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Understanding Work Socialization: A Qualitative Study of a Youth Employment Program

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UNDERSTANDING WORK SOCIALIZATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF A
YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

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UNDERSTANDING WORK SOCIALIZATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF A
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Through early work experiences, often in part-time jobs, young people come to learn about the working world. This learning process is often considered a source of anticipatory socialization, or an experience that comes before real work and serves to socialize individuals into particular organizations and vocations. In contrast, this study seeks to understand how individuals are socialized into broader meanings of work through early, part-time work experiences by studying a Youth Employment Program (YEP) aimed at providing hands-on job opportunities for at-risk youth. Drawing upon in-depth interviews, I analyze what young people learned about work and how such learning occurred. This study demonstrates that work socialization is about so much more than work and working as young people in YEP developed in significant ways both as individuals and as workers.

Keywords: work socialization, anticipatory socialization, individualization, youth employment, part-time work

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Katelyn S. Sandor

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> That's why I really like it [YEP]. These kids they need something to do, like
>
> somebody to look up to 'cause a lot of kids ain't got nobody. Everybody ain't got
>
> their parents, everybody ain't got their mom and dad. … You gotta want it, you
>
> gotta want to help yourself before another person help you. To me it's some of
>
> them out there could be saved. Because, I got saved. I just got shot last summer
>
> [and] this summer I'm working. I graduated and everything and graduated with a
>
> job. I transferred, the whole 360 in a year. I know people, I know other kids; they
>
> can change. (Jayla)

Jayla[1] is a 19-year-old working her first job in a Youth Employment Program (YEP).

Youth employment is an increasingly important area of study. In an article by the New

York Times, 15% of workers ages 16-24 are unemployed, compared with 7.3 percent of

all workers (Dewan, 2014). Relatedly, a Times article about youth employment notes

that 15% of people aged 16-24 in the United States are neither working nor in school

(Dockterman, 2013). As the U.S. economy continues to fluctuate, there seems to be a

profound effect of the recent recession on young people. There is renewed interest in

programs like apprenticeships and vocational high schools (Dewan). According to

Carnevale in a New York Times article by Dewan, youth programs went out of style in

the 1980's as the baby boom generation stopped needing them because there were plenty

of job opportunities available. However, now that people are suddenly talking about

youth, the need for job opportunities, and how to prepare a next generation of workers, a discussion of such programs and a need for youth employment opportunities is at the forefront of national concern.

According to the United Nations' World Youth Report (2003), there are 1 billion young people between the ages of 15 and 24 who are in the process of or have already made the transition from school to full-time work. A young person's first job becomes a rather important step and a "special period in the human life span" (Harpaz, Honig, & Coetsier, 2002, p. 230) on one's journey toward adulthood (Page, Stevens, & Lindo, 2009). Early work experiences are especially important for vulnerable youth, who often have higher barriers to enter the job market (Myers, et al., 2011). In an effort to combat the limited availability of job opportunities for young people, the Foundation—a nonprofit community foundation located in a medium-sized city—created, funded, and implemented the Youth Employment Program (YEP). It was YEP that took a chance by hiring Jayla. But it was her YEP experience that radically altered her view of work and self. YEP seeks to help meet a "significant unmet need for vulnerable children and youth to learn the basic employment skills in order to be prepared for competitive jobs and successful careers" (The Foundation, 2012). The Foundation works with twelve other nonprofit organizations to hire, employ, train, and work closely with vulnerable young people ranging in age from 14-24. Many of the youth involved in YEP use part-time work to supplement family income, make ends meet, and strive to build a better life.

In this thesis project, I use a social constructionist, qualitative approach to understand the experiences of young people in YEP. Through in-depth interviews with youth involved in YEP and YEP supervisors, I developed a deeper understanding of how

YEP youth are formed by this early part-time job experience and what it teaches them about what work is and how to succeed at work; a notion that I call work socialization. As this study demonstrates, early part-time job opportunities are more than a paycheck. These experiences provide a glimpse into what future life in the working world will likely be like (i.e., getting up early, working with others, tackling unknown tasks) and how to navigate that process efficiently, effectively, and with an aura of professionalism. What youth learn and experience in early work will likely influence their impact on their communities throughout their lifetimes.

In chapter two I discuss socialization in the organizational communication research and offer three critiques which lead me to develop the theoretical concept of work socialization. I conclude that chapter by proposing two research questions intended to deepen our understanding of work socialization by considering what the youth learn through work socialization at YEP and how work socialization occurs. In chapter three, I discuss the methodology used to explore those questions and introduce the research site and participants. In chapter four, I analyze and interpret the interview data and argue that the youth in YEP learned technical skills related to the work *and* skills beyond the work including relational skills, professional norms, an appreciation for work, and ultimately a sense of self-efficacy. Additionally I show how work socialization transpired in YEP and argue that the overall culture of care was key for the positive work socialization that occurred through YEP. In the fifth and final chapter, I present the contributions, both theoretical and practical, of the present study outlining how work socialization furthers our understanding of the ways in which YEP youth learned about and made meaning out of work in a more general sense. I argue that future research should consider other

possible outcomes of work socialization in other contexts. I also argue for the need to

employ a longitudinal study of work socialization and for the study of work socialization

as it occurs in different periods in one's career.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of the current study is to provide insight into the process of

socialization from an organizational communicative perspective in order to better

understand the ways in which individuals experience socialization in and through work.

In this literature review, I provide an overview of the organizational socialization

literature that spans the disciplines of psychology, sociology, education, and

communication. To begin, I explain the process of socialization, which has been

conceptualized as occurring in three stages: (a) anticipatory, (b) encounter, and (c)

metamorphosis. Second, I present the current trends and methodologies of socialization

research. Finally, I discuss three major critiques of the process of socialization: (a) the

assumption that the process of organizational socialization is linear, (b) seeing

socialization as one-way transmission, and (c) the over-emphasis on the organization and

organizational entry. I conclude this chapter by offering work socialization as an

alternative framing that addresses these shortcomings.

Socialization in Organizational Communication Research

Socialization is often referred to as the process by which individuals learn the

norms, values, and required behaviors that allow them to become participating, active

members of an organization (Waldeck & Myers, 2008; Van Maanan, 1987). Becoming

an active member in an organization means that an individual is participating in the

organizational culture by taking on roles, norms, and values associated with the organization and the work position. According to Waldeck & Myers the process of acquiring organizational norms and practices is known as organizational assimilation. Jablin (2001) preferred the term assimilation over the term socialization to describe the process of joining, participating in, and leaving organizations. Socialization—the "process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211)—can occur before, during, and after a work experience.

Organizational communication research on socialization centers on three stages of socialization: (a) anticipatory, (b) encounter, and (c) metamorphosis. The first stage, anticipatory socialization, represents the level to which an individual forms expectations about careers, jobs, and organizations before occupying organizational positions. The second stage, encounter, involves one's actual experiences as a new member of an organization. The third stage, metamorphosis, is the period when new workers attempt to become accepted as members of the organization. Individuals are most commonly described as progressing from one stage to the next in order to become active members of a new organization.

Anticipatory Socialization

The first stage of organizational socialization, the anticipatory stage, is divided into two types: vocational anticipatory socialization (VAS), which is a means for learning about and understanding a particular vocation, and organizational anticipatory socialization (OAS), which is a means for learning about and understanding a particular organization. Both types of anticipatory socialization are seen as occurring prior to

organizational membership and young people are most often the focus of anticipatory socialization research.

VAS has been studied more expansively by organizational communication scholars. Vocation is understood within the literature as being focused on a specific future career or occupation, and the research on VAS emphasizes the ways that early experiences shape individual's choices about what occupation to pursue. Over the last half of a century, research about VAS has improved our understanding of the ways in which individuals learn about and develop interests in educational pursuits, career pursuits, and employment opportunities (Myers, et al., 2011).. VAS is shaped by five key sources: family members, educational institutions, part-time job experiences, peers and friends, and the media (Jablin, 1987). Each source has been studied at length but some have received more attention than others.

Those who study the first source of VAS—family members—emphasize that socialization is a continuing process starting in early childhood that impacts adulthood work experiences (e.g., Crites, 1969; Harpaz, Honig, & Coetsier, 2002). Children gain VAS information from adults through cultural osmosis, the process by which parents expose children to values about work and other family influences and children often effortlessly and unconsciously absorb that information (Gibson & Papa, 2000). Both VAS and OAS begin at a very early age and occur almost invisibly as young people soak in ideas, values, and understandings of work through cultural osmosis (Gibson & Papa). Moreover, a study of high school students found that parents who were more supportive of the students' math and science learning appeared to have significant influence on

students' early work aspirations (Myers, et al., 2011). Children gain VAS information through the interactions and experiences they are exposed to at a young age.

The second source of VAS is educational institutions. Children are both consciously and unconsciously provided information in the classroom through class activities, discussions, and assignments about how to behave both in school and, subsequently, in a work environment (Myers, et al., 2011). From the very beginning young people are being socialized into work through math word problems, activities, and in-class readings. Teachers' abilities to explain topics in a variety of ways and the enthusiasm that they brought to the classroom also made an impact on the ways VAS generates interest in different careers in an educational setting (Myers, et al.).

The third source of VAS is part-time jobs. Research shows that adolescents who work part-time jobs learn—and are then able to apply—communication skills that may apply to other work contexts (Greenberger, Steinberg, Vaux, & McAuliffe, 1980); however, a focus on part-time job experiences has declined since the 1980s (Jablin, 2001). Interestingly, youth who work during high school are less likely to be unemployed in adulthood and therefore, the connection between early work experiences and the process of a broader view of work socialization—a concept that will be unpacked and discussed in-depth later in this chapter—is an important aspect of youth development (Carr, Wright, & Brody, 1996). However, Levine and Hoffner (2006) found that part-time jobs were cited least often as providing advice/information about jobs, suggesting that employers rarely offer future-oriented advice to young workers.

A fourth source of VAS is peers and friends; these individuals represent a means for adolescents to discuss future career aspirations or choices in an attempt to make sense

of what one might want to do in the future (Super, 1953; Wallace, 1965; Zorn & Gregory, 2005). Talking about work goals begins very early as children discuss what they want to "be" when they grow up. Over time, the reality of our dreams becomes clear and we begin to make sense of what we are able to really achieve and the work that we are really able to do. We become socialized into the working world based on our interactions with the people we come into contact with throughout our lives.

The fifth source of VAS is the media, specifically television characters who provide children with an ability to know how to behave and communicate in work situations before they have had the opportunity to encounter a work situation in their own life (Noble, 1983; Rubin, 1978; Steinke, et al., 2006). From cartoon characters like SpongeBob working at Crabby Patty's to Dr. Grey in the TV series Grey's Anatomy, work is an aspect of media portrayal and one that is likely also an aspect of cultural osmosis in that the values, ideas, and understandings surrounding work influence, both consciously and unconsciously, influence the viewer.

The five sources of anticipatory socialization set the stage for individuals to select a vocation or particular career path (VAS) (Jablin, 1985). The five sources also influence the perceptions that one has of a particular organization before joining as an employee (OAS) (Jablin, 2001). Friends, romantic partners, family, memos, reports, and manuals are sources that provide one with information about an organization before one is deemed an active member. For example, in a study on blue-collar work groups in a manufacturing company, Gibson and Papa (2000) found that the majority of new workers had knowledge of the organization and job before being hired that they had gained by watching and listening to family members who were employed at the factory.

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OAS also happens through new technology. Walker, et al., (2009) argue the importance and abundance of information seeking by prospective and current employees on organizational websites. The website acts an artifact in that it represents the organization's purpose and mission. Cultural artifacts work to define the organization and often provide a consistent view of what the organization is, what it does, and who is a part of it. Negative aspects of an organization may also be gained through OAS. According to Gossett & Killer (2006) people also have the opportunity to learn about negative aspects of an organization through online chat rooms that span outside of organizational control.

Anticipatory socialization is the process of learning about an organization or vocation *before* entry into an organization or vocation. VAS provides insight into how individuals learn and develop interests in educational and eventual career pursuits (Myers, et al., 2011). OAS provides a means for coming to terms with what it might be like to occupy an organizational position (Jablin, 2001). Information gained anticipatorily through VAS and OAS is then drawn upon in the encounter stage, which will be discussed in the next section.

