person, who discussed the alignment of values and priorities

with the *meaning of work*, went on to say, "I think that it also...more and more of our generation

cares about the core principles of the business" (IP3, 2012, p. 18). While values are important to

all of the participants, the extent of the role values play in work varied among them. For

example, one participant stated:

> And I think it's everybody's threshold is different. When your core values don't
> exactly match up with your leader's core values, like for me like they can be
> as…like as an example I can be as liberal as I want to be and they can be as
> conservative as they want to be, but in my view as long as we get the job done at the
> end of the day, we respect each other's differences, and we don't force our views on
> each other then I consider that a productive day. (IP4, 2013, p. 1)

However, this same person did make it clear that, "I don't think I'm going to run out and

join a company that sells cigarettes or you know like nothing like that" (IP4, 2013, p. 2).

Meanwhile, another person emphasized the need of alignment of values between the individual

and work itself. The person said that work means, "Taking actions and putting effort forward

that aligns with your value system" (IP3, 2012, p. 10). The same participant further described

the notion of values as, "I sort of think values more of what you believe to be right and wrong. I

don't want to work for a company that's a war profiteer—that sort of thing" (IP3, 2012, p. 13).

This participant embodied the motivational idea of self-concordance which is, "the degree to

which a person's reasons for pursuing a goal is consistent with the person's interests and core

values" (Robbins & Judge, 2007, p. 197).

Additionally, according to Rokeach and the Rokeach Value Survey (RVS) these types of

individual values can be classified into terminal and instrumental values. Terminal values are

the "desirable end-states" and instrumental values are "means of achieving the terminal values"

(Robbins & Judge, 2007, p. 121). Examples of terminal values are: broad-minded, independent,

helpful, honest, and responsible. And, examples of instrumental values are: a comfortable life, self-respect, happiness, a sense of accomplishment, and freedom (Robbins & Judge, 2007). Thus, these values can differ on an individual level.

This idea of values was further supported by another participant who said:

> For me in my work environment it's definitely a value judgment like treating people the way I wanted to be treated as far as my coworkers go and you know definitely knowing the difference between right and wrong. I have a really strong conscience and when my conscience is ever like, "slow down you're doing something wrong." I can recognize that and it definitely makes me stop and look at what I'm doing, so definitely…definitely agree that work is a reflection of like right and wrong and making the best judgment. (IP2, 2013, p. 2)

One participant went on to explain how important it is to work for a company that is "caring about the same issues that I do" (IP1, 2012, p. 15). For example, this individual worked for an organization that had a leader they described as, "the President of the organization I just…you know…he was just an incredible leader—a very much believer in sustainability" (IP1, 2012, p. 4). Another important point mentioned was, "finding a way to support yourself, but not sacrificing who you are just for the sake of making money" (IP1, 2012, p. 22). In alignment with this idea, another point reflected on is the importance of sharing a "common vision" (IP3, 2012, p. 7). These findings are highly related to person-job fit and person-organization fit, which provides the link of an individual's values to the workplace. Person job-fit theory (Holland, 1985) posits that individuals will be more satisfied in their positions if they are in occupations that fit their personality characteristics. And, person-organization fit is when an individual's personality fits within an organizational culture (Robbins & Judge, 2007).

The belief in working hard.

Twenge (2010) reported that the Generation Y cohort displayed a weaker work ethic and that work is less central to the lives of these individuals than previous generations. In dispute of

those findings, these five participants discussed their desire and belief in working hard. These findings suggest that perhaps work centrality, which is the role and importance work plays in one's life (MOW International Research Team, 1987), has not decreased. Previous research advised that the decline in work centrality over the years could have been attributed to the fact that work was not fulfilling to individuals and they were forced to find meaning in activities outside of work (Maccoby, 1980). These interviews reflect that work centrality possibly has not decreased among these five participants because they have either found, or are pursuing, meaning in their work. The participants conversed their need to be productive in society, their belief in paying their dues, and work as a form of self-validation.

The need to be a productive member in society.

One participant described the importance of being productive because it means, "Not being a bump on a log and mooching off everybody else" (IP4, 2013, pp.14-15). This participant went on to explain why they believed people feel the need to be productive in society:

> I think it's kind of in part of how we're socialized. I think like someone raised by wolves in the middle of jungle and then they have to venture into society probably isn't going to think of contributing to society as that great of importance. I think it's something that you're definitely socialized and brought up with. It's one of those absolute values that you're instilled with, but yeah I agree with that…it's the assumption that everybody will contribute equally. It's like the…it's like we trust you to pay your fee for this, but if they didn't have people patrolling it at all….it would be like we have trust that you are going to pay, you will be truthful, and you will be honest with us. It's kind of like we expect you or it's that kind of trust where we trust you to become a productive member of society. We trust you and expect you to be productive in society, or to be productive. (IP4, 2013, pp. 15-16)

Another participant stated, "I can't be lazy, I can't be unproductive, I have to do you know ten things at one given time so I can say that I did a lot at work" (IP2, 2013, p. 6). The same participant went on to explain that, "work for me is a very personal thing. I feel like that the work that I do…my production level…whatever you want to call it… is definitely like, I

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feel like it's a reflection of who I am" (IP2, 2012, p. 4). When discussing the possibility of not

having to work, one participant said even if they didn't have to work they still would because:

> I think it comes back to we can't just sit at home and do nothing. We feel the need to be
> productive. Even if my work was painting or even if work was teaching an art class or
> even if my work was…I don't know…just doing an administrative desk job….answering
> the telephone, recording calls like if we won the lottery tomorrow and we were set for life
> I think we would both work part-time. (IP4, 2012, p. 22)

Researches have stated that Generation Y values leisure (Twenge, 2010; Twenge et al.,

2010). These findings dispute that notion and support Meriac's et al., (2010) research that there

was not a decrease among the generations valuing leisure in regards to work ethic, at least not in

respect to these five individuals. Similarly, one person stated, "I've realized I do much better on

a routine and if I don't have something I feel like I'm waking up in the morning for…then it gets

pretty depressing for me" (IP1, 2012, p. 29). Another person proposed the same idea as

expressed in the following quote: "You have to be productive in life and you have to…you don't

have to do something, but I think you live a much more meaningful life if you do something"

(IP3, 2012, pp. 9-10). The same participant also pointed out that the need to be productive may

not be upheld by all individuals within Generation Y:

> You hear about graduates coming out of college and complaining like, "I haven't found
> work in a year" and you ask them, "why?" and, "well, I've been trying really
> hard"…"I've been trying really hard, but I couldn't find what I wanted" as opposed to,
> "I couldn't find any work." If you got out of college in our parent's generation and you
> couldn't find anything you would take a waiter job or more appropriately, the bus boy
> job. And, you would then have *a job* because *a job* is available, but there's plenty of
> college graduates out there right now who are like, "no, I want to work in you know
> sports marketing aimed at large consumer brands and I haven't been able to find a job"
> which you know god bless them… they know what they want to do, so that's great, but
> they also.. .for whatever reason they don't see all opportunity as, "I need to do
> something." (IP3, 2012, p. 14)

We believe in paying our dues.

When asked to provide a metaphor of the *meaning of work*, one participant responded

with:

> Work is……like a tree, or a flower maybe. I think for me the way I'm doing it is I'm
> putting in a lot of work for things that are not paying me because I have to set those
> roots. If I don't establish a foundation now, if I don't go to college now…I'm going to
> have to do it at one point or another and I'm not going to have the solid foundations
> either. So even though I'm sacrificing a lot, working really hard to do this now, I'm
> laying that foundation so later that I can get paid in those professions. And the way that
> I see it is that I've had to work at a lot of jobs; that has not been fun but it's been going
> back to that laying the solid foundations for myself. The way that I see it is as I get
> older and as I grow and as I reach those stepping stones in my career that eventually it
> will blossom into something that is fruitful in my life, that does mean something, that is
> a beautiful experience in my life and so I can look back and see how I've grown and
> how I've changed and having that foundation is essential for me to establish myself.
> (IP1, 2012, p. 30)

One person suggested an organization should be aware of the following:

> And, also that we're disillusioned and so not to…not to take our negativity and our
> boundaries offensively. We just haven't had those great of experiences and we kind of
> are a little upset about them, but that's doesn't mean that we're not going to work hard,
> that we're not going to be a great asset, it just means you have to take our complaints
> and shrugs with a grain of salt. (IP5, 2013, p. 12)

Another participant disconfirmed research suggesting that this cohort feels a sense of entitlement

(Lower, 2008). They said:

> "You get what you get and you don't pitch a fit." My grandmother's saying. Whenever
> you get what you get, you know, you get what you put into it. That's plain and simple.
> You literally get quote for quote what you put into the job you're going to see back—
> period, that's it. (IP4, 2012, p. 29)

The same participant went on to say:

> If you don't expect anything, if you don't put anything in, you don't get anything out.
> You know, you want a lot and you expect a lot then you need to put in the effort, you
> need to meet it half way. They can only give you a hand, you actually have to grab it
> and pull your butt off of the pedestal. (IP4, 2012, p. 29)

This notion was reinforced by another participant who described the following:

I mean I've worked a lot of different jobs and I think for me it was you know when you're first starting out you just kind of have to pay your dues and work those jobs that are not so great. (IP1, 2012, p. 14)

One person described how much they care about their work:

I can't just go home from work and just leave it behind….I'm always stressed about something, which is not good for my health. But you know my husband is always like "you need to relax…you just need to leave work at work where it is" and I'm just like "I can't…I can't physically do that…I care too much"… that's my problem is I care too much about my work and I think I would be that way with any job. (IP2, 2012, p. 4)

And, the same person discussed struggling with people who don't care as much about work:

My experience is I struggle with people who don't care about their jobs. And, I struggle with the people who do the minimum to get by because I'm not like that. I try to do my best at everything, so those are kind of the things I have struggled with in the past is people not pulling their weight. (IP2, 2012, p. 2)

This same participant described one of their most important points about their perspective on

work:

I would say doing the best with what you have. You know every day is different at work. You may have a good day, you may have a bad day, but I try to do the best that I can with what I've been given in just making every opportunity count; trying to do my best in everything that I do; I try not to half-ass anything; I kind of go above and beyond the expectations of my job. (IP2, 2013, p. 6)

Work as a form of self-validation.

According to Roger's theory of personality, the self is "the perception an individual has

of himself or herself and of his or her relationships to various aspects of life" (Lefton & Brannon,

2003, p. 425). Thus, for several of these participants, their relationship to their work was one

important aspect in how they perceived their self. One participant stated, "That I do really

believe that for me as a person work is important both in terms of validating who I am at some

level" (IP3, 2012, p. 2). Another participant discussed a good work experience as one where the

individual was, "actually be taken seriously in my work" (IP1, 2012, p. 17). The same participant

went on to explain one reason it felt good for them to work several jobs simultaneously:

> I just had no time and there was no reason for me to be working that much but…you
> know I think at the time it was really satisfying and it felt good because being a teenager
> and just screwing up in school and finally feeling in control and feeling like I have jobs
> and I'm making money for myself that was such a huge self-esteem boost. (IP1, 2012, p.
> 19)

One participant pointed out how working hard reflects that you are a good person:

> I take failure on a very personal level. I'm definitely my own worst critic, so
> when I do something wrong at work I internalize it and I take it really hard. I'm
> like, "wow I must be a horrible person because I made mistakes." And I can't let
> it go versus a lot of people are like, "oh, I made a mistake move on." So for me I
> try to do my best because I want it to show that I'm a good person and that I work
> hard, and that I take pride in what I do. So I feel like when I do well I can kind of
> show that I'm a good person, and when I do something wrong or when I fail I
> take it as a really big hit to my own self-esteem. (IP2, 2013, p. 4)

And this participant went on to explain the effects of working with customers and having

good work ethics:

> And I feel like they respect me for my work ethic and for my ethics and I realize
> like…I realize through them I am a good person because sometimes it's hard to
> see that in yourself whereas if other people notice that it makes you feel
> appreciated. (IP2, 2012, p. 2)

This notion is in accordance with the social psychology process of social influence, where

"besides being affected by the processes of self-reflection and social comparison, our self-

attitudes are influenced by others' attitude and by their actions towards us" (Wiggins et al.,

1994, p. 227). When asked to elaborate on how the participant defined work ethics, this

individual went on to say:

> Just being honest and truthful…you know when you're selling XXX you can be
> talking about a lot of money and you know I feel like the people who come in to
> buy things from me trust me and that they know that I'm not going to try and rip
> them off or try force them to buy something they don't want to buy, so I think
> ethics in a sales position is something that is kind of hard to come by because it's
> like, "Oh I gotta sell, I gotta sell!" Whereas I would rather sell you something

that you are going to really like and not something that you are going to want to return in five days; so just the ethics that way are is what I really try to go for. (IP2, 2012, p. 2)

Summary of the essential theme.

First, the spread of the hermeneutic spectrum is provided for *The Meaning of work is a Reflection of Who We Are*, along with a visual representation. Subsequently, a summary is provided for the essential theme and its corresponding essential sub-themes and essential sub-sub-themes in a table format (see Table 15) displaying key points from the participants and supporting literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum.

In respect to the hermeneutic spectrum, this essential theme has a moderate to broad spread of hermeneutic description. There was descriptive variation in the individual constructions for the essential sub-themes and their corresponding essential sub-sub-themes, thus resulting in three levels of interpretation (i.e., essential, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub- themes). While they all shared that values play a role in their work, there was variation among the participants in their individual thresholds for where and to the degree they believe the alignment of values are important. Some participants discussed values as what is right and wrong, and the importance of the business's core values. Others communicated the importance of the alignment of values among themselves and leadership in an organization. Another participant made it clear that while values are important, their values do not need to be aligned with leadership as long as there is the presence of mutual respect.

All of the participants believed in working hard, but varied on how they expressed the characteristics of working hard. One way the essential sub-themes were characterized was the importance of being a productive member of society. None of the participants communicated

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sense of entitlement upon entering the workforce. They discussed the experience of working in jobs or positions they didn't enjoy to build a foundation for a future career. The participants understood that they had to pay their dues while working towards their overall goals. For several of the participants work serves as a form of self-validation. This essential sub-sub-theme is possibly influenced by the degree of one's identity that is wrapped within the work that they do. These descriptive variations could be the reflection of the spread of individual diversity of the participant's lived experiences and what each individual prioritizes in their lives, as well as their unique thresholds for value alignment.

It could be proposed that this essential theme is also influenced by the following essential themes of this study, including: *The Meaning of work is Influenced by Our Social Networks*; *The Meaning of work is the Opportunity to do Work that is Meaningful*; and *The Meaning of work is Completing Tasks and Being Compensated to Meet Our Basic Needs*. Our caregivers, friends, and family influence the development of values and beliefs (Lefton & Brannon, 2003). Similarly, if participants desire to do meaningful work, then they may choose to work for an organization that upholds the same values they do. And last, they believe in working hard because they have to be able to meet their basic necessities. This level of descriptive variation underscores the importance of context specificity for this phenomenon to gain a deep understanding of how individuals construct and develop their *meaning of work*. The spread of hermeneutic description for this essential theme is presented in Figure 19.

Key points from participants and supporting literature.

In summary, for these five study participants, one essence of the *meaning of work* is that it is a reflection of who these participants are. This essential theme is composed of two essential sub-themes including, the *role of values* and the *belief in working hard*. *The belief in working*

hard is composed of three essential sub-sub-themes including: the need to be a productive

member of society; we believe in paying our dues; and work as a form of self-validation.
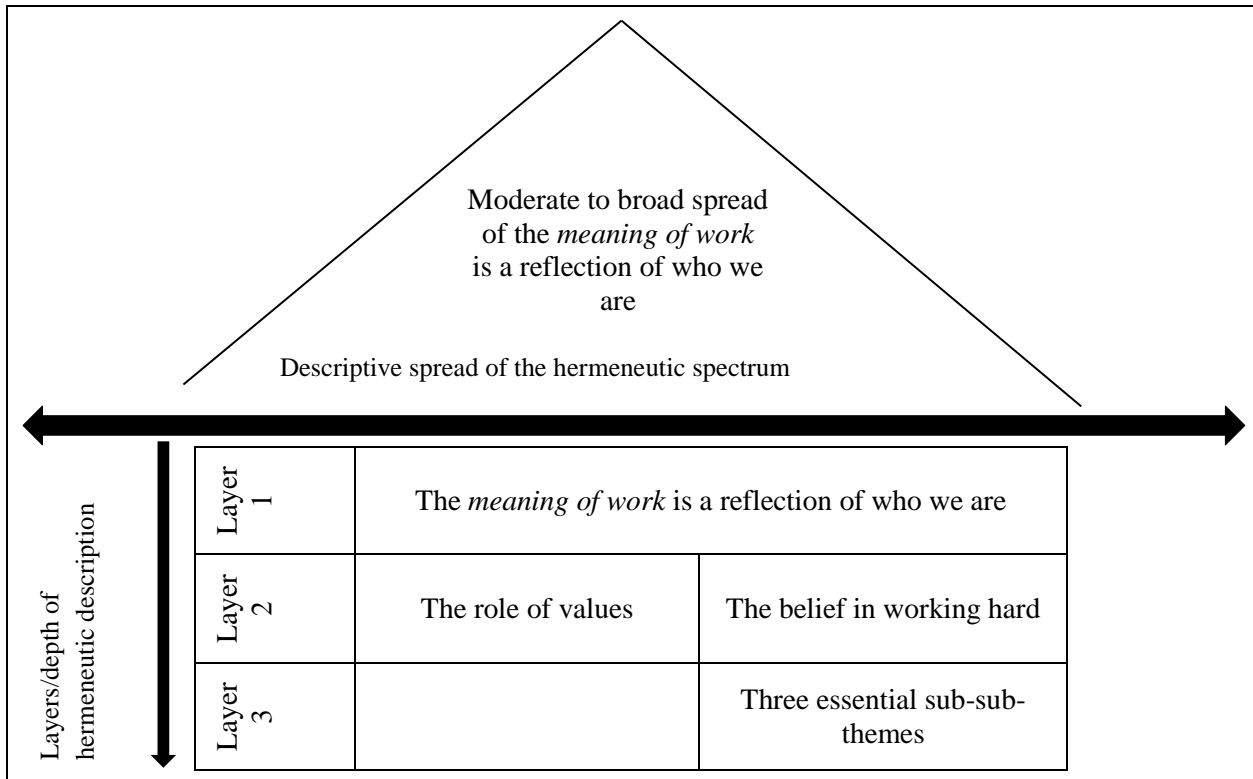

Figure 19. A moderate to broad spread of the hermeneutic description for the *meaning of work* is a reflection of who we are

Table 15 summarizes the essential sub- themes and corresponding essential sub-sub-themes by

providing key points from the participants, along with supporting literature.

Table 15

Key points from the essential sub-themes and corresponding essential sub-sub-themes of the meaning of work is a reflection of who we are.

Essential Sub-Themes	Essential Sub-Sub-Themes	Key Points From Participants	Key Points from Supporting Literature
The role of values		• We believe we have different values than previous generations in the workforce. • We believe in the alignment of values and priorities with our work. • We are driven to find meaning in our work.	• Work values have changed over the generations (Chen & Choi, 2008; Gursoy et al., 2008; Twenge & Campbell, 2010).

