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The Dark Side of Deeply Meaningful Work: Work-Relationship Turmoil and the Moderating Role of Occupational Value Homophily

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ABSTRACT How are close personal relationships experienced by people in deeply meaningful work? Drawing upon in-depth interview data with 82 international aid workers, I offer three distinct contributions. First, I find that people who experience their work as deeply meaningful have high work devotion. I identify *boundary inhibition* as a mechanism to explain why they participate more willingly in overwork and erratic work, despite giving rise to time- and trust-based conflict in their relationships. Second, I find that people with high work devotion often also experience emotional distance in their personal relationships when their close others don't value their work – a context I call *occupational value heterophily*. This disconnection-based conflict compounds the time- and trust-based conflict and engenders an emotionally agonizing situation, which I call *work-relationship turmoil*. Third, when close others do value their partner's work – a context I call *occupational value homophily* – it fosters an emotional connection and offers an avenue for work-relationship enrichment. These findings draw upon deeply meaningful work to detail the multi-faceted work-relationship experience among those with high work devotion.

Keywords: boundary inhibition, deeply meaningful work, occupational value homophily, work devotion, work-relationship conflict, work-relationship turmoil

INTRODUCTION

> At work, all these people are really smart, and inspiring, and great. But there is a dark side of the work. I've seen, in this industry, a lot of divorces and messed up families, a lot of people who gave up personal opportunities, people who had good relationships whose relationships never came to pass, who didn't get married, or

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> people who were married and their marriages fell apart because of people's commitment to this job. That's the dark side of the work.
>
> – International aid worker [M07]

Across occupations and industries, employees increasingly desire work that feels meaningful (Hurst, 2014; Twenge et al., 2010; Wey Smola and Sutton, 2002), as it provides fulfilment (Berg et al., 2010; Kahn, 2007), enjoyment (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), and wellbeing (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Yet, people in meaningful work may find it all consuming (Bailey et al., 2017; Cardador and Caza, 2012; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017), leading them to accept lower pay, dangerous conditions, and long hours (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Vinje and Mittelmark, 2007). What are the implications, then, for their relationships outside of work? Although research has alluded to the work-life experience in meaningful work (see, for example, McCrea et al., 2011; Munn, 2013; Tummers and Knies, 2013), we still lack an understanding of how personal sacrifice in deeply meaningful work extends to workers' close personal relationships.

Throughout history and across cultures, close personal relationships have been the single most important factor in making life meaningful (Baumeister and Leary, 1995; House et al., 1988). However, modern occupations demand 'ideal workers' who spend long hours at work and dedicate their full attention to the endeavour (Kanter, 1977; Williams et al., 2013). As a result, work confiscates time, energy, and attention from non-work domains, which can engender negative consequences for employees' private lives and give rise to conflict (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Perlow, 1999; Trefalt, 2013). The majority of research on this topic has examined how the increasingly consuming nature of work takes finite time away from caregiving responsibilities within the nuclear family, engendering 'work-family' conflict (Hochschild, 1997; Jacobs and Gerson, 2004; Moen, 2003) or away from domestic or leisure activities, giving rise to 'work-life' conflict (Orrange, 2007). To extend this research, I focus my attention on 'work-relationship' conflict, when stress and strain arise in a relationship with 'close others' (e.g., spouse, family, friends) as a result of the work performed by one or both people in the relationship. I define close relationships as emotionally intimate relationships in which two people understand, validate, and care for one another (Reis and Shaver, 1988).[1] This focus on work-relationship conflict extends work-family and work-life research in two respects. First, it broadens the scope of who is considered important in one's home life beyond the nuclear family. Second, it takes a more expansive view of the considerations that impact the work-life experience, moving beyond finite time, energy, and attention to also examine how the more emotional components of one's life are impacted by participation at work.

While work-relationship conflict most often arises when external employer demands clash with workers' preferences (Reid, 2015), for some employees it is exacerbated by the socially-constructed 'work devotion schema', which brings purpose to their long hours and fosters a deep dedication to work (Blair-Loy, 2001, 2003). When one has an emotional connection to work, it is likely that work will generate positive, enriching effects on employees' private lives, as well as giving rise to tremendous sacrifice. Through present, however, research has not fully resolved under what conditions either outcome would

arise (for work in that direction, see Bergmann et al., 2014; ten Brummelhuis et al., 2017). The most comprehensive conceptual framework to date integrates enrichment and conflict (see Wayne et al., 2017), but does not consider situations with both high enrichment and high conflict. I suggest that enrichment and conflict could co-exist orthogonally and potentially play interactive roles within the work-relationship interface. We require research that examines situations which hold the possibility for high enrichment and high conflict in order to probe the mechanisms therein. Deeply meaningful work provides a perfect case. In this paper, I explore the following research question: *How are close personal relationships experienced by people in deeply meaningful work?*

To examine this phenomenon requires first defining deeply meaningful work. Scholars generally agree that meaningful work entails both subjective components, enabling self-actualization, along with social components, enabling self-transcendence (Lepisto and Pratt, 2017; Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012; Rosso et al., 2010). Most empirical study of meaningful work has focused on the former aspect, self-actualization (Lepisto and Pratt, 2017). Extending prior research (Bailey and Madden, 2017; Bailey et al., 2017), I suggest that work is *deeply* meaningful when both aspects are present. As such, international aid work provides an optimal empirical setting that holds the possibility for deeply meaningful work, but where participants experience varying levels of meaningfulness. Drawing upon in-depth retrospective narrative interview data with 82 international aid workers, I develop a conceptual model that offers three distinct contributions.

First, I find that people who experience their work as deeply meaningful become devoted to work (Blair-Loy, 2001, 2003). While past research has identified an association between deeply meaningful work and personal sacrifice (e.g., Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Kreiner et al., 2009), I identify *boundary inhibition* as a mechanism that can help to explain *why* people who are devoted to work participate more willingly in high intensity work practices, such as overwork and erratic work, despite giving rise to conflict in their relationships. This insight helps highlight the unique challenges of work-relationship conflict in deeply meaningful work and suggests that, given the presence of boundary inhibition, people with high work devotion may not be adequately assisted by the traditional conflict mitigation strategies of increased control and flexibility offered by work-family scholars and organizations (Kelly et al., 2011).

Second, while time-based conflict from overwork and trust-based conflict from erratic work are difficult, I show how people with high work devotion also experience emotional distance in their close relationships when their close others don't value their work – a context I call *occupational value heterophily*. This disconnection-based conflict compounds the time- and trust-based conflict and engenders an emotionally agonizing situation, which I call *work-relationship turmoil*.

Third, I identify a positive component of the work-relationship experience that arises more powerfully among people with high work devotion. In particular, I find that when people are in relationships with close others who do share similar beliefs about the importance of their work – a concept I call *occupational value homophily* – it facilitates a form of *connection-based enrichment*. While this enrichment is helpful on an individual level, occupational value homophily may draw boundaries around a more tightly defined pool

of available candidates for satisfying close relationships (see also Hogg, 1992; Hogg and Turner, 1985), identifying another way in which work increasingly structures our private lives (Hochschild, 1997).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Deeply Meaningful Work

While philosophers and scholars have long considered whether work can serve as a domain for meaningfulness (Dutton et al., 2010; Hughes, 1958; Lips-Wiersma and von Hirschberg, 2017), 'meaningful work' lacks a consensus definition. Most scholars generally agree, however, that meaningful work entails both subjective components, rooted in a psychological paradigm, along with socially-oriented components, rooted in a sociological paradigm (for example, see Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017; Lepisto and Pratt, 2017; Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012; Michaelson et al., 2014; Rosso et al., 2010; Wolf, 2010).