Encounter Socialization

The encounter stage is the second stage of the organizational socialization model where individuals become "newcomers" in an organization (Jablin, 1987). Organizational encounter is a transition phase or process during which a person ceases to be an outsider and becomes a member of the organization (Staton-Spencer & Darling, 1986). In the encounter stage, individuals participate in sense-making activities by adjusting existing attitudes and behaviors that were gained through anticipatory

socialization. In encounter socialization, individuals are initiated into the organization through both formal and informal means.

There are a number of sources of information in the encounter stage: colleagues, supervisors, non-work contacts, and organizational documents. First, colleagues help to reduce organizational uncertainty and provide the new member with information about the norms, values, and requirements of the work culture (Jablin & Sussman, 1983). Second, immediate supervisors share organizational expectations and role-related information and provide performance feedback to help the new employee make sense of their organizational position (Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian, & Samuel, 1998). Third, friends, romantic partners, family, and subordinates provide a means for a new member to share progress and concerns about the job or organization (Teboul, 1994). Finally, web sites (Walker et al., 2009), and other written sources such as memos, reports, and manuals provide insight into the common practices, requirements, and duties as outlined by the organization (Morrison, 1993).

By building relationships and reducing uncertainty, organizational newcomers are better able to navigate the new work experience. Newcomers experience more referent informational uncertainty than any other type of uncertainty (Forward, 1999). Referent uncertainty includes the technical data needed to perform certain tasks and general input concerning role demands (Miller & Jablin, 1991). Such uncertainty has very real implications for employees. The development of peer relationships provides valuable and tangible socio-emotional support during the "newcomer" or assimilation process (Teboul, 1995; Zorn & Gregory, 2005). In addition, organizational websites and internal intranet programs help to reduce newcomer uncertainty (Chang & Lin, 2011). Further,

official orientation programs and organizational training programs also act as a source of information for employees during the assimilation process (Feldman, 1994; Jablin, 2001). The encounter stage may take different lengths of time but the goals remain the same. An individual will learn about and experience the process of socialization by taking in the norms, expectations, and requirements of their position in the organization while navigating and influencing the process as it occurs. After an individual becomes comfortable in his or her role in an organization and is accepted by others within the organization, he or she will experience the third stage of the socialization process.

Metamorphosis Socialization

Metamorphosis—the third stage of the organizational socialization process—occurs when newcomers negotiate roles, adjust to the norms and attitudes of the organization and work groups, and become fully integrated into the communication culture and network of an organization (Jablin, 1987). Unlike anticipatory socialization, encounter and metamorphosis are continually repeated throughout a member's life in an organization (Jablin, 2001). In other words, the organization in and of itself is only new once, but the process of adjusting to and becoming absorbed into the organizational culture occurs and reoccurs throughout membership. Metamorphosis represents an individual's absorption into the culture of the organization. Individuals experience turning points or particular moments of change from outsider to insider and/or the notion to disassociate with the organization if the job does not seem to fit (Bullis & Bach, 1989). The metamorphosis stage and encounter stage are very closely related in that turning points often occur in the encounter stage and lead an individual to metamorphosis (Hinderaker, 2009). When "newcomers" are no longer considered new to the

organization, they become active members of the organization. Individuals are finally

able to identify with the "organizational culture, demonstrate communication

competency, and accurately perceive the communication climate" (Wien, 2006, p. 7).

The three stages of organizational socialization have been studied extensively.

Each stage has its own unique characteristics and features. The focus on "newcomers"

and young people entering an organization for the first time dominates the literature

because—as it is argued—such exposure provides insight into the ways in which these

stages actually occur (Crites, 1969; Harpaz, Honig, & Coetsier, 2002; Jablin, 2001).

Throughout the socialization literature, a variety of methods are used to understand the

stages of socialization.

Research Methods in the Study of Organizational Socialization

Much of the current socialization research focuses on organizational assimilation.

Quantitative, empirical research methods from a variety of disciplines dominate the

socialization literature. Questionnaires and surveys are utilized to find answers to

questions such as: How do the five sources of anticipatory socialization differ? (Levine &

Hoffner, 2006) and What are the types of uncertainly clergy experience during

organizational entry? (Forward, 1999). Longitudinal studies are also on the rise, as is

appropriate given the acknowledgement that socialization occurs across the life span

(Gibson & Papa, 2000).

Qualitative methods are also used to understand the organizational socialization

process. In-depth interviews (e.g., Zorn & Gregory, 2005), focus groups (e.g., Myers, et

al., 2011), interpretative analysis (e.g., Clair, 1996) and ethnographic methods (e.g.,

Kramer, 2011) are on the rise in socialization research. Qualitative studies seek to

unpack answers to questions such as: What communication experiences help to manage uncertainty for volunteers as they select organizations to join during anticipatory socialization? (Kramer, 2011) and How do newcomers become insiders? (Gaitens, 2000). Much of the research focuses on individuals entering a full-time position within a particular vocation or a particular organization and thus lacks analysis of broader work experiences before full-time vocational or organizational membership (Gaitens, 2000; Levine & Hoffner, 2006; Zorn & Gregory, 2005).

Critiques of the Organizational Socialization Research

Dominant approaches to studying organizational socialization have been critiqued by a number of scholars. In this section, I outline and explain the primary critiques of the socialization literature as (a) presenting socialization as a linear process, (b) viewing socialization as one-way transmission from organizations to individuals, and finally, (c) focused in organizations.

Socialization as a Linear Process

The first critique of the organizational socialization research is that it assumes that the process of organizational socialization is linear in nature (Clair, 1996; Kramer, 2011). Clair argues that categorizing work, labor, and jobs that are performed prior to organizational assimilation as anticipatory suggests that "any work prior to organizational work is preparatory in nature" (p. 251) and simply prepares one for "real" work. In addition, Clair explains that stage models imply that "one cannot enter into a real job until he or she has participated in unreal jobs, which devalues the work activities of numerous people" (p. 265). According to Waldeck and Myers (2008) the developmental approach to socialization comprises a "systematic and linear model for understanding the

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complex personal and relational issues" surrounding organizational assimilation (p. 336).

Socialization is seen as having a before (anticipatory) and a during (encounter), and

eventually an end goal to be achieved (metamorphosis) that can be clearly distinguished.

However, linear models limit the ways in which we are able to conceptualize the process

of socialization. Individuals are constantly entering and exiting different organizations,

vocations, and/or positions within an organization. Focusing on socialization as a linear

process is problematic and lacks the acknowledgement that the socialization process

occurs throughout the working life.

Socialization as a One-Way Transmission of Culture

A second critique of socialization research is that it sees socialization as a one-

way organizational process through which the culture of an organization is transmitted to

individuals (Kramer & Miller, 1999; Smith & Turner, 1995; Turner, 1999).

Organizations are seen as having a set of prescribed rules and values that newcomers

'sign on' to upon entering an organization (Jablin, 2001). This notion that newcomers

'sign on' to the organizational culture, adjust to it, and join it assumes that individuals

have little, if any, agency in the socialization process. As individuals are socialized into

an organization, they are learning the appropriate behaviors and values as prescribed by

and through organizational discourse (Barge & Schlueter, 2004). When a newcomer

enters an organization the newcomer is assumed to become socialized or assimilated into

the already-prescribed organizational culture. Framing socialization as assimilation

focuses attention on the organization and its efforts to influence individuals to meet its

needs as well as the efforts of individuals to change organizations to meet their needs. In

an effort to shift this focus, Katz and Kahn (1966) introduced the terms role making and

role taking to describe the process by which people become functioning organizational members. According to Katz and Kahn, role taking refers to socialization and role making refers to individualization. Individualization is the process by which new employees attempt to "individualize" his or her role in an organization (Jablin,1987; Schein, 1968). Much of the literature situates the study of socialization with little regard to individualization and instead assumes the process to be one that is linear and one-way in nature (Smith & Turner, 1995). The concept of individualization acknowledges that individuals are active members in the socialization process and are therefore not simply indoctrinated into the organizational culture as is often implied by much socialization research (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Schein, 1968).

Socialization as Assimilation into an Organization or Vocation

The third critique of organization socialization research is that it over-emphasizes assimilation into a particular organizational or vocational context. Bullis (1993) considers this a narrow rendering of socialization "as a process through which newcomers become organizational members" (p. 10) and suggests that it is productive to also conceive of it more broadly as "a central process through which individual-societal relationships are mediated." Organizational socialization research often focuses on a narrow view of socialization and the assimilation of newcomers to specific organizations rather than on a broader process of developing orientations toward work itself (Bullis, 1993; Clair, 1996; Waldeck & Myers, 2008). Much of the current literature focuses specifically on socialization *into organizations* and lacks a more in-depth focus on the role of socialization *into work more generally* (Clair, 1996). By focusing on the context (the organization) rather than the process of socializing, previous scholarship provides a

means by which to understand socialization only as it pertains to the entering of organizations (Waldeck & Myers, 2008). For example, in a study of firefighter culture by Myers (2005), communicating and participating with family members and friends throughout the lifespan before organizational entry are considered aspects of socialization into a particular firefighter culture. Such research focuses on socialization into cultures of organizations or a specific type of vocational occupation, rather than into more general ideologies of work. As a consequence, the literature overlooks the question of how individuals are socialized into larger meanings of work and professionalism that span beyond the organization, such as what it means to work and norms related to working.

Defining Work Socialization

I have reviewed three critiques of the dominant ways socialization has been studied within organizational communication: over-emphasizing socialization into organizations; framing socialization as a linear process; and portraying socialization as an overly deterministic process. One way to address these critiques is to broaden the focus beyond organizational socialization to instead focus on the ways in which individuals learn about and are socialized into work in a more general sense. I use the phrase "work socialization" to refer to this in an attempt to reclaim a more expansive understanding of socialization than has dominated organizational communication research. In the fields of sociology and psychology, socialization is viewed more broadly as the process by which people learn culture, roles, and norms in order to function within a society (Darity, 2008). While this idea could be applied in various ways to issues of interest to organizational communication scholars, the organizational communication discipline has primarily conceived of socialization narrowly as pertaining to the process of joining organizations.

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What I call *work socialization*—the ways in which individuals make sense of work and come to understand the appropriate and expected behaviors associated with work—complements research that defines socialization as learning an organization's culture and expands the concept of socialization to also include the process by which individuals learn broader cultural ideologies and norms of work.

Work socialization seeks to explain how individuals are socialized into working more broadly. I use the concept of work socialization because it refers to the process of learning and can be applied more broadly as the process of learning that begins in early childhood and extends on into adulthood. Work socialization is broader and fundamentally different from organizational socialization because it is less about managing uncertainty and fitting in—a common theme underlying organizational socialization literature (see Chang & Lin, 2011; Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian, & Samuel, 1998)—and more about developing a broad understanding of what work is, what it means to work, and how individuals learn how to do work.

The term work socialization is used in some sociology research (i.e., Feij, 1998) where it is defined as an interdisciplinary approach to answer the question "how does one become a successful worker?" Although this idea is incorporated into how I am defining work socialization, my definition is broader in that it also includes orientations to work more generally (Cheney, Zorn, Planalp, & Lair, 2008). Work socialization, as defined in this study, is the process of learning the norms, values, and accepted behaviors associated with working as well as what work is.

In addition to broadening the questions organizational communication scholars are asking about socialization, the concept of work socialization also seeks to redress

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common critiques of the dominant research on organizational socialization. First, work socialization occurs through working and is not simply something that occurs prior to one's employment, a notion that breaks the linear critique as outlined previously. Second, work socialization also acknowledges that individuals are an integral part of the meaning making process; therefore, a one-way indoctrination into working culture is not viable because the individual is as important as the work. Third, the concept of work socialization goes beyond anticipatory socialization in that it does not imply that individuals are being socialized into a particular vocation or organization, an assumption that leads to the over-emphasis on socialization into vocations and organizations.

Work socialization provides an avenue for understanding meanings of work and the values and norms individuals come to recognize as accepted behaviors related to work. This occurs not only before one enters full-time employment (i.e., anticipatory socialization) but also throughout the working life. Work socialization is interested in questions such as "How do individuals make sense of work?" and "What do individuals learn about what it means to work?" Research on anticipatory socialization—as discussed previously—has attended a bit to such questions; however, it frames such socialization as occurring prior to "real" work. In essence, research orients socialization toward possible future vocations or an organization rather than to work more broadly. In contrast, the concept of work socialization that I develop in this thesis assumes that work socialization occurs in a variety of contexts and throughout the working life. Work socialization incorporates some of the constructs, relationships, and activities that have been of interest to scholars studying VAS—as described previously—but also includes broader issues of interest to those studying organizational communication. As a result, work socialization

seeks a broader understanding of what it means to work and how to do work well. Areas

of organizational communication research on meanings of work and professionalism

inform what I am calling work socialization.