Table 15

Continued

Essential Sub-Themes	Essential Sub-Sub-Themes	Key Points From Participants	Key Points from Supporting Literature
		• The core values of a business are important to us. • Our values do not necessarily have to align with the values of leadership, as long as we can respect each other's differences and get the job done. • Values can be perceived as what is right and wrong, and making the best judgment. • We don't want to sacrifice who we are for money. • It is important for an employer to care about the similar issues.	• Generation Y values finding meaning in work (Robbins & Judge, 2007; Twenge & Campbell, 2010). • Motivational notion of self-concordance (Robbins & Judge, 2007). • Instrumental and terminal values (Robbins & Judge, 2007). • Person-job fit theory (Holland, X). • Person-organization fit (Robbins & Judge).
The belief in working hard	The need to be a productive member of society	• We do not want to mooch off of anyone or society. • We do not like being lazy or unproductive. • Our production levels can reflect who we are. • A productive life can lead to a meaningful life. • We feel the need to be productive at work and at home. • It is necessary to have a purpose to get up each day, which is work.	• Generation Y values leisure (Twenge, 2010; Twenge et al., 2010). • There was not a decrease among the generations valuing leisure in regards to work ethic (Meriac et al., 2010).
	We believe in paying our dues	• Working in jobs that we do not enjoy will help us build a solid foundation for a future career. • Sometimes we may seem negative and set strong boundaries, but it does not mean that we will not work hard because we will. • We are not entitled. We believe in putting forth the necessary effort in reaching our goals. And we understand we may have to start out working jobs that are not that great. • Sometimes we care too much about our work and take it home with us. • It bothers us when people do not care about their jobs. • We believe in going above and beyond expectations.	• Generation Y feels a sense of entitlement (Lower, 2008).

Table 15

Continued

Essential Sub-Themes	Essential Sub-Sub-Themes	Key Points From Participants	Key Points from Supporting Literature
	Work as a form of self-validation	• It feels good to be taken seriously in our work. • Working hard reflects that we are a good person. • It is important to have strong work ethics. • Customers appreciate and respect working with people who have strong work ethics. • Work ethics includes honestly.	• Roger's theory of personality and the self (Wiggins et al., 1994). • Effects of social influence on an individual (Wiggins et al., 1994). • Generation Y displays a weak work ethic and work is less central to their lives than previous generations (Twenge & Campbell, 2010).

The *Meaning of Work* is the Importance of Social Relationships

The importance of social relationships in the workforce is in alignment with McClelland's theory of three needs, one encompassing the need for affiliation (Robbins & Judge, 2007). These types of relationships provide us with "various social satisfactions" and contribute to our overall well-being (Wiggins et al., 1994, p. 112). Additionally, Harpaz et al., (2002) found that the *meaning of work* is influenced by socialization in the organization, and Isaksen (2009) reported that social engagement is an important factor in individuals creating their own meaning at work. This essential theme is composed of two essential sub-themes and no essential sub-sub-themes. The essential sub-themes are relationships with co-workers, and relationships with customers and clients. A visual representation of this essential theme and essential sub-themes is displayed in Figure 20.
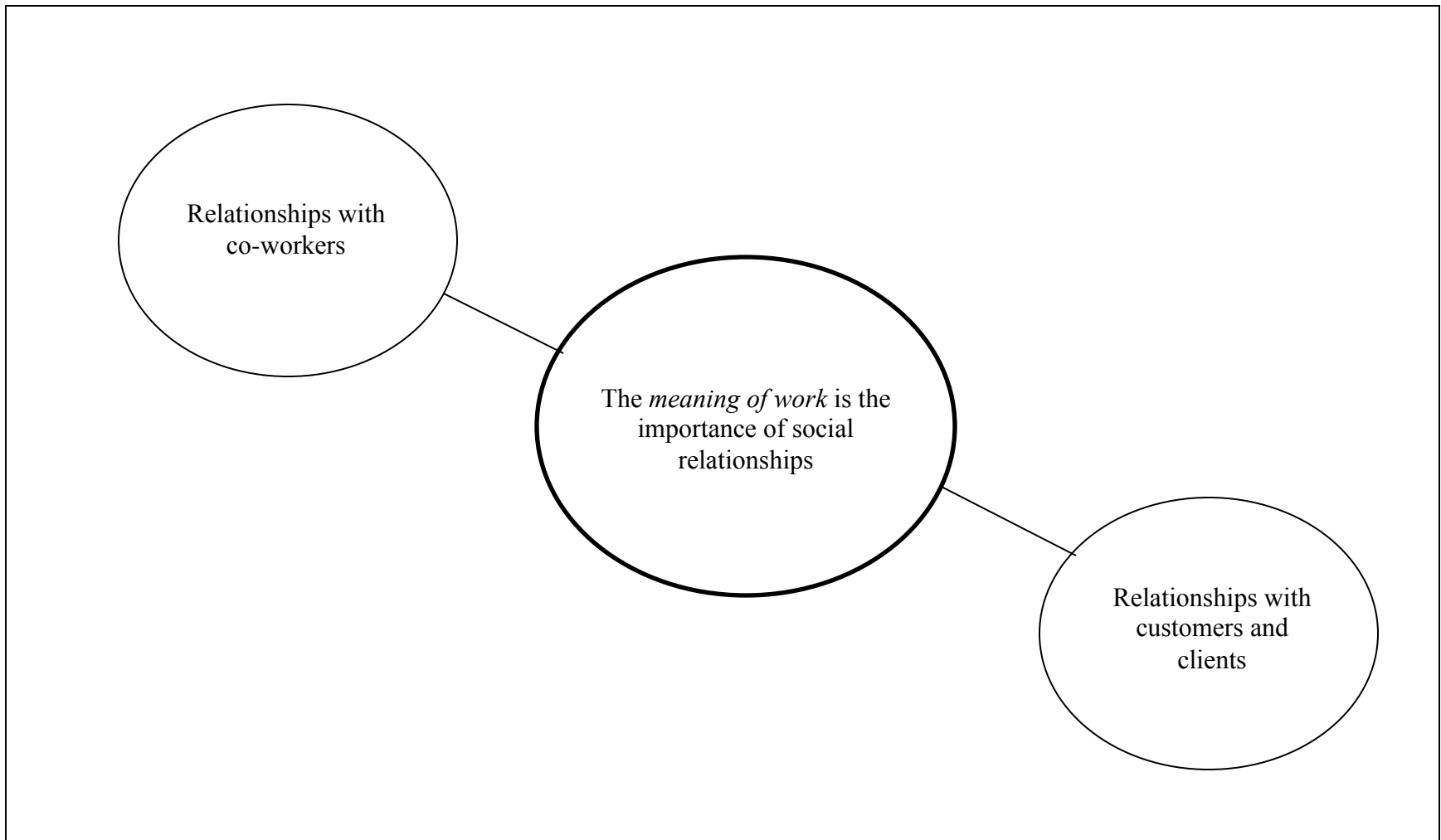
Figure 20. A visual representation of the *meaning of work* is the importance of social relationships

Relationships with co-workers.

Literature reports that Generation Y values their relationships to other employees

(Gursoy et al., 2008). Consistent with these findings, participants described the importance of

their relationship with their co-workers. One participant said:

> And it was the first job where I met employees that I felt like actually cared about
> me…working with my peers in particular in a college environment…some of those
> people to this day are still some of my really really good friends, and so I think that
> was a rare opportunity because in most jobs you know you have a very much like…I
> was working with friends it felt like…we were all college students, we were all going
> through the same thing, and so that was a really amazing experience. (IP1, 2012, p.14)

For one person, the relational aspect of the job made work more satisfying, as expressed in the

following quote:

> I think the fun jobs were jobs where I was doing my work while working with others
> and enjoying that like relational aspect. And, enjoying like what I was doing in
> participation with others. So, I guess it was mostly because of coworkers or because
> clients or customers were… were interactive. (IP5, 2013, p. 4)

When I asked them to elaborate on why social relationships are important, the participant

added:

> I think because it makes it more enjoyable so it's easier to work when I'm having good
> relationships with my boss or my co-workers. And then I think it's also probably part
> of my personality where I live by myself and I do a lot of things by myself, so I have
> my personal time by myself. So I like having relationships that… I like having much
> more of my social life within work. (IP5, 2013, p. 3)

Another person described why relationships at work are important:

> The people I work with are often times the people that I become friends with because
> these are the people I spend the most time with. And it's been hard because my
> manager, I've worked for him for six years and he's like a father to me so…sometimes
> it's hard to separate them. And, you know sometimes it's…sometimes you just can't
> do much about it…because you know I see them five days out of seven, so you know I
> see them the most. And, I try to separate it, but sometimes I just don't know how
> to…sometimes I don't know if I want to either. You know I have friends that I keep in
> touch with, but you know when you get older you know friends kind of move away
> and you lose touch and there's only two people that I really stay in touch
> with…actually from high school that I was friends with, and you know I've gained a

friendship at work with one of my new coworkers and so I mean they're kind of like a family there, so it's kind of nice to have that support system. And it's been kind of emotional for me to be like, "I'm leaving my store for a while." I've actually cried multiple times about it because I feel like I'm leaving them behind, so it's been hard. (IP2, 2012, p.10)

The person elaborated on forming friendships at work, and described the difficulty in establishing new ones at the individual's new work location. They said:

Because the people you work with are the ones that you see the most. I spend more time with my co-workers than with my own family or with my husband. So they're kind of the ones that you kind of….are kind of forced to bond with…because there are really no other options. And you know where I work there is a group of five or six people so it's kind of a close knit group of people and it's been a little bit of a challenge for me because when I first did the interview with you I was still working in XXX and then I went to XXX, and now I'm in XXX. So I've transitioned from one place to another place to another place. So I've worked in that store for about two months now and I'm trying to kind of build relationships with those people, but they're kind of not really the type of people I want to build a relationship with. Like maybe on a superficial level, maybe on like, "oh hi, how are you doing, how's your life, you know…moving on," but they're not people that I feel a real close connection to as far as personality wise so it's been a little bit of a challenge for me just because I like the people I work with, but I don't necessarily want to be friends with them and the people I used to work with were the people I considered my friends and now they're not really my friends because I don't work with them anymore. So I'm kind of in a weird spot where it's like I like the people I work with, but I don't feel like I have a good social relationship with them. So, it's really kind of a transition. (IP2, 2013, pp. 3-4)

Another characteristic of the importance of relationships was not based on becoming friends with the people you work with, but being able to at least get along with them to be productive. One person provided an example of their experience of not getting along well with a co-worker and the difficulty that it presented. This experience is in accordance with what literature describes as "relationships conflict," in which co-workers' personalities clash and results in a lack of understanding taking place (Robbins & Judge, 2007, p. 506), thus, making completing work tasks difficult. The person shared the following story:

But, when she found out that I wasn't like best buddy buddies with her it drew a line in the sand and she became negative towards me. I mean it's not like I don't like you, I

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mean I think you're fine… I think you're a pretty decent person you know. I just don't want to spend every moment with you and don't come inside my bubble space…this is my space, don't touch me. And, I think it was just our different personalities. She was very touchy and that kind of stuff. And, it's just really hard to try and work with someone and you're like, "okay, you can't ignore me…we have to work…you have to talk to me…you can't just avoid and keep not continue talking to me." So, I would say that was the worst experience…trying to work with someone who figured out that I wasn't best friends with them and getting around that which that actually never went away. It was just like having to go through third parties to get anything done which took even longer and was ridiculous. (IP4, 2012, p. 8)

Another participant described the negative experience of working with difficult people. The person said: "There were some great people there that I really liked and there were some raging assholes and sadly one raging asshole makes a lot of good people fade into the background" (IP3, 2012, p. 3). The same person described a positive experience of working with a team of people:

Taking an idea and seeing it executed and have impact and scale….which is I believe a result of working with a team of people on a shared goal and going through a process that usually has some creative element to it, some operational elements to it, and just finding that harmony through trial and error. (IP3, 2012, p. 12)

Relationships with customers and clients.

Participants shared stories about positive and negative experiences they have had with customers and clients and how that experience has influenced their *meaning of work*. Literature suggests that customer interactions influence employee's job satisfaction—positive and negative contact can correspondingly increase or decrease levels of satisfaction (Robbins & Judge, 2007). Additionally, in relation to the participant that is an entrepreneur, Sullivan (2000) discussed the importance of possessing relationship building skills due to the necessary relations that have to be established with clients and vendors. One participant described interaction with customers as a positive experience. This individual stated:

Even in what we do, like I enjoy the project development side…I enjoy various other elements of what we do, but what I enjoy most is when we are negotiating or trying to

build a relationship or something like that…it's sort of the poker game of business which is really about, you know, once again the exchange and interaction between people—that's what I…that's my favorite part of what we do. So, I think that kind of what's made me do what we want to do and staying engaged. (IP3, 2012, pp. 8-9)

An interest in the interactional component of relationships is also described by another participant that stated:

And, same thing with people calling in wanting feedback for recruiters or trying to call and get feedback on a candidate that they submitted….it's really good to get to see the broad scope of personalities and how they work. (IP4, 2012, p. 7)

Conversely, several participants shared some bad experiences with customers that made their work difficult. One participant shared the experience of working in the hotel industry:

I think when I was working for the hotel, I think a lot of the mentality and the hospitality industry is you kind of take a lot from crap from people too because they are paying a lot of money and its very much known whatever the person wants, they get. So, I've had a lot of friends work for hotels and just being yelled at for not giving them upgrades. (IP1, 2012, p. 11)

The same participant shared a bad experience working in a student testing center:

My testing center job I was being constantly yelled at by students and people due to test anxiety, and I started reaching the point where I would come into work like people are going to yell at me. And, it wasn't the management it was the students. (IP1, 2012, p.10)

This participant also shared the positive experience of working at the student testing center that made it more rewarding:

At the testing center I think one really big thing was those students that were like "thank you so much for your help" like going that extra mile of like "okay you had a bad experience with this test, let me call another testing center, let me schedule your appointment for you, let me email you the directions" going above and beyond for that and hearing like "I so appreciate you doing that" or very much… there were a lot of students that really didn't care if people were kind of freaking out and for me I'm the personality type that really genuinely wanted to sit there and be like "I totally understand what you're feeling, do you want to go in the hallway and take a little bit of a break and I'll let you start a little bit later?" Because I know as a student if I'm in that situation, I would wish that someone would be empathetic to me. (IP1, 2012, p.15)

In this participant's current position there is more at stake in how well the interaction takes

place with the customer. The individual describes the importance of this interaction:

> We have women come in that have been kicked out of their homes that are trying to
> get out of an abusive relationship, and so if I'm the first person when you walk into the
> office… it really matters how I handle that and so even if I'm not the one that's
> counseling or I'm not gonna actually help them get through that crises…depending on
> how I handle that they may come back to our office or never want to come back…or
> you know if I'm insensitive to them they may never get the help that they need. (IP1,
> 2012, p.16)

Another participant talked about building relationships with customers over the past few

years:

> The one thing that I really like about my job now is my customers and the people I
> help because I've built really good relationships with people over the last six years
> there…people who come in and only want to work with me or call me and you know
> want to talk to me about stuff. (IP2, 2012, p. 2)

This person added the following example of a good relationship with a customer:

> I actually…I had a lady that I have been helping probably since I've been there and I
> remember the first Christmas she…..she gives me a hard time about buying stuff all
> the time, but she buys it….and she apologized for being such a pain and she brought
> me a candle for Christmas that year and she always calls for me by name and she…
> last year I got married and she gave me a gift for my wedding, so I mean it's really
> cool…like I feel like we obviously it's not like obviously a friendship, but it's just…I
> don't know how to describe it, but it makes me feel good that someone likes me that
> much, that they actually care about me. (IP2, 2012, p. 3)

For one person, another characteristic of relationships with customers is getting to know

details about them on a personal level. They said:

> I have really enjoyed making relationships with people, so I worked in a restaurant and
> a coffee shop and both of those had regulars and I really enjoyed somebody walking in
> and me knowing exactly what they wanted and so instead of having to spend my time
> figuring those things out, doing transactions, I got to spend my time asking about their
> kids and what did they do for the weekend and things that are kind of outside of work.
> (IP5, 2013, pp. 4-5)

On the other hand, this same person had experienced some situations that were not positive

interactions with customers, such as the following example:

Angry people in every job has always been pretty killer…people who are demanding and you mess something up and there's just no forgiveness and there's just nothing that you can do to…whether it was, sometimes it was just an accident and no apology would be accepted or times when somebody wanted something that you just really couldn't provide, and there was nothing to be done. Part of it was being frustrated with people for not having that forgiveness. (IP5, 2013, p. 5)

Summary of the essential theme.

First, the spread of the hermeneutic spectrum is provided for *The Meaning of work is the Importance of Social Relationships*, along with a visual representation. Subsequently, a summary is provided for the essential theme and its corresponding essential sub-themes in a table format (see Table 16) displaying key points from the participants and supporting literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum.

This essential theme has a narrow to moderate spread of hermeneutic description on the hermeneutic spectrum. There were two levels of descriptive interpretation (i.e., essential and sub-essential themes), resulting in a moderate spread of description. However, even within these two levels of hermeneutic interpretation, there was little descriptive variation in the individual constructions for this essential theme. The lack of variation could be the result of all five participants having already held several work positions, thus experiencing many situations with fellow co-workers. In addition, they also have all currently, or previously, worked in positions where they interacted with customers or clients on a regular basis. Several of the participants have worked in the service industry. One participant is an entrepreneur, thus the importance of building relationships with customers and clients is pertinent. And, another participant works in a women's clinic. That participant explained how significant of an impact their interaction with people who come into the clinic can be. Regardless of industry, position, or organization, these participants all have the shared lived experience of working with other people—resulting in

experiencing this contextual factor of the study similarly. These experiences result in an

analogous lived experience of the importance of social relationships on their *meaning of work*.