The subjective view locates meaningfulness in the individual's relationship to their work (Dobrow and Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). This perspective involves the fulfilment of needs, motivations, and desires that result in *self-actualization* and expressing one's full potential. Many scholars emphasize an identity component, wherein meaningful work can be a vehicle to developing and becoming one's self (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012). Self-actualization captures the question, 'does my work reflect and fulfill who I am?' (Lepisto and Pratt, 2017, p. 111). When the answer is affirmative, then the work feels meaningful.

As a complement, the socially-oriented view suggests that work is meaningful because of social, cultural, and institutional norms that convey the value of one's work (Becker and Carper, 1956; Bellah et al., 1996; Weber, [1905] 1958), helping to answer the question, 'why is my work worthy?' (Lepisto and Pratt, 2017, p. 111). With this view, work results in *self-transcendence* because it is valuable to others (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012). The appreciation for self-transcendence as a component of meaningful work has been taken up by a stream of research on 'callings', a sub-type of meaningful work that is 'endowed with a powerful sense of being right and good and necessary' (Baumeister, 1991, p. 126). The current study departs from research on 'callings', however, because it does not include the third component of a 'calling': a destiny or summons 'originating beyond the self' that must be discovered (Dik and Duffy, 2009, p. 427).

My aim is to elaborate a more comprehensive definition of meaningful work. Therefore, I call work that enables *both* self-actualization and self-transcendence 'deeply meaningful work' (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009). Moreover, when there is consistency across domains of meaningfulness (Bailey and Madden, 2017; Bailey et al., 2017), in this case a synergy between self-actualization and self-transcendence, I suggest that it leads to the most deeply meaningful work.

The Double-Edged Sword of Deeply Meaningful Work: Teasing Apart Conflict and Enrichment

Beyond the positive rewards of self-actualization and self-transcendence, however, research also suggests that people who find their work deeply meaningful participate more willingly in high-intensity work practices that can lead to personal depletion (Kreiner et al., 2009; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017), such that meaningful work becomes a 'double-edged sword' (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009). Existing studies have suggested that a sense of 'moral duty' is what leads zookeepers and community health nurses alike to sacrifice pay, physical safety, and time, resulting in exhaustion and burnout (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Vinje and Mittelmark, 2007). However, outside the context of 'calling' work we lack mechanisms that could help explain why people who find their work deeply meaningful are reluctant to scale back at work.

More broadly, scholarship on work-life conflict in meaningful work has not offered consistent findings that assist in teasing apart the tension between conflict and enrichment. For example, McCrea et al. (2011) studied nearly 3,000 public sector employees and found that meaningful work slightly reduced work-life conflict, while Munn (2013) argues that the presence of work-life conflict makes work feel less meaningful. Offering additional insight, a survey study of 600 military couples found that the negative impact of work-induced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on marital satisfaction was buffered if the spouse perceived the worker's job was meaningful (Bergmann et al., 2014). While usefully examining a situation with the potential for high work-relationship conflict and high work-relationship enrichment, the study unfortunately does not predict how conflict is experienced when the spouse does not see the work as meaningful, a counterfactual which could arguably be incredibly important in this context. Finally, the work-life literature provides little guidance, as connections between work-induced conflict and enrichment remain a matter of debate (Powell and Greenhaus, 2006), and the most comprehensive conceptual framework to date integrates conflict and enrichment, but does not examine their interactive properties in situations with varying levels of each (see Wayne et al., 2017).

We require research that offers a fine grained analysis of the experience of deeply meaningful work in order to tease apart how people can experience conflict from strain between aspects of their work and home life (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Carr et al., 2008; Michel, 2011; ten Brummelhuis et al., 2017) and also have positive spillovers from work to their personal life (Rothbard, 2001; ten Brummelhuis et al., 2017; Tummers and Knies, 2013). This study attempts to offer a more nuanced and multi-faceted understanding of the work-relationship experience for people in deeply meaningful work that captures the complexity of both conflict and enrichment, guided by the following question: *How are close personal relationships experienced by people in deeply meaningful work?*

The Work-Relationship Experience

In order to guide a complex inquiry of how close personal relationships are experienced by people in deeply meaningful work, the work-life and work-family literatures provide some solid foundational conceptual terrain. This scholarship richly documents how, as

people spend more time at work, the overwork erodes close personal relationships that provide both emotional and instrumental support (Allen et al., 2000; Fellows et al., 2016; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985; Hochschild, 1997; Kossek et al., 2012; Moen, 2003; Perlow, 1999). This time-based account offers a strong baseline for understanding the work-relationship experience. The time-based account may be too simplistic, however, as it does not fully explain why work-relationship conflict might occur even when people are physically present with their close others.

First, the time-based account does not capture how work disrupts the ability to provide consistent attention to a close other, something which is necessary to cultivate a healthy relationship (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003). Research from psychology suggests that relationship quality decreases when people cannot rely upon one another, eroding the trust which is essential for a close personal relationship (Allen et al., 2000; Fletcher et al., 2000; Hassebrauck and Fehr, 2002). This suggests that the erratic nature of work may give rise to a trust-based form of work-relationship conflict that has not been fully captured by extant research. Given the rising prevalence of precarious work (Barley et al., 2017; Cresswell et al., 2016; Henly and Lambert, 2014; Kalleberg, 2009), attention to the work-relationship consequences of erratic work are of crucial importance.

The time-based account also fails to consider the impact of work on emotional connections between people, though these connections are necessary to nurture a thriving high quality relationship (Fletcher et al., 2000; Hassebrauck and Fehr, 2002). Research on attention residue has revealed that people need to stop thinking about one task in order to fully transition their attention and perform well on another (Leroy, 2009; Leroy and Schmidt, 2016), suggesting that people may need to fully disengage from work – cognitively and emotionally – in order to be wholly present for a close personal relationship. Given that it is ever more challenging to disengage from work (Barley et al., 2011; Duxbury and Smart, 2011; Mazmanian et al., 2013), it is imperative that we more deeply consider the emotional components of the work-relationship experience. In my inquiry I aim to extend the work-life and work-family literatures through broadening the considerations of the work-relationship experience beyond time.

METHODS

Research Context

To examine how people in deeply meaningful work experience close personal relationships, two criteria are necessary – 1) the context must offer the possibility for deeply meaningful work, but enable variation in the extent to which people view their work as meaningful, and 2) participants must experience some work-relationship conflict. International aid work fulfils both of these criteria. First, as I detail more in the findings section, international aid work offers opportunities for both self-actualization and self-transcendence. Second, aid work engenders work-relationship conflict for multiple intersecting reasons. It is a prototypical 'greedy institution' (Coser, 1974) with high work demands that routinely spill into evenings and weekends (Moen et al., 2013). Furthermore, aid work is unpredictable. Most aid workers are hired on limited-term and

relatively precarious contracts that ask employees to be immediately available (Henly and Lambert, 2014). In addition, aid work has erratic scheduling around deadlines, which demands extra flexibility from close others, especially for workers with children (Mäkelä et al., 2015; Saarenpää, 2015). I exploit this setting to develop theoretical mechanisms regarding the experience of close personal relationships with broad implications for the literatures on meaningful work and the work-life interface.

Data Collection

I obtained extensive access to the full staff of four medium- to large-sized international aid organizations headquartered in the United States. I selected the organizations in order to generate a diverse population. Two of the organizations specialize in scientific-technical approaches to aid work: legal aid and conservation science. The other two are generalist organizations, providing both long-term development and short-term humanitarian relief work.

I developed a detailed survey and distributed it to a probability sample of people involved in program work, as identified by each organization's human resource department. The survey had a response rate of 43 per cent (n = 298). From this population, 82 individuals agreed to be interviewed and are generally representative of the broader survey population. Table I provides summary characteristics for both the survey population and the interview sample, disaggregated by gender. Within the findings, the gender of respondents is indicated with the first letter of their respondent code, 'F' for females and 'M' for males. (Appendix 1 provides individual characteristics on the interview respondents.)