Meanings of Work

The contemporary context of work requires researchers to move beyond formal

organizational settings and study the diverse ways people create and organize meaning

about, through, and for their work and working lives (Broadfoot, et al., 2008). The recent

interest within the organizational communication literature on meanings of work seeks to

accomplish that by asking what makes work meaningful and considering the value and

importance that individuals and society place on work. Cheney, et al., (2008) define

meaningful work as "a job, a coherent set of tasks, or any endeavor requiring mental

and/or physical exertion that an individual interprets as having a purpose" (p. 144).

Cheney, et al. suggest that organizational socialization research has focused on

socialization as the assimilation of newcomers rather than the process of developing

orientations toward work itself.

Both organizational and societal contexts shape individuals' experiences and

enactments of work (Wieland, 2011) and people have radically different relations to work

and view work in different ways (Wieland, Bauer, & Deetz, 2009). According to

Feldman (1994) pre-existing job attitudes and behaviors do affect choice of employment

and that once an individual is employed part-time, his or her behaviors and attitudes

change throughout the lifespan. Therefore, work socialization is related to and further

develops meanings of work by specifically focusing on how individuals are socialized

into dominant meanings of work. These broad meanings of work often result in an

increase of skills, and altered attitudes, opinions, and values of work in a broader sense (Feij, 1998).

Professionalism

Another stream of research that is relevant to and informs work socialization is professionalism. What counts as "professional" is socially constructed through discursive practices such as the way "one needs to learn to control and discipline one's body" (Scott, 2011, p. 239). The professionalism literature seeks to find answers to how people learn appropriateness and what is expected and accepted in the working world (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007). While what counts as professional depends on context, such as vocation, organization, or position, being "professional" is also a broader social construct that points to generally expected behaviors, values, and norms of the working world. Learning how to talk, dress, work with others, and display competency and confidence are things we learn through experiences prior to full-time employment and organizational entry. Professionalism may be learned through the coaching and training provided by mentors, educational activities, and other programs that occur away from a particular occupation or organization. Although becoming a professional may mean being an active full-time member in a professional organization, learning about what it means to be professional and behave professionally begins at a very early age and continues throughout the lifespan both within and beyond organizational and occupational bounds.

The meanings of work literature and professionalism literature are asking vital questions that are central to the concept of work socialization. For example, the literature on meanings of work poses questions such as: What is work? What does work mean?

Why do work? The professionalism literature asks questions such as: How do

individuals do work? What do individuals learn about the norms and values associated

with work? Work socialization fuses these literatures to provide a broader understanding

of what it means to work and how individuals do work detached from a specific vocation

or organization. Work socialization recognizes that "the organization" is only one aspect

of the socialization process (Clair, 1996).

The concept of work socialization seeks to link together the three concepts that

have gained attention in organizational communication research in the past decade:

anticipatory socialization, meanings of work, and professionalism. A qualitative, social

constructionist approach to the study of work socialization would provide insight into

how individuals make sense of what it means to work and how they come to understand

and negotiate the norms, values, and behaviors that dominate the working world. In

seeking a broader sense of work, work socialization acknowledges that reality and

knowledge are constructed and reproduced by people through communication,

interaction, and practice (Tracy, 2013). As a result, a social constuctionist perspective

addresses the issue raised by the third critique above by challenging the assumption that

socialization is a one-way transmission of ideas, values, and knowledge.

A Social Constructionist Perspective of Work Socialization

Social constructionism has been highly influential in social research since the late

1960s and posits that "social reality cannot be constructed as either totally objective or

totally subjective…social reality is seen as an intersubjective construction that is created

through communicative interaction" (Miller, 2005, p. 27). Tracy (2013) defines social

construction as "the interpretive idea that reality and knowledge are constructed and

reproduced by people through communication, interaction, and practice" (p. 63). In other words, we create our social world through language and action. Burr (1995) (as cited in Allen, 2005) outlines four ways that social constructionism impacts research: 1) it encourages researchers to be suspicious of how we understand the world and ourselves; 2) it recognizes that the process of constructing social identities depends heavily on social, political, and historical factors; 3) it acknowledges that individuals enact various roles within various contexts and that language is used to produce and reproduce knowledge; and finally, 4) it argues that knowledge and social action are interconnected. Social constructionists view the world as changing, fluctuating, and subjective in nature. Allen argues that social constructionism provides a viable framework for expanding and deepening scholarship on both discourse and organizations. A social constructionist approach to work socialization unpacks the ways in which discourses surrounding work are constructed and reconstructed to create and recreate meanings of work and norms of professionalism.

In order to view work socialization from a social constructionist perspective, it is also necessary to unpack the ontological framework of interpretivism. Interpretivism is interested in the interaction of the individuals with themselves, family, society, and culture (Black, 2006). Interpretivists seek to unpack and provide thick descriptions of different phenomena in order to gain a local understanding of specific social events and collectives because reality is socially constructed (Miller, 2005). Tracy (2013) defines the interpretive paradigm as "a way of seeing both reality and knowledge as constructed and reproduced through communication, interaction, and practice" (p. 62). Therefore, the researcher acknowledges an active role in the research process and seeks to interpret the

ways in which phenomena occur. By stepping away from a particular organization (i.e., the context) and looking at work experiences in a broader sense, a social constructionist perspective within the interpretivist paradigm could develop a deeper understanding of what is learned, understood, and shared (i.e., the process) throughout the socialization process. For this thesis project, I argue that seeking a part-time, youth employment perspective will provide a means for understanding how work socialization occurs and what work socialization looks like.

Early Part-Time Work and Work Socialization

This literature review established that the current organizational socialization literature focuses too narrowly on the stages of socialization within the confines of particular organizations. Seeking a broader understanding of work socialization as it occurs through part-time job experiences opens this area of inquiry as crucial to the process of how individuals become engaged and active members of work and society. I have argued for a social constructionist perspective of the socialization process focusing specifically on the concept of work socialization as a means of understanding how we come to make sense of work throughout the human lifespan. Additionally, in developing this literature review, I found little scholarship as to how part-time job experiences influence the ways in which individuals make sense of and learn the norms, values, and accepted behaviors of the working world (Clair, 1996; Wein, 2006). One way to study work socialization involves focusing on the part-time work experiences of young people. Examining the early employment experiences of young people would provide an understanding of how their orientations toward work are shaped through early work

experiences. Such a focus could illuminate how young people learn what makes work meaningful and what it means to be professional.

In the framework of organizational socialization, early part-time jobs are considered to be an aspect of anticipatory socialization that helps to prepare young people for *real* jobs (Clair, 1996). Educational institutions and part-time jobs are often categorized as a primary source of anticipatory socialization (Greenberger, et al., 1980; Myers, et al., 2011). Arguably, work experiences prior to full-time employment provide knowledge about work that transcends particular organizational and vocational constraints and are often the moments where individuals learn about roles, responsibilities, and how to work with others (Gore, Kadish, & Aseltine, 2003; Karpukhin, 2001; Simmons, 2009).

Looking to youth for answers to socialization questions is not a new phenomenon for the disciplines of psychology, sociology, and education (e.g., Feij, 1998; Harowitz & Trivitt, 2007; Schoenhals, Tienda, & Schneider, 1998). However, an understanding of the part-time, early work experiences of youth is lacking in the communication discipline. A communicative perspective would provide an understanding of how young people make sense of early part-time job experiences and how they come to identify the appropriate norms and values of the working world. Their perspectives are valuable given that they are experiencing the working world first-hand for the first time. Because of this, gaining insight into how youth are navigating these part-time work experiences would provide a better understanding of the outcomes of and process of work socialization.

Understanding how young people make sense of part-time work experiences will provide a better understanding of how young people negotiate the meanings of work and professionalism that they encounter. As a social constructionist conducting an interpretivist study, I do not focus on making generalizable claims but instead will seek to shed light on the experiences of the young people included in the study, how part-time work participates in work socialization, and what the social construction of work looks and feels like for young people experiencing work. The present study focuses on youth employed part-time through a youth employment program focused on helping at-risk young people gain hands-on work experience. Looking to early part-time jobs provides us with a means for understanding work socialization away from a particular full-time vocation or organizational position and to view socialization into broader meanings of work.

Research Questions

The following research questions are meant to extend and expand our understanding of the concept of work socialization. By focusing attention on part-time employment experiences, these questions will work to unpack how meanings of work are produced and negotiated in everyday talk about work.

RQ1: What are young people learning about work through early part-time job experiences in YEP?

In order to understand how work socialization occurs in part-time work, I want to seek an in-depth understanding of what young people learn about work through YEP. This first research question seeks to understand the outcomes of work socialization, the

meanings of work and norms for working that youth learn through their part-time work experiences in YEP.

RQ2: What are the everyday practices through which work socialization occurs in part-time work in YEP?

Socialization is an inherently communicative process (Bullis, 1993; Clair, 1996). Individuals learn and influence the process through communication, or the simultaneous experience of self and other (Edwards, Edwards, Wahl, & Myers, 2013). In other words, our realities are socially constructed through communication, and we only come to know ourselves based on our relationships, interactions, and experiences with others. A communicative perspective acknowledges that we are an active part of the socialization process and that we are not simply indoctrinated into the cultures that we are a part of but that we shape, influence, and navigate the process as it occurs. Little is known about how work socialization occurs and what role communication plays both directly and indirectly in the process. Specifically, I am interested in understanding how work socialization occurs in everyday activities and conversations. This includes documenting the observations and discussions that are likely to facilitate work socialization, who is involved in such conversations, and when and where work socialization is most likely to occur in YEP. It also includes considering how work socialization is constructed through talk and the ways that part-time workers in YEP negotiate work in their everyday encounters.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In order to study work socialization among youth employed through YEP, I used

qualitative research methods. Qualitative inquiry stresses the socially constructed nature

of reality and seeks answers to questions that stress how social experience is constructed,

created, and given meaning. In this chapter, I first introduce the Youth Employment

Program that served as the site for my research. Second, I introduce the youth interview

participants and supervisor interview participants. Third, I reflect on my relationship

with the research site and participants prior to the present study in order to self-

reflexively situate my interpretations. Fourth, I discuss the methods and procedures used

in this thesis project. Finally, I discuss the data analysis process.

Research Site

As stated in chapter one, vulnerable youth often have higher hurdles to jump

when it comes to the job market (Myers, et al., 2011). To combat the limited availability

of job opportunities for young people, the Foundation created, funded, and implemented

YEP. In essence, YEP seeks to help meet a "significant unmet need for vulnerable

children and youth to learn the basic employment skills in order to be prepared for

competitive jobs and successful careers" (The Foundation, 2012). The Foundation works

with twelve other nonprofit organizations to hire, employ, train, and work closely with

vulnerable young people ranging in age from 14-24. YEP began in the summer of 2011

and completed its third year, at the time of this study, in August 2013. YEP was made possible through a million dollar grant from a national foundation with the purpose of providing job opportunities for young people in a need-based area. Over three years, more than 500 young people have had the opportunity to gain hands-on work experience through the program. The majority of the youth in the present study live in central city neighborhoods where 41 to 91% of the residents are minority, 16 to 41% are living at or below poverty level, and 19 to 54% of the adults have less than a high school diploma (The Foundation, 2012). Additionally, 6% are in 0-8th grade, 69% are in 9th, 10th, or 11th grade, and 18% are in 12th grade; the remaining 7% have a high school diploma or GED, less than one year of college, or some college but no college degree. The program takes place in an area where 18% of adults are unemployed (The Research Institute, 2012). Interestingly, up to 34% of the adult population living in the inner city are unemployed. As a result, many unemployed adults are searching for and being hired into jobs that were historically filled by young people. Thus, YEP was developed to help young people find summer jobs and part-time work opportunities.