The spread of hermeneutic description for this essential theme is presented in Figure 21.
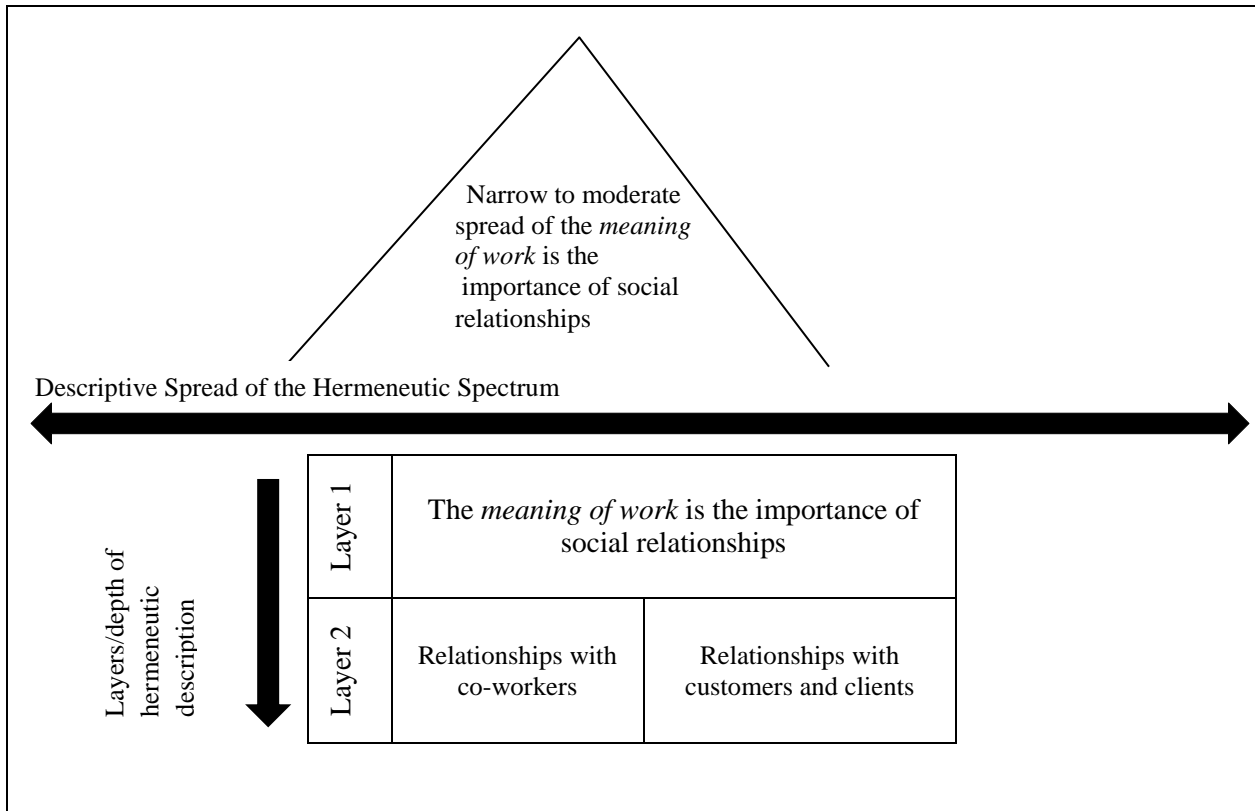
Figure 21. A narrow to moderate spread of hermeneutic description for the *meaning of work* is the importance of social relationships

Key points from participants and supporting literature.

In summary, for these five study participants, one essence of the *meaning of work* is

that social relationships at work are important. This essential theme is composed of two

essential sub-themes including, relationships with co-workers and relationships with customers

and clients. Table 16 summarizes the essential sub- themes by providing key points from the

participants, along with supporting literature.

Table 16

Key points from the essential sub-themes of the meaning of work is the importance of social relationships

Essential sub-themes	Key points from participants	Key points from supporting literature
Relationships with coworkers	• It is a good experience to work with other people who become your friends and actually care about you. • Working with others makes work more satisfying. • A social life within work is important. • Establishing relationships with co-workers can be difficult to do. • Friendships at work are not necessary as long as we can get along well enough to get our work done. • People that are difficult to work with can be the cause of negative work experiences. • Working with a team towards a shared goal is a good experience of work.	• McClelland's theory of needs (Robbins & Judge, 2007). • Provides social satisfaction and increases a person's well-being (Wiggins et al., 1994). • Social engagement is an important factor in creating meaning in work (Isaksen, 2009). • The meaning of work is influenced by socialization in an organization (Harpaz et al., 2002). • Generation Y values their relationships at work (Gursoy et al., 2008). • "Relationships conflict" can make getting work accomplished difficult between individuals that do not get along (Robbins & Judge, 2007, p. 506).
Relationships with customers and clients	• The social interactions and exchanges that take place at work are enjoyable. • Building relationships with customers and clients is enjoyable. • Observing the broad scope of personalities is enjoyable. • Having customers that care about you is a good feeling. • Bad experiences at work include being yelled at by customers, dealing with angry customers, and taking crap from customers because they always need to get what they want. • The first interaction between employee and customer/client can be extremely important based on the type of work. • It's enjoyable to get to know customers beyond the immediate transaction taking place.	• Customer interactions can negatively or positively influence an employee's job satisfaction (Robbins & Judge, 2007). • It is important to possess relationship building skills as an entrepreneur in order to create the necessary relations that have to be established with clients and vendors (Sullivan, 2000).

The *Meaning of Work* is Influenced by Our Social Networks

According to the MOW International Research Team (1987) family is an antecedent to the *meaning of work*. Guion and Landy (1972) posited that the *meaning of work* is influenced by an individual's experiences and environment. Similarly, researchers have stated that meaning is created from our values, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes that influence our behavior (Brief and Nord, 1990; Shamir, 1991). It is well documented that our values and beliefs are learned from our parents and others in influential positions in our environment as we grow up (Lefton & Brannon, 2003). All of the participants in this study mentioned the influence of their family or other significant individuals on their *meaning of work*. Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2000) conceptualized a social cognitive theory of career choice. One of the components of this theory is contextual variables. Contextual variables can be described as environmental influences such as family, friends, and other role models. Thus, this essential theme is composed of two essential sub-themes and no essential sub-sub-themes. The essential sub-themes include, influence of family and influence of individuals outside of the family. A visual representation of this essential theme and corresponding essential sub-themes is displayed in

Influence of family.

In alignment with all the literature mentioned, one participant described being inclined to work hard based on their family environment. The participant said, "almost everyone is my family is like…they're overachievers and just like my Aunt XXX…you know….she's crazy… and so is Uncle XXX. So, people like them have influenced me (IP2, 2012, p. 6).
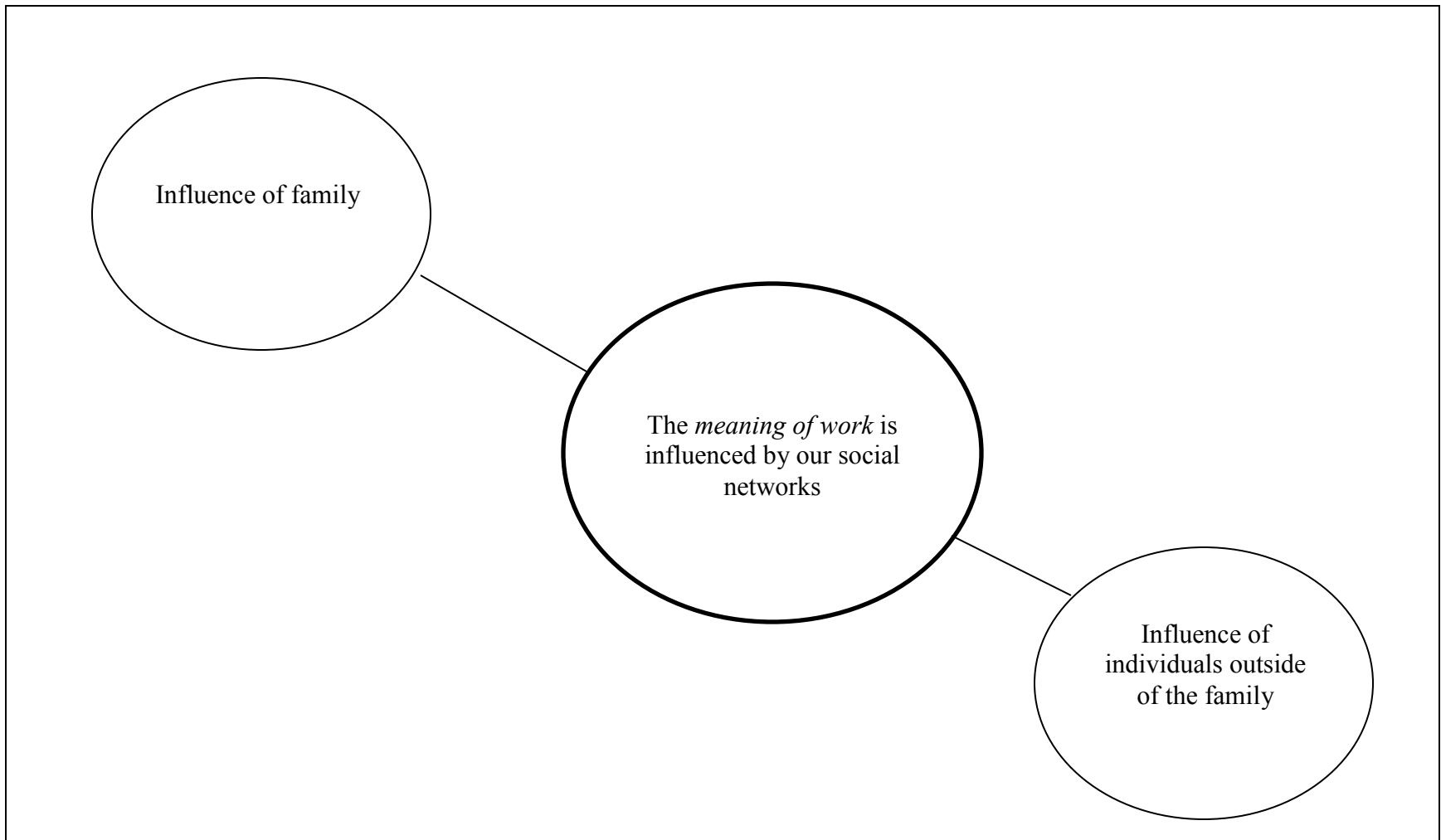
Figure 22. A visual representation of the *meaning of work* is influenced by our social networks

The participant added:

> Like my family environment….you know there's been obviously the positive…my grandfather was a civil engineer and professor at CSU, and all my aunts are you know have college degrees and they work way too hard, so I mean like my family influenced me that way and also influenced me to not want to be a failure. (IP2, 2012, p. 6)

Another participant explained how their Dad has influenced their *meaning of work*. They said:

> My Dad actually gave me really good advice. He said, "in college, focus on finding what your calling is and then find a way to get paid for it" and that… hearing that for me… really it was like "yeah, that's a really cool way of looking at it." My Dad's a professor and my mom's a professor, and he said you know, "professors don't make a lot of money" but he's been a professor all his life and he loves it. And, once he tapped into that passion he thought, "as long as I can find a way to support myself, that's what matters." (IP1, 2012, p. 21)

> The same participant explained that they are not married and do not have children

right now, thus the non-existence of the individual's own family right now has played a role

in their *meaning of work*. They shared the following:

> And I think it's a really cool time to be a woman right now because it's a really good feeling for me to be able to go where ever I want, I can do my own thing for now… and it's not the kind of thing where at 17 or 18 I had to get married and I am solely reliant on that person, and so that's I think a positive thing that's coming out right now is very much an independent mentality away from family…is focusing on your career and focusing on that for longer. (IP1, 2012, p. 32)

The participant went on to further explain, "I'm really just enjoying being young and being

single and having that freedom, and you know if I want to move to another state because

there might be an opportunity like that's a really good feeling to have" (IP1, 2012, p. 23).

This participant mentioned the suggestion that individuals of Generation Y value freedom

and independence for the following reason, "I think freedom and independence is something

that our generation really values is because we've seen a lot of our family's torn apart by

divorce and so it's very much changing the way we see about supporting ourselves" (IP1,

2012, p. 32). The person went on to describe the influence of being children of divorced

families:

> Being children of divorce I think is changing our mentality of life in many ways, not just work because it's not a reality for a lot of people for the man to be the breadwinner and that's it… and I can stay at home Mom. Even my friends who have gotten married and had kids, they go back to work within six months or a year because they have to and they're still barely making their bills. I think the whole idea of the breadwinner is very much…it's slowly declining for us and not only that, but I think with the empowerment of women that it's not a desirable thing for a lot of women to do anymore. If you want that that's totally great and that's totally fine, but I think a lot of women want their career and their wanting to wait longer to start a family because they don't have to do that, which is a really really cool thing. (IP1, 2012, pp. 31-32)

One of the participants is married and discussed the importance of support from a

significant other in pursuing a new career:

> And, we came up with the idea to start a company and went for it. It was really him saying, "We should do this….let's do it" and I said, "okay." The timing was a little crazy because we decided, or made that decision, about two or three months before I got married. So, I'm very fortunate to have a supporting, understanding wife and at that time fiancé who said, "If you care about it and you're passionate about it, you should go for it" so I went down that road. (IP4, 2012, p. 4)

This same participant also discussed the influence of parents on choosing a career path:

> I think obviously growing up, my parents—they were entrepreneurs…started their own businesses and I also saw them work for more corporate style jobs and I think that my perspective parallels a lot probably with what they have. I think they much preferred to be their own boss…be ultimately responsible for building something that was their own so I think that is the main thing. I think growing up around that gave me that basis. (IP3, 2012, p. 9)

The parents' reason for working also influenced one participant, as expressed in the

following quote:

> But both of them just kind of left it with the mentality that, "I don't want to spend my whole life looking for this perfect job; I would rather just get what I can and focus on things outside of the job." (IP5, 2013, p. 7)

The influence of parent's career choices on their children is supported by Bandura's observational learning theory, which suggests that we observe the behavior of our models and imitate it (Lefton & Brannon, 1993). However, it is important to note that some individuals experience the desire to be completely opposite of the environment they grew up in. One participant stated:

> And I think that's specifically because of the unstable environment I was raised. I have the exact opposite fixation on being completely stable. Like I said before, we want that little nest egg so in case something happens we're not in a boat in the river without a paddle. So I think that is the number one thing that really reflects my *meaning of work* is having that type of stability. (IP4, 2013, pp. 16-17)

This person went on to describe how her Mother, Father, and Step-Mother have all influenced their *meaning of work*:

> Just XXX (Mother) works so she could make an extra couple of buck and then go spend the money on herself and be selfish and then be broke again. And, for me I don't want it to be just you know…just to make a few bucks and go splurge it…I really want it to mean stability…my exact goal is the opposite of her. Also just talking with other people who love their jobs…like my Dad….big nerd and he went to work as a scientist for XXX in the science department and he's recently been promoted out of that and he still enjoys like going and talking to all these professionals about it because he still gets to be nerdy and sciency, but he gets to share his information and knowledge with other people and he love what he does. I mean he hates how much he has to travel, which sucks, but he really does love what he does. XXX on the other hand, my step-mother, she's a stay at home mom and works part-time for the fire department and you know for her it's just a quick extra bucks. For her, her job is raising her kids who are almost raised and already I can see she's like, "well what else am I going to do to fill my time?" For her, her work is raising her children and that's what she really wanted to do and now that that job is closing or finishing up it's like going from full-time to part-time…your kids don't need you there 24/7 every day. But, whenever we call her and want to ask her advice she's like super ecstatic that we're involved with her. So, just those different meanings and how they're work means to them and how it fits into their life like I don't think I could be a stay at home mom….I would go freaken crazy….I call my step-mom "mom"…..I don't know how my mom does it. I would seriously go bonkers…I have to be doing something, I have to be active, I have to be moving, or have to be doing something. And, I think from seeing those different types of work styles I know that work means me being active, being involved, being fulfilled, doing tasks…that's what it means. So, I think looking at those different people and those different work experiences have really changed my being different from XXX

(Mother), and then seeing my Dad's work, seeing my step-mom's different version of work… I think I definitely want to go down my Dad's kind of path. (IP4, 2012, p. 14)

Influence of individuals outside of the family.

Participants also discussed the influence of individuals that are not family members on their *meaning of work*. The importance of networking was brought up by one participant. They said:

> I think right now it's so much about networking and who you know to get jobs. And, that's the reason I've been doing all this outside voluntary work is because I feel like that's the only way I am going to get into my field. Even though I haven't been paid I'm like, "it'll be worth it I think!" (IP1, 2012, p. 7)

This notion was reinforced by another participant in stating:

> Then this position became available and my supervisor at XXX is actually best friends with the owner of the company, so that's how I got my foot in the door is that somebody knew somebody and said put me down as a reference. (IP4, 2012, p. 11)

These experiences of gaining employment through our social networks are supported by Granovetter's (1995) research. He found that people are more likely to find positions based on our social networks and job contacts due to the flow of information, rather than through formal means. A second way this essential sub-theme was constructed was based on how the choice of career paths was influenced by significant individuals throughout one's life experiences. One participant explained:

> I know for me there have been individuals along the way of my recovery and my journey where they really took the time to listen to me or just expended you know little acts of kindness to me or they themselves just being in my life and seeing them as an example of things that I wanted to be that I had never found in other people. That's had a huge impact on my life. (IP1, 2013, p. 15)

Participants reflected on talking to and observing others who are passionate about their work. This idea is also in alignment with observational learning theory (Lefton & Brannon, 2003) and the contextual influence of our immediate environments on our career

choices (Lent et al.,1994)   One participant mentioned, "just from working and talking to other people and seeing what they do for a living and whether they enjoy it or not" (IP4, 2012, p. 13). Another participant shared the following:

> I think too you meet people that it's very evident that they're committed towards a cause and so to even see someone like that that's very passionate about doing what they want to do, that inspiration…there have been a lot of people that have really encouraged me and they… they've done it by leading by example. And that's had a really huge impact on my life too. (IP1, 2013, p. 15)

Summary of the essential theme.

First, the spread of the hermeneutic spectrum is provided for *The Meaning of Work is Influenced by Our Social Networks*, along with a visual representation. Subsequently, a summary is provided for the essential theme and its corresponding essential sub-themes in a table format (see Table 17) displaying key points from the participants and supporting literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum.

In respect to the hermeneutic spectrum, this essential theme has a narrow to moderate spread of description. Also, there were two levels of descriptive interpretation (i.e., essential and sub-essential themes), resulting in a moderate spread of hermeneutic description. However, even within these two levels of descriptive interpretation, there was little descriptive variation in the individual constructions for this essential theme. All five participants discussed the influence of family on their *meaning of work*, which further supports the notion that environment is a component in understanding the *meaning of work*. However, the manner in which they described this influence did have a small variation to it, which I believe is important to note in this section. All of the participants described how their family positively influenced their *meaning of work*, such as: making them want to work hard, making them want to pursue the

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work they're passionate about, and supporting them in attaining their ideal career choice.

