

Postmodern Views of Work:

The Effects of Narrative on the Perceived Value of Work

By

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## **Abstract**

As a result of the changing landscape of the world of work and the reduction of stability in occupations over the last few decades, many in the field of vocational psychology have suggested a reconceptualization in the way we view and think about work in the lives of people. These changes have prompted a shift to a contextual, constructionist view of work, and an expansion of the definition of work to include additional domains like personal care work, or unpaid work that is done for care of self, others and/or community. This particular work domain is typically genderized and thought to be largely devalued. The purpose of this study was twofold. First, this study examined the value placed on work activities evident in vignettes, in both market (work done for pay) and personal care work domains by having participants rate work activity descriptions on multiple positive and negative characteristics through the use of semantic differential pairings. Second, by employing tenets from narrative theory, this study examined the effects of reconstructing the narrative of personal care work by implementing positive changes in language in the personal care work descriptions, and having participants rate these descriptions on the same semantic differential pairings. In addition to evaluating the ratings of the work descriptions, this study also examined the relationship between value placed on work activities and gender of worker by varying the gender of the individuals in the descriptions. Relationships between the participants' salient identities, as measured by the Salience Inventory, and values placed on different work activities were also examined. Analyses indicated that the participant pool, in part, behaved in ways anticipated given societal beliefs and existing literature documenting the decreased value given to personal care work (Richardson, 2010). Further, data provided quantitative support for the benefits of a contextualization, which incorporates the relational nature of work by evidencing greater value

attributions given to work narratives emphasizing relationships. Finally, data revealed that the participants' own identification of social status and their identification with a salient work identity had no bearing on the value ratings they ascribed to the vignettes, regardless of language.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Over the past several years, many eminent vocational psychologists (Blustein 2011; Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Richardson, 1993, 2012a, 2012b; Savickas et al., 2009) have called for a change in the discourse in the way the field conceptualizes, discusses, and researches the concept of work. For the purposes of this study, discourse is defined as a set of meanings, metaphors, images or stories through which one makes interpretations and gives meaning to the world (Burr, 1995). The current paradigm found in vocational psychology theory and practice focuses largely on a decontextualized view of career development, which is highly contingent on stability in the labor force and interests related to the individual's vocational aspirations. With the advent of improved information technologies and the resulting development of a global marketplace, the stability previously inherent in employment spheres has been greatly reduced. Now, occupations are more transitory, less definable and less predictable requiring, a greater need for flexibility and adaptability (Savickas et al., 2009).

In addition to the changes in the world of work, traditional vocational theories also have come under scrutiny due to their highly individualized focus and their propensity to privilege or favor those with social capital who experience greater degrees of choice in the selection of career opportunities (Blustein, 2011). These critiques highlight shortcomings of traditional career development models in regard to classism, multiculturalism, and a lack of focus on the differences in work experiences expressed across genders (Diemer & Ali, 2009; Helms & Piper, 1994; Fassinger, 2008).

Traditional theories examine the career development process from a highly individualized and autonomous lens. Missing from the traditional discourse, as suggested by those calling for a re-crafted or new discourse for vocational psychology, is the influence of relational factors in the development of the work lives of all individuals. Models that fail to account for relational influences in work serve to propagate the definition of career as solely that which produces economic capital for the individual engaged in work behavior. A more contextualized approach for viewing the development of one's work trajectory opens the door for greater consideration of not only the relational aspects inherent in working life (Blustein, 2011), but also for a broadening of the definition of work to include work that is not done for pay (Richardson, 2012a).

The framework implemented by theorists developing relational and contextual models of vocational psychology (Blustein, 2011; Richardson, 2012a; Schultheiss, 2007; Young & Collin, 2004) is rooted in constructionism, an epistemological construct which proposes that people acquire and sustain knowledge about their self, their social processes, and culture through social interactions, relationships with others, and the language used to make meaning of and communicate these interactions (Schultheiss & Wallace, 2012). Social constructionism denies universal truths, and instead posits a multiplicity of possible truths that are both culturally and historically embedded and constructed through relationships and interactions (Gergen, 1999). The focus of relationships, the use of language as a tool to generate understanding, and the allowance of multiplicative truths in social constructionism lends itself nicely to the creation of contextual vocational theories that emphasize meaning making and mattering through the construction of work and life narratives (Blustein, 2011; Savickas, et al., 2009).



Conceptualizing work from Blustein's (2011) relational theory of working provides a solid framework for incorporating relational factors and combating some of the privilege inherent in traditional models of career development. The inclusion of relational interactions and influences, cultural perspectives, and the focus on meaning-making in work are significant contributions that provide support for individuals engaging in work activities and navigating work transitions in a global society, regardless of their access to vocational choice.

Richardson's (2012) counseling for work and relationships theory includes many of the same propositions and components of the relational theory of working. Her theory expands the definition of work even further to better account for the significant contributions and impact of personal care work, or unpaid work that is done for care of self, others or community. At present this domain of work has been either ignored or relegated to the role of "context of career" (Richardson, 2000). Additionally, this type of work is still largely genderized and marginalized, resulting in an erasure of the significance of personal care work. Richardson (2012) proposes that the field of vocational psychology, if informed by a counseling for work and relationships perspective, will be just as concerned and interested in the role of personal care work and personal relationships in people's lives as it has been with the role of market work. Equity of attention in both personal care and market work and their associated relational domains has the potential to increase self-esteem and broaden the source of dignity for individuals who participate in personal care work (Richardson, 2012a; Byars-Winston, 2012). Additionally, as relationships are a commonality in both market and personal care work domains, equitable attention to both work domains could help to attain a sense of

stability and equilibrium even in instances of work transitions or instability brought about by the ever-changing nature of the global marketplace and rapidly evolving economies.

Furthermore, as previously stated, the literature suggests that traditional conceptualizations or theories of work privilege individuals with greater levels of social and economic capital, social power, higher social class and resources for choice (Blustein, 2011, Richardson, 2010). As such, there may be little incentive for these individuals to adopt a contextual view of work or to support increasing the value of non-traditional ideas of work (e.g. personal care work, community care work). The influences of social class and privilege will be an important facet to explore when considering the impact of reconstructing the narrative of work to be more inclusive of personal care and other forms of non-market work.

While a great amount of theoretical writing has been put forth to outline and support this new conception, little in the way of empirical research has been done to provide support. This study seeks to utilize the expanded definition of work laid out by Blustein and Richardson and examine the value placed on different types of work. As social constructionism sees language as a powerful tool for making meaning and supporting discourse, it will be imperative to assess for the influence of changes in the language used to describe work and their impact on the way participants perceive the value of the work they read about.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

**Question I.** Are there a differences in the value ratings of market work and personal care work?

*Hypothesis I.* Market work will be rated as more valued than personal care work.

**Question II.** Does the gender of the character in the work descriptions affect the ratings given by participants?

*Hypothesis II.* Males in the work vignettes will be rated more positively than females in both work conditions.

**Question III.** Does the language utilized in the narrative of personal care work change the perceived value of the individuals engaging in the personal care work?

*Hypothesis III.* Characters in the personal care work vignettes in the Relational and Combined conditions will be rated as higher in value and contribution than characters in the personal care control description condition.

**Question IV.** Does a participant's social class impact how they value personal care work?

*Hypothesis IV.* While all individuals will rate individuals in personal care work vignettes as less valuable than individuals in traditional market care work vignettes, the effect will be greater for participants higher in perceived social class.

**Question V:** Does a participant's role salience impact how they value personal care work?

*Hypothesis V.* Participants with salient home/family identities will ascribe greater value to characters in the personal care narratives.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

It is not uncommon to see change or adaptation in prevailing schools of thought over time. Just as the field of psychology at large has progressed from dominant periods of psychoanalysis to behaviorism to humanistic and cognitive psychology (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013), the field of vocational psychology has also seen significant movement and adaptation across the years. The changes in vocational psychology have largely been in response to the shifting social and economic contexts of the time. Work has evolved across three dominant cultural and economic eras in American history, agrarianism, industrialism/urbanization and globalism (Savickas, 2000) with the transitory periods generating significant theory, research, and practice in vocational psychology.