73 per cent of the interview population were based in the home office in the USA, while 27 per cent were based overseas; nearly all travelled extensively for work. Interview respondents ranged in age from 28 to 74 with a mean age of 43, and were 52 per cent female. Given that all four organizations have headquarters in the USA, nearly two-thirds of the interview population is American, with the other third originating from 22 different countries. 73 per cent of the non-American respondents were men, displaying the influence of gender norms on women's employment globally.

I collected all the interview data myself, in person or via Skype. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and over two hours, with the average interview lasting around 80 minutes. All interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed. Working with an uploaded copy of their professional resume, I asked respondents to narrate each transition in their career history, discussing what was going on for them professionally and personally at those transitions. This strategy combines critical incident techniques developed to measure an individual's work values (Herzberg et al., 1959) with well-validated means of exploring life narratives (McAdams, 1993). The data collection enabled me to probe the extent to which they found their work meaningful, as well as facets of the work-relationship experience during each job spell.

Data Analysis

This paper emerged from a grounded theoretical research design (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), informed by a broad interest in the work-life interface among people with high work devotion. I iterated among in-depth coding and analysis of each participant,

Table I. Demographic overview of survey population and interview sample

	Population			*Interview Sample*		
	Male	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
Gender	132 (44.3%)	166 (55.7%)	298	39 (47.6%)	43 (52.4%)	82
Age						
Min	31	27	27	32	28	28
Max	69	74	74	64	74	74
Mean	47.9 (S.D. = 9.2)	43.7 (S.D. = 10.1)	45.6 (S.D. = 9.9)	44.3 (S.D. = 8.5)	42.1 (S.D. = 9.4)	42.6 (S.D. = 9.1)
Nationality						
U.S.	45 (34.1%)	104 (62.7%)	149 (50.0%)	17 (43.6%)	35 (81.4%)	52 (63.4%)
Non-U.S.	87 (65.9%)	62 (37.3%)	149 (50.0%)	22 (56.4%)	8 (18.6%)	30 (36.6%)
Relationship Status						
Single	15 (5.0%)	42 (25.3%)	57 (19.1%)	5 (12.8%)	12 (28.0%)	17 (20.1%)
Commited relationship	16 (12.1%)	18 (10.8%)	34 (11.4%)	6 (15.4%)	7 (16.3%)	13 (15.9%)
Aid-Worker Spouse	2 (14.3%)	3 (16.7%)	5 (15.6%)	1 (20.0%)	0 (0%)	1 (8.3%)
Married	98 (74.2%)	91 (54.8%)	189 (63.4%)	28 (71.8%)	20 (46.6%)	48 (58.6%)
Aid-Worker Spouse	22 (22.4%)	23 (25.2%)	45 (25.2%)	10 (25.6%)	6 (18.2%)	16 (47.1%)
Parental Status						
Current Parent	82 (62.5%)	81 (48.8%)	163 (54.3%)	18 (50.0%)	19 (44.2%)	37 (45.1%)
Future Desire for Kids	33 (24.4%)	63 (36.0%)	96 (32.0%)	16 (41.0%)	21 (48.8%)	37 (45.1%)

comparisons across participants, connections to the literature, and emergent model building (Eisenhardt, 1989; Langley, 1999; Ravasi, 2017), eventually identifying the key concepts in the conceptual model presented here.

Throughout the data collection I observed significant tension with respect to respondents' satisfaction with their work life and their close personal relationships, which I came to call *work-relationship conflict*. I identified that work-relationship conflict was often instigated by two high-intensity work practices: 1) overwork, which created absence and *time-based conflict* in personal relationships, and 2) erratic work schedules, which created unreliability in relationships, leading to *trust-based conflict*. However, I also found that respondents were very reluctant to scale back on work – a common approach to managing work-life conflict (Becker and Moen, 1999) – despite the harm to their relationships.

As I analysed the data a second time, I identified that respondents who experienced greater work-relationship conflict also tended to find their work most meaningful. I therefore turned to the literature on meaningful work to identify and code perceptions of self-actualization and self-transcendence through work (Lepisto and Pratt, 2017; Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012). When workers experienced both self-actualization (as a result of identity fulfilment through work) and self-transcendence (as a result of personal value fulfilment through work), they became deeply devoted to work ($n = 70$). The finding resonated with Blair-Loy's (2003) observation regarding professional women's adherence to a 'work devotion schema', but suggested an alternative precursor to work devotion. Whereas Blair-Loy's (2003) study identified that pressures from society and employers lead to work devotion, among my respondents the source of devotion was the personal search for a meaningful life. Moreover, previous literature had not specified micro-level mechanisms through which those with high work devotion experienced increased conflict. As I analysed my data, I found that people with high work devotion struggled to erect personal boundaries that would limit their dedication to work and alleviate their work-relationship conflict. I came to call this concept *boundary inhibition*.

In contrast, the remaining 15 per cent of participants ($n = 12$) either did not perceive self-transcendence through their work ($n = 4$), their work did not enable self-actualization ($n = 5$), or they perceived neither of these aspects through their work ($n = 3$). (See Table II for a summary of results). People who perceived their work more as a job or a way to pay the bills, but not necessarily a site for self-actualization or self-transcendence, did not have work devotion and were more comfortable maintaining boundaries that limited their availability to work. As a result, they experienced reduced work-relationship conflict.

Through the second pass of the data another finding emerged: some established couples were able to maintain relative relationship harmony even in the face of work-relationship conflict arising from overwork and erratic work. In the third pass through the

Table II. Participant perceptions of each component of meaningful work.

	Low Self-Actualization	*High Self-Actualization*
High Self-Transcendence	$n = 5$	$n = 70$
Low Self-Transcendence	$n = 3$	$n = 4$

data, I examined these outlier cases to identify the mechanism for ameliorated conflict, detecting that the worker perceived that their close other appreciated and valued their work. I describe this relationship context as one of *occupational value homophily*, adapting Lazarsfeld and Merton's (1954) work on value homophily. After identifying this trend in couples, I returned to the data and also found occupational value homophily with non-romantic close others, including friends and family. I found that these contexts of occupational value homophily facilitated a strong emotional connection between the person in deeply meaningful work and their relationship partner. This *connection-based enrichment* moderated the effects that time- and trust-based strains placed on the relationship.

Notwithstanding the outlier cases of occupational value homophily, most workers expressed far more emotional turmoil than is captured by standard predictions of work-family conflict, which emphasize finite time, energy, and attention. Featuring prominently in my data are people experiencing self-described 'emotional crisis' as they felt pulled to perform deeply meaningful work but acknowledged the tremendous cost it had in broken and abandoned relationships. As I reviewed the literature on value homophily (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954, p. 36), I answered the call to analyse these situations of tumult, returning to the data a fourth time to consider whether this was simply about extremely limited time arising from overwork and erratic work. I identified, instead, that emotional turmoil arose particularly in situations of *occupational value heterophily*, wherein people felt that their relationship partner did not value a core avenue for their self-actualization – their work. Furthermore, as their close other did not find the self-transcendent aims important, resentment about the worker's absence grew. Rather than the work providing a counterbalance of connection-based enrichment, as was the case in contexts of occupational value homophily, I found that relationship contexts of occupational value heterophily resulted in an emotional disconnection, which I came to call disconnection-based conflict. This distance added emotional insult to the existing injury from time-based and trust-based conflict, compounding into *work-relationship turmoil*. In this fourth pass through the data, I also identified that many aid workers tried to ameliorate the strain of work-relationship turmoil through extra-marital affairs and temporary relationships. This finding further validates the critical role played by occupational value homophily with close others, as people attempt to seek occupational value homophily as a counterbalance to their work-relationship conflict in whatever ways they can. The next section details these findings and the resulting conceptual model.