However, there was one participant that described the influence of one parent on their *meaning of work*, but from a different perspective. This participant shared the desire to be completely unlike their Mother and the environment they were raised in. This varied perspective underscores the importance of the individual contextuality in trying to understand the *meaning of work*. All the participants have a similar lived experience of being influenced by family, but it's important to understand how they describe that experience. Furthermore, the participants discussed the influence of individuals outside of the family in a similar manner. They reflected on the importance of networking in today's society to gain employment, and the influence of talking and observing people who are passionate about their work. All of these experiences result in a relatively similar lived experience of the influence of our social networks on the *meaning of work*. The spread of hermeneutic description for this essential theme is presented in Figure 23.
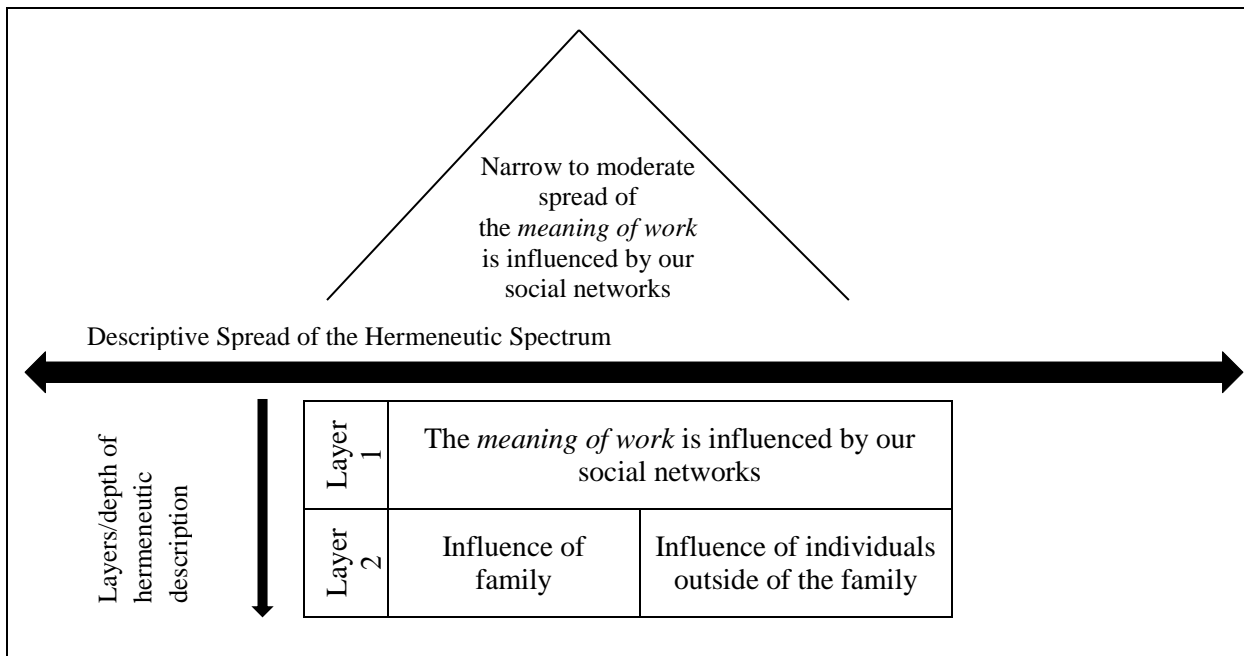

Figure 23. A narrow to moderate spread of hermeneutic description for the *meaning of work* is influenced by our social networks

Key points from participants and supporting literature.

In summary, for these five study participants, one essence of the *meaning of work* is that our social networks influence our *meaning of work*. This essential theme is composed of two essential sub-themes including, relationships with co-workers and relationships with customers and clients. Table 17 summarizes the essential sub- themes by providing key points from the participants, along with supporting literature.

Table 17

Key points from the essential sub-themes of the meaning of work is influenced by our social networks

Essential sub-themes	Key points from participants	Key points from supporting literature
Influence of family	• Family influences us to work hard. • Family influences us to follow our passion as long as we can support ourselves. • Not having a family of our own allows us to be independent and spend time pursuing our careers. • Observing parents' divorce influences the idea of how individuals support themselves. • The support of significant others and family is important in pursuing work we are passionate about. • Reasons for working are influenced by our family. • Work styles are influenced by our family. • Growing up in an unstable environment influences individuals to strive to be completely different than their parent/s.	• Family is an antecedent to people's meaning of work (MOW International Research Team, 1987). • The meaning of work is influenced by individual's experiences and environment (Guion & Landy, 1972). • Our values and beliefs are influenced by our family and other significant people in our lives (Lefton & Brannon, 2003). • Social cognitive theory of career choice (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). • Bandura's observational learning theory suggests that we observe the behavior of our models and imitate it (Lefton & Brannon, 1993).

Table 17

Continued

Essential sub-themes	Key points from participants	Key points from supporting literature
Influence of individuals outside of the family	• Networking is extremely important in pursuing a job in the workforce. • We are influenced by people who are passionate about their work. • We are influenced by people who lead by example.	• The meaning of work is influenced by individual's experiences and environment (Guion & Landy, 1972). • Our values and beliefs are influenced by our family and other significant people in our lives (Lefton & Brannon, 2003). • People are more likely to find positions based on our social networks and job contacts due to the flow of information (Granovetter, 1995). • Our values and beliefs are influenced by our family and other significant people in our lives (Lefton & Brannon, 2003). • Social cognitive theory of career choice (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000).

The *Meaning of Work* is Considering and Exploring All Opportunities

This essential theme is composed of three essential sub-themes and no essential sub-sub-themes. The essential sub-themes include: opportunities to broaden our skills; opportunities to test the waters; and opportunities that were never there before. Much of this essential theme reflects the notion that in today's workforce organizations are no longer in control of employee's careers—the employees themselves are (Swanson & Holton, 2009). A visual representation of this essential theme and essential sub-themes is displayed in Figure 24.

Opportunities to broaden our skills.

In respect to a boundaryless career, workers must focus on developing competencies that are transferable to many organizations rather than firm-specific knowledge and skills. Thus, individuals should seek out opportunities for continuous learning and obtain skills that increase their marketability (Sullivan & Emerson, 2000, p. 3).
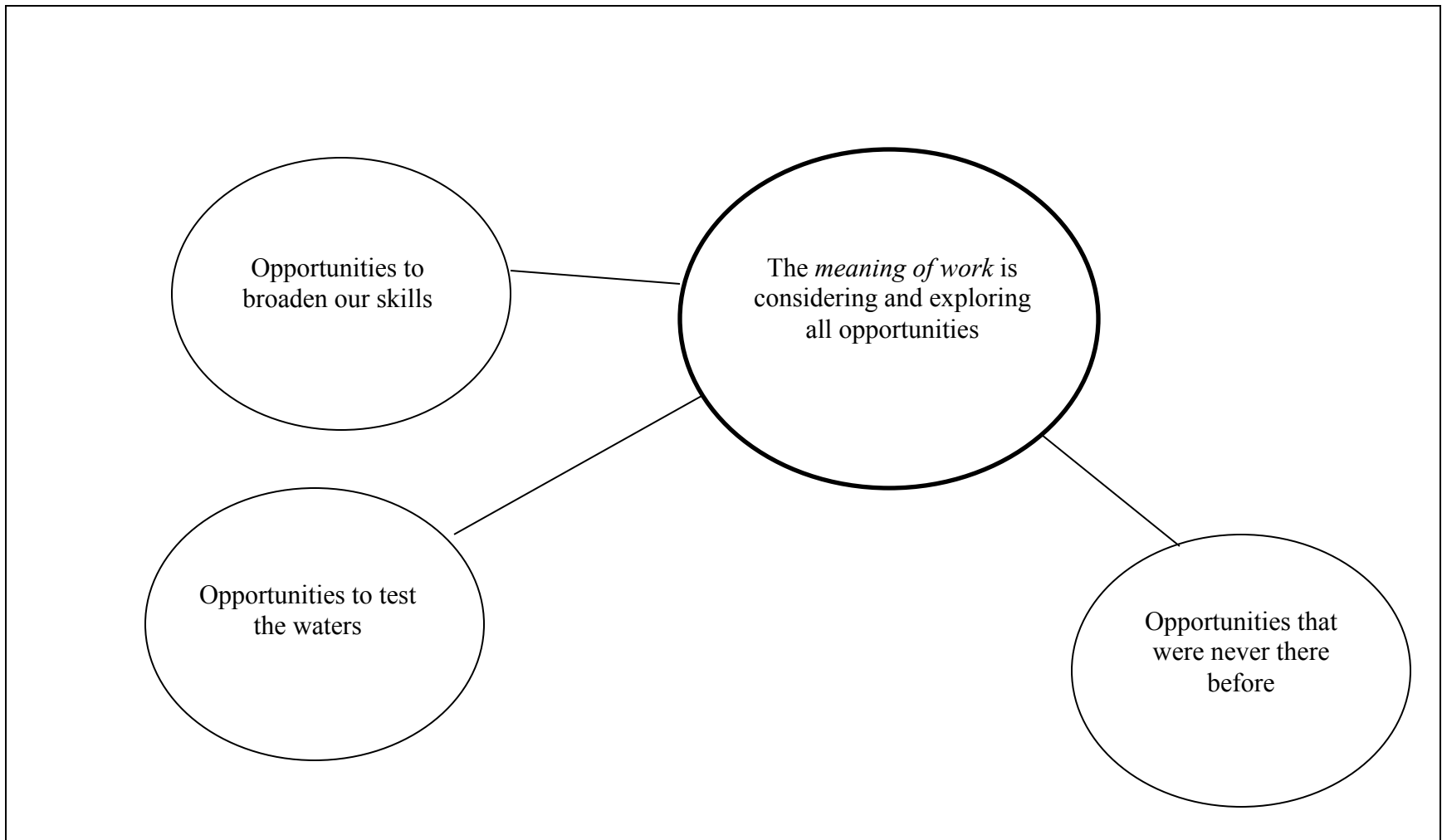
Figure 24. A visual representation of the *meaning of work* is considering and exploring all opportunities

McCabe and Savery (2005) have suggested an extension of boundaryless careers referred to as "butterfly" progressions where individuals "flutter between sectors in order to build up human capital and progress his/her career" (p. 103). In alignment with these assumptions, one person discussed the notion that having several different work experiences is positive because, "experience looks different, so you don't need experience in just one area and I think it looks better too…or it doesn't necessarily look better, but it benefits you more to have all these different experiences" (IP5, 2013, p.14). When asked to elaborate on how having several work experiences benefits an individual, the person stated the following:

> I think knowing different work environments adds constantly to what you're going to do in your next work experience because you'll have, "oh, I've worked with these kind of people…oh, I've worked in a place where I've had to sit by myself all day in a cubicle versus I have been at the front desk of some place." So, I think like it changes…it adds to how you will act in an environment. I think it also gives you lots of knowledge because each specific one you can…you don't have to use it as just a specific, "oh, this only works in this job…like this skill is only here." All these skills can be used in so many different jobs. (IP5, 2013, p.15)

Opportunities to test the waters.

Researchers label this generational cohort as job-hoppers (Ng et al., 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Currently, data shows that individuals hold an average of 6.3 jobs between the ages of 18 to 25, and those with a higher education hold more jobs than those with less education ("Bureau of Labor Statistics," 2013). When asked to respond to the idea that individuals in Generation Y are job-hopping, one person exclaimed:

> I feel like they're trying to say that like we're flies or like a monkey "oh, there's something shiny; oh, look there's something shiny over here; oh, look there's something shiny over here." And, I don't think that our job-hopping is really "oh shiny, something better" I think it's "oh, this is a new experience this is something I need to try to see if this is something I'm good at." (IP4, 2012, p. 27)

This participant shared their personal reason for trying to experience several different work opportunities:

I'm trying to see which category really…I guess which aspect of business really I fit into. That's why I'm currently working here for the support and I get an opportunity to do a little bit of everything to see what I'm really, really good at. (IP4, 2012, p. 4)

Another participant described how previous work experiences can serve as opportunities to learn what they like and dislike. The participant said:

I think a lot of work is finding out what you don't want to do first, and so you know you kind of have to experiment and see what's out there and then each job whether it was good or bad was a definite learning experience and so really each position I had, you know you go through phases of being in different work and saying "you know I don't like this or oh, I really like this job, how can I further this, how can I get paid more for this?" And so you know I think sometimes the perception is "well, you just can't keep down a job" and I mean some people are definitely like that, but you know for me it's like…it's a good feeling to kind of have a fresh start on certain jobs and I have changed a lot through the jobs that I've worked and I've learned what I want to do and what I don't want to do and now it's really narrowed down my search of this is what I like, this is you know what I know I would enjoy. (IP1, 2013, pp. 14-15)

Reinforcing this idea, one person talked about their lessons learned from previous work positions. They said:

And, then after that I did mostly service jobs. I was working in coffee shops and restaurants and that sort of thing. And, they were fun but you didn't make any money at them and they're not things you want to do for the rest of your life. But, they were fun and they taught me about stress level—like I learned how to work in very stressful environments and be fine. And, then I worked in the hotel industry and learned that I am not a huge fan of corporate business styles. (IP5, 2013, pp. 3-4)

Another participant expressed their same perception on previous work experiences. They said, "There's a lot of good aspects of situations or a lot of good learning experiences I've had through work. Just like learning what I like and what I don't like" (IP4, 2012, pp. 6-7). That same participant stated that the purpose of testing the waters was to find a career that they could eventually settle into and have stability, as expressed in the following quote:

But, I'm trying to model my grandmother's and great grandmother's career choices. I don't want to be that person who literally changes jobs six times because that's the way XXX (Mother) is. I mean now I'm okay with it. I'm really trying to find out what I want to do and where I want to go after I graduate and… yeah….I would like to say that after grad school that I worked with one company or I chose one career and I did it the entire time…even if I changed companies, or changed managers, or changed title

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positions as long as I'm along the same career path and it still brings me joy…I'd like to stay there. (IP4, 2012, p. 26)

This participant's statement is in alignment with literature that disputes the notion that Generation Y individuals are job-hopping. Terjesen et al. (2008) and Dries et al. (2008) reported that Generation Y individuals do want long term career progression and that organizational security is important. It could be argued that these participants are searching for person-job fit and person-organization fit (Robbins & Judge, 2007). Furthermore, the idea of testing the waters is in alignment with both Levinson's life stage development model (1978) and Super's career development model (1957). Levinson's model is based on age. "Early adulthood (20-40) consists of the following: early adult transitions (17-22), entering the adult world (23-28), thirties transition (29-33), and settling down (34-39). Between the ages of 17 to 22, individuals are "to begin thinking about one's place in the world separate from the institutions of youth (e.g. parents, school)" and "to test one's initial choices about preferences for adult living" (Ornstein, Cron, & Slocum, 1989, p. 118). Upon entering the adult world between the ages of 23 to 28, individuals are "to develop a sense of personal identity in the world of work and nonwork (e.g. family, community)" (Ornstein, Cron, & Slocum, 1989, p. 118). Thus, it could be argued that these five Generation Y participants are currently trying to figure out and develop their identity in the areas of work and non-work, based on their age. In alignment with this notion, perhaps the societal expectation for young adults to figure out what they want to do for the rest of their lives at such a young age is unrealistic, and causes unnecessary pressure.

A similar argument is based on Super's career development model, which consists of the trial stage where individuals are "to identify interests, capabilities, fit between self and work, and professional self-image" (Ornstein, Cron, & Slocum, 1989, p. 121.). The second

career stage of Super's model is establishment, where the purpose "is to increase commitments to career, career advancement, and growth," and "to develop a stable work and personal life" (Ornstein, Cron, & Slocum, 1989, p. 121). Thus, participants could be testing the waters based on their age and/or career development stage.

   Opportunities that were never there before.

   As mentioned in chapter two, there has been an increase in boundaryless, protean, and kaleidoscope careers (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). All three career types are characterized by the career locus of control shifting from the boundaries of the organization to the control of the individual (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). Likewise, participants discussed how work is different from previous generations. More specifically, they reflected on the point that individuals no longer keep just one job throughout their lifetime. In describing previous generations, one participant said:

> I think it's very common, especially for our generation to switch jobs so much and so I told you the story of my grandfather whose like worked for the same oil company for 50 years and that just does not happen anymore. (IP1, 2012, p. 24)

The same participant added, "I think I see in my Mom's generation a very much like you have an obligation to stick this job out" (IP1, 2012, p. 25). Another participant compared previous generations with Generation Y in the following manner: "I think of it as being you get a career and you stick with it your whole life and don't see that even being a possibility for most people, but also people just not wanting it" (IP5, 2013, p. 14). This was reinforced by one person who suggested that in the future the individual would, "probably go after some other entrepreneur opportunity" (IP3, 2012, p. 10). On the other hand, one participant shared the story about their grandmother in attempt to provide an example of them wanting to settle down into one career:

They literally had one company they worked for in the same line of job for their entire 40 plus working years, or career years. My grandmother worked for a hospital, she was a nurse, and then my great grandmother worked for a bank. And, you know, that was it. That was their portfolio…period. Where they're like …well actually my grandparents were the ones like, "it's okay, you don't have to settle down, you don't have to settle down yet," and I kind of want to. I want to find that career path; I want to be set like they were. (IP4, 2012, p. 25)

Participants reflected on reasons for why individuals are no longer working in one job for their entire career. One participant discussed current society as, "just being able to create new things and new reasons to work" (IP5, 2013, p. 16). And a result of creating new things and reasons to work, said the following:

I think there's just so many more options and so I don't know that if those options weren't there or if they just weren't thought of for the two previous generations, but for our generation we just have so many things to do and to be… that it's just kind of like, "why would you just stop at one?" "Why would you just want to do one job when there are all these really cool jobs out there?" (IP5, 2013, p. 14)

Another driving force that influences people to explore opportunities is the following:

It's just because there's just so many different types of people and everybody's like, "well there's so many different people, what do I want to be?" Even though you were raised in one way, you see all these opportunities….it's like the job-hopping, there's all these different opportunities…well I want to see them all before I choose one, you know. (IP4, 2012, p. 29)

One additional reason there is more opportunity is that there is the capacity to find jobs through the use of technology:

I think that's a huge thing now is we are so connected through the internet that it's completely changed things. I mean you can go on Craigslist and look for a job now you know whereas before you would have to drive around or go on foot and drop off your resume. And, you can look at globally…looking for a job in another country and that opportunity was never there before, so technology has been huge. (IP1, 2012, p. 28)

In 2010, Lohr reported that there was a well-established pattern of jobs created by technology. However, other individuals have astounding things to report. Rotman (2013) has stated that technology is actually destroying our jobs due to it being able to replace employees, thus

reducing the demand for people. This provocative finding is supported by the Wharton School

stating that technology is reducing employment, and playing a role in the disparity of wealth in

our nation ("A Smaller Piece of the Pie," 2013).

Additionally, one participant mentioned how staying in one job is not even possible

anymore. They said:

> I think there is also the feeling that you can no longer work your way up in a
> profession….that there is not a lot of opportunities to do that. Like, my grandpa talks
> about all the time….if you just stick with the job you have financial security, you are set.
> I don't have that feeling now with a job anymore. (IP1, 2012, p. 31)

And last, one participant made the following point, "Just because you just got into the

first job and you worked it for the rest of your life and you were miserable doesn't mean you

really had more job stability than someone who was job-hopping" (IP4, 2012, p. 27).

Summary of the essential theme.

First, the spread of the hermeneutic spectrum is provided for *The Meaning of work is*

Considering and Exploring All Opportunities, along with a visual representation.

Subsequently, a summary is provided for the essential theme and its corresponding essential

sub-themes in a table format (see Table 18) displaying key points from the participants and

supporting literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum.