Area nonprofit organizations who agree to participate as YEP work locations are encouraged to apply to receive YEP funding to help cover the wages and miscellaneous costs necessary to hire more young people. The grant money is dispersed to other nonprofit organizations by the Foundation in order to pay for youth employee wages. In 2013, twelve nonprofit organizations received YEP funds and the program ran June through August. All twelve organizations are supported through a web of supervisors, staff members, and program leaders. Within the work locations, a team of three to five people in a supervisory role worked closely with the youth on a regular basis. As a result

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of receiving YEP funding, at least one supervisor, program leader, or staff member was required to attend a one-day training session hosted by the Foundation. Throughout the analysis chapter, I refer to those in a supervisory role in YEP work locations with the term supervisor. The required training session for supervisors trained supervisors in the "best practices" for understanding the youth population that they will be working with. The "best practices" include learning how to encourage, build relationships, teach young people about job etiquette and professionalism, et cetera.

In addition to the program training, the nonprofit program supervisors are encouraged to require and/or offer youth employees the opportunity to participate in training sessions of their own. Youth training sessions are meant to help equip the youth with time management skills, job etiquette, and team building skills. After talking with supervisors and youth about the training sessions I found that the amount of time and the requirements of the youth vary by YEP location. In some locations youth are required to participate in a training session for one hour per week and in others the youth are encouraged, but not required, to attend an after-work training session three to four times throughout the summer. The training sessions are centered on job etiquette (i.e., how to fill out an application, how to conduct oneself in an interview, et cetera) and exploration of one's future (i.e., college visits, guest presentations from local business owners, et cetera).

Overall, YEP seeks to teach youth transferable skills by providing young people hands-on experience working in jobs such as baking, lawn care, and office work. The youth learn skills such as how to mow, edge, plant flowers, lay mulch, and the like. Some learn how to work with tools to build picnic tables, Adirondack chairs, doghouses,

and other wood-working projects. Others learn how to measure, poor, and mix-up batches of cookies, scones, and cakes. Many of the youth interact with customers at lawn care sites, a food pantry, or at a small bakeshop. Additionally, some youth learn about computers by taking them apart for recycling or inputting information, filing, and creating marketing materials for their employment location. Overall, the youth are working at nonprofit organizations that employ a mission to improve the local community by providing goods and services that promote the common good.

Research Participants

I used convenience sampling to gain access into five of the 12 participating organizations and then recruited participants from within those organizations. For this study I was looking for two groups of participants. First, I sought young people who were experiencing the world of work in YEP at an early age, specifically youth between the ages of 14-20. My reasoning for looking for young individuals who were working in a formalized work environment for the first time is because I felt they were best able to articulate more clearly the ways they are being socialized into work. I sought out young people who had no or little job experience prior to their current YEP employment opportunity. For this information, I relied heavily on the program coordinators and work location supervisors to encourage participants who met this criterion to participate in the study. In addition, I explained that all youth employees who participated in an interview would be entered into a drawing for a $50 gift card. Second, I requested interviews with the supervisors who worked closely with the youth on a daily basis. Upon gaining access to the five participating work locations, I simply talked with supervisors about the study, and five were interested in participating. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of not

only how the youth experience work but also how the supervisors saw the youth experiencing work.

In total, I interviewed 16 youth employees (see Figure 3.1) from four different work locations involved in YEP during August 2013. The youth employees ranged in age from 15 to 20-years old. Thirteen out of 16 youth interview participants were of minority race/ethnicity (e.g., African American/Black, American Indian, Asian Pacific, and Hispanic/Latino). Six youth employees were female and ten were male. For eight youth included in the present study, YEP represented their first work experience. Five youth had experienced only one other job prior to YEP and two youth had experienced three or more jobs prior to their employment in YEP. Eleven youth employees worked in YEP locations focused on lawn care, lawn maintenance, and woodworking. The six other youth participants worked in other locations including a recycling center, a thrift store, a factory, and a food basket office. The majority of the youth were in 11th and 12th grade, and four youth were headed into their first or second year of college in the fall. The one-on-one youth interviews lasted between 25 and 49 minutes with an average interview time of 32 minutes. Drawing upon a semi-structured interview guide I asked the youth questions about work surprises, what they learned at work, and how they felt about their supervisors and the experience as a whole. The interviews were audio recorded. Fourteen youth interviews were conducted on-site during normal working hours and these youth were paid normal wages by the participating organization for their time. Additionally, one youth interview was conducted at a local coffee shop and another youth interview was conducted over the phone a week after the person had completed YEP.

Pseudo Name	Sex	Race/ Ethnicity	Age	Year in School Fall 2013	Type of Work	Experience working
Michael	M	C	18	Not enrolled	Recycling center	1st job (2nd summer)
Zari	F	AA/B	17	Not enrolled	Office assistant	3+ jobs
Jaime	M	H	20	2nd year community college	Thrift store	3+ jobs
Noah	M	C	17	12th grade	Woodshop	2nd job
Jayla	F	AA/B	19	1st year community college	Lawncare	1st job
Elon	M	AA/B	18	1st year community college	Lawncare	2nd job
Taye	M	AA/B	18	12th grade	Recycling center	1st job (2nd summer)
Malik	M	AA/B	17	12th grade	Lawncare	2nd job
Summer	F	AI	16	11th grade	Lawncare	1st job
Aiden	M	C	17	12th grade	Lawncare	1st job
Alexa	F	AA	15	10th grade	Lawncare	1st job
Demarco	M	AA/B	15	9th grade	Lawncare	1st job
Imani	F	AA/B	15	10th grade	Lawncare	2nd job
Jacob	M	C	16	11th grade	Lawncare	1st job
Deon	M	AA/B	19	2nd year university college	Factory work	3+ jobs
Kimani	F	AA/B	18	12th grade	Lawncare	2nd job

Figure 1. Youth Interview Participants. This figure provides insight into the youth population interviewed for the present study.

In addition to the youth interview participants, I was also able to gather five supervisors who were willing to participate in the present study (see figure 3.2). All five supervisors were Caucasian/White and three out of five supervisors were male (see Figure 3.3 for a key outlining race/ethnicity and biological sex in Figure 3.1 and 3.2). Two supervisors had been with the participating organization for over five years and talked about their nonprofit organizations as having a positive influence on the youth as well as a positive influence on their own lives. The supervisors see the work that they are doing as important and meaningful and they talked about enjoying helping young people develop skills that will likely allow them to experience a better life. Drawing upon my interview guide, I asked supervisors questions about what it was like to work with the youth in YEP, how they saw young people navigating work in the program, and how they

viewed and participated in helping young people build work-place relationships.

Supervisor interviews lasted between 29 and 52 minutes with an average interview time

of 39 minutes.

Pseudo Name	Sex	Race/ Ethnicity	Type of Program	Years with Program	Youth Employees
Sylvia	F	C	Office Environment	2	2
Bill	M	C	Bakery/Urban Garden	7	20-25
Joe	M	C	Lawncare	2	15-20
Pamela	F	C	Lawncare/Woodshop	13	90
Rob	M	C	Sending Center	4	60

Figure 2. Supervisor Interview Participants. This figure provides insight into the supervisor population interviewed for the present study.

Key:	M: Male	AA: Asian American
	F: Female	AA/B: African American/ Black
		AI: American Indian
		C: Caucasian
		H: Hispanic/Latino

Figure 3. Interview Participant Sex and Race/Ethnicity Key. This figure provides an explanation for the letters used to depict the biological sex and race/ethnicity of both the youth and supervisor interview participants.

The identity and participation of both supervisors and young people who

participated in the present study have been kept confidential. I developed pseudonyms

for participants that roughly reflect gender and race/ethnicity of the participant (see

Figure 3.1 and 3.2). It was important for me to choose names that reflected participants'

original name and cultural identity. I recognize that many of the youth in this program

come from a background different than my own and I wanted participants' pseudonyms

to be reflective of who they are. In order to locate appropriate pseudonyms, I searched

for popular baby names by race/ethnicity for the years 2012 and 2013.

<div align="center">**Researcher Relationship to Site**</div>

I had a relationship with the Foundation prior to conducting this study given that I

had interned there during the summer of 2012. My internship was in the unit at the

Foundation that runs the YEP program: I was responsible for updating online social

media platforms, developing a blog, and writing press releases. I spent most of my

internship working closely with YEP to develop a blog that reflected on the positive work

experiences of young people in the community. I chatted with supervisors, talked to

youth while they were at work and working, and took photos and videos to post on the

blog. During the middle of the summer, I wrote a press release that got picked up by a

local radio station. Myself, along with my internship supervisor, went to the radio station

for an on-air interview about YEP and what the program was doing for the community.

It is important that I reflect on this past history with YEP because it reflects the

fact that I believe strongly in the mission of YEP and the difference it makes in the lives

of the youth. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) assert that "researchers often fuse their personal

interests with their professional pursuits" (p. 76). I see the program as a positive force in

a community where too many young people find themselves unemployed or down on

their luck. I believe that the program supervisors are caring people who are doing what

they can to help young people carve out a better life for themselves. My experience as an

intern with the Foundation working closely with YEP altered my perspective on life. It

was from that experience that I realized that I, too, wanted to make a positive difference

in the world. I recognize that although I am only a few years older than most YEP youth

employees, I have had access to experiences and opportunities that many YEP employees

do not. Although I have not experienced financial hardship and struggle or the

marginalization of racism, I recognize that my life and the opportunities for work I have

had up until this point in my life reflect my privilege as a white, middle class woman and

are markedly different from other young people in my community such as those who are

likely to participate in YEP.

Methods and Procedures

As a former YEP intern, I maintained relationships with Foundation leaders who

gave me access to the YEP program to conduct this qualitative study. After a discussion

with my previous supervisor in the YEP program at the Foundation, I was given the

approval to contact participating nonprofit organizations' acting supervisors. Members

of the organization also felt that a qualitative approach to the program would bring an in-

depth understanding of what and how the youth felt about YEP.

Before any data were collected and any interviews were completed, the study first

had to pass IRB (i.e., Institutional Review Board). The purposes of the IRB are "to

ensure that the rights of human subjects are properly respected and that a study's

procedures or outcomes will not place them in undue physical, psychological, social, or

economic risk" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 118). As a result of IRB approval on August

1, 2013, I was able to begin data collection.

The Foundation connected me to the 12 participating nonprofit organizations. I

first sent an email outlining the goals and purposes of the present study to all 12

participating locations. I received interest from five locations and was granted access to

interview youth employees and supervisors in those locations. The five interested

participating nonprofit organizations then connected me with potential participants in order to seek their informed consent to participate in the study.

I set up a visit day to each of the five organizations to describe the study to young employees and seek participants. Many youth showed interest in participating, and I ended up handing out 28 informational letters and informed consent documents. I ended up interviewing 16 youth from four out of five locations and in addition, five supervisors from each location in a span of three weeks during the end of August and beginning of September 2013. To recruit supervisors to participate in the study, I talked to them while I was on site sharing information about the study with the youth. I told them about what I was doing and trying to accomplish and five supervisors from the participating work locations were interested in my mission and more than willing to participate in an interview.

All study participants were asked to fill out an informed consent form. YEP participants range in age from 14-24, therefore, for those individuals who are considered to be minors, parental informed consent forms were distributed prior to on-site scheduled interview days in order to seek the parents' or caregivers' permission to include their children in the study (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 124). The program coordinators and supervisors sent home a copy of the parental informed consent form with underage YEP participants one week prior to the scheduled interview days. Both the parental informed consent and regular informed consent forms are written in a way that all recipients could understand the purpose of the study, the risk, and the need for their permission in order for underage children to volunteer to participate.

This study is based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Respondent interviews are typically used as a "stand-alone procedure" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 180) and are conducted to find out how people express their views, how they interpret their actions, and how they conceptualize their life world. Interviews provide a means of developing insight into how individuals experience work because individuals will have the opportunity to share their understandings and the knowledge they have learned through their part-time job experience. I chose semi-structured interviews because I felt that I would be able to garner a deeper understanding of work socialization by allowing the youth and supervisors to talk opening about their experiences in YEP. Interviewing allows for the data to grow organically as the conversations moved from beginning, to middle, to end.