FINDINGS

The findings section proceeds in three parts. First, I present data that illustrate how many workers glean both self-actualization and self-transcendence through international aid work, resulting in deeply meaningful work. Those who experience both aspects have higher work devotion than their colleagues, inhibiting work-relationship boundaries and increasing participation in high-intensity work practices. Next, I present data that convey how people with high work devotion experience an emotionally painful form of work-relationship conflict which I come to call work-relationship turmoil. Turmoil

results when the time-based conflict arising from overwork is met with erosion of trust arising from erratic work and emotional distance as a result of occupational value heterophily. Third, and finally, I show that when close others value and appreciate their partner's work – a context I call occupational value homophily – it fosters an emotional connection and offers an avenue for work-relationship enrichment. I detail the power of occupational value homophily as a conflict mitigation tool, and how people actively seek it out through both long-term and temporary relationships. Figure 1 illustrates this process with a conceptual model.

The Experience of Deeply Meaningful Work: Work Devotion and Boundary Inhibition

Greedy workplace contexts demand work devotion and precarious work is characterized by erratic work practices. In this section, I show how work devotion can be amplified for people who experience their work as deeply meaningful, thus eroding their work-relationship boundaries and further intensifying their participation in overwork and erratic work. The majority of participants (n = 70, 85 per cent) perceived their work as deeply meaningful, enabling both self-actualization and self-transcendence. In contrast, as illustrated in Table II, the remaining 15 per cent of participants (n = 12) either did not perceive self-transcendence through their work (n = 4), their work did not enable self-actualization (n = 5), or they perceived neither of these aspects through their work (n = 3). I describe each of the two dimensions. I begin with self-transcendence, the feature most under-studied in meaningful work, but which I argue is crucial for deeply meaningful work.

Self-Transcendence. Selznick (1957, p. 151) noted that day-to-day tasks can be infused with a grander sense of purpose via 'socially integrating myths' that 'state, in the language of uplift and idealism, what is distinctive about the aims and methods of the enterprise'. This rhetoric is infused across the international aid sector, and is highlighted in recruitment efforts that announce, 'We're determined to achieve dramatic change for the world's

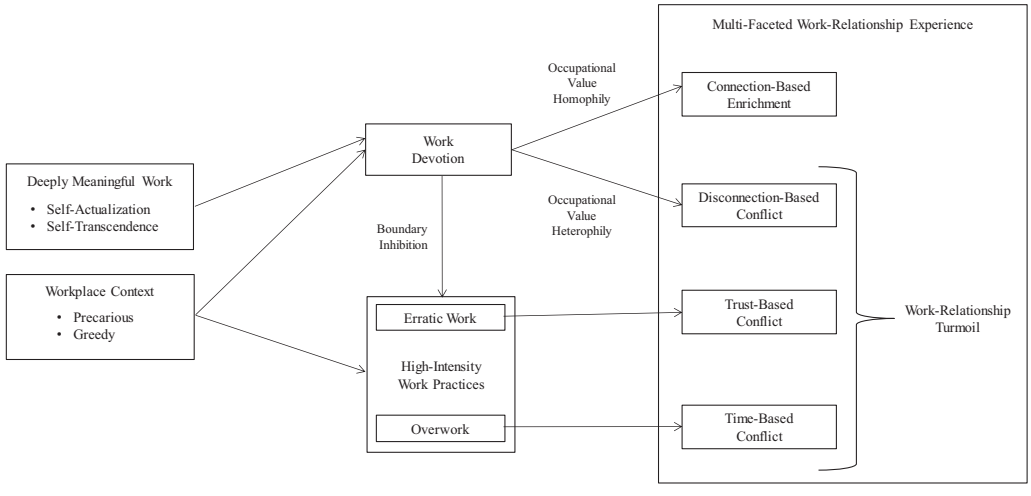

Figure 1. Model of the multi-faceted work-relationship experience among people with high work devotion

most vulnerable children' (Save the Children International, 2018) and 'A career at CARE is … an opportunity to be a part of something that can help bring about lasting change in the world' (CARE, 2018). This rhetoric successfully attracts aid workers to the industry who often, in turn, derive a sense of meaningfulness from this aspect of their work.

> I had to find moments in my work at [the past organization] I could kind of grasp on to and say this is meaningful and this is making a difference, but it was up to me to kind of figure that out. [In my new organization] the whole environment is such that I walk in and I feel like I'm part of a movement. [F30]

> I talk to people who are lawyers and they say, 'Yes, it's intellectually stimulating, but I don't love it because, you know, there's no meaning – it's just what I do, and then I live the rest of my life'. For me, the meaning is really important, being part of something that is meaningful. [M36]

Especially for participants coming from other industries, aid work provided significant meaningfulness. The above participant [M36] left an advertising firm to join the Peace Corps and mentioned, 'now people see me as this incredible do-gooder, and I do derive pleasure from that appearance'. Society values this work, which makes it feel more meaningful to those who do it.

In contrast, seven participants felt a disconnect between the proclaimed social value of their work and their perceptions of the actual value of their work, reducing the meaningfulness that work provided for them.

> [This work is] so difficult and so complicated, and this idea that you're going to do this one thing and transform the lives of millions of people just like that is not only naïve, it's infuriating at times. We need to get more realistic about what we can actually do, despite everyone outside the industry believing we're saints. [M16]

> I've become pretty cynical about aid in general. You probably know Nairobi's a real hub for NGOs, and there are tons of ex-pats driving around in shiny Land Rovers. It's humiliating. [M17]

The lofty aspirations of the international aid sector lure many people. However, the disconnect between aspiration and reality can feel unbridgeable, resulting in feeling 'infuriated' [M16] and 'humiliated' [M17]. These people often reframed their work as a job, rather than as a source of meaningfulness.

Self-Actualization. When the structure and activities of work align with one's personal work values or motives, it can engender significant fulfilment, resulting in deeply meaningful work. 85 per cent of the participants not only experienced self-transcendence through work, but also self-actualization.

> This is really my dream job. I'm so happy to be doing what I'm doing. The amount of fulfilment I get from the travel and from the work and from my colleagues really makes me more than satisfied in my job. [F33]

> My work is a big part of who I am and it's something that I really enjoy. I see progress and I see accomplishment and I see a large group of people working towards a common goal. To me there's a lot of self-fulfillment with that. [F28]

People who experience self-actualization are not merely content with their employment, but they see it as 'a big part of who I am' [F28]. Work serves as a vehicle to explore one's values and become one's self. Aid workers mentioned, 'a lot of my identity is wrapped up in my international development environment world' [F44], 'I really care about making a difference in the world, and my work allows me to do that' [F41], and 'work has been a huge part of my life and my identity' [F30]. Aid work can be deeply meaningful due to the simultaneous experience of self-transcendence and self-actualization. Workers live their values to be of service to others and thereby enact their true selves.

However, not everyone described such a perfect storm. Five people acknowledged the self-transcendence offered by their work, but given their particular position within the organization, they didn't find self-actualization nor feel that their work was personally enriching. One respondent ended our conversation with, 'Helping people is something I really enjoy, but I enjoy interacting directly with people, being creative, and being physically active, and I don't get to do any of that here'. [F03] She continued,

> I started this book last week called, I Don't Know What I Want, But I Know It's Not This[: A Step-By-Step Guide to Finding Gratifying Work]. I want to reconcile [my work with] the things that I know I'm good at and the ways that I am fulfilled and come alive. I want to feel rewarded and stimulated and creatively nourished by what I'm doing every day. [F03]

These participants acknowledged a sense of meaningfulness from the self-transcendent aims of the industry, but emphasized that the structure of the work did not draw upon their personal strengths, thus thwarting self-actualization. For some, this was due to the intangible impact of aid work. As one respondent mentioned, 'Doing laundry, you see a finished product. When you work with people, you see growth in people, but it's just never done, which is hard for me personally' [M17].