In respect to the hermeneutic spectrum, this essential theme has a narrow spread of

hermeneutic description. There were also two levels of descriptive interpretation (i.e., essential

and sub-essential themes), resulting in a moderate spread of description. However, even within

these two levels of descriptive interpretation, there was little descriptive variation in the

individual constructions for this essential theme. The level of descriptive variation could be the

direct reflection of all five participants either being in the same life stage (Levinson's life stage

development model) or being in the same career development stage (Super's career

development model). All of the participants shared the need to seek out and explore work

opportunities. These opportunities provide the individuals with the chance to test the waters,

build their skills, and take advantage of things that were never there before for the previous

generations. In conclusion, the participants have all shared a similar lived experience of this

essential theme—based on the possible contextual factors of age, cohort, career stage, and/or the

evolution of work itself. The spread of hermeneutic description for this essential theme is

presented in Figure 25.
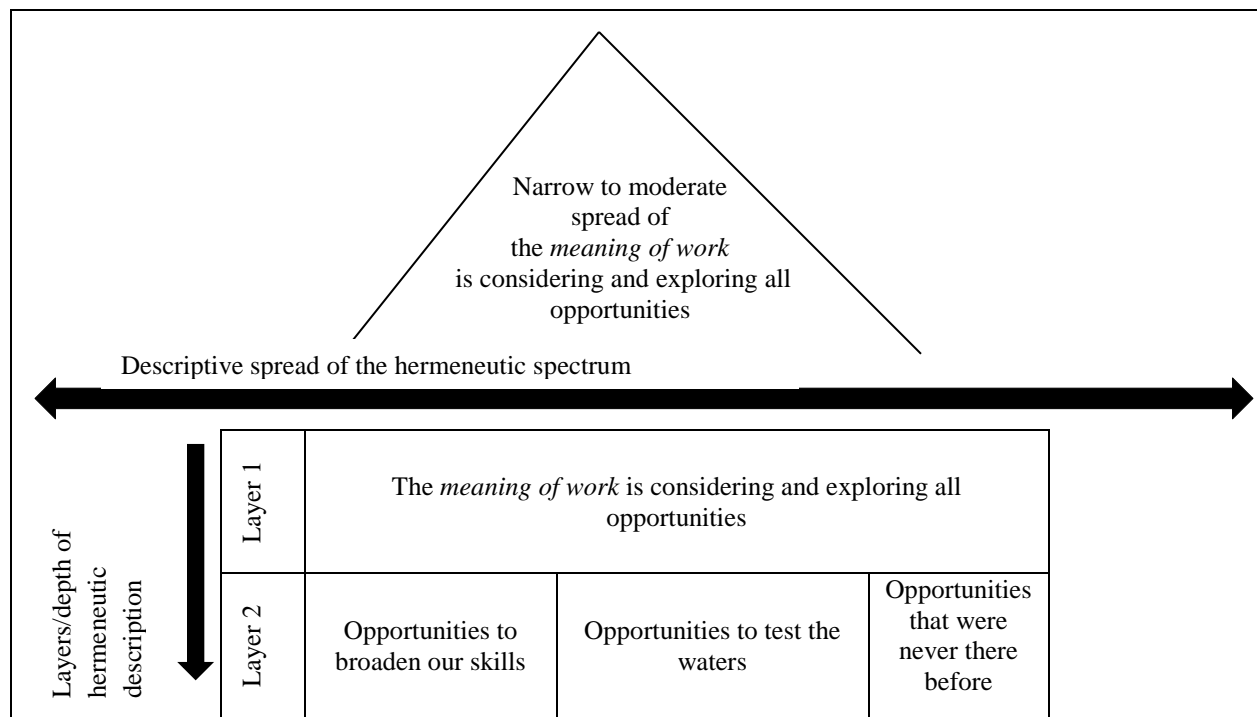
Figure 25. A narrow to moderate spread of hermeneutic description for the *meaning of work* is considering and exploring all opportunities.

Key points from participants and supporting literature.

In summary, for these five study participants, one essence of the *meaning of work* is to

consider and explore all opportunities. This essential theme is composed of three essential sub-

themes including: opportunities to broaden our skills; opportunities to test the waters; and

opportunities that were never there before. Table 18 summarizes the essential sub-themes by

providing key points from the participants, along with supporting literature.

Table 18

Key points from the essential sub-themes of the meaning of work is the considering and exploring all opportunities

Essential sub-themes	Key points from Participants	Key points from supporting literature
Opportunities to broaden our skills	• Holding several jobs over a lifetime is positive because we have accumulated a large amount of skills to offer to an organization.	• Individuals are in control of their own careers (Swanson & Holton, 2009). • Boundaryless careers focus on individuals developing transferable skills (Sullivan & Emerson, 2000). • Butterfly progressions is an extension of the boundaryless career where individuals progress their career by "fluttering" among sectors (McCabe & Savery, 2005, p. 103).
Opportunities to test the waters	• We try different work experiences because we are figuring out what we are good at doing. • Having several work experiences provides us with opportunities to learn what we like and what we dislike doing. • We want to eventually have a stable career that provides us joy.	• Generation Y individuals are job-hoppers (Ng et al., 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2008). • Individuals hold an average of 6.3 jobs between the ages of 16 to 25. Those with higher education hold more jobs than individuals with less education ("Bureau of Labor Statistics," 2013). • Generation Y individuals seek long-term career progression and value organizational security (Dries et al., 2008; Terjesen et al., 2008). • Person-job fit and person-organization fit (Robbins & Judge, 2007). • Levinson's life stage development model (Ornstein, Cron, & Slocum, 1989). • Super's career development model (Ornstein et al., 1989).
Opportunities that were never there before	• Work has changed over the generations because individuals no longer have just one job their entire life. • Some of us still eventually want to settle into one career when we figure out what we are good at doing. • We are able to create new reasons to work in today's society.	• There is a rise of boundaryless, protean, and kaleidoscope careers (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). • Locus of control has shifted from the organization to the individual (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Peiperl & Baruch, 1997). • In 2010, there was a pattern of jobs being created by technology (Lohr, 2010).

Table 18

Continued

Essential sub-themes	Key points from Participants	Key points from supporting literature
	• We want to experience as many opportunities as possible before choosing one career path. • We are able to find jobs through the use of technology. • There is the feeling that individuals can no longer work their way up in a profession like previous generations. • An individual being in one job their whole life, but being miserable, is no better than someone who is job-hopping.	• In 2013, researchers reported that technology could be destroying our jobs ("A Smaller Piece of the Pie," 2013).

Conclusion of Chapter Four

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings by providing descriptive quotes that made explicit the voice of the participants and situated the phenomenon in its context. The posed research question for this study was, "Based on their lived experience in the workplace, how do the five Generation Y employees in this study describe the notion of 'the *meaning of work*,' and why so? The notion of the *meaning of work* was described by the co-construction of the ten essential themes including: the *meaning of work* is influenced by education; the *meaning of work* is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful; the *meaning of work* is balance; the *meaning of work* is completing tasks and being compensated to meet our basic needs; the *meaning of work* is the importance of social relationships; the *meaning of work* is considering and exploring all opportunities; the *meaning of work* is influenced by our social networks; the *meaning of work* is a reflection of who we are; and the *meaning of work* is working for an

organization that functions well; and the *meaning of work* is influenced by the current state of the economy.

These ten essential themes were composed of essential sub-themes and essential sub-sub-themes that provided additional layers of depth in understanding the phenomenon and illuminated the participants' reasons for why they believed each essential theme is important in their shared lived experience of the *meaning of work*. The combination of the ten shared essential themes, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes create the structural essence of the *meaning of work* for these five participants.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

This dissertation has provided four chapters: Introduction; Review of Informing Literature; Methodology; the Shared Stories of Five Generation Y Employee's Meaning of Work; and Conclusion and Implications of the Findings. Chapter One provided the purpose, informing bodies of literature, methodological framework, informing theoretical frameworks, research questions, rationale, researcher's history, ethics, and definitions. Chapter Two presented a review of literature for both Generation Y and the *meaning of work*. This review illuminated the gaps in the literature, further substantiating the need for this study. Chapter Three described the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology and concomitant methods used in this study. Chapter Four presented the ten essential themes, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes that formed the structured essence of the *meaning of work* phenomenon for the five participants in this study.

The purpose of this study was to conduct an exploratory, in-depth examination of Generation Y participants to try and more fully understand, identify, and describe some work-related meaning and patterns among the individuals in this cohort. The depth and the richness of the findings from this study provided an understanding of how the five Generation Y individuals in this study described and perceived their *meaning of work*. These findings revealed the complexity of the *meaning of work* phenomenon. Some of the essential themes, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes were consistent with the existing literature, such as the influence of the economy, balance, working for an organization that functions well, and the opportunity to do work that is meaningful. While others were worthwhile surprises, such as how the participants described the notion of testing the waters and their complex perception of the

importance of education. These findings provide idiographic data that future studies can build upon and reflect the need to continue trying to understand Generation Y individuals at a deeper, more intrinsic level. In addition, this study provides recommendations based on the findings for organizations, individuals, and the field of Human Resource Development (HRD), which is explained in detail in Chapter Five.

With that said, the fifth and final chapter is divided into five sections. The first section discusses the relevance of my findings to the informing theoretical frameworks presented in chapter two. The second section is a description of my lived experience as the human instrument. Next, I present the authentication criteria for this study. The fourth section addresses the following research question: How do the findings from this study inform, among others, HRD research, theory, and practice? And, the final section is a reflective conclusion of this chapter and the study.

Relevance of the Findings to the Informing Theoretical Frameworks

As mentioned in both Chapter One and Chapter Three, my data collection and analysis did not fit into a specific framework that was meant for testing theory. Instead, I used theories to inform my study by gaining an initial understanding of the *meaning of work* and Generation Y constructs. By doing so, I was able to bound the purpose of my study and develop my initial research questions. This section is divided into two parts. The first part is a discussion of the generational theories. The second part is a discussion of the *meaning of work* theories. Within each corresponding part I discuss the following: how the findings from this study are relevant to the theories; how the theories illuminated what I saw in the findings; and questions provoked, if any, from this examination. I conclude this section with suggesting recommendations based on the preceding discussions.

Discussion of the Generational Theories

My study was informed by two generational theories (Mannheim 1952, 2000; Howe & Strauss, 1997, 2000). Howe and Strauss (1997, 2000) defined generations by a range of 20-22 years, thus illuminating the range of birth dates that are encompassed by this cohort. They suggested generations are "shaped by events or circumstances according to which phase of life its members occupy at a time" (Howe & Strauss, 2007, p. 42). Therefore, characteristics of people are not defined by their age groups, but by the generation that they belong to. Mannheim (1952, 2000) explained that generations have the following in common: they share the same social location, they must have consciousness of being within a group, and they must stem from the same region. Sharing the same age, group, and social class, results in individuals having similar life experiences. The five participants in this study all lived in the same geographic region and were approximately the same age.

Similarly, Howe and Strauss (2007) stated that characteristics of a generation are influenced by "how they were raised, what public events they witnessed in adolescence, and social missions they took on as they came of age" (p. 42). Both theories suggest that having similar life experiences result in the development of similar patterns of thinking and behavior, illuminating the importance of understanding the Generation Y cohort at a deeper, more intrinsic level. With this said, the participants shared several contextual influences: education; current state of the economy; and social networks, such as family. In addition, one could propose that witnessing older generations work for organizations that do not seem to care about their employees' well-being or loyalty has influenced these participants to desire balance, meaningful work, and to work for organizations that function well.

Howe and Strauss (1997, 2007) also emphasize the importance of the state of society as generations mature. They suggest, "It matters very much to the makeup of a generation whether it comes of age during or after a period of national crises, or during or after a period of cultural renewal or awakening" (2007, p. 45). The Generation Y cohort is considered a hero generation. Thus, these individuals are focused on "actions, community, and institutional life" because they were born "after a spiritual awakening" (p. 47). In support of this notion, participants discussed the desire to find a career doing meaningful work, such as helping people and changing society for the better.

Howe and Strauss (1997, 2007) offer that the generations construct can be used as a measure of predictability—reinforcing researchers' desires to generalize some similar generational characteristics to all individuals in the cohort. The findings from this study support the idea that there are shared meanings among individuals on a broad level. One could propose this broad level encompasses the shared similarities of a generational cohort. However, the findings from this study also underscore the importance of individual differences within a generational cohort. An example is the essential theme of *the meaning of work is balance*. Balance could be considered a shared similarity among the Generation Y individuals. But, on an individual level, one participant experienced and perceived balance differently from another participant. For example, one person believed in setting strong boundaries between work and life. The other person explained that it was really all in flex. So, while one can conclude that balance is important to Generation Y, we still need to understand what balance means to individuals within this cohort. Therefore, while generational theories can be used to understand the broad, shared characteristics of a cohort, it is important to acknowledge, examine, and understand the individual differences. This examination provokes several questions. First, to

what extent we should be labeling generations with all-encompassing characteristics? And second, to what extent should organizations be implementing one-size-fits-all practices based on these broad shared characteristics, given the variation of individual differences?

Discussion of the Meaning of Work Theories

Four informing theoretical frameworks for the *meaning of work* are presented below. These include: a model of the meaning of work (The MOW International Research Team, 1987); the meaning of work and meaning at work (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009; Chalofsky, 2003); meaningfulness at work and meaningfulness in work (Steger & Dik, 2010); and work as a job, career, or calling (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Wrzesniewski, 2003).

A model of the meaning of work.

The MOW International Research Team (1987) provided a model of the *meaning of work* that consists of three operationalized constructs: conditional variables (antecedents), central variables to the meaning of work, and consequences. They suggested that the *meaning of work* is influenced by personal, career, and environmental situations, thus illuminating the complex interactions and interrelationships that exist in understanding this phenomenon. The antecedents for the model are family and individual age, birth cohort, sex, and education. The central variables for the model are work centrality, societal norms, and intrinsic and extrinsic values. The final operationalized construct for this model of the *meaning of work* is consequences.

The findings from this study support the antecedents of education, family, and birth cohort. An essential theme of this study was the *meaning of work* is influenced by education. All five participants attended college and possessed a four-year degree. The influence of family was an essential sub-theme. How the family influenced the participant's *meaning of work* varied on an individual level. Participants also discussed the importance of individuals such as role models.

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In relation to birth cohort, there were similarities since the individuals were part of Generation Y, thus resulting in some shared behaviors and thinking patterns (Mannheim, 1952/2000; Howe & Strauss, 1997/2007). Sex was implicitly and age was explicitly relevant to the findings of this study. One could propose stratifying future samples based on those two variables.

Work centrality, societal norms, and intrinsic and extrinsic values (The MOW International Research Team, 1987) are all relevant to the findings from this study. Work centrality is the role and importance work plays in one's life. In relation to this variable, one of the essential themes from this study was *the meaning of work is a reflection of who we are*. This theme encompasses the idea that these participants believe in working hard and that work is important to them—especially doing work they believe is meaningful.

Societal norms are defined as the expectations about an employer and obligations people are expected to contribute (MOW International Research Team, 1987). Similar to societal norms, is the essential theme *the meaning of work is working for an organization that functions well*. Participants discussed the importance of their basic expectations being met in the workplace including: not feeling like property; being treated well by management; being treated with respect; being trusted and given autonomy; working for an organization that has evolved into the 21st century; and being rewarded for hard work. In respect to obligations, participants worked because it is the expected thing to do, and because they wanted to be a productive member of society. Obligations were not discussed in specific relevance to the workplace, but to society.

The last central variables are intrinsic and extrinsic values of work goals and outcomes (MOW International Research Team, 1987). I suggest that the essential themes *the meaning of work is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful* and *the meaning of work is a reflection of who we are* is related to intrinsic values. Doing work that is meaningful provided them

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fulfillment. And, participants believed that working hard is an important part of who they are and what they believe in. The extrinsic values of work goals and outcomes is related to *the meaning of work is working for an organization that functions well* and *the meaning of work is completing tasks and being compensated to meet our basic needs.* Similar to work goals, participants discussed the importance of being recognized for hard work. One participant described how fulfilling it was to be promoted at work. When no reward is offered, such as a promotion, one participant explained that the job is, "a dead end and you think why am I even trying because it doesn't matter" (IP1, 2012, p. 8). In relation to work outcomes, participants discussed the importance of working for benefits and money to be able to meet their basic needs.

Finally, consequences are the expectations and assumptions one holds about work taking place in the future and the outcomes the individual expects from working (MOW International Research Team, 1987). Participants shared their expectations of finding work they believe is meaningful. An outcome mentioned was finding a career that provided a balance between doing meaningful work and being financially secure. One participant emphasized that money would not be the most important driving force for choosing a career. They said, "So I think that's the biggest thing is money isn't everything" (IP1, 2013, p. 17). The same person explained the following, "my career…that eventually it will blossom into something that is fruitful in my life, that does mean something—that is a beautiful experience in my life" (IP1, 2012, p. 30). This notion is reiterated by another participant that wants work to eventually be "fulfilling and something I happen to be paid for" (IP4, 2012, p. 20). And, another participant explained that after they are finished with their current work opportunity that they will, "go after some other entrepreneur[ial] opportunity" (IP3, 2012, p. 10).

This model of *the meaning of work* illuminated several variables that were important in understanding the phenomenon. However, the participants did not mention any of these variables explicitly by name; therefore we can only hypothesize the level of similarity among the constructs. This point provokes two questions for future ponderance. To what extent are the findings from my study similar and dissimilar to the variables in this model? And, how well do these narrowly defined constructs capture the true complexity of the *meaning of work* phenomenon? Or, are there components that are missing from the model?

The meaning of work and meaning at work.

Chalofsky and Krishna (2009) proposed the separate, but interacting notions of meaning of work and meaning at work. Meaning of work is focused on individual and intrinsic motivation, and meaning at work is the relationship between the individual and the organization. The findings from this study do not separate the two notions, as meaning at work was never mentioned by the five participants. I would propose that rather than being two distinct constructs, the components are interrelated and combine to form the structured essence of the *meaning of work* phenomenon.

According to Chalofsky (2003), the meaning of work stems from the notion that an individual is completing meaningful work. Meaningful work is an integrated wholeness, which is constructed by three components (Chalofsky, 2003). These components are: sense of self, the work itself, and a sense of balance. Each of these three notions is relevant to my findings. The sense of self is bringing the mind, body, emotion, and spirit that are all incorporated and necessary to achieve meaning to work; recognizing and developing individual potential; believing that an individual can reach full potential; and knowing an individual's purpose and how to fit work into that purpose. Similarly, the participants discussed the importance of balance

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of work and non-work activities. Non-work activities included the importance of: mental and physical health; education; family and friends; and activities and hobbies they enjoyed. I propose that non-work activities and meaningful work are reflections of the participant's identity and values—resulting in a well-established sense of self.

Next, the work itself is comprised of the following: performing; challenge, creativity, learning, and continuous growth; and autonomy and empowerment. In alignment with the 'work itself' the participants discussed being forced to challenge their comfort zone and the importance of continuous learning. Participants discussed the importance of being trusted by their manager and the disdain of dealing with micromanagers. One participant even mentioned that being given autonomy provides room for being able to be creative and equates to the feeling of empowerment.

Last, sense of balance is the balance of work and personal self, work and spiritual self, and the balance of giving to the self and others. Balance was an essential theme for these five participants. More specifically the balance of giving to the self and others was mentioned by one participant in context of the helping profession. In addition, participants mentioned the link between balance of work and the overall balance of life.

Chalofsky (2003) and Chalofsky and Krishna (2009) illuminated the importance of the interaction between the individual and environment in understanding the *meaning of work*. They also presented several variables that were important to understanding the phenomenon and could be perceived to have similar meanings as the essential themes, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes from this study. However, this point provokes the same questions that were made explicit for the model of the meaning of work regarding capturing the true

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complexity of the phenomenon and the possibility of missing components (MOW International Research Team, 1987).

Meaningfulness at work and meaningfulness in work.