#### **The Shift to a Contextual Model of Career Development**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of great activity and growth in the field of vocational psychology. This period saw a move from self-employment to employment by organizations. The modern industrial society demonstrated stability in the workforce. Careers became hierarchical with the goal of moving up or advancing to higher rankings in the organization, and it was commonplace for individuals to spend their entire career employed by the same organization. Education was also adapted to better educate and train individuals for skillsets that aligned with the industrial world (e.g. business, marketing, production, etc.). No longer was it expected that an individual's future work trajectory would follow in the traditions of family members before them (Savickas, 2000). These changes in the workforce opened up options and choices for certain individuals as they developed their future plans. The industrialization and urbanization of

the workforce necessitated a different way of thinking about work. Additionally, the increased employment opportunities for many required greater effort and attention to making vocationally related decisions. The field of vocational psychology responded to the needs brought about by the changing economic and social contexts, and as a result saw the production of one of the liveliest periods of research and theory generation. It was during this period that many of the marquee vocational theories were constructed, researched, and applied. This time period saw the development of Holland's (1973) RIASEC model and the strong emergence of the trait-factor paradigm, Super's (1980) conceptualization of career development as a process that occurs throughout the life span, and vocational theories with greater inclusion of the career development issues of women and minorities (Gottfredson, 1981), among others.

To best serve the individuals in this era, vocational psychology theory and the applied practices generated by these theories focused largely on “objectively measuring individual differences, studying occupations, and scientifically matching people to positions. These commitments led to privileging the core values of rational decision making, independence, planning, individual achievement, advancement up the hierarchy, and personal success and satisfaction” (Savickas, 2000, p. 58). The stability of the labor force during this period lent itself nicely to matching paradigms. Job markets were not changing, and as such it made sense for practitioners to help individuals uncover interests and other characteristics in their personality structures that would best align with a stable occupational environment.

Traditional perspectives of the world of work also evidenced a far greater demarcation in what is now deemed the market work sphere, or the sphere that focused

on the work one does for pay, as well as social and family work spheres. Work (or perhaps better stated as career) during this period was a set of activities that occurred outside the home in a work setting and that generated economic production. The delineation of different work spheres during this period produced an increase in value and attention attributed to the market work sphere. (Richardson, Constantine, & Washburn, 2005).

At the present moment, the world of work is yet again just past the precipice of major change and restructuring of its social and economic contexts. With the advent of improved information technologies and the resulting development of a global marketplace, the stability previously inherent in employment spheres is greatly reduced. As stated, the presence of this stability allowed for a conceptualization of career development that occurred in sequential phases across the lifespan and was driven by the notion of fixed vocational interests that would align with various work environments, allowing for development of a salient career identity attached to a particular line of stable work. Now, occupations are more transitory, less definable and less predictable, requiring a greater need for flexibility and adaptability (Savickas et al., 2009). Work in the global age of information requires not just a well-refined singular skill set, but a plethora of transferable and adaptive skills and the ability to construct meaning from the work one engages in despite its stability or transitory nature (Savickas, 2005).

Changes in the structure of the world of work certainly played a significant part in the call for a new discourse in vocational theory. However, it is not just the changing economic context that necessitated a critical transformation in the way work is viewed. The discourse of traditional vocational theories has also drawn significant critiques

regarding their propensity to privilege or favor those with social capital who experience greater degrees of choice (Blustein, 2011). Traditional theories and methods of career counseling have not adequately addressed issues of social class and race, and as such there is a need for reconceptualizing the way vocational psychology theory and practice incorporate these constructs. (Diemer, 2006; Helms & Piper, 1994). Further, the aforementioned segregation of paid work and unpaid social/family work spheres inherent in traditional vocational psychology conceptualizations serves as an erasure of the work and contributions done by those engaging in unpaid care work (Fassinger, 2008). This type of work has been consigned to “the context of career” signifying it is merely a byproduct that influences one’s work decisions, and is not in and of itself work. This results in marginalization of this work sphere and depreciation of the worth and value of the contributions produced by personal care work (Richardson, 2000). As this type of work is still largely done by women, it is likely that the erasure of the value of care work also serves to further marginalize the population of people engaging in this type of work.

In response to these changes and critiques, the last decade of vocational theory and research has introduced a new discourse in the way we think about work (Blustein 2011; Blustein et al. 2004; Collin & Young, 2000; Richardson, 1993; Savickas et al., 2009). This change encourages a shift away from the highly individualized focus of career development that predominated much of vocational psychology literature and research for last many decades to a more contextualized view of work. A contextual model of work opens the door for greater consideration of the myriad of factors that influence the construction of work. It recognizes that interactions with work and work-related decisions are not constructed in a vacuum, but are inherently relational processes.

Work-related decisions and their resulting trajectories are not solely a product of isolated individual agency, but of interactions with a multitude of internal and external influences (Blustein, 2011). A contextual model does not view the spheres of market work and family/social work as separate domains, but instead views work more holistically (Richardson, 2012a). The introduction of this type of model allows for an expanded definition of work, which seeks to better understand and recognize the relationships between work and other influential life domains (Blustein, 2011). The intertwining thread in the dialogue of the new discourse in vocational psychology is a focus on not just helping people develop careers, but helping people construct their lives through connectivity of work and relationships (Richardson, 2012a; Savickas, et al., 2009).

### **Social Constructionism in Vocational Psychology**

Many of the scientific and philosophical theories espousing a contextual model utilize or even demand a social constructionist epistemology (Mancuso, 1993). This is also true of the vocational theories that promote a contextual model. Social constructionism, an epistemological construct that has been present in sociology and philosophy for some time, has within the last decade begun to take root in the field of vocational psychology. At its most basic, social constructionism proposes that people acquire and sustain knowledge about their self, their social processes, and culture through social interactions, relationships with others, and the language used to make meaning of and communicate these interactions (Blustein, 2011; Schultheiss & Wallace, 2012). It rejects the notion of universal truths and the idea that things can only be understood through objective observations or by bringing forth internal psychic structures, and



instead posits a multiplicity of possible truths that are both culturally and historically embedded and constructed through relationships and interactions (Gergen, 1999).

In social constructionism, language is viewed as a critical component that either serves to sustain an existing discourse or to generate new understandings and meanings, which give rise to a new discourse (Gergen, 1999). With respect to vocational psychology, changing the discourse to incorporate a social constructionist perspective acknowledges multiple truths, and allows for meaning and value to be attributed to not just one construction of what work is, but to the many possible constructions created by each individual engaged in work behavior. In this perspective, language is the vehicle that produces meaning making of work and relationships via the construction of career/work narratives (Savickas, 2005). Furthermore, a change in discourse has the potential to shift power distributions (Burr, 1995) making social constructionism a prime perspective to address the aforementioned critiques of traditional vocational theories.

### **Relational Perspective of Working**

Blustein's relational theory of working (2011) is one such theory that has introduced a contextual model of career development. Rooted in social constructionism, his theory posits that people learn about their world through the contexts of the relational interactions in which they participate. A central premise of this theory is that connection and work are fundamental to survival. Blustein proposes that a perspective that acknowledges these assumptions and adopts a relational lens for viewing work can lead to the development of a vocational theory that incorporates the experiences of working across the spectrum of choice and privilege. In essence, focusing on relational aspects, a

commonality in all types of work, better addresses the experience of work for all individuals.

Blustein outlines seven fundamental propositions that comprise his relational theory of working. First, he acknowledges that the space shared between work and relationships is significant, overlapping, and reciprocal, that is each domain has the potential to affect the other. Further, the internalization of early relationships plays a significant role in shaping one's experience of and adaptation to the working world. The relational theory of working acknowledges that work and relationships cut across life contexts, and as such occur in both the market spheres and personal care spheres. Work based decisions and approaches to work transitions can be facilitated or inhibited by the quality of and influence of relational experiences. This proposition highlights the move away from the notion of career decision-making and career development as autonomous and individualized processes. Additionally, the relational theory of work places a strong emphasis on the ability of relationships to facilitate the derivation of meaning and mattering in and from work, even in situations when an individual is not able to exercise choice in his/her work role, or finds that his/her work role is frequently shifting due to the transitory nature of careers in the information age. This further illustrates Blustein's supposition that though work roles may change, the presence of relationships remains stable.

It is important to note that vocational theories at large, including traditional and postmodern relationally inclusive theories, recognize that optimal work satisfaction is achieved when work experiences are congruent with the individual's interests and values (Blustein, 2011; Holland, 1973; Super, 1980). Blustein's theory allows for the realization

of work satisfaction in instances when these optimal work conditions are not feasible or attainable by allowing for construction of meaning making through the impact of relational aspects of work. For example, an individual may be forced to engage in work tasks that may not be personally interesting or values congruent, but acknowledging how this work is beneficial to others, how it is relationally important, can give purpose and meaning to the tasks, and thus result in satisfaction. Developing a clear relational language about the work context can contribute to one's ability in constructing meaning and mattering in work (Blustein et al., 2004). The final proposition included in the relational theory of work highlights the connection and security received from culture and its ability to adaptively aid in work-based transitions (Blustein 2011).

Blustein's development of the relational theory of work is another prime example of the responsiveness of vocational psychology to the shifting needs of the world of work. The inclusion of relational interactions and influences, cultural perspectives, and the focus on meaning making in work are significant contributions that provide support for individuals engaging in work activities and navigating work transition in a global society, regardless of their access to vocational choice.