Boundary Inhibition and the Amplification of High-Intensity Work Practices. People who find their work less meaningful are more likely to maintain boundaries between their work and the rest of their lives, resulting in work-relationship balance. For example, the nine respondents who did not find their work *deeply* meaningful, as it was lacking either self-actualization or self-transcendence, were more willing to scale back at work when it caused conflict at home. Similarly, the three participants who perceived neither self-actualization nor self-transcendence through their work erected the strongest work-life boundaries that their work would allow. In contrast, the 70 people who experienced both self-actualization and self-transcendence through work had high work devotion and participated more willingly in overwork and erratic work. For these participants, the interactive effect of self-actualization and self-transcendence elevated work to deeply meaningful levels, where self-transcendence provided an avenue for amplified self-

actualization. I identify *boundary inhibition* as a mechanism to explain how people with high work devotion override healthy work-relationship boundaries and participate more willingly in these high-intensity work practices.

Given the dual self-actualization and self-transcendence of deeply meaningful work, people described feeling 'almost addicted' to the intensity of purpose they derive from their work (see also Rowlands and Handy, 2012). As a result, I find that these participants struggled consistently with boundary maintenance. One respondent, who noted she works 70 hours in a 'good week', reflected,

> There's something about people in this field that our eyes are always bigger than our stomachs. […] There's just something about the way people are coded. It's just part of the DNA that we want to see good programs, and we want to help people. We take such pride in the work that you just want to be a continuous part of feeding that and having meaningful involvement and meaningful contribution into that. That means that it's hard to find the 'off' button. [F19]

The draw of meaningfulness inhibits potential boundaries around personal space, and instead pulls their mind and body into work on an ongoing basis. Participants who have high work devotion find it extraordinarily challenging to find the 'off button' or preserve energy for non-work life (see also, Kreiner et al., 2009). Many described their work as unique in its ability to provide such deep meaningfulness.

> There's just this culture that we're doing work that's really important, that we're very lucky to have this job. [M04]

Furthermore, the inhibition of healthy work boundaries appeared to be pervasive across the institutional culture.

> This is not a place that naturally pulls you aside and reminds you, 'Go home early today. Take time. Say no. This is a beautiful opportunity but let's wait'. It's not part of our core DNA and our instincts because we all have the grander mission in mind and care so deeply about these issues that we're working on. The collective culture here is usually like 'We should do it, we should totally pursue it'. [F08]

Given the self-transcendent 'grander mission' of the work, people struggled to limit their time at and availability to work. This inhibition of boundaries exacerbates participation in already high-intensity work practices.

In summary, people who found their work deeply meaningful experienced boundary inhibition and the exacerbation of high intensity work practices. However, I also found data that suggest that some people are able to maintain relationships more effectively amidst high-intensity work. In particular, it appears that men are more likely to have both deeply meaningful work and a committed personal relationship (87 per cent for men versus 63 per cent for women). This finding suggests that men may be more likely to have partners that stick with them through periods of overwork and erratic work.

Echoing this, female respondents talked about the high rate of female 'trailing spouses' who decelerate their own careers to support their husbands'. In the next section I detail how excessive participation in overwork produces a time-based conflict, while excessive participation in erratic work engenders a trust-based conflict.

The Multi-Faceted Experience of Work-Relationship Turmoil

People with high work devotion often experience an emotionally painful form of work-relationship conflict. I find this arises from the compounded effect of excessive participation in overwork and erratic work, due to boundary inhibition, alongside a work-induced emotional distance in their close relationships. When time-based, trust-based, and disconnection-based forms of conflict co-occur, I call this tumultuous experience *work-relationship turmoil*. Moreover, I find that turmoil often leads to relationship dissolution. I describe each of the three forms of conflict, in turn.

Overwork and Time-Based Conflict. As a baseline, international aid work is characterized by significant overwork, which I define as working more than 40 hours per week. As one participant noted:

> It's just rampant throughout – people who go above and beyond, working evenings, working 5:00 a.m. phone calls after 11:00 p.m. phone calls the night before, working weekends. [F19]

For those with high work devotion, however, overwork is exacerbated. Inhibited inclinations to clock out at a reasonable hour generated a form of *time-based work-relationship conflict*. As one respondent mentioned:

> Ultimately, I will end up with about 40 or 50 of my close colleagues really, really liking my work, and feeling like it is really meaningful, and my wife saying, 'Why haven't you got any time for me and the kids?' [M04]

In this way, excessive participation in overwork generates extraordinarily difficult time-based conflict.

Erratic Work and Trust-Based Conflict. While long hours can become routine, aid workers who find their work deeply meaningful also make themselves more available on short notice for the erratic and irregular nature of precarious work. This prioritization of availability to unpredictable work, however, often results in a lack of dependability to people outside of work. When this inconsistency becomes normalized it almost inevitably leads to *trust-based work-relationship conflict*.

> In my social life, I feel like I'm always canceling on people. A lot of my trips come up without much notice, which is really, really hard, particularly when they're long-term trips. When I went to Mali, I had like ... Oh my god, that was horrible. I had like a week's notice to decide whether to go for a month, or it was less than a week even. [F33]

The respondent's boss gave her the opportunity to choose whether to go on the trip; like most people in this study, she had a hard time saying no. People with high work devotion can derive tremendous fulfilment from responding to a work-related crisis, feeling needed in a time-sensitive situation. Yet, this primacy of work schedules inevitably leads to cancelling personal plans, resulting in perceptions that the aid worker is unreliable to close others. Almost every respondent with high work devotion recounted relationships that were lost or abandoned due to their dedication to work, including missing a father's sixtieth birthday party [M37], not making it to a best friend's debut choir performance [F11], or repeatedly rescheduling a romantic weekend away [M28].

Furthermore, aid workers noted that their excessive participation in erratic work disrupts the routines that anchor many long-term relationships. As a 59-year-old man who had been married for over 30 years noted:

> You get accustomed to making your own decisions when you are away, and you need to get used to collaborating again when you come back together. There are a lot of things in relationships that are routine and that you don't have to think about much, but if you are constantly going back and forth, back and forth, then you lose those routines. It's not the best kind of situation. [M19]

Respondents expressed that their absence makes it difficult for their close other to rely on them. The one who stays home learns to do things independently and the interactions that form the backbone of many relationships disappear. Given that relationships require consistency to build intimacy and trust (Dutton and Heaphy, 2003), the lack of reliability results in a unique form of trust-based conflict.

Occupational Value Heterophily and Disconnection-Based Conflict. While time-based and trust-based work-relationship conflict are nearly ubiquitous for those with high work devotion, I find that the strain is further increased in relationship contexts of occupational value heterophily. Building on the concept of value heterophily (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954, p. 111) – when relationships form between those who are dissimilar in some respect – I argue that an emotional disconnection is more likely to occur in relationships when the close other does not value the work being done by the one with high work devotion. For individuals devoted to work, occupational value heterophily is extraordinarily painful, as they feel that their close other rejects a key part of their identity. I find that this work-induced emotional distance creates a form of *disconnection-based work-relationship conflict*.