Interviews were conducted on-site and during normal working hours in supervisor offices or separate conference rooms. During the interviews I followed a semi-structured interview guide. I developed separate questions for youth participants (see Appendix A) and the supervisors (see Appendix B). In addition to interviewing YEP participants and supervisors, I also wrote field notes and scratch notes about the interview process. As I wrote field notes, I really began to make sense of the work socialization process. I used my field notes as analytic memos to take note of the tone of the interview and also other interesting things that arose before, during, and after each interview.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. To transcribe the interviews, I used a program called Express Scribe and a USB foot pedal. I transcribed all 21 interviews verbatim. In total, I ended up with 152 single-spaced pages of youth interview

data and 48 single-spaced pages of supervisor interview data. Additionally, I also ended up with 34 pages of single-spaced analytic memos.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of moving from raw interviews to evidence-based interpretations (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As I transcribed the interviews, I began the data analysis process implicitly. Transcription provided me the opportunity to immerse myself in the data. As I transcribed, I stopped often to write analytic memos, interesting aspects of a conversation, or reoccurring themes (Rubin & Rubin).

After I completed transcription, I used traditional coding techniques (e.g., copy reading, marking key words, flagging themes, developing a codebook) to conduct data analysis. To analyze the data, I created codes to identify the data as belonging to or representing a particular phenomenon (Tracy, 2013). I began data analysis by looking to the youth interview transcripts. After reading and rereading through a printed copy of the youth interview data, a process referred to as data immersion (Tracy), on my third read through, I began writing in the margins and marking pages with sticky notes. In addition to reading and rereading through the data, I found it helpful to spend time simply thinking and digesting the data. As a commuter student, I would spend my 45-minute drive to and from campus sitting in silence allowing my mind to wander and ferment. It was during such downtime that I was able to make key connections between how the youth experienced work and what they learned within the YEP experience. I also developed a deeper insight into how I could articulate my understanding to my thesis advisor and ultimately in this thesis project.

After immersing myself in the data, I developed codes through a series of primary coding through the data to assign words or phrases that captured the main ideas of each line of text. Primary coding is a means of finding surface level commonalities in the data. Line by line I coded for key terms or words present in the data. I conducted first level coding in order to focus on *what* was present in the data. The first level coding is important because "the initial data texts coded will influence the resulting coding scheme" (Tracy, 2013, p. 13). After I had a significant number of codes, I developed a codebook, or legend, for my data to make sense of and explain the data analysis process. The initial codebook included 25 codes.

Following the development of a codebook and an open discussion with my advisor bout the emerging themes within the data, I conducted a series of second level coding on the youth interview data. Second level coding provides even deeper exposure to the data. The coding process is how I have come to make sense of and interpret the semi-structured interviews. After second level coding, I developed a codebook consisting of 12 major codes or themes with most referring to a culture of care, an exciting theme that emerged in the data. I also conducted a number of keyword searches to locate discussions surrounding care, skills learned, and professionalism. I turned to supervisor interview transcripts second to see how their perspectives aligned with what emerged in the youth interview data. I conducted a series of keyword searches and developed codes related to care, context, and discussions pertaining to the youth experience. As I started to organize my codes, I started to see that most of the codes fit within two topical areas (a) how the young people are experiencing work in YEP and (b) what young people were learning through part-time work in YEP. From these two

topical areas, I was able to go back through the data to discern how the youth learn about work in YEP.

In addition to my individual work in the data analysis process, I spent a significant amount of time discussing the data at length via telephone and during in-person meetings with my thesis advisor. I began to develop a deeper sense of the data through our open dialogue about what I was noticing in the data and how I was interpreting the data. With the help of my advisor, I was able to conceptualize and develop a strong argument for the presence of work socialization in YEP.

In conclusion, I employed a qualitative method to study how youth experience work YEP. Through analyzing the in-depth interviews I conducted with young people and supervisors in YEP, I was able to develop a sense of what the youth learned and how work was accomplished as a result of their early part-time work experience in YEP. In the next chapter, I outline my analysis and interpretations by presenting what the youth learned about work and how they learned about work in YEP.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF WORK SOCIALIZATION IN YEP

In the following chapter I provide insight in to the culture of care created and sustained in YEP. Through the culture of care, five outcomes of work socialization occurred including an understanding of task skills, professional norms, relational skills, an appreciation for work, and a sense of self-efficacy. To begin this chapter, I provide insight into my experience as a researcher at one of the YEP locations. This first-person narrative illuminates what the interview process was like and, more importantly, serves to preview the analysis that I develop in this chapter and give the reader a sense of what the youth experienced in YEP.

It's 1 o'clock in the afternoon on a hot August day and I am waiting outside the main office door at one of the YEP locations. I wait only a few moments in the sun before a pickup truck hauling a trailer full of shovels, mowers, and other lawn care equipment pulls into the drive. "You must be Katelyn," the driver hollered. As the driver waives me into the building through the garage door, I notice four young people exiting the truck one by one. Two smile at me, one says "hello", and the other walks away and out of sight. 10 minutes later, I am sitting in a small office looking into a woodshop through a plexi-glass window. A YEP employee enters through the office door, shakes my hand while looking me in the eye, and introduces herself. Beyond the girl and through the window I notice a young man sanding a tri-color hunk of wood. I go over the necessary procedures

and begin the interview. I am struck by how open, calm, and willing she is to talk to me about her personal life and her experiences at YEP. She answers questions openly and candidly. The conversation is comfortable and before I know it, our time is up. I thank her for her time. She stands, smiles, and walks through the open door and out of sight. As I am jotting down a few notes and readying myself for the next interview, I watch a group of YEP employees unload and organize the lawn care equipment. I notice a young girl bent over at the waist with her mouth wide in a smile. The supervisor is saying something that I cannot hear and the girl is laughing enthusiastically. Next to her, a young man is sweeping the woodshop floor. He, too, is smiling with a big toothy grin. As I shift my gaze from one side of the large workshop to the other, that same young man is still sanding that board. A supervisor is standing next to him, pointing and nodding. Five minutes later, a young man enters the office and the interview process begins again. Throughout the day, I get the chance to interview the laughing girl, the smiling sweeper, and the young man who was sanding a board. As it turns out, that board he was sanding was actually a cutting board. His first attempt was rather unsuccessful so his supervisor told him that he needed to make sure that the next board was as smooth as possible before they could give it to the customer. With a second chance, the young man put in a little extra effort and he sanded until the board was smooth to the touch. He told me that he felt good about what he accomplished with the extra work he put into the second cutting board.

All 16 young people talked about the program supervisors with what I interpreted as heartfelt emotion. The youth told me that the care provided by the leaders and

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supervisors meant comfort and happiness in the workplace for YEP participants. Based on in-depth interviews, brief experiences in YEP organizations before and after interviews, and experience as an intern with the Foundation, I noticed that a culture of care is what helped the youth to build relationships with co-workers and supervisors. The youth opened up to me about initially feeling shy and reserved with supervisors and peers and explained that starting a new job is exciting but also "scary", "intimidating", and "daunting". For the youth in YEP, fears of working were eased by the kindness and compassion displayed by the program leaders, supervisors, and the overall playfulness of peers. The youth told me that when they felt like they belonged—in some cases within a few days—their nerves disappeared. Interestingly, the youth talked about how that feeling of belonging came about more from the way staff interacted with them than from peer interactions. When I went on site to complete interviews, I noticed that supervisors talked to the youth about their weekend, how school was going, or how they were feeling that day.

Some young people discussed the lighthearted atmosphere of the workplace and how their initial interactions with the staff made them feel comfortable right away. The caring behaviors of program leaders and staff members seemed to create feelings of belonging and a sense of comfort for the youth employees. For example, Malik, a lawn care employee with no prior landscaping work experience said,

> As soon as I came in I shook one of the staff's hands and they said to me, 'You shake hands like a girl, you gotta work here.' It was really funny to me. I knew I was gonna like working here because just the humor and funniness and the laid back and everything; it's like it feels like a home environment.

Notably 13 out of 16 youth interviewees used the term "second home" to refer to YEP and many referred to supervisors and other youth members as family. Interactions between YEP staff and youth created a culture that valued family and inclusion. I was intrigued by this designation because many of the young people in YEP come from a home environment, as I was told by supervisors, the Foundation, and many of the youth themselves, that was quite opposite of what they experienced at YEP. The youth told me that YEP emphasized care, understanding, and positivity at the forefront and therefore the youth experienced YEP as a positive second home.

To understand how the supervisors established a culture of care in the workplace I asked all five how they conveyed care for both the individual person and for the YEP employee. Supervisors explained that care was necessary in order to get through to the sometimes troubled, down and out, or unhappy YEP youth. By establishing a culture of care, supervisors were able to build trust with youth employees on a personal level in conjunction with the normal demands of the work. Program leader Rob summarized this idea well:

> I think it is your daily interactions. When [the youth] walk through the door, how does it feel to them? Do they ring a bell and check in? Do they get shuttled off and then all you do is talk to them about work, work, work, work? There's no relationship there. … I could leave a meeting with the director here and then go work with a student and it's all about how you talk to them. Students are very keen to know if you're just blowing smoke or if you're really interested in them. And [here] we take time to say: How's your life, how's your family, how's *this* person?

By caring about the individual before the employee, care became vital to the way YEP members experienced work. As a result, their work through YEP developed into a way for youth to begin to figure out who they were; to realize that individuals and members of society matter; and to recognize that they could be and do more than they may have previously thought.

Care was represented in the way program leaders talked and listened to the youth and also in the way program leaders showed compassion for the youth by providing for their basic needs. As program leader Rob explained above, the supervisors asked the youth questions about what was going on their lives besides work. Supervisors built close relationships with the youth by talking to them on a one-on-one level and taking an interest in their life both in and outside of the workplace. The youth employees echoed this sentiment. Noah explained that his supervisor showed care for him as an individual, and not just an employee, by asking about his life. At his YEP location, Noah enjoyed working in the woodshop. He built small picnic tables, birdhouses, outdoor Adirondack chairs, and doghouses. Noah said that he believed that the staff cared about him as a person more than about the tasks he was assigned and accomplished at work. I asked Noah if there were specific ways he felt the staff had shown him care. His response was telling:

> Listening to me. I can come to them for advice and I can get it. Just talking to me. *Talking to me like I'm a real person* [emphasis added]. At my last job I was just talked about; I was just a worker. But [here] they talk to me about my dreams and what I want to do when I grow up and why I love doing this [woodshop] kind of stuff.

Noah had previous work experience as an assistant to a funeral home director. He mentioned that in that role he did not know very much about who his boss was and how his boss didn't know much about him. He compared his prior experience to his YEP experience: The care he felt coming from the staff in YEP was new to him but something that he talked about as liking as a part of the whole work experience in YEP. Zari, who was spending her second summer at the same work location, also explained that she was able to develop a strong connection with her supervisors and the people who volunteer because of the family-like culture and the way her supervisors trusted in her as an employee:

> I feel like we're all a family and I grew very comfortable around the people I see every day. …to know they *trust* me, you know, as even being a minor to say, 'Here, lead us so we can serve 1,500 kids today'. …You feel much more motivated to have a group of adults that got your back and they are here at your side for help and things like that.

In addition to conversations Noah and Zari referenced, the supervisors also showed compassion to the individual youth employees through donations and gifts that helped the youth in their everyday lives. YEP employee Jayla explained, "She [the supervisor] brought me a safe with a key so I could lock up all my social security, everything, the important stuff that I need. … that's love. Ain't nobody gonna do nothing like that if they don't care and love about you." The program leaders, supervisors, and staff the youth worked for, and with, became mentors and friends who helped the youth with their lives both in and outside of the workplace. One young man talked about a staff member who shared a sack lunch with him because he didn't get to eat breakfast before coming to

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work. Another staff member created a donations list for a youth employee who was

moving away to college and needed supplies because she would be living on her own for

the first time. The act of supplying the youth with material items they needed helped

supervisors to build a culture of care. The caring culture encouraged youth to participate

fully in the work experience because they felt cared for as individuals and as employees

in YEP.

In addition to personalized talk and gifts of care, within the overall culture of care,

program leaders constructed YEP as a safe place to fail; a theme I develop later in this

chapter. The youth reported that their supervisors were invested in them as employees

and as individuals. The investment supervisors made in the youth helped the youth feel

connected to both those individuals and their job on a personal level. Through creating a

culture of care, the supervisors constructed a positive work environment and ultimately

helped the youth in both their work and personal lives. The culture of care also enabled

the youth to develop valuable skills through this early work experience.