### **Counseling for Work and Relationship**

Richardson's theoretical writing about counseling for work and relationships is also rooted in a social constructionist framework. In addition to this framework, she draws from feminist and social justice perspectives with the goal of producing a conceptualization of work that is more inclusive of work behaviors of women and individuals with reduced capabilities to exercise choice in their work lives. The development and dissemination of her theory has largely been in the service of promoting

the evolution and movement in the discourse of vocational psychology from career to work, from work to work and relationships, to the expansion of work and relationships to include market work and personal care work (Richardson, 2010). In this context, work is defined as “any instrumental and purposive activity that produces goods, services, or social relations that have economic or social value” (Richardson, 2012a, p.202). The seemingly small semantic transition from the language of career to the language of work is important for multiple reasons. First, the use of the word work is more inclusive of women’s work based reality. The language of work is more encompassing and inclusionary of the purposive activities that many women do in the multiple domains of their lives (e.g. work for pay, non-paid personal familial care work, non-paid personal care work for community, etc.). It allows for valuing of work in all domains. Second, the language of work is more suitable to the realities of individuals that lack the opportunity for choice in “career development” (Richardson, 2010). Focusing on personal care work and the relationships in both personal care and market work can serve as a buffer against any negative market work experiences for individuals who lack agency in choosing their desired market work position.

**Market Work.** Richardson (2012) defines market work as “the work that people do for pay in public spheres of life as well as the work that they do in educational institutions to prepare for market work” (p.191). The current vocational theory paradigm gives power and worth to market work (Blustein et al., 2004). It is largely viewed to be not only synonymous with the idea of work, but also typically viewed as the sole concept of work.

**Personal Care Work.** Personal care work is essentially any work that is provided in the service of care without pay. This includes care of the self, care done in service of relationships (e.g. children, partners, parents, friends, other family members), and care done in the service of the community (volunteerism, time dedicated to community organizations, etc.). Data from the US Census Bureau and the Family Caregiver Alliance suggests that a significant portion of the United States population engages in this type of work. For instance, an estimated 65.7 million caregivers, or approximately 29% of the U.S. adult population, report unpaid provision of care for someone who is ill, disabled, or aging (The National Alliance for Caregiving & AARP, 2009). Personal care work is also still a heavily genderized work domain that is also overrepresented by minority groups (Richardson, 2012a; Blustein et al., 2004; Byars-Winston, 2012; Paré & Dillaway, 2005). More women than men (66% vs. 34%) shoulder the burden of caring for aging loved ones (The National Alliance for Caregiving & AARP, 2009), and more women than men work as a stay at home parent, 24% vs. 0.9% in 2012 (Vespa, Lewis, & Kreider, 2013). When personal care work is not valued, the significant work done in this domain is relatively invisible at a macro level. As women largely do this work, this could result in a relative invisibility of the contributions of the work done by women thus perpetuating inequality in the perceived value of work contributions in personal care domains (Richardson, 2012a).

While care work does not produce direct economic capital, it does produce investment in the capabilities of recipients. Receiving quality care has also been suggested as a means to help recipients of care develop skills, values, and habits that benefit themselves and others (England & Folbre, 2000). Individuals benefiting from the

provision of care services develop capabilities for future labor market success as well as for healthy relationships as a parent, friend, or spouse, resulting in productive secondary societal contributions provided by the primary care giver. Additionally, provision of care contributes to the intellectual, physical, and emotional capabilities of recipients of the care (England, 2005). Further due to the greying of the American population, the value of unpaid family members providing care to aging loved ones is projected to be the largest source of long-term care services in the United States for the next 30 years (Coughlin, 2010).

At present this domain of work has been either ignored or relegated to the role of “context of career.” Richardson (2012) proposes that the field of vocational psychology, if informed by a counseling for work and relationships perspective, will be just as concerned and interested in the role of personal care work and personal relationships in people’s lives as it has been in the role of market work. Equity of attention in both personal care and market work and their associated relational domains has the potential to increase self-esteem and broaden the source of dignity for individuals who participate in personal care work (Richardson, 2012a; Byars-Winston, 2012). Degendering and revaluing personal care serves to decrease power dichotomies present in the current view of work in our society. Revaluing personal care work may also help men to establish a broader base of work identities, which can result in reduction of the pressure experienced in male gender roles to value market work and “breadwinning” about other life roles (Pollack & Levant, 1998). Additionally, as relationships are commonality in both market and personal care work domains, equitable attention to both work domains could help to

attain a sense of stability and equilibrium even in instances of work transitions or instability brought about by the ever-changing nature of the global marketplace.

### **Life Role Salience**

Super (1980) posited that one's life is comprised of a combination of roles over the lifespan. He identified nine primary roles that individuals will play through the course of their life including (1) Child, (2) Student, (3) Leisurite, (4) Citizen, (5) Worker, (6) Spouse, (7) Homemaker, (8) Parent, and (9) Pensioner. Super also noted that individuals may not play all of the nine roles throughout their life and that they might play multiple roles at any given period. Super continued his research on life roles by examining and developing a model for determining importance individuals place in the various roles they play, expressing that individuals might view one or more of these roles as more salient. He noted that this salience can be measured by behavioral and affective dimensions by assessing one's participation in, commitment to, and values expectations around these various life role domains (Super, 1982).

In addition to specifying various roles individuals will play throughout the lifespan, Super (1980) also elucidated the domains or "theaters" in which these roles would be carried out. He cited four primary theaters including (1) the home, (2) the school, (3) the community, and (4) the workplace.

While Super drew clear delineations between work as done by individuals in the role of the worker and in the theater of the workplace and other relationally based roles and their domains, he was one of the earlier developmental vocational psychologists to acknowledge the various contexts that comprise an individual's life and include these contexts in the examination of vocational development. Further, Super (1980) noted that

the simultaneous engagement in different roles and theaters indicates that occupation, family, community, and leisure roles impact and influence each other, thus indicating some degree of contextualization and integration of these life roles.

### **Social Class and Vocational Psychology**

The literature suggests that traditional conceptualizations of work privilege individuals with greater levels of social and economic capital, social power, higher social class, or resources for choice (Blustein, 2011; Byars-Winston, 2012; Diemer & Ali, 2009; Richardson, 2010). Social class has been found to influence several aspects of the vocational development process including occupational expectations (Diemer & Hsieh, 2008), work-role salience (Diemer & Blustein, 2007), and vocational and educational aspirations (Ali & McWhirter, 2006). Further a qualitative analysis of the conceptions of work given by urban youth from lower socioeconomic stratifications demonstrated that these youths tended to view work as a means to an end and not as a means to express interests or implement self-concept, which the authors suggest is in stark contrast from the conceptions of work intended by most traditional vocational theories. In these instances, it was not necessarily the act or experience of performing the work task that was valued, but the idea that work resulted in generation of some positive gain (i.e. economic capital). This same study also demonstrated that views and beliefs of work are largely shaped by family experiences and family perspective, lending further support for the necessity of expanding the conceptualization of work to be more inclusive of the roles and influence of family (Chaves, et al., 2004).

Additionally, social class has been understandably associated with an individual's access to resources. The presence or lack of resources has been found to either facilitate



or hinder, respectively, the vocational development process (Diemer & Blustein, 2007). Research has demonstrated that individuals in lower social class stratifications lack access and opportunities for quality vocational guidance (Blustein, Juntunen, & Worthington, 2000), quality mentors or occupational models (Diemer & Ali, 2009), and exposure to rigorous college preparatory curriculum and internship opportunities (Wilson, 1996). The persistent experience of structural barriers, like lack of resources, and the potential for various forms of labor market discrimination in combination with employment in undervalued work experienced by individuals with lower levels of social capital or social status can result in emotional detachment from market work. Emotional detachment from market work could distance market work or occupational identities less salient to individuals who experience these barriers (Byars-Winston, 2012). Operating from a discourse that values personal care work alongside market work has been posited to be an additional source of dignity and affirmation for individuals who have lesser opportunity to choose or engage in market work domains that are perceived to be of greater value (Richardson, 2012a).

The literature has clearly indicated that social class plays a significant role in vocational development (Diemer & Ali, 2009; Thompson & Subich, 2006), the attainment of occupational aspirations (Ali & McWhirter, 2006), and the meaning and purpose that people place in various work activities (Chaves, et al., 2004). Shifting to a contextual model of work and relationships that accepts value placement and defines work as both market work and personal care work can provide opportunities for individuals in less than optimal or no market work placements to recognize, find meaning, and feel valued in the purposive activities that produce contributions, be they

economic or social. A contextual vocational theory of this nature can work to shift the discourse from one that favors individuals with greater degrees of privilege to one that is more inclusive of work across cultures and social classes (Blustein, et al., 2002).