Respondents in romantic relationships with occupational value heterophily had often met many years before the participant became devoted to work. Frequently, the resulting disconnection-based conflict ultimately led to the dissolution of the relationship. One respondent, who was divorced at the time of the interview, reflected on her previous marriage:

> I had been dating someone before I went to Peace Corps. Really good guy. We were both in the forest service and enjoyed many of the same things. Then I got over to Honduras, where I did my [Peace Corps] service, and absolutely loved what I was doing. I had no interest in any of the men that were there, but my boyfriend was

> worried that I would find someone like me and run off with him. Basically, in order to reassure him that I wasn't going anywhere, we got engaged. Then, nine months later, we decided to get married. [F28]

This respondent highlighted that she and her ex-husband 'enjoyed many of the same things', but distinguished that from 'find[ing] someone like [her]'. Distinguishing between these two ways to connect explicates how occupational value homophily is different from other points of connection between people and their close others. Her career took her around the world and into increasingly important positions across aid organizations. She flew home to see her husband as often as possible, thus reducing the underlying physical absence, but 'there was a breakdown in communication and we just – we weren't communicating'. Though the travel and physical distance were difficult, as they each felt 'increasingly alienated', she identified that her husband's disregard for the importance of her work and their ensuing emotional distance was the leading precursor to their relationship dissolution. In relationship contexts of occupational value heterophily, partners avoid each other throughout a series of reciprocally induced crises, in which each person's actions evoke hostility in the other (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954).

Other respondents experienced value heterophily with friends and family. As one respondent commented,

> In the 15 years I've been doing [aid work], I've gotta be honest with you, they have no idea what I do. […] Either they think I'm a spy, or they think that we just go hand out items for kids. That's my fault, too, that I've never been able to communicate it effectively. […] Without that understanding, it's hard for them to appreciate what I do, so it's just the resentment that I'm never around. That's hard because I feel like they don't really get who I am, because what I do for work is a big part of who I am. [F19]

This respondent expressed a common sentiment – a sense that their close other did not 'get' who they were, since they did not 'get' the value of their work. When a close other doesn't similarly value, appreciate, or understand the work, the worker experiences this as a rejection of their very self. Importantly, occupational value heterophily does not simply result in the absence of an emotional connection; rather, given the worker's devotion to their work, it actively generates emotional distance in the relationship. In many instances, aid workers eventually stop trying to bridge the distance, acquiescing to relationships that lack emotional connection.

I find that disconnection-based conflict compounds the already difficult situation of time-based and trust-based conflict to create a painful, often torturous situation, which I call work-relationship turmoil. While time-based and trust-based conflict are ubiquitous for those with high work devotion, in the next section I detail how people in relationship contexts of occupational value homophily do not experience the compounded turmoil.

Occupational Value Homophily and Work-Relationship Enrichment

Building on the concept of value homophily (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954, p. 23) – the tendency for relationships to form between those who are alike in some respect – I argue

that an emotional connection is more likely to occur in close relationships with occupational value homophily, particularly for those with high work devotion. When a person with high work devotion and their close other share similar values, attitudes, and beliefs about the importance of one's work, they can reconnect more effectively and intimately. Occupational value homophily appears to be an important path to work-relationship enrichment for people in deeply meaningful work for two reasons. First, this context assuages the strain of time-based and trust-based conflict as the close other appreciates that the worker's absence and unreliability is in service of aims which they agree are important. Second, as the person with high work devotion views her work as an integral part of her identity, the close other simultaneously expresses an appreciation for the worker herself, which facilitates a warm connection. Occupational value homophily does not negate other facets of underlying work-relationship conflict. However, given the intimate value- and identity-based ties with work held by people with high work devotion, homophily layers on a *connection-based enrichment*.

Some workers enjoyed not only occupational value homophily, but occupational homophily, with a close other who is also an aid worker. In such relationships, not only do people value and appreciate their close other's work, but they fully understand the details. A female aid worker who was married to a male aid worker conveyed the following:

> When one or the other is traveling, it's not a tremendous burden. He may be gone for a few weeks in Haiti. […] It's not like he's doing it for GE [General Electric Company], and I'm like, 'Why are you on these trips?'. I know exactly what he's doing and, to be honest, I think it's important. […] That just enriches our relationship. [F19]

The respondent's belief in the importance of the work enriches their relationship. Though the underlying time-based and trust-based work-relationship conflict is not reduced, the work-induced emotional connection reverberates back to lessen the overall strain. Moreover, I find that this is not simply about reciprocity, wherein close others simply trade taking time away. If the respondent's partner had the same travel schedule for a multinational corporation, it would not lead to the same emotional connection because she would not appreciate the work in the same way. Occupational value homophily creates a form of enrichment and mitigates conflict because of the mutual perception of the importance of aid work.

People also discussed the presence of occupational value homophily in relationships without occupational homophily, with close others who are not aid workers, but who valued and appreciated their partner's work.

> I met my now husband [...] in Washington [...] He worked at the Center for Global Development, so he is interested in international development-type work, but a little more academic perspective. He applied to PhD programs and ended up getting into Yale. I feel like it is particularly important if international development is an interest to find somebody in life that shares that interest. [F35]

> I married the perfect person for me, because she believes in the mission of [my organization]. Even if she's not working for them, she knows; she worked as a Peace

> Corps volunteer. She's not 'material-driven', so it's okay that I make $55,000 a year. [M29]

In this context of high work devotion, sharing a belief in the importance of one's work enables one to be a 'perfect' partner.

Occupational value homophily can also exist across disparate occupations or industries, when the relationship partners each appreciate the other's work, but for different reasons. As one respondent commented about his partner who worked in finance, 'we joke that he'll keep us comfortable in this life, and I'll get us into heaven [[small laugh]]. Our karma is net zero' [M36]. The respondent found his own work deeply meaningful, felt his work was valued by his husband, and also valued what his husband's work brought to the relationship. In these contexts, occupational value homophily similarly facilitates an appreciation for the other person's professional pursuits, both mitigating the strain of time-based and trust-based work-relationship conflict, and simultaneously helping to foster a warm emotional connection.

The Search for Occupational Value Homophily. People with high work devotion understand that occupational value homophily is a conflict mitigation tool. Respondents actively sought value homophilous relationships, both through the pursuit of longer-term, sustaining relationships with friends, family, and significant others, as mentioned above, but also through more temporary relationships. These findings strengthen and substantiate the role of occupational value homophily in moderating the experience of work-relationship conflict for people in deeply meaningful work.

Aid workers who experience work-relationship turmoil are often physically surrounded at work by 'people who are more like-minded than the person you are married to' [F28]. The situation of occupational value heterophily with close others at home and occupational value homophily with colleagues at work often leads to what one respondent described as 'pretty much an industry-wide acceptance of temporary relationships' [M38]. Furthermore, I find that 'temporary relationships', often colloquially called affairs, are not simply a sexual outlet, but have intimate emotional components. For people highly devoted to their work the opportunity to be in the company of someone who shares their commitment to self-actualization and self-transcendence through work can feel sustaining. Most respondents mentioned the prevalence of temporary relationships in the industry, and some even acknowledged infidelity of their own.

> You are working long hours together, there's that work bond. But there's also a play bond, because that is one of your few emotional outlets, and that's fairly intense. [M38]

The ability to mitigate the stress of work and the strain of work-relationship turmoil with someone who appreciates the work can be a welcome relief. Workers intentionally used temporary relationships to mitigate relationship strain. However, such relationships often eventually triggered the dissolution of a more long-term relationship.

CONCEPTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Research has acknowledged the double-edged sword of deeply meaningful work (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009), but has not been able to fully explain the mechanisms underlying it nor the repercussions in relationships. I identify two important mechanisms that help explain when, why, and how deeply meaningful work can lead to poor outcomes for employee wellbeing – boundary inhibition and occupational value heterophily. In addition, I offer a third contribution as I show that the pain of work-relationship conflict among those with high work devotion can be alleviated in relationship contexts of occupational value homophily. Therefore, occupational value homophily and heterophily moderate the work-relationship experience of those with high work devotion, giving rise to either a connection-based enrichment, in homophilous relationships, or to disconnection-based conflict, in heterophilous relationships. Below I discuss the implications for research on meaningful work and the work-life interface.