The Outcomes of Work Socialization in YEP

The first research question asked, "What are young people learning about work

through early part-time job experiences in YEP?" I found that the youth learned and

developed a variety of valuable skills. Work socialization in YEP went far beyond the

skills necessary in order to complete work tasks and get along with others at work. In

this section I argue that in addition to gaining job skills related to their specific job tasks,

the youth also developed an understanding of professional norms, relational skills, an

appreciation for work, and, ultimately, a strong sense of self-efficacy. The youth

believed that these various skills were transferable to life and future work.

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Task Skills

Task skills are the abilities an individual must acquire in order to complete his or her job. Not surprisingly, the youth talked about developing the skills necessary to complete their assigned tasks: how to use tools, how to lay mulch, how to mow, et cetera. The youth reported that these skills came quite easily. Noah explained,

> It's not something you have to think about. So once you start you, you know what you need to do. And you can get it done. Like already I'm able to get through my work without having to ask questions. It's faced paced, yeah, but it's simple enough to be fast.

Elon talked about learning about different tools: "Well, I'm learning what certain tools are because before I came here I did not even know what a spade shovel was," he said. "Or a flat shovel. I thought all shovels was just shovels. It's just different kinds. Now I am learning a lot of new things, how to use them and everything." The youth surmised that skills related to their assigned tasks at work (i.e., mowing, edging, filing, woodwork) might be transferable depending on future work opportunities. For example, a few youth talked about how they felt they could confidently help their parents, grandparents, or caretakers take care of a home lawn, plant flowers, or fix a broken picnic table because of what they learned in YEP.

Professional Norms

When talking about work, often times the youth began to talk about professionalism. They said things like "just act professionally" or "be professional". Professional norms have to do with expectations for how one should act appropriately on the job. I enjoyed hearing from the young workers about how they learned to navigate

the work and the workplace: As one young person said, wearing a suit and tie to a construction site is not dressing for the job. Professionalism included the type of clothing you wear, being mindful of how you talk to peers and supervisors, and developing a sense of integrity for yourself and your work. The youth explained that professionalism and working well are both about following directions, managing tasks both independently and in a group, and completing tasks efficiently and effectively.

Another aspect of professionalism the youth discussed learning through YEP is the importance of being to work on-time, fully awake, and prepared work. The young workers talked to me about getting up early, working long hours, and feeling tired when they finally got home. Demarco said, "It make[s] me feel good about myself that I can get up and go to work because most of the inner city kids can't just get up and [go] to work cause like … some kids, most kids is lazy and don't like getting up in the morning." Demarco and other YEP employees were learning about time-orientation and the need to be to work on time, awake, and prepared to do work in YEP.

Relational Skills

However important task and professional skills are, the youth in YEP learned far more than how to mow a lawn or wake up early. The relational skills YEP employees learned through this early job experience are vital to the heart of the program. Relational skills involve the youth and their program leaders and peers on an interpersonal level. Relational skills spanned the YEP experience and often went beyond just communicating about the work. Learning to open up and to be oneself while at a YEP work location were important relational skills that the youth reported gaining.

Learning to work well in groups is another relational skill the youth reported developing in YEP. The youth saw that when they were on the job, they were all working together to finish a task. The youth explained that they tried to help one another to complete assigned tasks correctly and efficiently. They learned that if a YEP employee couldn't get along with the people they worked with, or the people who were in charge of them, then they would have a harder time. The youth in YEP were able to develop strong relational skills with supervisors and staff members because of the culture of care. Malik said,

> In other places I worked, working as a group sometimes didn't work out. But here it's always good because its like the group is a family. We get to know each other really close. …We know when certain people of the group don't want to do certain things and how or when they can't, and we can help them.

To develop workplace relationships, the youth talked to one another about music, TV shows, and other things they enjoyed. Deon, a 19-year-old youth employee who's experienced a number of early jobs, explained that there's always an opportunity to build friendships at work but that in YEP developing friendships happened naturally. He said,

> It's okay to establish friendships as long as it doesn't interfere with the position. I definitely developed friendships with my coworkers. And I really enjoyed it because I went to work and I had something else to look forward to, you know, other than getting paid. …We'd just talk and sometimes life stories would come up or we'd ask what we would do that day or we'd talk about our home life.

In addition, the youth were often thrust into different groups to complete different tasks. First time worker 15-year-old Alexa said,

I think the cool thing about [it] is you're not always working with the same

people. I like everybody but it's nice to get to work with other people.

The way they learned about different personalities and how to relate to different people

was an important relational skill YEP employees acquired. Staff members in YEP were

constantly giving the young people advice, listening, and offering second chances. When

talking about how to relate to others in the workplace Kimani, a YEP employee who

previously worked in fast food for two months, said that in contrast to her previous

manager, her YEP supervisor was personally invested in her and wanted to have a closer,

more personal relationship with her. Because of this, she explained, "when you make

these relationships with these people, these people can help you." Supervisors, program

leaders, and staff members alike talked to the youth employees one-on-one. They took

the time to ask them how they were doing and about their life outside of work. By

tackling work from this perspective, supervisors placed employees in a culture of care.

Supervisors sought a deeper connection to youth employees because they ultimately

wanted to see the youth become successful members of the surrounding community.

Opening up to their supervisors and peers about how they were feeling as

individuals is another relational skill the youth developed in YEP. The caring culture

encouraged the youth to open up about their personal wants and needs. By opening up,

the youth were able to build trust and a sense of mutual respect. For example, Jaime

talked to me about feeling frustrated at work because he felt his peers disrespected him.

He explained that he learned how to show and receive respect as a direct result of a

conversation he had with his supervisor one day at work:

You know, there's gonna be people that you work with that you're not gonna get

along with but at the same time you have to respect them because if you want

respect back from that person then you have to respect them first. … [I learned

this] because my boss one day sat down and talked to me and told me, 'you know,

you need to start respecting others and then you will start getting respect' and I

was like 'hmmmm'.

For the program leaders, gaining respect from the youth was the result of building

positive relationships and establishing trust through care and understanding. In doing

this, the youth began to acknowledge and reciprocate a level of respect for supervisors,

peers, and themselves in the workplace.

An Appreciation for Work

The youth also learned an appreciation for work in YEP because of the focus on

the individual person before the employee. For Noah, knowing if he was working well or

not started with external motivation—hearing compliments and critiques from staff

members and supervisors and receiving a paycheck—and transformed into internal

motivation. He said doing work well is, "when you can keep moving forward. When you

don't have to go backwards and redo things over and over again." Ten youth discussed

the feeling of working well based on personal inclinations toward wanting to (a) perform

well for themselves (b) perform well for the supervisors, and (c) complete the task at

hand. By realizing that they could do work well, efficiently, and effectively and that

accomplishing work made them feel good, the youth came to appreciate work. For

example, Jaime, a 20-year-old who spent his time working at a thrift store, explained why

he thinks doing work well is important. To begin he explained that there are always

things that we don't want to do but that they are our job to do. Jaime talks about

recognizing that even though he may not like the task he must complete, he understands

that it is important. He said,

> I mean, it doesn't matter if you like it or not because at the end of the day, that's
> your paycheck. So, if I go and have to clean a bathroom or something, honestly, I
> don't like to clean bathrooms. Well you know, I mean who does? But at the end
> of the day, I know that I am getting paid to clean the bathroom.

Jaime is just one example out of many that demonstrates this understanding and

appreciation for work in conjunction with making money. But the majority of the youth

also talked to me about how their YEP experience transformed from being about

paycheck to becoming something they actually looked forward to each day. Malik, a 17-

year-old who used to work in a fast food restaurant prior to his YEP employment at a

lawn care location, talked about coming to appreciate a job well done through his work at

YEP:

> At McDonalds, yeah we're making food for people; people are eating our fast
> food and everything. But you don't get to see the progress *you're* making. You
> don't get to turn around a different day and see what you did yesterday and how
> nice it looks and everything and it's just, it puts a big smile on my face.

For the youth, completing a task and seeing the results of their hard work was rewarding.

Through jobs like lawn care and woodshop, the youth were able to physically see a

project from start to finish and appreciate the work they had a hand in completing. Jacob

explained,

It makes me feel proud of my self. [Before] I would always just do what I had to

do and now I'll do the best job that I can. I do work for others as I would do it for,

like, my own lawn. Because I don't want my lawn getting messed up so I do their

job like I would do my own.

In addition, the mission of improving the local community set forth by YEP work

locations also had an influence on the youth. For example, Zari said, "Knowing every

day that I am contributing to feeding 5,500 kids makes my job feel more like a passion

and a commitment as to just a job." The youth began to see their work as meaningful

because they felt good about the work they were doing and they could actually see that

they were doing their work well. The youth realized how rewarding doing work could be

both intrinsically (pride in a job well done and a feeling that what they do made a

difference) and extrinsically (positive feedback and a paycheck).

Self-Efficacy

The youth also learned that an important aspect of work is trying new things and

learning to trust themselves to do what they've been taught. Through this process, the

youth developed a sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as "a belief in one's

capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective

situations" (Bandura, 1997, p. 2). Self-efficacy occurs when human beings believe in

themselves and what they can accomplish; as a result, they are more likely to realize their

goals.

In some cases, a confrontation or issue at work helped a young person to grow as

an employee and to develop a sense of self-efficacy. For example, Michael found

himself in trouble with a supervisor who he felt connected with on a personal level.

Michael confided that he felt angry and upset with himself for disappointing his supervisor. He explained,

> Well this summer when I was working in glass, I had to wear goggles and I didn't want to wear them so I kept putting them on my forehead. And when the dude working back in the glass, he's like, "You gotta wear glasses," and I was like, "Last year we didn't have to wear glasses." And we got into it. He told [my boss] and [my boss] talked to me. And he was like, "I didn't expect this out of you." That was bad for me. I didn't take that very well. I just went back to my workstation and I was mad the rest of the day. … I was like, I don't know, angry I guess. I was mad. 'Cause, he was kind of right. He did not expect that out of me 'cause I usually just do what I'm told and that day I didn't want to.

Michael told me that after this incident, he always wore his goggles when he was working in glass. Through his experience, he learned the importance of safety at work but he also learned about how he felt when his supervisor was unhappy with his performance. As an employee, Michael felt he wanted to be acknowledged and respected for his work, but realized that he needed to follow directions in order to complete the task to the best of his ability. This is an example of how YEP members developed a sense of self-efficacy. When a YEP employee did something wrong or not up to the standards of a supervisor, they report feeling deflated and upset with themselves. In essence, failures acted as turning points that the youth experienced in order to grow and develop. This can be a hard lesson to learn but it is an important lesson because it helped YEP members to foster a sense of integrity and responsibility to follow rules, ask questions, and admit when they were wrong.

Relatedly, the youth learned that by having a good attitude and completing their tasks, they felt better about themselves in the workplace. Taye learned he was a hard worker through his first job experience in YEP. "You just show up without complaints and get straight to business," he said. "You leave when you are done or maybe stay a little late. … it's something different because I never worked, I never worked before. …I'm a hard worker."

Some youth talked about work as the outcome of their time spent doing a particular task. Aiden told me about a time he mowed a lawn and left seven "Mohawks" (i.e., when the lines aren't straight and connected and there is a line of grass between two paths). Aiden said he wasn't sure what to do to fix his mistake so he first asked a peer, who told him to ask his supervisor:

> And so I went up and I asked him [the supervisor], "How do I fix this without messing up the lines that are already there?" And he told me, "You'll have to do the entire lawn over again and this time just make sure your wheels are touching the line from before." And so I made sure that my wheels were inside the line. …I was a little worried that I had messed up the entire lawn. Um, and that's why I was so hesitant but I was like 'OK, I can do this.'

Aiden was nervous about making a mistake but quickly realized that he had the ability to correct it. He could have left the lawn with the "Mohawks" or blamed his mistake on a peer, but he didn't. Aiden wanted to do the work well and he became confident in his work because of the opportunity his supervisor gave him: He was able to take the time to go back over the lawn in order to make sure it was "Mohawk" free for the customer. As a result, Aiden felt good about doing his work well the second time around. Aiden

developed a sense of self-efficacy because he began to believe in himself and realized that he could do the work well.

Many of the youth talked about how the skills they learned would likely transfer to work and life; meaning that they believed that their experiences in YEP would apply both to future jobs and to their personal lives. Deon said,

> I can't go to a construction job from an office space and just be chilling and relaxing you know; you have to be doing stuff. But I feel like the personalities you can take. You can take the work ethic with you. You can take the sense of responsibility with you. [Those things you can] take with you to any job.