However, given that the traditional discourse and conceptualizations of work favor individuals with more vocational volition and privilege, there may be little incentive for these individual who experience greater degrees of privilege to adopt a contextual view of work or to support increasing the value of non-traditional ideas of work (e.g. personal care work, community care work). For this reason, and for purposes of proposing a conceptualization of work that is inclusive to all individuals regardless of social class, the influences of social class and privilege will be an important facet to explore when considering the impact of reconstructing the narrative of work to be more inclusive of personal care and other forms of non market work.

Despite evidenced importance of the role of social class in the vocational development process, this construct is still largely underrepresented in research of vocational theory (Diemer & Ali, 2009). The diversity of measurement possibilities for the construct of social class likely contributes to this underrepresentation and also creates a lack of uniformity in the analysis of this construct across psychological research. Most attempts to objectively measure social class utilize some combination of income, wealth, occupational prestige, and educational level to construct the variable most known socioeconomic status or SES (Deimer & Ali, 2009).

### **Subjective Social Status**

While there are valid objective methods of measuring social class, these objective measures omit an important variable in the conceptualization of social status – the

perception of the individual regarding their own social status or standing. An individual's perception bears significant importance in stratification, as many individuals are prone to identification of referent groups that do not necessarily align with quantitative economic evidence that would place them in a different group. However, despite this misalignment, these individuals will likely base their perceptions of their own status and of others on this subjective conceptualization (Deimer & Ali, 2009; Mistry, et. al., 2015).

The most common measurement technique of subjective social status developed by Adler, et. al., 2000, provides a visual representation of a ladder and asks individuals to place themselves on a "rung" that they feel best represents their standing in comparison to the rest of society. This technique has been used as a measure of subjective social status (SSS) in a variety of research contexts and has been found to be a strong predictor of physical health outcomes (Adler, et. al., 2000), intergroup attitudes toward difference socioeconomic classes of individuals (Mistry, et. al., 2015), respondent's sense of personal control (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009), and as a marker of one's perceived distance from privilege (Kerr, et. al., 2012).

### **Language and Attitudes**

A key component of social constructionism is the emphasis of language in gaining knowledge and understanding of the social world. In social constructionism, it is language that constitutes reality as opposed to reflecting it (Gergen, 2001). The use of language is such a natural part of human existence that oftentimes unbeknownst to us the language we use has a dramatic impact on the way we co-construct our experience and view the world (Richardson, 2012b). Linguists and cognitive psychologists have found that language has a significant impact on the way we think about ourselves in relation to

space and time (Boroditsky, 2003), how we interpret events and make decisions (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981), and the way we perceive and explains emotions (Barrett, Lindquist, & Gendron, 2007). Studies manipulating the use of metaphorical language used to describe hypothetical crime outbreaks influenced participants suggested solutions to solving the crime problem. This study demonstrated that small alterations in the language used to describe an event can produce significantly different responses to the event (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011).

In the psychotherapy setting, interventions utilizing manipulations of language have been a used repeatedly as successful therapeutic techniques to changes thought patterns related to how therapy clients view situations or events in their life. Reframing, as it is labeled in many orientations of therapy, is often defined as the process of changing the conceptual and/or emotional viewpoint of a situation, event, or object, and placing it in another fitting context that is the same or similar (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). Language is the vehicle through which we construct and make sense of our thoughts and as such is also the vehicle through which we can reframe them and tell a different story.

Language, and the attention we give to language, can also affect our attitudes about different events or objects. In a study examining attitudes about different aspects of the work environment, it was found that directing attentional processes to specific aspects of the work made these aspects more salient. This study demonstrated that noting certain aspects of the environment or certain aspects of work activity can cue someone into noticing these aspects more and can lead to forming attitudes congruent with what was noted. For example, it was postulated that calling attention to the fact that workers are

doing the same thing over and over would make the job seem more routine and less interesting, while calling attention to the great social importance of products being made would make the job seem more significant (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978).

Taken together, this literature would suggest that implementation of language that calls to attention the importance of personal care work and relational aspects of working could lead to formation of positive attitudes about individuals engaged in this type of work, as well as increased value being attributed to this type of work and the contributions that result from this type of work.

The following chapters will outline a study that sought to provide quantitative support that builds on existing suppositions in the literature, placing a specific emphasis on the importance of the language utilized to discuss work, particularly personal care work. Upcoming chapters will detail the study design and analysis procedures, and provide summaries and explanations for how this work can further be utilized in the research and clinical practices of vocational psychology.

## **Chapter III**

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

Participants in this study included adults over the age of 18, and were recruited via utilization of Amazon's MTurk. The purpose of Mechanical Turk (MTurk) is to help people (participants) find paid tasks. MTurk enables researchers to recruit participants to perform tasks such as filling out surveys, opinion polls, cognitive psychological studies, and many others. Amazon MTurk had been extensively used by psychologists in the last few years for participant recruitment (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011, Litman et al., 2015). Participants on Amazon MTurk see a list of potential jobs (referred to as HITs) when they log into their MTurk account. Studies have found MTurk to be a promising avenue for data collection in psychological research. Analysis of demographic characteristics generally attained in MTurk participant pools have been found to be at least as diverse as noncollege samples and more diverse than convenience sampling of the college population, oftentimes the standard used in psychological research. Further, the quality of data provided by MTurk samples has been found to meet or exceed psychometric standards associated with published psychological research (Buhrmester, et al., 2011). Utilization of Amazon's MTurk allowed for a diverse sample of adults who are presently engaged in various work roles.

**Demographics.** Demographic information and descriptive statistics for the study are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Demographics of sample and descriptive statistics. (n=500)**

Variable	N	%
Sex		
Male	214	42.5
Female	286	56.9
Age		
18-29	178	45.6
30-49	141	36.2
50+	71	18.2
Race/Ethnicity		
Asian/Pacific Islander	26	5.2
Black or African American	41	8.2
Latino/Latina	22	4.4
Native American/American Indian	4	0.8
White	397	79.4
Other	10	0.2
Level of Education		
Some High School	4	0.8
High School Graduate or equivalent	42	8.4
Some college credit no degree	124	24.8
Associate's Degree	69	13.8
Bachelor's Degree	199	39.8
Graduate or Professional Degree	62	12.4

### **Instruments**

**Demographics Questionnaire.** A general demographics questionnaire was included at the beginning of all participant surveys. Demographic items included age, year in college, gender, race/ethnicity, college major, first generation student status, parental level of education and parental occupation.

### **Subjective Social Status**

To measure Subjective Social Status participants were presented with the following question and a visual representation of rungs of a ladder and asked to place

themselves at the position at the ladder that best represents their perceived social standing.

“Think of the ladder below as representing where people stand in our society. At the top of the ladder are the people who are the best off. Those who have the most money, most education, and best jobs. At the bottom are the ladder are the people who are the worst off. Those that have the least money, least education, and worst jobs. Select the rung that best represents where you feel you stand on the ladder.” (Adler et al., 2000).

**The Salience Inventory; Neville & Super, 1986.** The Salience Inventory is, by design, a 170 item inventory designed to measure participation in, commitment to, and value expectations of five different life roles: Student, Worker, Homemaking, Leisurite, and Citizen. As this study is primarily targeted at the adult population and seeks to ascertain information regarding views of work, all items associated with student role were excluded from the current study due both to lack of relevance for research questions and an effort to reduce participant fatigue. The Salience Inventory allows for many different interpretive options (intra-role comparisons, inter-role comparisons, value comparisons, and ipsative interpretation) making it a measure than can provide a multiplicity of information regarding salient life roles. For the purpose of this study and the research hypotheses herein, the ipsative interpretation method was used. Ipsative interpretation of the Salience Inventory allows for the identification of a participant’s strong or weak salient areas by comparing differences in their own ratings across life role domains, making it possible to ascertain the importance to the participant of any of the



five roles. This analysis approach creates a categorical variable wherein the participant's highest score in a life role domain designates their placement into that domain.

### **Focus groups**

A preliminary focus group consisting of adults across the lifespan who participate in both market work and personal care work was conducted to explore individual views and constructions of the role of work and relationships throughout their lives. Individuals in the focus group varied on a number of characteristics including gender, age, educational attainment, socioeconomic status, and geographic location in the United States among others. Qualitative information gathered from these focus groups was used to construct the work descriptors utilized in the survey.

Focus group participants were first prompted to share how they viewed or defined work. As all participants had participated in both market work and personal care work and various points throughout their lives, participants were also prompted to share their experience in both, highlighting any similarities or differences found in their experiences in these domains. Additionally, participants were asked to share about their own perceived feelings of value in work they had done throughout their lives, as well as the perception of value from others regarding the work they had done or are still doing.