Deeply Meaningful Work, Work Devotion, and Boundary Inhibition

People in deeply meaningful work often thrive on the self-actualization and self-transcendence that work offers, but may sacrifice their relationships in the process. Like moths drawn to a flame, the source of purpose may also become the weapon of harm. While past research has identified personal sacrifices made by those in deeply meaningful work (e.g., Bailey et al., 2017; Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Cardador and Caza, 2012; Kreiner et al., 2009; Schabram and Maitlis, 2017), I explicate boundary inhibition as a mechanism that can help to explain *why* people who are devoted to work more willingly participate in high intensity work practices, despite much personal cost. This insight highlights the unique challenges of work-relationship conflict in deeply meaningful work. Given the presence of boundary inhibition, people with high work devotion may not be adequately assisted by the traditional conflict mitigation strategies of increased control and flexibility offered by work-family scholars (Kelly et al., 2011).

Furthermore, this finding also contributes to the work-family literature (Blair-Loy, 2004), by showing *how* the 'work devotion schema' becomes embodied within workers' decisions and actions when the benefits of both self-actualization and self-transcendence are on the table. This suggests an additional path to work devotion, examining how pressures from employers and society interact with personal searches for a meaningful life. Finally, the differential results by gender corroborate a large body of research demonstrating that women are socialized to care for domestic responsibilities and support men's career success (see, for example, Cooper, 2014; Stone, 2007, ten Brummelhuis and Greenhaus, 2018). My findings extend that body of scholarship, suggesting that the opportunity for close relationships and deeply meaningful work are not equally available to women and men.

Work-Relationship Turmoil

I detail how people with high work devotion often experience an emotionally painful form of work-family conflict, which I call *work-relationship turmoil*, resulting from the erosion of trust and emotional distance in their close relationships piled on top of overwork.

Extending extant research, which focuses primarily on time-based conflict, I highlight how the work-relationship experience is far more emotionally complex and tumultuous than pragmatic considerations like time. Given the rising prevalence of people who have a deep emotional attachment to their work, taken alongside the emotional components of non-work life, this new lens helps to more accurately capture employees' work-relationship experiences.

More specifically, I identify that high-intensity work practices result in inconsistent interactions with close others, which engenders *trust-based conflict*, and show how people devoted to their work struggle to say 'no' to unexpected work assignments. Given the increased prevalence of precarious work (Cresswell et al., 2016; Kalleberg, 2009), particularly for knowledge workers, this insight suggests unique challenges for work-relationship conflict that have not been fully captured by previous research, which has focused primarily on the constraints of finite time.

Furthermore, my research identifies that devotion to work can lead to – a *disconnection-based conflict* in close relationships, should the other person not value the work. The impact of occupational value heterophily for those with high work devotion could potentially result in broken relationships with family and childhood friends, and make it difficult to form meaningful relationships with new neighbours, should they not understand and appreciate the importance of one's work. As a result, the prevalence and impact of occupational value heterophily has significant implications for the breadth of impact that work has on one's personal life, particularly in contexts of deeply meaningful work and high work devotion.

Occupational Value Homophily and Connection-Based Work-Relationship Enrichment

Third, and finally, I identify a condition under which deeply meaningful work can have a positive effect on close personal relationships: occupational value homophily with close others. This finding may modify predictions from research on attention residue (Leroy, 2009). In relationship contexts of occupational value homophily, the attention residue from work may potentially serve as a bridge which enables successful transition between deeply meaningful work and close personal relationships without disengagement. Occupational value homophily may also be an avenue for work-relationship enrichment, advancing research which suggests that work-relationship enrichment can exist in tandem with work-relationship conflict (Edwards and Rothbard, 2000; Gareis et al., 2009; Wayne et al., 2017).

Furthermore, I suggest that occupational value homophily may be a uniquely modern and increasingly salient form of value homophily (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954), given the rising prevalence of people finding close friends and even spouses at work (Drexler, 2014), devoting themselves to work (Blair-Loy and Cech, 2017; Halrynjo and Lyng, 2009; Williams et al., 2016), and seeking meaningful work (Twenge et al., 2010; Wey Smola and Sutton, 2002). Though people have always preferred to spend their time with those who are similar (McPherson et al., 2001) and organizations have long been a natural environment for romantic relationships (Quinn, 1977), in a context of increasingly specialized work, occupational value homophily may draw boundaries around a more

tightly defined pool of available candidates for close relationships (see also Hogg, 1992; Hogg and Turner, 1985). Deeply meaningful work may become a central life domain and, potentially, the dominant axis of value homophily with close others, above and beyond other interests like sports, arts, religion, or other hobbies (Huston and Levinger, 1978). Prior research has demonstrated that work increasingly structures our private lives, even configuring the way we think of leisure time (Hochschild, 1997). This study expands those impacts to the mediation of our close relationships and the satisfaction we gather from them.

GENERALIZABILITY AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

Though gleaned from workplaces that are exceptionally greedy, precarious, and unpredictable, the insights from this study are likely generalizable to people who find their work deeply meaningful (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997) or to those who have high work devotion (Blair-Loy, 2003). While the amplitude of the findings may be different in other settings, expectations for work devotion are increasingly common across fields as broad as engineering (Kunda, 1992), medicine (Kellogg, 2011), academia (Cech and Blair-Loy, 2014; Manchester et al., 2013), finance (Michel, 2011; Turco, 2010), consulting (Reid, 2015), and the tech industry (Perlow, 1998). Moreover, most workplaces have become increasingly greedy with information technology (Barley et al., 2011; Duxbury and Smart, 2011; Mazmanian et al., 2013), and precarious work is spreading across the labour force and up the occupational ladder (Barley et al., 2017).

Future research can more intricately tease apart the varied experiences of workers who find their work *deeply* meaningful (that is, serving both self-actualization and self-transcendence) versus those who may find their work meaningful (that is, serving either self-actualization or self-transcendence). In addition, while deeply meaningful work offers a strong path to work devotion (Blair-Loy, 2001; 2003), it would be fruitful for scholars to explore how boundary inhibition, the experience of work-relationship turmoil, and the importance of occupational value homophily apply in intense work settings where workers may be devoted but not find their work meaningful, per se. Furthermore, the conceptual model in Figure 1 illustrates links between the workplace context and both work devotion and high-intensity work practices, however scholars can probe the organization of work more deeply to untangle how participation in high-intensity work practices varies based upon external demands from the workplace vis-à-vis an individual's work devotion.

This paper identifies how relationship context influences varying experiences of work-relationship conflict for those in deeply meaningful work. Scholars might investigate how a shared orientation to what is important about work may mitigate or exacerbate conflict across other settings. A useful extension could examine how an emphasis on the importance of work within the broader socio-cultural context influences the relative need for occupational value alignment within the relationship context. For example, perhaps if people find their work deeply meaningful and have strong affirmation regarding the importance of their work from social norms, the necessity for a relationship context

with occupational value homophily may be reduced. I encourage future scholars to identify and analyse these interactive dimensions.

Furthermore, building on the emerging body of work that explicitly examines couple dyads (Bergmann et al., 2014; Wayne et al., 2013), it would be promising to interview close others regarding their perceptions of work-relationship conflict and occupational value homophily. As prior work has found conflicting evidence regarding the experience of forming close relationships with colleagues (Horan and Chory, 2011), it may prove insightful to include cases where close others work for the same organization.