Other youth talked about work in a broader sense noting the importance of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Alexa explained that when she talked to her supervisors about work, they told her that even though she may not want to do the type of work she was assigned it was her job to do so. "You still gotta work," she said. "And cause you have to pay bills when you get older," said Alexa. "There's a necessity of having a job and doing the job." By developing an understanding about work and what work means, the youth began to connect their YEP experience to their thoughts about future work and life. Such thoughts helped the youth develop a sense of self-efficacy because they began to see that learning to do work well in YEP would likely influence their understanding of doing work well in future job opportunities.

I have shown that within a culture of care the youth employees were able to learn task, professional, and relational skills, as well as an appreciation for work and a sense of self-efficacy. Learning to edge, build a picnic table, organize a spreadsheet, or sort recycled electronics are simply byproducts of the experience as a whole. Early work at

YEP is about more than learning how to complete tasks. In this program, the caring culture provided by supervisors, program leaders, and staff members created an experience of early work that was generally positive and that developed well-rounded young people (the individual) who could apply what they learned in other contexts.

The Process of Work Socialization in YEP

Throughout this chapter I have argued that YEP developed a culture of care and that the youth learned various valuable skills through YEP. Now that I have established *what* the youth learned in YEP, I shift to focus on *how* work socialization occurred in YEP. The second research question asked, "What are the everyday practices through which work socialization occurs in part-time work in YEP?" I found that work socialization occurred not only through formalized training sessions aimed at helping the youth learn about proper job etiquette but also through hands-on work, daily interactions, and mentoring by program staff.

Training Sessions

The first way that work socialization occurred in YEP is through training sessions. Most youth participated in daily, weekly, and/or monthly job etiquette training sessions that the program designs to help the youth develop a broader understanding of what work means and how to behave at work. YEP training sessions covered job etiquette and "best practices" for doing work and doing work well. After the Foundation trained YEP program leaders about how to hold such training sessions, each location's supervisors had the freedom to train in their own way and to focus on topics they deemed important. The youth reported that the job etiquette training sessions involved

icebreaker-type games, weekly journals, and at some locations even a mini field trip to a local college for a campus tour.

While the youth mentioned the training sessions as ways they learned about work, they put much greater emphasis on the hands-on experience of work rather than the classroom-type discussions. This is interesting given the centrality of the training sessions to the YEP program. This demonstrates that at YEP work socialization occured more through informal than formal channels: The experience of working with others far outweighed the training sessions for the youth. Perhaps this is because work socialization—as discussed in the previous section—is about so much more than learning task skills and even, professional norms and relational skills. Appreciation for work and self-efficacy are beyond what a training session is able to provide. When I talked to the youth about their perceptions of professionalism, they talked both about what they learned through working and what they learned through employability training sessions. Despite, much of what the youth had to say about work, what work is, and how to work came about through talking about their hands-on work, personal observations and the conversations they had with their program leaders and peers on a daily basis, rather than from the scheduled work etiquette training sessions.

Hands-On Work

The second way that work socialization occurred in YEP is through the hands-on work the youth experienced on a daily basis. The youth learned to complete assigned tasks, ask questions, and follow professional rules at their YEP work location by actually doing work (hands-on) rather than talking about what work might be like (training sessions). At one of the work locations, most of the work tasks revolved around lawn

maintenance. Youth learned to mow, edge, spread mulch, and the like. According to

Malik, encouragement from the staff to try something new helped him to see that he

could do more than he ever thought he could. He explained,

> I remember one time, the staff asked me to edge and I was like, 'ah, I don't know
>
> how to edge' and they were like 'well, try and see how it works for you'. And I
>
> tried it and then it was perfect. I had, I had a lot of fun and everything doing it and
>
> my confidence boosted. Because I was like, if I can do that then I can probably do
>
> a lot of other stuff that I didn't think I could do.

By allowing the youth to try new tasks and learn new skills without focusing on doing

something right or wrong, the supervisors were allowing the youth to figure out things for

themselves and, as a result, develop confidence in their own abilities.

Daily Interactions

The third way that work socialization occurred at YEP was through daily

interactions. The youth were not only completing tasks but they were also learning about

how to complete tasks well. There were two types of everyday interactions that were

particularly salient: observations and humor.

Observations. Observation was one way the youth learned various elements of

work socialization. The youth observed others—supervisors and peers—while on the

job. Youth reported that they often stood back and observed the way their work locations

functioned and to see how to do different tasks. One example of the way the youth used

observations as a part of work socialization was talked about openly and clearly in my

conversation with 17-year-old Aiden, whose YEP job was his first job:

For me it's more of a visual thing. I watch from behind the scenes to see how they interact with the other peers. And when I figure it out and how they are acting, I feel better approaching them. …Eventually I'll warm up to the way they act or the way they want things done.

The youth recognized that they were not going to be able to do everything right, right away. Observing one another helped the youth to see that they had the ability to help one another. For many youth, observing others helped them to feel more confident in themselves because they had a chance to watch others work and see how to do work well. The youth observed their peers in order to help one another. Elon explained, "we showed other people what we didn't know, how to do, and it's gonna be way easier [for them] than somebody that don't know you and really don't care if you learning or not."

Humor. Another way work socialization occurred through everyday interactions was through the use of humor in YEP. Supervisors used humor to build positive relationships with the youth. The youth were able to experience work in YEP as something that was enjoyable because of the people they work with and the way those people interacted with one another. For example Malik said, "The staff can joke around with us and stuff. It's not always like they're the boss and we're just the workers. They understand us and we understand them." The use of humor in YEP was also a way the supervisors created a culture of care: Supervisors used humor to show focus on the individual first and the employee second.

Mentoring by Program Staff

The fourth—and perhaps most important—way that work socialization occurred at YEP was through the YEP employees' relationships with supervisors, program leaders,

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and staff members. Although formal training sessions and peer relationships facilitated work socialization, it was the supervisors that ultimately helped the youth come to understand work and what it means to do work well. Mentoring is embedded within the culture of care in YEP and vital to the way youth experienced and learned about work and what it means to do work. Three aspects of the mentoring relationship that are central to this are compliments, learning from mistakes, and the sharing of supervisors' own life experiences.

Compliments. The first way work socialization occurred through mentoring by program staff was through compliments. Compliments were an important part of the learning experience for YEP participants. Again, for supervisors, showing the youth that they cared about them on a personal level helped the youth to see the workplace and the work as a positive environment and an experience they looked forward to on a regular basis. External motivation often came in the form of feedback through comments about a job well done or the way a youth employee handled a task or solved a problem. Compliments of a job well done encouraged the youth to do their work well. The youth echoed this sentiment. For example, Malik said, "[When] I get compliments like, 'Hey, you're doing a good job.' I like that!" In addition, Summer talked about feeling good about herself after showing her supervisor the lawn she completed. She said she felt that way when the supervisors told her, "Oh, yeah, that's great. You did a great job." Compliments are an important aspect to the YEP experience that helped the youth to develop an appreciation for work and doing work well and a sense of self-efficacy.

Learning from mistakes. The second way work socialization occurred through mentoring by staff, and what I consider unique in YEP, resides within the idea that the

program was a "safe place to fail". Young people in YEP recognized that there were

consequences for doing something wrong, but they also noted that they would not be

punished as severely as if they were working at an organization that was not considered a

safe place to fail. Rob, a program leader, explained this perspective:

> It's unique because it's a safe place to fail. We have a network of employers that
>
> are trained ahead of time and they understand their role. Our network of
>
> employers are not just businesses who want employees, they are businesses who
>
> want employees and are also interested in changing and assisting that next
>
> generation of workers. So, we have excellent work sites. When we have students
>
> that probably wouldn't have been hired elsewhere in a traditional employment
>
> kind a setting, we have the opportunity to put 'em into a work experience,
>
> knowing it might not work out. And the employers know it might not work out.

Supervisors are invested in helping to assist the next generation of workers and helping

young people who may not be able to land job experience otherwise due to a juvenile

background and/or a lack of work opportunities for young job seekers. Because of the

care supervisors have for a young person's personal role in YEP, program leaders also

seemed to care on a deeper level than other supervisors might. Summer talked to me

about how at other jobs she and her peers might not get as many chances to mess up. She

noticed that in YEP they are given a second chance and that her supervisor took the time

to talk to them one-on-one about a mistake or an issue. "She really doesn't want to fire

people," said Summer. "Because she wants them to do better. And she spends a lot of

time trying to make that happen."

YEP is a safe place to fail because when the youth make a mistake, they are supported in such a way that helps them learn from their mistake. Program leader Rob said, "We wrap around them afterwards, the employers and us, and say, 'hey you're being removed from the job, and here's why' and 'let's try this again in a different setting or maybe next year'." Pamela, another program leader, talked about how she saw the YEP work experience as a safe place to fail:

> I think it's because we really show these kids self worth. And confidence. And we don't hold their hands here because they know what the consequence is. If you're not gonna do it, you're gonna get written up, and then you're gonna get suspended, and then you're gonna get fired, and I'll find someone else that will work better than you. And I think it's that whole challenge to the kids.

A safe place to fail is not meant to be a way for youth to dodge their responsibilities as an employee: There are still consequences to their actions and repercussions for wrongdoing or inappropriate behaviors. However, what might get a young person fired at a different job might simply result in a warning and calm discussion from a program leader in YEP. The culture of care as manifest in being a safe place to fail helped the youth experience a positive view of work and self as well as to develop skills necessary for future work success.

Sharing experiences and advice. The third way mentoring by program staff fostered work socialization was through the way supervisors shared their personal experiences and offered advice within a culture of care. For most YEP employees, the caring environment of YEP was a welcome surprise. For Jayla, the way supervisors asked about and took an interest in her personal life was unexpected:

I just didn't expect them to be so nice and caring; they want us to be here. I didn't

expect them to care about what's going on in our personal life and telling us to

come to them if we need anything or if they can help us with anything. I didn't

expect all the good energy that I see in here.

The youth developed an awareness of self and other through the communicative

behaviors of program leaders. By showing care and displaying caring communicative

behaviors to the youth, the supervisors and staff members were modeling accepted

behaviors, norms, and values that align with YEP. Because the staff members were

invested in the mission of YEP, the youth learned how important their YEP experience

was to others. For Jayla and others, the YEP supervisors saw her as an individual not just

as an employee. She said, "I trust these people. I'd trust these people in here with my

life. And I really do, I trust these people in here with my life." The caring culture

encouraged the youth to trust in their supervisors.

Supervisors also acknowledged their own experiences and shared those

experiences with the youth. In many instances, the youth talked about how supervisors

shared aspects of their personal lives with them. Such admissions by program leaders

acted as another way to show the youth that they, too, could do work and do work well.

Supervisors showed an investment in the youth through the way they communicate about

life outside of the workplace. Michael, an 18-year-old working his second summer in

YEP at a technology recycling center said that his supervisor told him that he went to

college for a year and hasn't gone back. "He was telling us we should always have a

goal," Michael explained. The honesty of the supervisor about his personal path helped

Michael to feel connected with his supervisor on a personal level.

Supervisors also offered advice to the employees about work and life on a regular basis. A few interviewees compared YEP jobs to working at a fast food restaurant. Kimani explained with a rising tone to her voice,

> … say you have a problem with somebody here, you can find better ways to solve it. And at an everyday job, they don't teach you that stuff. You come to work and go home. Say you work at McDonald's, they not gonna care. They just want you flippin' them fries and go home. You don't got nobody who gonna sit here and talk to you, and coach you, and be there for you, and give you good accurate advice that's gonna help you.

This is just one of many examples of how the supervisors offered constant advice and feedback and how the youth then learned that there superiors in YEP were invested in them as individuals and as employees.