Emergent themes from the first focus group included a repeated emphasis on the intrinsic fulfillment that is derived when engaging in personal care work for family members, and navigating the fluctuating perceptions of external appreciation for the work being done. Multiple individuals reported that while they enjoy and are internally fulfilled by their ability to engage in personal care work, they at times do feel as if the work they do is more thankless than most work completed in market work spheres.

Interestingly, a few of the individuals who engage primarily in personal care work via stay at home parenting reported experiencing instances that could be labeled as quite parallel to microaggressions when discussing their work behaviors with others in their lives who do not identify with or engage in personal care work as their primary work behavior. For instance, one focus group participant reported a conversation had with a friend discussing their respective work activities in which the friend stated she could never do what the focus group participant does as she would be “so bored all day.” Participants also reported that they frequently were labeled as not working, unemployed, or without a job, which they felt was not an accurate representation of how they view their work. Data derived from the first focus group seemed to support the claims made by Richardson (2012), Bluestein, (200), and Byars-Winston (2012) that personal care work is largely marginalized and devalued.

### **Generating and Piloting the Work Vignettes**

General qualitative information detailing different work experiences derived from the focus groups, information from the existing literature on personal care work, personal care work narratives, and brief occupational descriptions of different types of work gathered from O\*Net were utilized to construct brief one to three sentence vignettes of different types of work activities. Vignettes were developed to represent four different language conditions: Control, Fiscal, Relational and Combined, and two different work conditions: Personal Care Work and Market Work. The Control conditions were the shortest of the vignettes stating only the content of the work (e.g., John stays at home and provides care for his children). The Fiscal language condition builds from the control vignette by emphasizing a fiduciary gain or influence in the work (e.g., John stays home

and cares for his children because it makes the most financial sense for his family). The Relational language condition builds from this control vignette by adding language designed to infuse the work with a purpose as it relates to some relational aspect of the work (e.g., John stays home and cares his children because he values their development and growth). The final language condition, the Combined condition as titled, combines both the fiscal and relational language into one description (e.g., John stays home and cares for his children because it makes the most financial sense for his family, and because he values their growth and development.) This formula was utilized for all vignette sets for both the market work and the personal care work conditions. Further, attention was given to the likeness of the work activities utilized in the Market and Personal Care Work conditions, so as to generate comparable work activities for both conditions (e.g., Sharon stays home and provides care for her ailing father in the Personal Care condition vs. Sharon works as a hospice nurse in the Market Work condition).

The sets of vignettes for each level of language (market work descriptions and personal care descriptions) were administered to a small sample (N=5) of university graduate students who had received training in career development and vocational psychology for ratings and feedback on the sensitivity and detectability of the manipulations of language made for the corresponding conditions. Graduate student raters were presented with two lists of work activities descriptions, one list from each condition, and were asked to pair the work activity in list one to its corresponding activity in list two. Following the matching procedure, each rater was presented with the paired descriptions with the highest congruence rates (one from each condition), and asked to rate the two descriptions on likeness of the scenarios described in an effort to ascertain

more quantitative data related to the congruence of the descriptions. Description pairs with the highest congruence rating were used in the full administration with the sample population. Graduate student raters were also solicited for any additional feedback for item improvement. The overarching goal in the development of the work descriptions for the two work conditions used in this study was to have two descriptions (one in each condition) depicting comparable work scenarios that only differ in the language used to differentiate the work as market or personal care.

### **Semantic Differential Pairs and Total Values**

The present study utilized semantic differential pairs to assess attitudinal ratings of participant perceptions in characters in the administered vignettes. Semantic differentials measure individual's reactions to stimulus concepts (the vignettes) on a bipolar scale with contrasting adjective at each end of the scale (Heise, 1970). Semantic differential scales have the ability to reduce the probability of acquiescence to positive response styles that result from social desirability from participants (Friborg, Martinusson, & Rosenvinge, 2006), and have been frequently used as a method for assessing attitudes or feelings about presented constructs (Heise, 1970). Semantic differential scales have been found in numerous studies to reliably assess attitudes on three different domains, evaluation, potency, and activity (EPA). Seminal studies of the utility of semantic differential pairs have found that these scales have been effectively used to assess attitude change that results from structuring specific content messages in different ways (Osgood, Tannenbaum, & Suci, 1957), and have been used to assess attitudes toward various jobs and occupations (Triandis, 1959; Beardslee and O'Dowd, 1961). Given the likeness of utility of these scales found in existing literature, the present

study selected 10 bipolar adjective scales which were validated in Osgood et. al.'s (1957) thesaurus study and as such demonstrated congruence with the EPA structure common and necessary in the use of semantic differential pairs. Further, in an effort to reduce family wise error rate that could present from multiple hypotheses testing for all ten of the pairs, these characteristics were condensed to formulate a total values score for each vignette in which participants were exposed.

### **Procedures**

Upon receipt of human subjects approval from the University of Kansas Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk, Researchers advertise their studies on MTurk, and participants choose only those studies that interest them. Participants on Amazon MTurk saw a list of potential jobs (referred to as HITs) when they log into their MTurk account. The price was provided next to the name of the HIT along with the approximate length of time that the HIT would take. Participants were and are free to choose the HITs that they are interested in taking, from a long list of thousands of tasks. The name of the HIT for this study was listed as "Postmodern Views of Work: The Effects of Narrative on the Perceived Value of Work." The survey took approximately 20-25 minutes to complete. The participants were paid \$0.75 for filling out the survey. Once they clicked on the HIT they were taken directly to the survey, which was hosted on Qualtrics. Participants were then presented with a cover page providing brief study details and information requesting informed consent for study participation. Participants were informed of the anticipated duration of the study, information regarding anonymity and confidentiality of their responses, the minimal risks associated with participation and completion of the study, information detailing the

voluntary nature of participation, and that withdrawal from the study would not result in any negative repercussions. If a participant agreed to participation by electronically acknowledging informed consent, they then continued in the survey beginning with the four demographic items.

Participants completed demographic items as noted above, and were then randomly presented with 16 vignettes. Each participant received two vignettes from each language condition and for each gender condition. After reading a work vignette, participants were asked to rate the character in the vignette using a seven-point semantic differential scale with dichotomous variables assessing for the character's value and contribution based on their engaged work activity (e.g. unsuccessful/successful, unintelligent/intelligent, worthless/valuable, etc.). Semantic differential scales have the ability to reduce the probability of acquiescence to positive response styles that result from social desirability from participants (Friborg, Martinusson, & Rosenvinge, 2006), and have been frequently used as a method for assessing attitudes or feelings about presented constructs (Heise, 1970).

After completing the ratings, participants proceeded in the survey to the Salience Inventory. Upon completion of items for this scale, participants were provided with their validation code for receipt of services from MTurk and their participation in the study was complete.

### **Data Analysis**

The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of value attributed to individuals who engage in different types of work. The primary objective of this study was to examine the effect of the language used to describe the work activities on

participants' ratings of the value and contribution that result from the various types of work described. This study also sought to explore factors that may influence or impact a participant's attitudinal ratings (e.g., gender of the participant, social power and social prestige of the participant, the participant's role salience).

***Hypotheses I, II, III, and V.*** A one-way repeated measures ANOVA was utilized to determine if ratings in the personal care work description condition were significantly higher than ratings of standard work description condition on scales assessing for value and contribution to society at large. This same type of analysis was utilized to determine if the characters in the relational and combined language condition vignettes were rated significantly different on scales that assess for positive personality characteristics (e.g. intelligence, conscientiousness, generosity). To reduce impact of family wise error these characteristics were condensed to formulate a total values score. This analysis determined if there were significant differences based on the gender of the character in the narrative and the value rating ascribed to that character. Finally, for Hypothesis V, a oneway ANOVA with the salience category as a between-subjects factor was conducted on the values scores for the personal care narratives.

***Hypothesis IV.*** A repeated measures oneway ANCOVA was conducted to test Hypothesis IV. Values scores for personal care and for market vignettes served as the within subjects measure and perceived social class was included as a covariate.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

The present study sought to identify the impact of the language used to describe personal care and market work activities on the designated value assigned to these varying types of work. More specifically, the study aimed to examine the impact of contextualizing work activities through language by emphasizing the relational aspects of personal care and market work (Research Question III). Research questions and hypotheses were developed to first test general assumptions identified in the literature about the different types of work and the prescribed value of the work and the individuals conducting the work (Research Questions I and II). Further questions were developed and hypotheses tested to examine the influence of participant characteristics on the value rating of these types of work (Research Questions IV and V).

#### **Statistical Analyses**

A power analysis was conducted to ensure adequate sample size and power attained in this study. G\*Power, a statistical power analysis software, indicated that to detect a medium effect (partial  $\eta^2=0.06$ ; Cohen's  $d= 0.2526$ ) with 95% power at an alpha level of 0.05 with eight groups present in the 4X2 study and two measurement points for each level would require a sample size of 352. Thus, indicating that the actual sample size of 500 in this study was more than adequate.