Steger and Dik (2010) proposed a framework for meaningfulness at work and meaningfulness in work. They also illuminated the notion that work is an interaction between the environment and the individual. Steger and Dik (2010) suggested that meaning is composed of two components, comprehension and purpose. Purpose is long-term and provides structure for what individuals do and participate in. Comprehension involves the notion of person-organization fit theories. Meaningfulness at work is when an individual understands his/her fit within the organization she/he works for. The participants discussed how work is a reflection of who they are, underscoring their drive to find work that is meaningful to them to obtain person-job fit (Holland, 1985) and person-organization fit (Robbins & Judge, 2007), which provides the link of an individual's values to the workplace. Meaningfulness in work is the self-understanding an individual has about his/her own identity. Therefore, meaning is derived from work when individuals understand his/her role within the organization's overall purpose.

 Participants discussed the importance of being involved in the process and feeling ownership of their work—thus as a result, are perhaps able to understand their role in their organization. However, it could be posed that these individuals are still trying to figure out their identity as workers when they enter the workforce—corresponding to the notion that they are *testing the waters* and exploring all opportunities that they can.

Steger and Dik's (2010) theory illuminated that meaningfulness at work and meaningfulness in work are constructs that were possibly related to the *meaning of work* phenomenon. Both theories by Chalofsky (2003) and Steger and Dik (2010) elicit the need for

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research to further investigate and understand the similarities and differences between constructs such as meaningfulness, meaningful, meaning at work, and meaningless; and the role of each of these constructs in informing the *meaning of work.*

Work as a job, career, or calling.

Last, Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) believed employees can be job crafters of their own work. Employees who craft their own work are capable of changing how they view work, their work identity, and ultimately, the meaning of work. Employees can view work as a job, career, or calling (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, & Rozin, 1997; Wrzesniewski, 2003), thus illuminating that these terms have different meanings and are not necessarily interchangeable. Employees who consider their work a job seek financial rewards and work out of necessity (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Wrzesniewski, 2003). Employees who view their work as a career are focused on advancement and achievement (Bellah et al., 1985; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). And, viewing work as a calling entails employees being focused on fulfillment and usefulness of their work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Wrzesniewski, 2003). In respect to work as a calling, participants reinforced the notion that work should be "something that enriches your life" (IP4, 2012, p. 10) and work should provide fulfillment. Wrzesniewski (1997, 2003) suggest that individuals who seek financial rewards and work out of necessity consider their work a job, versus a career or calling.

According to the findings in this study the categories of job, career, or calling do not appear to be exclusive. When viewing the *meaning of work* phenomenon holistically, it seems that even though some of these participants considered their work a career or calling, they still worked out of necessity to meet their basic needs. Thus, provoking the question of to what extent are these views of work exclusive?

Conclusion

Several of the informing theoretical frameworks for the *meaning of work* presented above stem from a post-positivist perspective. According to Merriam (1998), "Theorizing about data can be hindered by thinking that is linear rather than contextual" (p. 188). While these theories inform the *meaning of work* by acknowledging the interaction of the individual and the environment, the theories encompass "context-stripping procedures" (Mishler, 1973, p. 3). In fact,

> …what is usually generated is simply a larger and more inclusive *theory-in-a-box*. Theories-in-boxes have as their central characteristics the assumption of regularity and predictability. They generally address the physical world rather than the social or socially constructed or political world. (Lincoln, Lynham, Frank, Nafuko, & Shinn, 2013, p. 6)

A consequence of these theories stemming from the post-positivist paradigm is that study participants respond to a survey in which the researchers have pre-determined the definition of the constructs. Pre-determinism results in constructs that are too rigid and do not account for individual constructions of the variable/s or influence of context, which may or may not be in alignment with the ones proposed by the survey. This point is in alignment with the questions provoked for several of the theoretical frameworks. According to Lynham and Lincoln (2013, paper-in-progress), "Context demonstrates a certain 'stickiness' such that findings are deeply ensconced in the setting, residing as a permanent part of any scenario" (p. 13). Thus, it is important to call attention to the notion that by dismissing contextuality, some theories such as these may be at risk of reducing a complex phenomenon, such as the *meaning of work*, to less than its true essences.

In conclusion of this section, if it important to emphasize the importance of continuously making sure that the theories that we use in research and practice are still applicable and relevant

to the current workforce. To do so, I recommend that we use the General Methods model of theory-building research in applied disciplines created by Lynham (2002). This model included five phases: "conceptual development, operationalization, confirmation or disconfirmation, application, and continuous refinement and development (of the theory)" (p. 229). Application "enables further study, inquiry, and understanding of the theory in action" and an outcome of this phase is to be able to "use the experience and learning from the real-world application of the theory to inform, develop, and refine the theory" (p. 233). The phase of "continuous refinement and development" includes the "ongoing study, adaptation, development, and improvement of the theory in action and ensures that the relevance and rigor of the theory are continuously attended to and improved on by theorists through further inquiry and application in the real world" (p. 234). This model can be used to help researchers and practitioners assess whether theories conceptualized on the *meaning of work* and generations are applicable and relevant to the current workforce; and if not, to engage in continuous refinement and development so that their work is not based on atheoretical grounds.

My Lived Experience as the Human Instrument

Guba and Lincoln (1986) stated that, "rarely does anyone report how he himself was changed by undertaking the study or what personal truths he found as a result of his interactions with a project or a culture" (p. 148). They suggested, "That is an unfortunate omission, since in the process of becoming aware of other value perspectives and cultures, we also become more aware of ourselves as persons, as professionals, and as scientists" (p. 148). Therefore, this section is dedicated to describing my lived experience as the human instrument. I examine my lived experience in relation to the seven characteristics and five desirable qualities proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1986). In addition, I provide advice to others who may be considering or

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already conducting a study using a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology stemming from the interpretivist paradigm.

Seven Characteristics of a Human Instrument

The seven characteristics of a human instrument include: responsiveness, adaptability, holistic emphasis, knowledge base expansion, processual immediacy, opportunities for clarification and summarization, and the opportunity to explore atypical or idiosyncratic responses. Each of these characteristics is discussed below.

Responsiveness.

The first characteristic is responsiveness, which is the ability of the human instrument to be interactive with the participant(s) and the environment. Responsiveness entails being able to provide, be responsive to, and be aware of cues that are taking place during the interview (Guba & Lincoln, 1986). I was extremely nervous during my first and second interviews, as I had never interviewed a stranger. I had an entire list of interview questions that I had prepared beforehand. These questions were created from: a review of the informing theories and literature; my chosen methodological approach; and previous participation in a proposal development course. Reflecting back, having a pre-prepared list of questions had both positive and negative aspects. The positive aspect of the list was that I was so nervous conducting the interview that my anxiety made it difficult to probe the participant's responses. The list provided plenty of backup questions to ask while my mind was blank. The negative aspect was that I had opportune times to probe during these first two interviews that were not taken advantage of. I was not able to think of probing questions to the participants' responses until I came home and transcribed the interviews. Consequently, my data from the first round of interviews was not as rich as it could have been.

I made notes on the transcribed interviews of where to follow-up and probe certain topics or statements. I was able to see my error, adjust, and become finer tuned into being responsive to the participants. I believe my anxiety stemmed from the concern of asking the individuals personal questions. I felt as though I could be invading their privacy. For example, during my first interview the participant shared the importance of wanting to pursue a career where they were helping people. More specifically, they wanted to become an advocate. During my second interview, I needed to follow-up with the question of why becoming an advocate was so meaningful to this individual. I felt uncomfortable asking that question since I know that people may have traveled quite the journey in life to be passionate enough to become an advocate. I did not want to offend the individual or seem as though I felt entitled to knowing that type of information. My advice to others is to be confident as the human instrument. Asking personal questions is part of using this type of methodology because we are trying to deeply understand the meaning of a phenomenon, which is complex. It is within these questions that we gain rich data that provide a deeper level of understanding that would not be known otherwise. If a participant feels uncomfortable answering a question then they will tell you.

Holistic emphasis.

The second characteristic of a human instrument is having a holistic emphasis, meaning there are no boundaries to the number of constructs that can be derived from the data, except by participant responses and limited imagination (Guba & Lincoln, 1986). I found this concept difficult to conceive during the preliminary analysis of my data. When using a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology it is necessary for the researcher to be consciously aware of any pre-existing biases and pre-judgments, and to make them explicit (Moustakas, 1990). However,

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I found it extremely easy to want to attach a label previously learned in class, or from the textbooks, to ideas mentioned in the interviews.

For example, it would have been easy to identify and label certain categories as intrinsic (doing meaningful work) and extrinsic motivation (doing tasks to get compensated to meet our basic needs). However, text books and peer-reviewed articles narrowly define extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, thus I did not want to force the data into existing categories. By doing so, I would be ridding my phenomenon of its true complexity. In addition, my participants never used the terms, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, to describe their lived experience of the *meaning of work*. So I feel as though it is important to not jump too quickly to pre-existing labels, and generalize them to explain notions the participants are describing. I allowed myself to let the pre-existing notions go and let the data speak to me during the constant comparative analysis. In doing so I was able to use the participants' descriptions and language, along with my own imagination, to construct the essential themes, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes—rather than being dictated by previously acquired information.

Adaptability.

Adaptability is the third characteristic of a human instrument, which is being able to adapt to the environment, context, and informational needs (Guba & Lincoln, 1986). Due to the emergent nature of a study located in the interpretivist paradigm, researchers often do not know what they are investigating until they start interviewing participants. As a result, the human instrument has to be able to adapt to the idea that the interview questions, focus of the study, and methodology and methods may need to be modified as the study progresses.

Being adaptable and flexible caused me a lot of anxiety in the beginning of my study. As previously mentioned I was trained in the post-positivist paradigm so I wanted structure and

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clearly stated outcomes throughout the process. However, as time progressed I became more comfortable with the emergent nature of this type of study. I think patience is an important trait to encompass because in time all of the elements started to come together and it began to make sense—I had to learn to trust the emergent process, rather than try to follow a procedure!

Processual immediacy.

The fourth characteristic of the human instrument is processual immediacy, which is "the ability to process data immediately upon acquisition, reorder it, change the direction of the inquiry based upon it, generate hypotheses on the spot, and test them with the respondent or in the situation as they are created" (Guba & Lincoln, 1986, p. 136). As mentioned above, it took time for me to get used to being able to change the direction of my inquiry during an interview and during the data analysis process. Previously, when conducting a study I was used to reading questions or instructions verbatim to a group, within a specific order, and with no modifications. Therefore, it was a struggle to adjust to re-ordering, modifying, and probing questions based on the participant's responses.

In addition to this, I found myself troubled with trying to fully comprehend the meaning of an emergent study. When I started conducting the interviews I was confused on the process of the study itself and caught up in worrying about whether or not I was doing it right. As the study progressed, I became more aware and comfortable with the emergent process. I became a better active listener. By doing so, I was able to change or modify my interview questions on the spot. I was comfortable enough by the fifth interview to summarize my hypotheses back to the participant to check for relevance and accuracy, and confirmation or disconfirmation. Doing so allowed the opportunity for the participant to provide further explanation or clarification. As a result, I was able to elicit and gather richer data.

Knowledge base expansion.

Knowledge base expansion is the fifth characteristic of the human instrument. During a study the human instrument continuously utilizes both propositional and tacit knowledge. Additionally, Guba and Lincoln (1986) suggest that we also are expanding our knowledge base on an unconscious level. The premise of this suggestion is that our engagement with the data continues in our minds even when we are not consciously aware of it—through hunches, feelings, impressions, and even our dreams. I support this idea based on my own personal experience during the process of data analysis.

During the data collection phase, I was somewhat still distant from the study itself. My first round of interviews took place over a four month period. Once I had transcribed an interview and conducted a preliminary analysis I was able to put it away until my next interview, which took place three to four weeks later. However, once I had conducted my entire first round of interviews I started the constant comparison process of my study and I was completely physically and emotionally immersed in my data. My entire house was covered with notecards. I had drawings, posters, and notes everywhere that I created to help me work through the data.

Sometimes I felt as though the process was overwhelming. The process continued for several weeks until I was satisfied with my results and felt as though I had something rich, descriptive, and reflective of my participants to be able to take back to them for member-checking purposes. Sometimes information or thoughts clicked when I least expected them to. And, while I do believe the process can be overwhelming at times I think it is a necessary experience in order to progress through this part of the process successfully. Otherwise, your mind will not continue to work through all this information on an unconscious level.

I propose that if you are in the midst of this process, any major distractions would be barriers to remaining immersed and completely engaged in your data—thereby not allowing for a continual stream of thinking, reflecting, and creativity to take place. Van Manen (1990) recommends that researchers implementing a hermeneutic phenomenology study maintain a strong and oriented relation to the inquiry process. He warns that if a researcher does not maintain this relation to the study then one is at risk for aimless wonder and becoming sidetracked—resulting in a disinterest in the topic, and leading to inaccurate interpretations and findings.

The opportunity for clarification and summarization.

The opportunity for clarification and summarization is the sixth characteristic of a human instrument. These are instances where the researcher can ask for clarification of statements, for statements to be further explained, and summarize the interview data for the purpose of a credibility check (Guba & Lincoln, 1986). As time progressed and I gained experience interviewing the participants I started to feel more comfortable and confident. Thus, I was improving in my ability to take notes, listen, and clarify and/or summarize statements and responses with the participants. As a result I was able to immediately attain feedback, which prevented me from spending time after the interview entertaining and analyzing false understandings or assumptions about a participant's responses.

The opportunity to explore atypical or idiosyncratic responses.

The final characteristic of the human instrument is the opportunity to explore atypical or idiosyncratic responses from the participants rather than seeking out the norm. This characteristic provides the chance/s for new ideas, interpretations, revisions, and even expansion of the researcher's thoughts and boundaries all together (Guba & Lincoln, 1986). In this study

there were factors that all five participants shared and ones that were unique to the individuals. For example, all of the participants were pursuing or had attained a four-year degree and all of them had been affected by the downturn of the economy. However their specific career paths, factors that influenced their development of the *meaning of work*, and work-related experiences that motivated them all varied on an individual level. The individual differences are where I found some of the atypical or idiosyncratic responses. To elicit these individual differences, I had to pose questions that forced reflective answers from the participants. These answers provided a deeper level of understanding and resulted in new ideas, interpretations, revision, and expansion of thoughts and boundaries for this study.

Desirable Qualities of the Human Instrument

Guba and Lincoln (1986) suggest five desirable qualities that the human instrument should strive to possess. These qualities include: having empathy, dealing with psychological stressors, being a good listener, being attentive to the social and behavior signals of other individuals, and finding other people truly interesting. Each quality is discussed below in relation to my own lived experience.

Having empathy.

The first desirable quality is empathy, allowing for understanding to be able to take place. I propose that most people who choose to study a phenomenon from a hermeneutic phenomenological methodological perspective already possess empathy. Otherwise, they would not be interested in the richer, deeper understanding of a phenomenon. I suggest that empathy is even more prevalent when the human instrument has experienced the phenomenon being studied themselves. I am an individual in the Generation Y cohort who has reflected on the *meaning of work,* thus it is easier for me to understand and share another individual's feelings and

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experiences regarding the phenomenon. Thus, it is easier for me to walk in their shoes, so to speak.

Dealing with psychological stressors.

The second desirable quality is the human instrument must also be able to deal with the psychological stressors that are inherent in this type of study. Guba and Lincoln (1986) mentioned the following stressors: dealing with isolation, handling large amounts of data, dealing with one's own reflections, and being able to change and adapt as the human instrument throughout the study. As I previously mentioned, being submersed in this type of study can be mentally overwhelming. I believe it is important to have a support system in place. A student in my cohort was conducting a study using the same methodology, thus I was able to use her as a sounding board and as a confident for advice. In addition, my advisor was available for discussing my questions and concerns. My family also listened to the relentless conversations about my data, issues or hypotheses I was contemplating, feelings of isolation, and struggles I was having with adapting as the human instrument. In regards to my own reflections on the *meaning of work*, I consider this dissertation a journey of my own that I took with all of my participants. Thus, it was a learning experience for us all. The study provided a time and a place for this type of reflection, which not many people have the luxury of being given anymore.

Being a good listener.

The third desirable quality is the human instrument must be a good listener regardless of his or her own stance or values on issues and topics that are discussed. In the beginning my difficulty with being a good listener was irrelevant of my own values or stance on topics that came up during the interviews. My difficulty was caused my anxiety. I propose that if you have

empathy and a genuine curiosity to understand others, then a divergence of values or stances on topics will not be an issue in the conduct of this type of study.

Being attentive to social and behavior signals of other individuals.

The fourth desirable quality is the importance of the human instrument to be attentive to the social and behavior signals of other individuals (Guba & Lincoln, 1986). I believe part of this quality is getting to know your participants and creating a foundation of trust. I mentioned in my reflexive journal that it is difficult to establish trust in such a short period of time. However, even with two interviews per participant, they provided me with rich data. So I can only imagine the rich data that would be collected over multiple interviews for an extended period of time, when trust was firmly established.

Finding people truly interesting.

Last, the fifth desirable quality is finding people truly interesting (Guba & Lincoln, 1986). This quality is also a pertinent part of a hermeneutic phenomenological study. The researcher must be truly interested in eliciting the voice of individuals who have the lived experience of the phenomenon, and desire to put those voices out there in the academic and practical community. I think this point is extremely important to my study as copious amounts of research have been done on Generation Y individuals, but not with them. Therefore, a gap has been created in the literature where Generation Y individuals' voices need to be heard by researchers who find these individuals (as well as others) truly interesting.

Additional Advice as the Human Instrument to Others

In this section I provide advice to other researchers who may be considering or already conducting study using a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology stemming from the interpretivist paradigm. My advice covers two main areas relevant to implementing this type of

study. The first area is snowball sampling, conducting interviews, and data analysis. The second

area is staying true to the methodology of your study.

Snowball sampling, conducting interviews, and data-analysis.

My first piece of advice for the topic of snowball sampling and conducting interviews is

related to time. When deciding to use this type of methodology, one must acknowledge that their

ideal timeline may end up being extended. My first issue started when I received IRB approval. I

had an extremely hard time gaining entrance to the phenomenon of the *meaning of work*. People

are extremely busy and it is not that they have no interest in your study, but it is difficult to ask

them to give up what free time they have in order to participate in multiple interviews. Luckily,

my colleagues ended up recommending three of the participants. One of those participants was

able to recommend two other participants that were interested in being part of the study. I also

experienced difficulty in receiving any responses when I followed up with the individuals I

interviewed in my study for their recommendations for potential participants. My advice is to

have back-up plans for sampling. Do not assume that participants who do agree to participate in

you study will be able to recommend others who are willing to do the same. Create a tentative

network of people that you will be able to reach out to in the event that your participants are a

dead end for recruiting others.

Once you have scheduled the interviews contemplate the appropriateness of the meeting

location for an interview. If you are meeting at a neutral place then make sure it is quiet. I met

one of my participants at a coffee shop near a mall around Christmas time and it was busy and

loud. It was difficult to hear the participant when transcribing the interview. Also make sure you

have more than one recorder.