Finally, the dynamism of occupational value homophily within a relationship context over time deserves attention. Past research has shown that proximity can lead to interest (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954), suggesting that close others may develop increased occupational value homophily over time in partnership with those who have high work devotion. Alternatively, however, high degrees of time-based or trust-based work-relationship conflict may lead a close other who originally held occupational value homophily to shift their perspective, thus decreasing occupational value homophily over time. Temporal analyses that compare people's work-related decisions over time could also help to distinguish when people have high work devotion as an act of self-justification for the conflict they experience, versus those who exit their organization or occupation as a result of the conflict. In this same vein, following respondents over time could illuminate whether the search for occupational value homophily is truly a support mechanism, as I posit in this study, or if it is more accurately understood as further self-justification for the importance of their work. I encourage scholars to examine these interactive hypotheses.

Future scholarship can examine the impact of boundary inhibition, work-relationship turmoil, and occupational value homophily across alternative settings to test how well the conceptual mechanisms travel. It is my hope that the current framework will deepen knowledge and guide future research regarding work-relationship conflict and deeply meaningful work.

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Though organizations have generally capitalized on the additional labour that people freely offer when they find their work deeply meaningful (May et al., 2004) or subscribe to the work devotion schema (Blair-Loy, 2003), this paper demonstrates the significant 'dark side' of such practices. Work-relationship conflict has negative implications for employers, including absenteeism, low organizational commitment, poor job performance, and turnover intentions (Allen et al., 2000). For their part, employees suffer depression, substance abuse, burnout, and other negative health symptoms (Allen et al., 2000). Therefore, the double-edged sword of deeply meaningful work needs to be a crucial consideration for both organizations and employees.

This study implicates strategies of flexibility or task-completion as avenues to reduce work-relationship conflict, wherein workers manage their own timing around completing work responsibilities (Kelly et al., 2011). These solutions may be less effective for people in deeply meaningful work because work devotion makes it difficult to set the work down. Instead, the current findings suggest that organizations should adopt, and leaders should

model, more broad-based cultural norms that encourage boundary maintenance. In addition, for employees seeking more occupational value homophily in their relationships with close others, adopting a stance of humility with respect to work and an openness to patiently share that with others, while also actively listening to and appreciating the primary interests of the relationship partner, may assist in helping others appreciate the work.

CONCLUSION

People are drawn to spend their time and emotional investment in the areas they value most greatly and where they feel most valued (Hochschild, 1997). Unfortunately, both work and home domains increasingly compete for time and emotional investment, and as a result, compete as avenues to craft a meaningful life. Deeply meaningful work can result in individual fulfilment. When the stars align, in relationship contexts of occupational value homophily, deeply meaningful work may also result in connected close relationships. However, in relationship contexts of occupational value heterophily, deeply meaningful work may add insult to injury and strain existing relationships. Finally, deeply meaningful work may make it difficult to form new relationships with a diverse array of others, thus eroding private life in service of work.

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NOTE

[1] While close relationships can include romantic or sexual intimacy, the primary focus of a close relationship is emotional intimacy. Furthermore, while not all close relationships are functionally beneficial or of a high quality (Fletcher et al., 2000; Hassebrauck and Fehr, 2002), I assume that those pursuing close relationships would prefer high quality close relationships, yet for readability, I do not write 'high quality close relationships'.

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Appendix 1

Code	*Age*	*Relationship Status*	*Aid Worker Spouse*	*# Children*	*Terminal Degree*	*Nationality*
M0l	46	Married	Yes	1	MA	United States
M02	50	Married	No	2	BA	Mexico
M03	48	Single	N/A	0	MA	United Kingdom
M04	43	Married	Yes	2	BA	United Kingdom
M05	37	Married	No	0	MA	Canada
M06	37	Single	N/A	0	PhD	United States
M07	48	Married	Yes	2	MA	United States
M08	50	Single	N/A	0	MA	South Africa
M09	48	Married	No	1	PhD	United States
Ml0	49	Committed	No	0	MA	Belgium
Mll	42	Married	No	0	JD	China
Ml2	36	Married	No	0	MA	India
Ml3	42	Married	Yes	1	MA	India
Ml4	37	Married	No	0	BA	Polwd
MU	58	Married	No	1	MA	India
Ml6	38	Committed	No	0	JD	United States
Ml7	41	Married	Yes	2	MA	United States
Ml8	46	Married	No	2	MA	Malawi
Ml9	59	Married	Yes	2	MA	United States
M20	36	Married	Yes	0	MA	Canada
M2l	37	Married	No	1	MA	Italian
M22	47	Married	No	2	BA	Pakistan
M23	49	Married	No	1	MA	Guatemala
M24	48	Single	N/A	0	MA	United States
M25	61	Married	No	2	MA	United States
M26	64	Married	No	0	MA	Italy
M27	40	Married	No	2	MA	United States
M28	45	Committed	Yes	0	MA	Australia
M29	34	Married	No	0	MA	United States
M30	43	Married	Yes	2	MA	India
M3l	51	Married	Yes	2	MA	United States
M32	36	Married	Yes	1	MA	United Kingdom
M33	62	Married	Yes	0	PhD	United States
M34	40	Committed	No	0	MA	France

(*Continued*)

Appendix 1. (*Continued*)

Code	*Age*	*Relationship Status*	*Aid Worker Spouse*	*# Children*	*Terminal Degree*	*Nationality*
M35	32	Married	Yes	0	MA	United States
M36	34	Committed	No	0	MA	United States
M37	32	Single	NBA	0	BA	Germany
M38	35	Married	Yes	0	MA	United States
M4l	38	Committed	No	0	MA	United States
F0l	44	Married	No	2	MA	United States
F02	44	Single	NBA	0	MA	Ecuador
F03	34	Single	NBA	0	MA	United States
F04	36	Single	NBA	0	MA	Germany
F05	43	Married	Yes	2	PhD	United States
F06	48	Single	NBA	1	PhD	United States
F07	44	Married	No	0	MA	United States
F08	45	Married	No	2	BA	United States
F09	32	Committed	No	0	JD	United States
F10	32	Committed	No	0	MA	United States
F11	39	Committed	No	0	JD	United States
F12	56	Married	No	2	BA	United States
F13	36	Married	No	0	MA	Thailand
F14	53	Married	No	0	BA	United States
F15	54	Single	NBA	0	BA	United States
F16	29	Committed	No	0	BA	United States
F17	63	Committed	No	2	BA	United Kingdom
Fl8	49	Divorced	NBA	1	MA	United States
Fl9	39	Married	Yes	0	MA	United States
F20	44	Married	No	2	MA	Turkey
F2l	64	Married	Yes	2	MA	United States
F22	41	Single	NBA	0	MA	United States
F23	33	Single	NBA	0	MA	United States
F24	37	Single	NBA	0	MA	United States
F25	30	Single	NBA	0	BA	United Kingdom
F26	35	Married	No	0	MA	Pakistan
F27	40	Single	N/A	0	BA	United States
F28	42	Committed	No	2	MA	United States

(*Continued*)

Appendix 1. (*Continued*)

Code	*Age*	*Relationship Status*	*Aid Worker Spouse*	*# Children*	*Terminal Degree*	*Nationality*
F29	37	Divorced	No	2	MA	United States
F30	42	Married	Yes	2	MA	United States
F31	28	Single	N/A	0	BA	United States
F32	38	Married	No	0	PhD	United States
F33	30	Single	N/A	0	MA	United States
F34	41	Married	Yes	2	MA	United States
F35	33	Married	Yes	0	MA	United States
F36	43	Married	No	2	MA	Kenya
F37	37	Committed	No	0	BA	United States
F38	74	Separated	N/A	1	PhD	United States
F39	34	Married	No	0	MA	United States
F40	38	Married	No	2	MA	United States
F41	36	Married	No	1	MA	United States
F43	53	Married	No	2	MA	United States
F44	50	Divorced	N/A	1	MA	United States