Upon reading a work vignette, participants were instructed to rate the character of the vignette on 10 different semantic differential scales comprised in a 7-point Likert type rating. In an effort to reduce family-wise error rates, a Totals Value variable was created by summing these scores. Due to an error in survey design randomization, not all



participants received the random assignment of vignette gender as anticipated. Although it was intended to have 16 vignettes, one for each combination of work (2 levels coded 1 or 2), language (4 levels coded 1 through 4), and gender (2 levels coded 1 or 2), an error occurred with the assignment of the gender variable such that most participants received 2 vignettes with the same gender instead of one of each. However, the presentation of the same gender twice for a given work-language combination was not consistent across the 8 work-language combinations for any participant. As such, analyses done for hypotheses testing utilized composite variables related to the characteristic of the vignette that was relevant to each hypothesis. For the hypothesis relating to a comparison of work categories (market versus personal), for example, a composite variable averaging across the other characteristics (of the same language and gender conditions in this case) was created. For example, the values score for market work, in such an analysis, was created by averaging the value scores from 111, 112, 121, 122, 131, 132, 141, 142. These numbers simply reflect the coding of the conditions present in the vignette. For example, a '1' in the first place represented 'market' and the scores averaged across language and gender categories. Take the example of vignette 1 and vignette 2. Vignette 1 was designed as a description of activities with the combination of market work, control language, and a male character (111). Vignette 2 was designed as a description of activities with the combination of market work, control language, and a female character (112). Each of these received a values score based on the respondent's ratings, and multiple exposure from the repeated measure design allowed for the allocation of a score for gender where values were unintentionally missing. The same was done for the other analyses, creating average values scores for the gender categories, as needed for each

hypothesis test.

The following is an explanation of the statistical analyses and results for each of the five research questions and hypotheses.

**Research Question I.** Are there a differences in the value ratings of market work and personal care work?

**Hypothesis I.** Market work will be rated as more valued than personal care work. This hypothesis was tested with a repeated measures ANOVA, with the market values score and the personal care values score as within subjects measures. The within-subjects test was significant,  $F(1,496) = 9.224, p = .002$ . Examining the mean values scores for the two types of vignettes indicated that market work was valued more than personal care work ( $M=54.84, SD=6.92$ ;  $M=54.41, SD=7.05$ , respectively) lending support for hypothesis I.

**Research Question II.** Does the gender of the character in the work descriptions affect the ratings given by participants?

**Hypothesis II.** Males in the work vignettes will be rated more positively than females in both work conditions.

In order to test differences in summative value scores between the male and female gender assignments to the characters in the vignettes, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted with gender of character in the vignette as the repeated measure. There was a significant difference between the values rating of male versus female vignettes,  $F(1,500) = 111.450, p=.0005$ . Examination of the means for male versus female characters in the vignettes showed that male characters averaged across work (personal care vs. market work) and language type (control, fiscal, relational, combined)

were valued more highly for the work they did than the female characters in the same or similar vignettes (Male:  $M=55.31$ ,  $SD=7.93$ ; Female:  $M=53.75$ ,  $SD=6.82$ ). Similar to existing literature and current social underpinnings, these data support Hypothesis II, by indicating an elevation in value for male characters over female characters despite the type of work in which they engage.

**Research Question III.** Does the language utilized in the narrative of personal care work change the perceived value of the individuals engaging in the personal care work?

**Hypothesis III.** Characters in the personal care work vignettes in the Relational and Combined conditions will be rated as higher in value and contribution than characters in the personal care control description condition.

In this analysis, only the vignettes involving personal care were analyzed. The hypothesis that the Relational and Combined conditions would be rated higher in value and contribution than those in the personal care control condition was tested with a oneway repeated measures ANOVA, with the four language conditions (Control=1, Fiscal=2, Relational= 3, Combined=4). Mauchly's test of sphericity was significant, and the degrees of freedom for the F test were adjusted accordingly. The test of within-subjects effects was significant,  $F(2.83, 1404.61) = 82.26$ ,  $p = .0005$ . Paired sample t-tests were then conducted to determine significant differences between individual groups. The hypothesis was supported for personal care vignettes: both the Relational language condition and the Combined condition were rated as higher in value than the characters in the personal care Control and Fiscal descriptions. The means and standard deviations for the various work conditions can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2. Mean Values in Personal Care Work Vignettes. (n=497)**

	M	SD
Control	53.66	7.54
Fiscal	52.77	7.58
Relational	55.82	7.69
Combined	55.38	7.91

**Research Question IV.** Does a participant’s social class impact how they value personal care work?

**Hypothesis IV.** While all individuals will rate individuals in personal care work vignettes as less valuable than individuals in traditional market care work vignettes, the effect will be greater for participants higher in perceived social class.

A repeated measures oneway ANCOVA was conducted to test Hypothesis IV. Values scores for personal care and for market vignettes served as the within subjects measure and perceived social class was included as a covariate. There was no significant interaction between perceived social class and the type of work in the vignettes on how the participants’ valued that work,  $F(1, 495) = .016, p = .899$ .

Participant responses on the item measuring perceived social class were largely normally distributed. The estimated marginal means and associated standard errors are shown highlighted in Table 3, below. These means show the estimated average based on perceived social class scores of 5.99 and indicate no difference in values when the perceived social class score is controlled, demonstrating a lack of support for Hypothesis

4.

**Table 3. Estimated Marginal Means for Work\*Perceived SES.**

	M	Standard Error
Market		
< 5.99	54.8567	
≥ 5.99	54.8070	
Total	54.836	.311
Personal Care		
< 5.99	54.3298	
≥ 5.99	54.5165	
Total	54.406	.316

**Research Question V:** Does a participant’s role salience impact how they value personal care work?

**Hypothesis V.** Participants with salient home/family identities will ascribe greater value to characters in the personal care narratives.

In order to test this hypothesis, each participant was assigned to one of four groups (work, community service, home and family, leisure) based on their highest scores on the salience survey. Those who had the same high score in two different categories were not included in this analysis. The number of participants in each category is included in Table 4, below. A oneway ANOVA with salience category as a between-subjects factor was conducted on the values scores for the personal care narratives. The effect of salience group was not significant,  $F(3,455) = .486$ ,  $p = .692$ . As such,

hypothesis 5 was not supported.

**Table 4. Participant Life Role Salience Categorization and Values Ratings. (n=459)**

	N	M	SD
Work	137	54.8969	7.87463
Community Service	23	54.4293	5.31318
Home/Family	216	54.0179	7.02701
Leisurite	83	54.7184	7.08670

### **Summary**

Summarily, analyses indicate that the participant pool, in part, behaved in ways anticipated given societal beliefs and existing literature documenting the decreased value given to personal care work (Richardson, 2010). Further, data provide quantitative support for the benefits of a contextualization, which incorporates the relational nature of work by evidencing greater value attributions given work narratives emphasizing relationships. Stated more simply, the way we talk about personal care work can and does influence the value attributed to this traditionally undervalued form of work. Finally, data reveal that the participants' own identification of social status and their identification with a salient work identity had no bearing on the value ratings they ascribed to the vignettes, regardless of language.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

This chapter summarizes results of the present study and offers interpretation of main findings in regard to each of the research questions and hypotheses. The discussion includes how results from the present study fit within the prior literature on contextualized views of work and differences between attributed value to personal care and market work domains. Also in this chapter, a summarization of limitations of the current study is discussed, suggested directions for future research, and implications for practice within the framework of career counseling are offered.

### **Summary of Findings**

Many eminent vocational psychologists have, in the last decade, called for a reconceptualization in the way work is viewed. Specifically, researchers have posited a need for a more contextualized view of work that encompasses and emphasizes the relational context of work (Blustein, et. al., 2004), and expands the definition of work to include both work done for pay and work done without compensation in service of self, others, and/or community (Richardson, 2012). Literature further suggests that the contextualization of work in this manner and with the inclusion of narrative constructions of work life generates a greater sense of meaning and value in one's working life (Savickas, 2005). Drawing from these theoretical principles, the current study examined the impact of differential language conditions on the perceived value of men and women who engage in market work and personal care work. By crafting narratives that manipulated the language used to contextualize these types of work, this study was able to provide quantitative support for the benefits of the emphasis of relational contexts of

work, both in market and personal care domains.

**Research Question I.** Question I sought first to test the general societal assumption existent in the literature that market work is viewed as more valuable than personal care work. It was necessary to establish this baseline to ensure that the participants in the survey responded in a manner that would be expected given current societal views of work, thus allowing for further manipulation of the language via relational contextualization. Analysis of this research question showed a marginal but significant difference in the overall value rating scores between market and personal care work, indicating that in line with societal perceptions as documented in the literature, market work is valued to a greater degree than personal care work.