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On reflection, I contemplated additional questions that I should have asked the participants. I should have asked them why they were doing the interview. Two of the five participants shared their reasons for participating without me having to ask. I should have asked the other three the same question. It would have provided an additional lens into their interest of the phenomenon and given insight to finding others that might have been willing to participate in the study. Another example is when one of my participants mentioned the following:

> But, then past that I do really believe that for me as a person work is important both in terms of validating who I am at some level and also it's fair to say it plays a large part into my identity, which has evolved considerably over the last five or six years since graduating from college. And, I think that I work also because it is part of my identity to find meaning in life too. (IPX, 2012, tp. 2)

I would recommend taking the opportunity to probe in areas such as the following: Describe for me why you believe work is part of your identity? And, what does that mean? Additionally, I think it would beneficial to ask participants the following: How did they figure out what work means to them? And, what was their process for doing so?

In relation to data analysis, this was another area where I struggled. There were times I felt as though I had no idea what I was doing. So, I sat down and wrote out a list of procedures that I used as a guide through the process. For example, I used the constant comparative method described by Lincoln and Guba (1986), so ahead of time I wrote out all the steps that I needed to complete in order to conduct this process in a rigorous manner.

Staying true to the methodology of your study.

In reflection of my experience as the human instrument I believe it is important to revisit one of Van Manen's (1990) necessary research activities. He stated that one necessary research activity in a hermeneutic phenomenological study is to "maintain a strong and oriented relation" (p. 33) to the phenomenon being studied. By doing so, the researcher is able to avoid making

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inaccurate interpretations of the data and being sidetracked (Van Manen, 1990). Based on my

experiences I discuss below, I believe it is important for the human instrument to not only

maintain a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon, but to the methodology of the study

as well.

Throughout my dissertation process I experienced several inquiries and recommendations

from peers and committee members in regard to my sample and the write-up of my findings that

were not in alignment with my methodology.   As a result, I was forced to delve into the

literature and to understand the use of my chosen methodology at a deeper level. I presented an

argument discussing the suitability of the strategy used for sampling the participants in my study

with supporting evidence stemming from the selected paradigm, methodology, and informing

research and theoretical frameworks.

Establishing the foundation of my argument through intense examination of the literature

led to a positive outcome of furthered gained knowledge and understanding. However, I believe

my experiences also emphasize the need for all of us to gain conscious awareness of the lenses

that we possess and that we may sometimes knowingly (and unknowingly) influence our

inquiries, request, and recommendations to others. These lenses influence our ontological (what

makes for reality) (Guba, 1990) and epistemological (what makes for knowledge of reality)

(Guba, 1990) views and thus, influence our behaviors, perceptions, and beliefs about the world

(Willis et al., 2007). Thus, in conducting research as the human instrument I recommend that

individuals have a responsibility to stay true to the methodology of one's study and be prepared

to counteract opposing ontological and epistemological views that are not in alignment with the

purpose of your study. But in doing so, use the opportunity to start developing a level of

expertise on not only your topic, but within yourself as well by becoming consciously aware of the lenses you carry.

Conclusion of My Lived Experience as the Human Instrument

To summarize my lived experience as the human instrument I want to re-visit the statement by Guba and Lincoln (1986): "rarely does anyone report how he himself was changed by undertaking the study or what personal truths he found as a result of his interactions with a project or a culture" (p. 148). Thus, I provide my inner reflections on my experience with the participants and how I changed as an individual.

In the field of organization development, researchers and practitioners discuss the notion of transformational change (Cummings & Worley, 2009). Transformational change is explained by Cummings and Worley (2009) as "such fundamental change entails a new paradigm for organizing and managing organizations. It involves qualitatively different ways of perceiving, thinking, and behaving in organizations" (p. 505). This type of paradigmatic change takes place for the human instrument as well as a result of trying to understand a phenomenon at such a deep, intrinsic level. This research study forced me to question my own perceptions, beliefs, and values in searching for and understanding my construction of the *meaning of work*. Both the participants and the human instrument take a deep journey into self-awareness and reflection on the phenomenon.

Below is a direct quote from my reflexive journal as I reflected on my interviews with all five of my participants. I said,

> I am really starting to question my *meaning of work* and my beliefs around what I believe work should be and what role I should allow it to play in my life. It really creates this question of how much of my identity is wrapped up in my work . Work is such a large part of all of our lives—how can you completely separate the two. I wonder how many people's *meaning of life* is influenced by work. How do I define work? I don't even know—it changes every day based on my mood, every year based on my experiences.

Do I have this grand meaning of work that I've never really put into perspective? I don't know. (Reflexive Journal, 2012, p. 2)

And, then I reflected on the inspiration that I took away from my interviews with the first three

participants. I wrote the following:

I feel like when I do these interviews I walk away motivated. A piece of every single individual's story has motivated me in my own work in some form or another. I think for the first participant it was their drive towards doing something meaningful such as advocacy. For the second participant it was their strong work ethic. And for the third participant it was the bravery that it takes to quit a job and start your own business. These factors are motivating me in some form or another to do my part in society as well. This in itself is something that I don't think people realize they have the potential to do. This experience has been overwhelmingly positive. I think there is some influential and motivating piece we can take from every single person's story to apply it to different domains of our lives. I actually feel honored that I have the opportunity to be able to do something like this. (Reflexive Journal, 2012, p. 5)

And finally, I asked all of my participants to provide a metaphor of their *meaning of work*. Thus,

I, too, have contemplated this question and settled on the following:

My work says something about me—but it doesn't paint the whole picture. Work to me is a piece of glass/stone (i.e. tessera) of the mosaic—not the entire mosaic. Work fits in the mosaic and tells a story about me, but not the whole story. Work does not define me as a whole individual. (Reflexive Journal, 2012, pp. 2-3)

In conclusion of my lived experience as the human instrument I ponder the influences on

the *meaning of work*. During the course of this study, my reflection on my own meaning of work

changed based on the circumstances taking place in my life from day to day, moment to moment,

and week to week. Maybe our quest and journey searching for the *meaning of work* is not meant

to ever end. This notion is similar to Frankl's (2006) statement regarding the meaning of life. He

said,

For the meaning of life differs from man to man, from day to day and from hour to hour. What matters, therefore, is not the meaning of life in general but rather the specific meaning of a person's life at any given moment. (p. 109)

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Authenticity

Authenticity is the criteria that characterize studies stemming from the interpretive paradigm of inquiry on a metaphysical level. There are four criteria that are established in the overall goal of achieving fairness (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The first criteria is ontological authentication (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) that was achieved in the study by the participants each, individually, having a better understanding of *the meaning of work* since their reality has been explicated and reflected upon. An example of this criterion is that one participant told me after we had completed our second interview that they were glad they had volunteered to be in my study. They said it forced them to reflect on questions they would not normally contemplate.

The second criteria is educative authentication (Lincoln & Guba, 1986), which was achieved by having all the participants appreciate the constructions throughout the study to the final product (through successive member checking) regardless of personal value frameworks. This process allowed for the participants of the study to become educated of other's viewpoints. I believe that educative authentication was apparent after the second interviews took place. The second interviews encompassed member-checking. Participants were given a table outlining the essential themes, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes. I included descriptive quotes from the participants that provided support for the corresponding essential themes. This resulted in the participants being able to read other participant's quotes from their individual interview, and reflect and remark on them. Below are direct quotes from the participants after reading the table of essential themes, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes. One participant shared the following:

> There were certain things that people said in here that I hadn't really thought of, but then after just quickly reflecting on it…yeah that's there. I mean it might not be at the forefront of my mind, but it is affecting my meaning of work even if it's not one of my top five I guess is what I want to say. (IP4, 2013, p. 1)

The same participant expressed that they had never thought about one essential theme listed. They said, "I had never thought about the social relationships" (IP4, 2013, p. 4). This statement is in alignment with another participant that said, "Looking at the outline, I really do relate to all of them. And some of them are even ones I didn't think about before, but definitely do reflect how I feel about work and stuff like that" (IP2, 2013, p. 1). And last, another participant shared the following, "and it's cool to see the other folks and how they were really pretty on board with my opinions too. I think that was really interesting" (IP1, 2013, p. 1). I believe that these quotes reflect being appreciative of other's viewpoints and even acknowledging the expansion of knowledge that takes place from being exposed to them.

The third characteristic is catalytic authentication, which is the notion of putting theory to practice (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). In order to achieve this characteristic, this study provides a summation of research that begins to give a voice to individuals in the Generation Y cohort. The study provides stakeholders, such as organizations that employ Generation Y individuals, an initial understanding of this generations' construction of the *meaning of work*.

And, last, tactical authentication is that the ability to put theory to practice will result in an actual change taking place (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). These five Generation Y participants interviewed for this study hopefully feel a sense of empowerment by understanding what *the meaning of work* means to them and how they can make necessary changes to their lives in order to align their needs with their work.

Implications for Research, Theory, and Practice

This section attends to the following research question: How do the findings from this study inform, among others, HRD research, theory, and practice? For the purpose of answering this question, the section is divided into three corresponding parts: research, theory, and practice.

Research

The findings from this study inform several areas of future research for the *meaning of work* phenomenon including: accumulating knowledge from diverse perspectives; sampling; narrowly defining constructs; hermeneutic spectrum; and future topics to explore related to the *meaning of work* and Generation Y.

Accumulating knowledge from diverse perspectives.

It is my intention that the findings of this study will contribute to the accumulation of knowledge of these two bodies of literature, and serve to provide idiographic data that future studies can build upon. One such example of research that this study's findings can inform is being conducted by Steger, Dik and Duffy (in press). They have created a survey instrument that measures the construct of meaningful work. The survey accesses three components of meaningful work including: "the degree to which people find their work to have significance and purpose;" "the contribution work makes to finding broader meaning in life;" and, "the desire and means for one's work to make a positive contribution to the greater good" ("Meaningful Work," n.d., para. 4).

As mentioned in Chapter Four, several of the participant's descriptions of the *meaning of work* are highly related to Steger, Dik and Duffy's (in press) three components. One of the shared essential themes for these five participants was the *meaning of work is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful.* Several of the essential sub-themes, such as *helping people make their lives better* and *changing society for the better* are related to Steger et al.'s (in press) component of "the desire and means for one's work to make a positive contribution to the greater good" (para. 4). Participants also discussed their desire for work that is important and provides enjoyment, engagement, fulfillment, and passion. This desire is related to Steger

et al.'s (in press) component of "the degree to which people find their work to have significance and purpose" (para.4).

My research informs the researcher's survey (Steger et al., in press) by further substantiating that these components are important to understanding meaningful work, and informing the *meaning of work* phenomenon. This notion underscores the importance of building knowledge about phenomena through diverse paradigms and methodologies of research. Doing so would provide various lenses in examining and understanding the *meaning of work*. I propose that a survey instrument can be developed and used to measure each of the 10 essential themes that were constructed from this study. The thick description of these findings provides valuable information that can inform this development to promote further understanding of the *meaning of work* and produce findings that could be generalized to a specific population.

Sampling.

Another area of focus for future research is sampling. The purpose of this study was to try and understand the nature of the essential human experience of the *meaning of work* for the five interviewed Generation Y participants. Due to the paradigmatic and methodological stance of my study, my sample was not purposefully stratified. While the localness of a study is influenced by such variables as class, culture, and occupation—it would be a priori to utilize a theoretical framework based on these variables for this study stemming from the interpretive paradigm. In addition, phenomenology is interested in the "essentially human experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 62) regardless of the existence of specific views, orientations, lens, and categories. I recommend that the suitability of sampling techniques based on the selected

paradigm, methodology, and informing theoretical frameworks and theories needs to be further developed and refined throughout the literature.

Next, I recommend that future studies stemming from a different paradigmatic and methodological stance inquire about how insights and/or perceptions of the *meaning of work* would be similar or dissimilar if the sample was stratified to address sub-populations of the Generation Y cohort. Researchers could stratify by variables such as: gender, education levels (college educated versus no college education), culture, position levels, industry, and geographic location.

While I did not utilize the shared characteristics of my participants as a lens in presenting the findings of my study, these similar characteristics are worth noting in respect to the use of the snowball sampling technique. When using the snowball sampling technique there is the existence of implicit criteria of participants recommending other individuals who are similar. Snowball sampling is "dependent on social networks" (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 160) and starts with the researcher (Brown, 2005). McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001) discuss the role of homophily in social networks. They state that "homophily is the principle that a contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people" (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001, p. 416). Thus, it is appropriate to assume that individuals within a specific social network will recommend others who are similar to them resulting in shared similar descriptive characteristics—such as being college educated.

It has been suggested that a problem with snowball sampling is that the technique will not include individuals with dissimilar characteristics in the population, such as those with no college education (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). In response to this problem, Brown (2005) recommends for researchers to "be aware of the exclusions of this method" (p. 57). This point

emphasizes the importance of understanding and emphasizing the localness of a study, and in application "constructions are necessarily based on local circumstances and experiences, and hence have applicability, strictly speaking, only in the local situation" (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 71).

With that said, I recommend that individuals that choose to study this phenomenon from the interpretivist paradigm continue to work towards maximum variation, which is the notion of tapping into as many of the multiple realities of an experienced phenomenon as the researcher possibly can (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a result of maximum variation, numerous multiple realities will be accounted for and the contexuality of this phenomenon will continue to be broadened. In addition, by tapping into many multiple realties (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) the researcher is also reaching out to a variation of social networks that encompass a range of participants with similar and dissimilar characteristics. In conclusion, findings from both types of sampling would contribute to the accumulation of knowledge for the phenomenon of the *meaning of work* for Generation Y, providing greater depth and understanding.

Narrowly defining constructs.

As discussed in the informing theoretical frameworks section, findings from this study provoked the question of whether or not we often too narrowly define our constructs—resulting in a plethora of various meanings that are not accurately describing our targeted population. Thus, we need to continuously reflect on the question of how we know that the constructs we are selecting in our research study accurately represents our population's description of the phenomenon being studied.

Hermeneutic spectrum.

Another area of future research is the hermeneutic spectrum. In Chapter Three I began to outline the philosophical and methodological argument for the notion that was constructed with my advisor (Lynham, personal communication, May 28, 2013). The hermeneutic spectrum is a result of the hermeneutic circle and encapsulates the individual and shared constructions and co-constructions of a phenomenon by reflecting the spread (range) and depth (level) of interpretations. The multiple constructions of reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) are represented on the spectrum by its spread and depth of variation. The boundaries of the hermeneutic spectrum are only limited by the context of the study, and the environmental and social interactions of the participants. The finding of the hermeneutic spectrum informs improved methodology.

Chapter Four visually depicted the three ranges of described meaning on the spectrum: narrow, moderate, and broad. The philosophical and methodological argument for this construct needs to be further developed. We need to examine if the terms spectrum, spread, and depth accurately describe the notion. In addition, we need to further develop the meaning and understanding of the narrow, moderate, and broad range of descriptions to evaluate if these accurately portray the various levels of descriptive interpretation.

Future topics to explore related to the *meaning of work* and Generation Y.

Based on the findings from the five participants, I provide recommendations for topics of future research. The *meaning of work* is an interaction of the individual and the environment—a system of interacting parts and interrelationships that shape and influence the *meaning of work*. Research needs to be conducted on further understanding the developmental process of the *meaning of work* and how these interactions and interrelationships influence it. For these participants, the developmental process was influenced by previous work and educational

experiences, family, friends, and societal situations such as the economy and value of education. It would be useful to understand whether or not development of the phenomenon is a conscious process that is purposefully reflected on? And, to what extent does each of these variables interact to influence the *meaning of work*?

As noted in the sampling section, it would be useful to understand the *meaning of work* based on occupation and industry and to examine the dissimilarities and similarities. For example, one of the participants was an entrepreneur. Their job provided challenges and a sense of ownership. On the other hand, another participant discussed work as becoming someone else's property because they didn't ever use or implement their own ideas. Thus, it would useful to examine being an entrepreneur, and being your own employer, versus working for an employer.

Finally, as already notoriously mentioned in most of the literature, research needs to continue to sort out age, career stage, and generations. All of these participants were young and exploring their options. If the *meaning of work* is viewed from a system's perspective, then we can hypothesize that as cultural, social, and individual factors change, our *meaning of work* should shift and evolve as well. In addition society is moving toward a global workforce, thus we must address the notion of global generations. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Li and Nimon (2008) and Ralston et al. (1999) both conducted studies on the construct of generations in China and defined the cohorts on factors such as period of social reform and political orientation. Research needs to be conducted to better understand how generational cohorts are described and constructed in other countries and cultures.

Theory

It is my intention that the findings of this study will inform future theorizing and theory building on the *meaning of work* phenomenon. I used my prior analysis of informing theories and

the findings from this study to inform my recommendation for theorizing. Merriam (1998) describes theorizing as, **"**a step toward developing a theory that explains some aspect of educational practice and allows a researcher to draw inferences about future activity" (p. 188). Beginning to build theory from my study is in alignment with the paradigm to work inductively from the ground up because this type of inquiry encompasses the notion that theory is constructed from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Lynham (2002) created a general method model of theory-building which includes five phases: "conceptual development, operationalization, confirmation or disconfirmation, application, and continuous refinement and development (of the theory)" (p. 229). This section focuses on the conceptual development phase of the general method model of theory building (Lynham, 2002) for the *meaning of work* phenomenon based on the findings from this study. Lynham (2002) describes the conceptual development phase as the following, "The purpose of this phase is therefore to develop an informed conceptual framework that provides an initial understanding and explanation of the nature and dynamics of the issue, problem, or phenomenon that is the focus of the theory" (p. 231). According to Lynham (2002), this phase includes "the development of the key elements of the theory, an initial explanation of their interdependence, and the general limitations and conditions under which the theoretical framework can be expected to operate" (p. 232).

It became visible, based on my findings that the contextuality of a phenomenon can be continuously changing. For example, in my study the findings such as *student loan debt* and a *degree is no guarantee of anything* is highly related to, and influenced by, the essential theme of *the meaning of work is influenced by the economy*. These dynamic inter-relationships underscore the point that a theory may never be fully complete (Lynham, 2000). A theory never being

complete is also supported by the idea that the range of described meaning for a phenomenon has infinite amount of possibilities on the hermeneutic spectrum. I propose that if the economy was to drastically improve over the next few years' then *student loan debt* and *a degree is no guarantee of anything* may not have such an influence on the *meaning of work* because college graduates will be able to enter the workforce and find full-time employment in their chosen career field. The *meaning of work* is a highly contextual phenomenon and can change based on society, economics, and social, political, and individual factors. With this said, it is important for researches and practitioners to understand which overall contextual factors may contribute to understanding this phenomenon.