In conclusion, although the training sessions were one way that work socialization occurred, hands-on work, daily interactions, and mentoring by program staff were even more important. The mentoring by program staff was central to the overall culture of care present in YEP and to the work socialization that occurred through the program. Mentoring was especially influential in helping the youth develop an understanding of what it means to work, a strong appreciation for work, and an overall sense of self-efficacy. The YEP early work experience allowed the youth to learn how to work well but also—and what I consider to be most important—helped the youth begin to develop confidence in themselves and pride in what they were able to do as both an employee in YEP and as an person away from YEP.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

As the previous chapter demonstrated, for the youth in YEP work becomes about so much more than a job. Through YEP, the youth transformed from being nervous, shy and focused on a paycheck to being confident and excited to work. My findings suggest that the youth employees learned more than simply task skills, professional norms, and relational skills; they ultimately learned and developed an appreciation for work and a sense of self-efficacy. Further, I demonstrated that the youth developed these skills through a variety of practices beyond training sessions including hands-on work, daily interactions, and mentoring by program staff.

I have argued that care is vital to the way young people in YEP experience work. The supervisors' interactions with the youth created and sustained a culture of care that is the foundation for this process of work socialization. Supervisors showed care through personalized conversations, gifts of compassion, and wholehearted investment in the at-risk youth in YEP. The supervisors' commitment to the individual first and the work second lead the youth to see YEP as a second home. Through caring for young employees, supervisors showed the youth that work can be meaningful to an individual as well as to the organization and they helped the youth come to see themselves as competent and confident. Overall, my findings suggest that work socialization in YEP helped the youth begin to develop an understanding of what work is and how one should approach and accomplish work, regardless of the specific organization or vocation.

Theoretical Contributions

As discussed in Chapter Two, organizational communication scholars have been researching socialization and assimilation for a number of years (Jablin, 2001; Waldeck & Myers, 2008). Socialization research primarily focuses on a narrow, linear view of socialization and the assimilation of newcomers to specific organizations (Bullis, 1993; Clair, 1996, Waldeck & Myers, 2008). By focusing on work socialization, I am moving away from looking at socialization into organizations and instead seeking to understand socialization into work more generally. Studying work socialization enables an understanding of how broader ideologies of what it means to work and do work regardless of organization or vocation are learned and constructed. Work socialization furthers our understanding of the ways in which individuals learn about and make meaning out of work in a more general sense.

In this study, I was able to develop a broad understanding of the concept of work socialization by examining how YEP employees experienced early part-time work. In YEP, youth learned task, professional, and relational skills. In addition, the youth learned an appreciation for work and a sense of self-efficacy through doing work and being allowed to learn through their mistakes. Although my study suggests these five outcomes of work socialization, there are likely additional outcomes. Future research should consider the other outcomes of work socialization in other contexts.

My study suggests that work socialization in YEP is a process that involves two key things: (a) hands-on work/daily interactions and (b) caring relationships between supervisors and employees. In YEP, the youth learned more about work and what it means to work through their time spent developing relationships and observing others as

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opposed to formalized training. The youth talked about getting complimented on a job well done, learning to navigate the work efficiently through daily interactions, and learning most concretely what it means to work by being able to try, fail, and try again without major consequence. The positive outcomes of work socialization in YEP appeared most fully in the way youth learned an appreciation for work and a sense of self-efficacy. Although work socialization in YEP seemed generally positive, future studies should seek a further understanding of both the positive and negative outcomes of work socialization and how negative outcomes may influence one's understanding of current and future work opportunities.

My study suggests that a communicative perspective to work socialization furthers our understanding of what it means to work and do work. Work socialization blends the meanings of work literature and professionalism literature, two concentrations that are often segmented and study separately. My study suggests that these two avenues for understanding work presumably occur simultaneously. The meanings of work are represented in *how* the youth learned about work and professionalism is represented in *what* the youth learned about work. However, work socialization goes beyond the meanings of work and professionalism literature and considers more closely the process by which individuals make meaning out of work and that what individuals understand about doing work is not necessarily contextually bound in an organization or vocation.

This study also suggests that work socialization is a give and take, not just a one-way transmission of information from the organization to the employee. Although I did not develop this fully for this thesis project, as the supervisors and youth developed reciprocal trust through the culture of care in YEP, it became clear that the youth also

individualized their work experience. YEP shows that newcomers don't simply 'sign on' to the prescribed rules and values upon entering an organization (Jablin, 2001). The youth were given the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and this allowed them to make sense of what it meant to work as an individual and as an employee. Future research could extend this notion by looking at how employees individualize and adapt professional norms and meanings of work through local contexts of talk and text about work and working.

Further, my findings suggest that work socialization is a process that occurs in many forms and at many different times through a particular work experience. By focusing on early job experiences, this study suggests that work socialization does not simply occur in anticipation of one's real job (Clair, 1996) or vocation; instead, work socialization occurs as a result of working and through working. Future research could employ longitudinal methods to further develop the way work socialization socially constructs one's understandings of work and what it means to work and do work well. Additionally, future research could seek a deeper understanding of work socialization as it occurs in different periods in one's career; it would be especially interesting to understand how work socialization occurs in mid- and late-career experiences.

Work socialization is a promising concept for bridging the organizational socialization, meanings of work, and professionalism literatures that warrants further study. I employed in-depth interviews to complete this study. However, interviews are just one way to develop an in-depth understanding of work socialization and limit our understanding to participants' reports of work socialization. In the future, researchers could employ participant-observation to get a deeper sense of how work socialization

occurs in a situated context. Also, researchers could employ mixed methods by developing surveys designed to measure work socialization as it occurs through work experiences.

My findings suggest that the culture of care in YEP allowed the youth to learn beyond the task skills, professional norms, and relational skills required to do work and do work well. Because of this, future research should consider early work experiences that are not situated in a youth employment program to develop a deeper understanding of the aspect of care—and whether or not it is vital to the way youth experience work— and the ways in which young people make sense of work.

Practical Implications

This study also has practical implications for those who work with youth with relatively little job experience. This study suggests that although formalized training sessions are helpful for providing basic work information, they are less critical to the development of an employee than routine, daily interactions between youth and their supervisors. The culture of care in YEP set the stage for such a positive experience for the youth. Through caring relationships with their supervisors, the youth not only learned task, professional and relational skills but they also developed an appreciation for work and a sense of self-efficacy. These findings suggest that youth employment programs should encompass organizations with supervisors who are willing to put in extra time and effort. Supervisors in in YEP took the time to talk to the youth and really listen to the youth. They gave the youth things when they knew the youth needed something for their well being and safety outside of work. Because of their investment in the program and in the youth, the youth had a positive experience with work. The youth learned the

importance of giving back through work and being an active and positive member of a work community.

Although my findings suggest the youth are being socialized into the constructs of work more broadly through this positive experience at YEP, my study cannot make conclusions about the long-term impact this experience will have on the youth. The presumption I have made is that this positive early part-time work experience will set the youth up to view work as meaningful and themselves as capable throughout their working lives. However, given the uniqueness of the YEP program and the high level of commitment of YEP program leaders, it is important to reflect on whether YEP provides the youth with a realistic job preview. YEP is a youth employment program and the goal of the program is to help at-risk youth gain hands-on job experience in an attempt to help them better their lives. Because of this focus, arguably YEP does not provide a realistic preview of a "normal" part-time or full-time job. My concern is that as wonderful as the YEP experience is for the youth, future jobs might not provide a similar culture of care with supportive supervisors. It is possible that YEP sets youth up to be disappointed by the absence of a culture of care supporting them in future jobs; such an experience may lead them to become disillusioned with work and doubtful of themselves. A longitudinal study of these youth could provide answers to these important questions.

Conclusion

YEP is an example of the importance of early work opportunities for young people. Work socialization occurred in YEP through what was learned and how it was learned within a culture of care. The YEP early part-time work opportunities situated work as a good experience for the at-risk youth participants. YEP exemplified work and

working in a positive tone through a culture of care, safe place to fail, and the focus on the individual before the YEP employee.

As we have seen, through YEP Jayla learned how to mow a lawn, trim, edge, and plant flowers. She learned how to get along with her peers and how to talk with her supervisors. She developed an understanding of the way to behave at work versus outside of work. She developed an appreciation for work because of the way her supervisors in YEP treated her as an individual and not just as an employee. Because of their positive work experience in YEP, Jayla and the other youth began to believe in themselves and what they could accomplish. YEP helped the youth to see that they could "best" themselves and that they had the power to learn skills that could help them change their own paths. The culture of care in YEP as created and sustained by the supervisors, program leaders, and staff members was vital to the positive outcomes of work socialization in YEP. Supervisors that were willing to mentor and care for the young workers helped YEP employees to view work positively and to learn about what it means to work and how to do work well. Early work can positively shape young people's understanding of work and sense of self.

Endnotes

Jayla[1] – Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of all youth and supervisor interview participants as well as the YEP program, the Foundation, and the Research Institute.

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Appendix A

Youth Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Appendix A

Youth Semi-structured Interview Guide

To begin a youth interview session, I will collect the parental informed consent form and then discuss the research project with the participant. Then, I will have the youth participant sign the participant informed consent form. I will discuss the confidentiality of their participation in the study and voice that they may stop or quit the interview at any time and for any reason. To create a comfortable interview climate, I will give the young person the option to pick his or her pseudonym. I will refer to him or her using that pseudonym throughout the interview. After a pseudonym is established and I ask and answer any questions or concerns, I will begin the audio-recorded interview. There are a total of 15 questions on the interview guide; 4 questions were specifically requested by the Foundation. As with any interpretive study, I will allow the questions to guide themselves and therefore, it is not likely that all questions will be asked to each interview participant or that the questions will flow in numerical order. Each youth interview should last approximately 45 minutes.

Demographics: Age? Year in school? (if appropriate given age) First job? (if not, previous jobs) Hours per week?

1. Tell me about what you've done here this summer.
   - Can you tell me about what you do on a daily basis at work?
2. Why did you decide to work here?
3. What was the application and interview process like?
   - What did you expect this job to be like before you started working?
4. What are the most important skills that you learned during your job orientation?
   - What would you have liked to learn?
5. What have you learned now that the summer is almost over?
   - What have you learned about what it is like to work?
   - What have you learned about what is acceptable at work?
6. Can you tell me about a time when you were surprised at work?
   - Were you surprised about what you were required to do? Wear?
   - What surprised you about your boss's expectations?
7. Can you tell me about how you feel about your experience?
   - Did you like this job? Do you like working? Why? What do you like about it?
8. What was the most difficult part of your job?
   - What is the most difficult part of working?
9. Can you tell me about what you might like to do for work in the future?
   - How do you think this job will help you to get there?
10. Who did you talk to about your job? Why?
11. What does work or working mean to you?

Appendix B

Job Coordinator/Leader Interview Guide

Appendix B

Job Coordinator/Leader Interview Guide

To begin a coordinator/leader interview session, I will first discuss the research project with the participant. I will explain the confidentiality surrounding their participation and that they may end or quit the interview at any time and for any reason. Then, I will have the participant sign the participant informed consent form. To create a comfortable interview climate, I will give the participant the option to pick his or her pseudonym. I will refer to him or her using that pseudonym throughout the interview. After a pseudonym is established and any questions or concerns are acknowledged and explained, I will begin the audio-recorded interview. There are a total of 10 questions on the interview guide. With any interpretive study, I will allow the questions to guide themselves and therefore, it is not likely that all questions will be asked to each interview participant or that the questions will flow in numerical order. Each coordinator/leader interview should last approximately 45 minutes.

Demographics: Years with organization? How many youth are employed through YEP? How many years working with YEP youth?

1. Tell me what it's like to work with YEP?
2. What do YEP participants gain through the process?
3. How do you see the young people evolving?
   - In what ways?
   - Why do you think this occurs?
4. What are the young people learning about through your organization?
5. How do you think this experience influences young people?
   - In what ways do they change?
   - Are there certain points or elements of the experience that are especially formative?
6. Can you describe an experience where you shared information with the youth about what it means to work? (or gave career advice?)
   - In the future…Someday you'll…
7. Why are early job experiences important?
   - What do you think the young people will remember most about this experience?
   - Why?
8. How do you see young people navigating the job?
   - Who do they go to when they have questions?
   - How do they adjust to working?
9. How do the young people go about establishing relationships and making friendships while on the job?
10. What elements of the YEP experience have you seen youth resist?
    - How?
    - If so, why do you think they resist?
    - What are they resisting against?

Appendix C

HSIRB Approval Letter

Appendix C

HSIRB Approval Letter

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date: August 1, 2013

To: Stacey Wieland, Principal Investigator
        Katelyn Sandor, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 13-07-25

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Understanding Work Socialization through Young People's Part-time Job Experiences" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., *you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study*)." Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: August 1, 2014