**Research Question II.** In a similar fashion, the second research question also sought to identify if the data generated was reflective of what would be anticipated given existing literature (i.e., that males will be rated higher in value regardless of work condition.). The vocational world in the United States has long operated within the constructs of a greater sociopolitical patriarchal structure giving greater weight and value to contributions made by men. At present we still see significant gender inequities in pay (Blau & Kahn, 1996), and the literature repeatedly highlights the devaluing of work done primarily by women (Richardson, 2012; Waring, 1988). Again, analysis of this research question confirmed this hypothesis and indicated that in the present study there was a statistically significant difference between vignettes containing traditionally male named characters and using male pronouns and vignettes containing traditionally female named characters and using female pronouns, despite vignettes demonstrating identical or very similar work tasks. The present analysis demonstrated that in line with societal



perceptions as documented in the literature, work activities completed or engaged in by men, be they market or personal care, are rated as more highly valued than work activities in which women engage.

**Research Question III.** The first two research questions served to establish a baseline of participant response behavior analogous to existing literature. Upon generation of these findings, the study was then designed to introduce and assess language that would serve to contextualize relational aspects of personal care and market work. Given that individuals engaging in market work, generally and as indicated in the present study via Research Question 1, are viewed as holding greater value, this particular research question aimed to examine language manipulations aimed at increasing perceived value specifically in personal care work vignettes. Using four language conditions, a control condition stating only the content of the work, a fiscal condition building from the control by emphasizing the fiduciary elements of the work, a relational condition which also builds from the control condition by adding language designed to infuse the work with purpose as it relates to some relational aspect of the work, and a combined condition incorporating both the fiscal and relational language into one description, the present study examined the influence of language on the dependent variable of total value rating. Specifically, this research question and subsequent analysis addressed the impact on value as a result of the relational contextualization in the work vignettes. Utilizing a repeated measure ANOVA and randomization of presented vignettes to control for participant response bias, the analysis confirmed the hypothesis that relational and combined conditions, both of which used language emphasizing relational contexts of work, would demonstrate a higher value rating than

decontextualized views of the same work. This finding stresses the importance of the language we use to talk about traditionally undervalued types of work (i.e., personal care work).

**Research Question IV.** Given the multifaceted influence of social class on the development of work, Question IV was designed to examine the influence of participants' perceived social class on the way they value different forms of work. Specifically, this question was intended to examine if identification within a certain rung of society impacts the value ascribed to traditionally undervalued and genderized work activities. It was hypothesized that individuals who identified in the higher echelons of social standing would place less value on care work given an assumed lack of identification with work roles typically relegated to individuals historically associated with lesser access to economic resource or capital.

Contrarily, findings from this study demonstrated no significant difference between perceived social status and total value scores ascribed to personal care work vignettes, thus nullifying the hypothesis. Research does indicate that class differences do persist in present society. This is also verified in the study by the normally distributed range of responses found in the item used to measure subjective social status. However, some literature suggests that class differences, though distinct, do not directly translate to distinct differences in social status, resulting in a less pervasive and influential impact on outlook and attitude as it pertains to demarcations of views across social status (Scott, 2000). Given this lack of translation to distinct differences in social status, it is possible the utilization of a subjective social status measure as opposed to objective measures that would demonstrate class differences in participants do not influence attitudinal ratings. It

is likely, and shown in the distribution of participants on the subjective social status item (i.e., large clusters in the middle rungs), that the present study did not capture the variability of status necessary (i.e., individuals who identify in higher echelons of social standing) to demonstrate variable views or opinions of these traditionally undervalued work experiences.

**Research Question V.** Blustein (19943) posited that life role salience is understandably influenced by both immediate and distal contextual factors. Question V sought to explore if the influence of these contexts also impacts attitudes and subsequent ratings of types of work that may be completed by individuals whose salient identities may fall in line with one of the aforementioned life roles as determined by the Salience Inventory (Neville & Super, 1986). Specifically, this question sought to examine if individuals whose ipsative score places them in the Home/Family salience category – one of the more common ascriptions for individuals who engage in personal care work – might display greater affinity and ascribe greater value to personal care work conditions. Simply stated, would identification with this domain translate to higher ratings? Interestingly, the hypothesis for this question was not confirmed, indicating that despite similar identification, individuals still view personal care work as marginally but statistically less valuable as identified in Research Question I.

Existing literature suggests that we often “inherit” patterns of life-role salience and the co-occurring attitudes and beliefs about these life roles from dominant culture (Niles, Herr, Hartung, 2001). This has been found to create a pervasive influence on the on how individuals view these various role domains that are separate from their own identification within these domains. It is likely that the aforementioned phenomenon was

also present in the current study, creating a lack of variation in ratings of vignettes despite a participant's own identification within a personal care life role domain. It appears that despite this identification, participant's still viewed these vignettes through the lens of societal patterns of beliefs associated with personal care work, that is work that is traditionally and societally undervalued or depreciated, resulting in no variation of the ratings across language condition when analyzed with the salience category variable.

Further, the use of an ipsative interpretation of the Salience Inventory (Neville & Super, 1980) could have limited some of the overlap of role salience, creating less well-defined categories than the study would suggest. If participants' salience scores across the four domains were in fact closer than the categorization would suggest, this could explain the lack of clear demarcation in ratings based on salience.

### **Limitations**

As with any study, several limitations impact the scope this research project. Most notably, the utilization of Amazon's MTurk for the participant pool, while boasting some advantages, also produces some limitations. Participants who engage in tasks through MTurk receive financial compensation for their participation, which can reduce internal validity by promulgating selection bias

Further limitations in the study derived from an error in survey design resulting in not all participants receiving the random assignment of gender in the vignettes as anticipated. However, measures were taken in the analysis process to control for some of the error that would derive from this design issue. Utilizing repeated measures allowed for the creation of averages for the unintentional missing gender variables as all participants were exposed to several vignettes comprised of the work type, language, and

gender variables. Additionally, analysis of missing gender variables evidenced no pattern in where the double presentation of the same gender occurred, indicating that no variable combinations were impacted more than others. While these safeguards helped to reduce the impact of this error, the study would have been more sound if composite variables created from gender averages were not utilized to account for the missing values. The data set and analysis utilized in this study contained a great deal of power as the sample size of 500 was deemed as more than adequate according to an a priori power analysis. This could result in the potential of conflating the Type I error rate. Mean differences in the ANOVAs were quite small, but still showed statistical significance. While the power found in this study could increase potential for Type I error, it is important to note that findings of this study demonstrated alignment with extant literature and commonly understood societal views of unpaid care work.

### **Implications for Future Research**

While this study generated several initial answers surrounding the impact of language, the way we talk about personal care work and the value given to said work, it also generated the possibility for a multitude of additional questions. For instance, given findings that language impacts the value ascribed to work, further research would be warranted to examine if this also promotes reductions in marginalization and genderization of care work? The study provides quantitative support for the benefits of relationally contextualizing personal care work. Additional research should also work to more thoroughly examine the narrative practices employed in construction of work in this way and the impact this construction has in the practice of career counseling through assessment of worker satisfaction, esteem, and efficacy of those who engage in personal

care work. Process and outcome research of the implementation of the work outlined in this study and the original ideas put forth by the likes of Richardson, Blustein, Savickas and others could go a long way in further validating and providing quantitative and qualitative data that support the benefits of a new and inclusionary approach to defining work.

Additionally, much research has been done to illustrate the social and economic capital that derives from engagement in personal care work on a macro level (England & Folbre, 1999; England, 2005; Wagman & Folbre, 1996; Waring, M. 1988). Condensation of and continued attention given to this type of research could likely provide great contribution to changing the perceptions of the benefit and value of unpaid care work.

While this research focuses primarily on the language used to describe and the resulting value ascribed to personal care work, it is important to note that financial security is still a relevant factor necessary for survival and wellbeing in our present society. Further research examining the interplay between market and care work and the impact on health and well-being should be carried out. It would be interesting to examine potential mediating/moderating effects of meaningful personal care work for individuals who may come upon transitions that produce fiscal deficits and risks to financial stability.