In alignment with the axioms of the interpretive paradigm, you can't distinguish cause from effect because all factors are "mutual simultaneously shaping" (Lincoln & Guba, 1990, p. 70). In Chapter Four I mentioned the relevance of systems theory to the findings, and how the essential themes mutually shape the *meaning of work* for these five participants. Systems are not linear (Swanson & Holton, 2009), thereby "system ideas concern interaction between parts which make up a whole" (Checkland & Poulter, 2006, p. 7). Systems theory is "analyzing the relationship between the parts and the impact of those relationships" (Swanson & Holton, 2009, p. 19). As stated by Checkland and Poulter (2006), "Social situations are always complex due to multiple interactions between different elements in a problematical situation as a whole, and systems ideas are fundamentally concerned with the interactions between parts of a whole" (p. 4). Thus, I propose that we should approach the *meaning of work* from a systems model perspective and take a holistic view of the phenomenon by identifying the parts, the whole, and the interactions that take place between them and their environment/s in a non-linear manner. Figure 26 is a proposed systems model of the *meaning of work*.
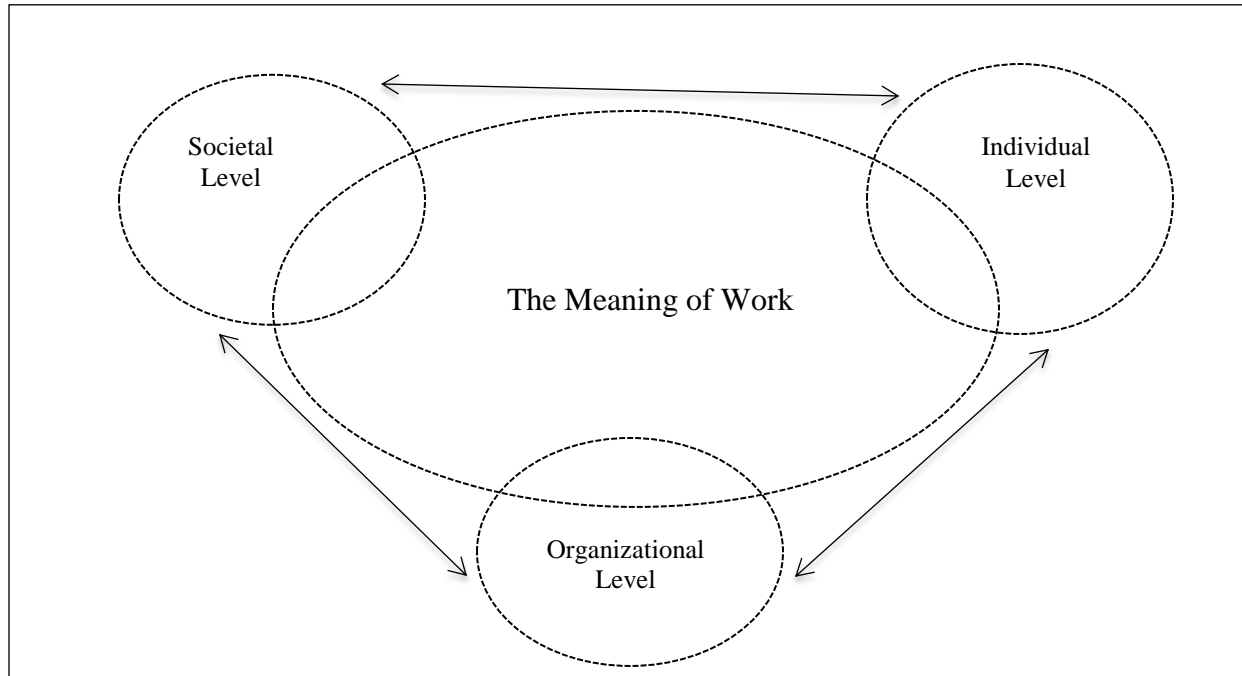
Figure 26. A systems model of the *meaning of work*

A systems model of this phenomenon allows practitioners and researchers to view it from

a holistic point of view and to understand societal, organizational, and individual level factors

that are important when trying to help people find, understand, and/or develop their *meaning of*

work. Thus, I propose that the key elements of this systems model of the *meaning of work* are:

societal level, individual level, and organization level. Based on these key elements, future

research needs to continue working on building this theory within the conceptual phase of

development. All three of these key elements need to be further defined. Next, researchers must

understand what the interrelationships and level of interdependence are among the key elements.

Finally, the limitations and conditions of the operation of the systems model of the *meaning of*

work needs to be further understood and explained. While the findings represent a local study, it

is important to note that the research did not take place in one organization, but represented

several diverse positions across various industries. Thus, there is the potential and need to

explore the system's model of the meaning of work within other contextual populations as well, such as the *meaning of work* for women or men in Generation Y—in various, specific fields. Doing so, would allow researchers to determine the level of transferability and transportability of the theory from an interpretive perspective (Lincoln & Lynham, 2011).

Once the conceptual development phase of the systems model of the *meaning of work* has been further examined and described, the model needs to continue to be addressed within each of the remaining phases of the General Method model: "operationalization, confirmation or disconfirmation, application, and continuous refinement and development (of the theory)" (Lynham, 2002, p. 229).Going forward I suggest that we continue to build, refine, and evaluate the usefulness of a systems model of the *meaning of work*.

Practice

Finally, it is my intention that the findings of this study will inform practice related to the *meaning of work* phenomenon. This section is divided into three levels of practice that are relevant to an organization: organizational level, individual level, and generational level.

Organizational level.

Several of the participants voiced the notion that they do not want to be treated like property by their employer. One participant shared how they feel like they become someone else's property at work because they are not using their own ideas to accomplish tasks. Organizations could institutionalize practices that would allow employees to be part of the decision-making process and creating innovate ideas that reach well beyond the walls of the cubicle. Doing so could promote feelings of ownership of their work as well. This notion is reflective of the essential theme *the meaning of work is the opportunity to do work that is*

meaningful. Participants described experiences of meaningful work being challenged, being

involved in the process, and feeling ownership.

Participants reinforced the notion that they want to work for an organization that has

evolved, as reflected in the essential theme *the meaning of work is working for an organization*

that functions well. Perhaps organizations could re-design their physical environment in which

work is conducted. As one participant eloquently stated:

> …there's obviously a need out there to rethink how people work. So much of what we
> see as the standard culture of large corporations that employ a huge segment of the
> population is modeled after the industrial revolution. Cubicles really are an extension of
> assembly lines, so, understanding that that really isn't a very productive way to do
> intellectual work. (IP3, 2012, p. 17)

With this said, organizations need to spend time reflecting on a productive layout that

stimulates social interaction and work productivity. An example of a dynamic environment

explained in this study was similar to a co-working space. While this space may not be suitable

for organizations that require individuals to be present in the office, it stimulates thinking about

alternative designs and structures. Spaces, such as co-working ones, could also serve as places

employees could go if they were allowed to telecommute a few days a week. An example of this

idea put into action is what AT&T refers to as "distributed workplaces" ("The Distributed

Workplace," n.d., para. 2). They believe this approach is the future of the workforce, as it saves

money and resources. Distributed workplaces encompass the notion that work is not constrained

by a physical space, but can be accomplished anywhere, anytime the individual chooses.

Collaboration can also still take place virtually in this environment.

In addition to not treating employees like property, organizations should also make sure

their management treats people well. For several of these participants how they were treated by

management was more important than the organization. One participant stated, "Working for a

corporation I know the corporation doesn't care, so for me it's more of the management and the people on my level versus the people above me who don't care" (IP2, 2013, p. 1). Similarly, another participant discussed the importance of doing work that benefited or changed society. I asked them to explain what they meant by this type of work, and while the participant mentioned an example such as social work, they also said, "even conscious businesses—businesses that are still doing like a profit, but are being conscious of, "what is my environmental impact?" …being like conscious towards their employees" (IP5, 2013, p. 2). Thus, even if a business does not do non-profit work, it is important to note that people believe they can contribute to the greater good of society just by being conscious of how they treat the environment and their employees. Organizations need to treat employees with respect regardless of their age and position level. They need to trust employees to get their work done with a certain level of autonomy. Participants clearly stated they did not like micromanagement.

Similar to re-designing organizational structure, organizations can also actively inquire about individual employee's meaning of work and re-design job tasks. Perhaps upon hiring or even during an annual performance review, try to understand factors that contribute to the individual's *meaning of work* and design them into the position itself. For example, providing challenging work and allowing the employee to be part of the process are both experiences of meaningful work that could be incorporated into a job. If the organization offers flexible schedules or options, then ask employees what balance looks like to them and have options for them to choose from—not a one-size-fits-all practice.

Organizations need to also prepare for the possibility that the workforce eventually consist of individuals who are more similar to consultants or entrepreneurs rather than traditional employees that report to one organization. Therefore, transferrable skills could become deemed

more and more important. This notion is relevant, as many Generation Y individuals who cannot find traditional employment are starting their own businesses. We need to ask ourselves, how can organizations prepare for this type of employment type transition? Perhaps, the field of HRD should revisit the domain of career development. While the career is no longer the responsibility of the organization, people are becoming more self-employed, thus should we focus career development on helping these individuals.

Developing systems is also a role of HRD (Ruona, 2000). The meaning of work is an interaction of the individual, organization, and society. It is a construct that is informed from a system's approach. As we continue to develop systems in an organization we need to take these notions into consideration. It's not just the responsibility of the organization to provide meaningful work, but it's also the responsibility of the individual to figure out how they can find meaning in their work and what that means to them. Thus, the field of HRD needs to understand how individuals do this to begin implementing policies and procedures in their systems to assist in this development.

HRD benefits society (Ruona, 2000). This notion is extremely relevant to the five participants in this study, as changing society for the better and helping people were essential sub-themes of *the meaning of work is the opportunity to do work that is meaningful*. If younger workers are indeed moving to a more meaning based notion of work then it would be important for HRD to place benefiting society and helping people as a priority so the field evolves with the workforce.

Last, it is important to discuss the role of education in preparing individuals for the workforce. Organizations in the workforce and academic institutions need to think about making the transition from college to the workforce less ideal and more practical. They need to openly

communicate the supply and demand of not only students in general, but certain majors as well. This information then needs to be openly communicated to the students. For example, as noted in chapter four, STEM majors have the highest employment rates, reinforcing the importance of communicating with the humanities majors that the unemployment rates for them in the workforce are currently low.

Similarly, we need to deeply reflect on the value of education in the workforce and the cost of a college education. How can society educate young adults without setting them up for a life of economic disaster once they have graduated college? Is college worth the expense? It is not just about being able to offer more young adults the opportunity for college, but also making sure they will be financially capable of having a successful future afterwards. In alignment with this notion many new graduates are faced with the conundrum that while they have a college education, they do not have experience. Academic institutions and the workforce need to work together to create more internship opportunities for students that are paid. Then students do not have to make the choice between making money to pay their bills versus gaining experience in their field, but not being able to make ends meet.

Individual level.

It is not the full responsibility of an organization to help employees find or understand their *meaning of work*. It seems that individuals entering the workforce (such as Generation Y) are figuring out what they can do on an individual level to find careers that are meaningful. Society and organizations must acknowledge that when Generation Y individuals enter the workforce they are still trying to figure out who they are as workers and individuals— corresponding to the notion that they are *testing the waters* and exploring all opportunities that become available. As mentioned several times, these individuals *testing the waters* and exploring

all opportunities is supported by Levinson's life stage development model (1978) and Super's career development model (1957). With this said, I propose that we should not view job-hopping as a negative characteristic of this generational cohort. We should perceive it as part of growing up and maturing within their careers. On an individual level, I recommend that people, and especially students, take the time to reflect heavily on their own meaning of work. What type of work would provide them fulfillment? What do they consider meaningful work? What does work mean to them? For what reasons do they want to work? And, what priorities (work and non-work related) are important to them? As a society, we need to allow individuals time to reflect on these notions and see it as valuable rather than time wasted. As stated by Socrates, *the unexamined life is not worth living.*

Additionally, it would be beneficial for students to immediately start thinking about how their educational costs and how the degree will transfer to the workforce. Students should think about how they can use college to prepare them for the future—skills, relevant classes, internships. College needs to be used to build a strong foundation for entering the workforce. In relevance to HRD, could the field be part of this transition from college (i.e., gaining experience, building transferrable skills, and paid internships) to the workforce? It is a core belief that HRD serves the individual and the organization (Ruona, 2002). On an individual level the field could support increasing transferrable skills and re-establishing career development. HRD can help develop skills in these individuals entering the workforce that make them more marketable to organizations.

Generational level.

Researchers and practitioners are quick to label a group or cohort of people. Based on the findings from this study, there were shared similarities among the interviewed individuals.

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By understanding more of the shared characteristics, we are able to conduct better research, teaching, and practices in organizations. However, how they experienced and described these shared similarities varied on an individual level—all of this must be acknowledged. For example, since we understand that balance is important to individuals (a shared characteristic) in Generation Y it would be useful to incorporate balance into our organizations. However, we must then acknowledge that how one individual defines balance may be different from how other employees define it—and attempt to implement practices based on this notion. In addition, if we are going to use generational differences and similarities to drive research and practice, then we must continue to understand what a generational cohort is. While several researchers have addressed the issue of describing a generational cohort, there is still a plethora of various dates and labels defining them. I suggest that we stop pushing forth the literature focusing on upholding and perpetuating negative perceptions of generational cohort characteristics—it does nothing to progress our workforce and information such as this could be used for discriminatory purposes. If we are going to implement practices based on informed literature, we need to hear the voices of individuals within the generational cohorts.

Conclusion

Findings from this study are in alignment with many of the core beliefs of HRD, as presented by Ruona (2000). The core beliefs of the field of HRD that were proposed 13 years ago are still extremely relevant to even the younger workers in the workforce. These beliefs need to be explicitly acknowledged and used to build a foundation for conducting future research, theory, and practice so that HRD can position itself to stay relevant in the workforce. As noted by Ruona and Coates (2012), there are "pull issues" that are important for the field of HRD to be thinking about that influence the "knowledge we should be generating via research, theory, and

practice to best prepare for meeting those demands" (p. 561). We should consider understanding the phenomenon of the *meaning of work* as a "pull issue" in society, as it seems to be pulling us away from what could be considered traditional practices in organizations. What is the emerging context of the workforce and how can we prepare for it? How can HRD establish itself in a more meaning driven workforce? The field of HRD needs to be prepared for this break in tradition, so that we don't "act too much like a closed system and tend towards entropy" (Ruona & Coates, 2012, p. 563). HRD professionals need to work to put the field ahead of the curve and create new, bold nontraditional practices that will be relevant for the future of our society and for an integrated praxis of research, theory, and practice—especially if we are moving to a more meaning driven workforce.

The final chapter of this dissertation offered the relevance of the findings of this study to the informing theoretical frameworks, reflections on the researcher as the human instrument and related suggestions to future researchers using this inquiry methodology, and provided implications for future research, theory, and practice. The purpose of this study was to explore and begin to understand the *meaning of work* for employees in the Generation Y cohort. The five participants interviewed for this study co-constructed ten essential themes, essential sub-themes, and essential sub-sub-themes that formed the structured essence of the *meaning of work* phenomenon. This study provided these five Generation Y individuals with a voice that will be communicated to the scholarly community. Hopefully, these findings will stimulate future research, theory, and practice to build further knowledge on understanding Generation Y and the *meaning of work.*

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Appendix A: Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: The Meaning of Work for Generation Y

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Susan Lynham, Education Building, RM 227,

Susan.Lynham@colostate.edu,

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Tabitha K. L. Coates, Organizational Performance &

Change, PhD doctoral candidate, tabitha.coates@gmail.com

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? You are being

invited to take part in this research because you are part of the Generation Y cohort (born

between the years 1981 to 1994). And, you have had at least one year of full-time work

experience.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? Tabitha K. L. Coates is a PhD doctoral candidate at Colorado

State University and will be the co-principal investigator and researcher conducting this study.

She will be under the guidance and supervision of Susan Lynham, a professor with the

University.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

You are part of the Generation Y cohort. The purpose of this study is to understand your work

experience and meaning of work.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT

LAST?

Interviews will be at a time and place that you and the researcher agree upon. There will be two

to three separate interviews. Each interview will last 90 to 120 minutes.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

You will be interviewed. You will be asked questions about your work experience. You will

also be asked questions about your meaning of work. You may be asked follow-up questions.

Interviews will be digitally tape recorded. The interviews will be transcribed verbatim by the

researcher. Each interview transcription will be linked to you by an alias. No identifying

information will be linked to you. You will be asked to be involved in member checking. You

will be given drafts of my preliminary analyses. You will check and correct any errors in the

analyses. You can give additional information that informs the findings. The purpose of these

interviews is to understand your meaning of work.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

Do not participate in the study if you were born before 1981 or after 1994. Do not participate if

you are currently under the age of 18. And, do not participate if you have not worked full-time (at

least 32 hours per week) for at least one year.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have

taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. You will have the opportunity
to reflect upon and explain what work means to you. This can benefit you by having a better
understanding of your meaning of work. This understanding could help you make necessary

changes in your life to find meaning in your work. This research will provide knowledge that

helps give a voice to Generation Y employees in the workforce. It also will provide stakeholders

(e.g., organizations that employ Generation Y individuals) an understanding of their meaning of

work.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is

voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop

participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research

records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study.

When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the

combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We

may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying

information private.

We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that

you gave us information, or what that information is. You will choose an alias of your choice at

the beginning of the study. This will be before data collection begins. There will be one list

linking your name with your alias. This list will be kept separate from all research records. The

list and the research records will be stored in separate places at the researcher's home under lock

and key. Research records include the audiotape recordings and the transcriptions of the

interviews. The research records will contain only your alias. All transcriptions typed out on the

computer will be password protected. If a place of employment is ever mentioned, it will be kept

confidential. The ideal time period to keep data is between five to 10 years. Due to the potential

cumulative nature of the study all related data will be destroyed after 10 years. Ownership of the

data will be confined to the researcher and the researcher's faculty advisor. The data will not be

shared with anyone who is not part of the study.

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? No,

you will not receive any compensation for this study.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any

questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can

contact the co-principle investigator Tabitha Coates at Tabitha.coates@gmail.com. If you have

any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human

Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take

with you.

This consent form was approved by the CSU Institutional Review Board for the protection of

human subjects in research on (Approval Date).

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this

consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a

copy of this document containing 3 pages.

_____ _____

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study   Date

_____

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

_____   _____

Name of person providing information to participant   Date

_____

Signature of Research Staff

Appendix B: Email to Participants

Dear;

The reason I am contacting you is to ask you to participate in a study examining the meaning of work for Generation Y. If you agree to participate, you will be invited to participate in at least two to three separate interviews at a time and a location that is mutually agreed upon. The interviews will take approximately 90-120 minutes each. Your overall time commitment will be approximately 270-360 minutes (4.5-6 hours) over a three to four month period. During the interviews you will be asked open-ended questions. I may also ask you follow-up questions in order to grasp a better understanding of your work experience and the meaning of work for you. You will be expected to participate in member checking for the findings and the interpretation of the results. I will provide to you my drafts of the preliminary analysis and member checking will allow you to check, and if necessary, correct the data for errors in the findings or interpretation of the results. Each interview will be digitally recorded. Each interview will then be transcribed verbatim by the co-principal investigator. The transcript will not be linked to your personal or work identification.

The purpose of this study to explore the meaning of work for Generation Y individuals, so that factors that could improve the experience and performance of these employees in organizations can be better understood. I am interested in this study as a graduate student pursuing my doctorate degree, as well as that I am a member of the Generation Y cohort who has several work experiences.

Before participating you must have knowledge of the procedures required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Appendix B: Email to Participants Continued

I have received approval from the IRB to conduct this research by meeting all requirements in conducting human research. If you choose to participate you will be required to sign a consent form. Your identity will be kept confidential. The principal investigator whose supervision I am working under is Susan Lynham, an associate professor at the Colorado State University in the School of Education.

Please call or email me if you have any further questions regarding the purpose of the study or your role as a possible participant in the study. Please let me know if you are willing to participate. We will then set up an appointment for the interview at a mutually selected time and location.

Thank you,