### **Implications for Practice in Career Counseling**

In considering implications for practice in career counseling, it is imperative to consider the impact findings such as these would have on not just the general discourse of work, but also and perhaps more importantly on the individuals engaging in the personal care work. One of Richardson's (2012) original suppositions was that increasing the value of personal care work could increase the overall holistic health of individuals

engaging in personal care work. Much aligned with the central tenets of meaning making put forth by Savickas (2005), these findings suggest that small changes in the stories we tell about the work people do can influence peoples' perspective of that work and furthermore the contributions of that individual. Expanding the discourse of work to incorporate the work people do not just for pay but in their daily lives, paying special attention to the broader conception of and the relationship one has to work, also serves to expand the practice of career counseling to more traditional mental health settings. Career counseling no longer has to be viewed as "four (or five) sessions and a cloud of dust" (Brown & Krane, 2000) but as an integrated, intentional practice of thinking, speaking, and acting in and about work. This makes career counseling as a practice just as applicable to the college student balancing their role as student and parent, the retiree caring for their grandchildren or ailing parent, or the individual struggling to find paid work but actively engaging in care work for members of his community by volunteering to take on odd jobs. Finding meaning in these avenues of work and emphasizing the relationships within these work activities can greatly improve the esteem, relationships, purposefulness in life, and overall wellbeing of all individuals, specifically those whose life circumstances do not allow for the agency necessary to engage in more traditional conceptions of career or vocation.

## **Conclusion**

The current study provides quantitative support for societal understandings and theorized differences in the valuation of market and care work. It also provides data to support claims that work conducted by women is undervalued in comparison to their male peers, despite engaging in the same work activities. Most notably, this study

illustrates that the language we use to talk about personal care work significantly influences in a positive direction the value designated to personal care work. Further, this study illustrates that the specificities of language are critical and speaking about work in a way that emphasizes relational contextualization is a core component to increasing the value ascribed to traditionally devalued personal care work. This study did not find significant differences in valuation of personal care work when examining social status or role salience as a covariate, indicating that these differences cut across the participant population despite one's perceived social standing or personal identification with a care work domain, respectively.



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## Appendix A

### Vignettes Sets

Set 1	Personal Care	Market
Control	Mary stays home and cares for her children.  2,1,2	Mary works as a high school teacher.  1,1,2
Fiscal	Mary stays home and cares for her children because it makes the most financial sense for her family.  2,2,2	Mary works as a high school teacher for a yearly salary.  1,2,2
Relational	Mary stays home and cares for her children because she values their development and growth.  2,3,2	Mary works as a high school teacher because she enjoys working with, educating, and mentoring youth.  1,3,2
Combined	Mary stays home and cares for her children because it makes the most financial sense for her family, and because she values their growth and development  2,4,2	Mary works as a high school teacher to receive a salary and because she enjoys working with, educating, and mentoring youth.  1,4,2

Set 2	Personal Care	Market
Control	Jane volunteers at the community center in her town.	Jane works for a community non-profit organization.
Fiscal	Jane volunteers at the community center in her town, because he she has free time in her day.	Jane works for a community non-profit organization because it suits her skills and allows her to earn a salary
Relational	Jane volunteers at the community center in her town, because she thinks it's important to support	Jane works for a community non-profit organization because she feels called to serve others in need.



	community growth and give back.	
Combined	Jane volunteers at the community center in her town, because she has free time in her day and thinks it's important to support community growth and give back.	Jane because it suits her skills and allows her to earn a salary. Additionally, she feels called to serve others in need.

Set 3	Personal Care	Market
Control	Sharon stays home and provides care for her ailing father.	Sharon works as a hospice nurse
Fiscal	Sharon stays home and provides care for her ailing father, because it is the more affordable care option.	Sharon works as a hospice nurse, and receives a comfortable salary.
Relational	Sharon stays home and provides care for her ailing father, because she values spending time with him in his remaining days.	Sharon works as a hospice nurse. She has always valued and excelled at caring for others, and feels this work gives her an opportunity to express these skills and values.
Combined	Sharon stays home and provides care for her ailing father because it is the more affordable care option and she values spending time with him in his remaining days.	Sharon works as a hospice nurse, and receives a comfortable salary. She has always valued and excelled at caring for others, and feels this work gives her an opportunity to express these skills and values.

Set 4	Personal Care	Market
Control	John stays home and cares for his children.	John works as an elementary school teacher
Fiscal	John stays home and cares for his children because it makes the most financial sense for his family.	John works as an elementary school teacher for a yearly salary.
Relational	John stays home and cares his her children because he values their development and growth.	John works as an elementary school teacher because he enjoys working with, educating, and mentoring youth.
Combined	John stays home and cares for his children because it makes the most	John works as an elementary school teacher to receive a salary and

	financial sense for his family, and because he values their growth and development	because he enjoys working with, educating, and mentoring youth.
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Set 5	Personal Care	Market
Control	Paul serves in an unpaid position on a local city governing board.	Paul works as a city council member.
Fiscal	Paul serves in an unpaid position on a local city governing board so he can be involved.	Paul works as a city council member for pay to gain experience in local politics.
Relational	Paul serves in an unpaid position on a local city governing board, because he is committed to making his community a better place.	Paul works as a city council member because he is committed to making his community a better place.
Combined	Paul serves in an unpaid position on a local city governing board so he can be involved and because he is committed to making his community a better place.	Paul works as a city council member for pay to gain experience in local politics, and because he is committed to making his community a better place

Set 6	Personal Care	Market
Control	Michael stays home and provides care for his ailing father.	Michael works in a nursing home.
Fiscal	Michael stays home and provides care for his ailing father, because it is the more affordable care option.	Michael works in a nursing home and receives a comfortable salary.
Relational	Michael stays home and provides care for his ailing father, because he values spending time with him in his remaining days.	Michael works in a nursing home. He has always valued and excelled at caring for others, and feels this work gives him an opportunity to express these skills and values.

Combined	Michael stays home and provides care for his ailing father because it is the more affordable care option and he values spending time with him in his remaining days.	Michael works in a nursing home, and receives a comfortable salary. He has always valued and excelled at caring for others, and feels this work gives him an opportunity to express these skills and values.
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Set 7	Personal Care	Market
Control	Susan works at home maintaining a small subsistence farm that provides food for her family.	Susan works as a general laborer for a small commercial farm.
Fiscal	Susan works at home maintaining a small subsistence farm that provides food for her family, because it saves money on grocery expenses.	Susan works as a general laborer for a small commercial farm to receive a salary
Relational	Susan works at home maintaining a small subsistence farm that provides food for her family, because she values a subsistence lifestyle and enjoys working in nature.	Susan works as a general laborer for a small commercial farm because she enjoys working in nature.
Combined	Susan works at home maintaining a small subsistence farm that provides food for her family, because it saves money on grocery expenses and because she values a subsistence lifestyle and enjoys working in nature.	Susan works as a general laborer for a small commercial farm to receive a salary, and because she enjoys working in nature.

Set 8	Personal Care	Market
Control	Bill works at home maintaining a small subsistence farm that provides food for his family.	Bill works as a general laborer for a small commercial farm.
Fiscal	Bill works at home maintaining a small subsistence farm that provides food for his family, because it saves money on grocery expenses.	Bill works as a general laborer for a small commercial farm to receive a salary

Relational	Bill works at home maintaining a small subsistence farm that provides food for his family, because he values a subsistence lifestyle and enjoys working in nature.	Bill works as a general laborer for a small commercial farm because he enjoys working in nature.
Combined	Bill works at home maintaining a small subsistence farm that provides food for her family, because it saves money on grocery expenses and because he values a subsistence lifestyle and enjoys working in nature.	Bill works as a general laborer for a small commercial farm to receive a salary, and because he enjoys working in nature.

Set 9	Personal Care	Market
Control	Margaret works at home caring for her grandchildren.	Margaret owns and operates a day care in her neighborhood.
Fiscal	Margaret works at home caring for her grandchildren because it provides a financial benefit for her daughter.	Margaret owns and operates a day care in her neighborhood to earn a salary.
Relational	Margaret works at home caring for her grandchildren because she values the quality time with her grandchildren.	Margaret owns and operates a daycare in her neighborhood, because enjoys caring for young children.
Combined	Margaret works at home caring for her grandchildren because it provides a financial benefit for her daughter and she values the quality time with her grandchildren.	Margaret owns and operates a daycare in her neighborhood to earn a salary and because she enjoys caring for young children.

Set 10	Personal Care	Market
Control	George works at home caring for his grandchildren.	George works for a nonprofit that coordinates mentor and after school programs.
Fiscal	George works at home caring for his grandchildren because it provides a financial benefit for his daughter.	George works for a nonprofit that coordinates mentor and after school programs to earn a salary.

Relational	George works at home caring for his grandchildren because she values the quality time with his grandchildren.	George works for a nonprofit that coordinates mentor and after school programs because he is very invested in the providing positive growth opportunities for the youth in his community.
Combined	George works at home caring for his grandchildren because it provides a financial benefit for his daughter and he values the quality time with his grandchildren.	George works for a nonprofit that coordinates mentor and after school programs to earn a salary and because he is very invested in the providing positive growth opportunities for the youth in his community.