

ABSTRACT

Called to Serve: Empirical Explorations and a Review and of Calling and the Social Work Profession

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The concept of calling as it relates to work was historically relegated to vocations and jobs within the church or ministry sector. More broadly, people have discussed being “called” to follow Christ or their specific religion, but only more recently have people’s jobs been described as a calling. The goal of the dissertation was to provide insights into the role and impact of a calling model on those pursuing and working in the social work profession. First, in a narrative review, the researcher looked at previous research on calling conducted in other professions and used those studies as a springboard for discussing the social work-specific research on calling. This review highlighted the need for important conversations and experiences around the concept of calling for students within social work. It also highlighted the value of utilizing a calling model with social work students. Second, in a qualitative study, the researcher conducted interviews with eight social workers who were at varying levels of their educational and professional journeys. The intent of this study was to determine the role of relationships in student decisions to pursue the social work degree. I identified four themes including the

importance of relationships with family and friends, faculty and field supervisors, and also relationships and interactions with clients. Finally, the researcher conducted a quantitative study to understand how a sense of calling to social work might impact other areas of a student's life. The researcher studied the relationship between calling, specifically the transcendent summons, and life satisfaction and then included potential moderating relationships with variables such as living one's calling, religiousness, and core self-evaluations. While the study provided valuable insights, some recommendations for future research include a broader and more diverse sample of participants, using a different measure for religiosity or spirituality, and a comparison of students from only non-religious institutions.

Called to Serve: Empirical Explorations and a Review of Calling and the Social
Work Profession

by

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To my children

Hailey, Brady, and Colby Olson

May you be brave enough to pursue your dreams.

And also

In memory of Diana Richmond Garland.

CHAPTER ONE

Calling and Social Work: An Introduction

The term “calling” was historically used to describe service to God within the church or on the mission field and all other jobs were seen as a means to end rather than an end in themselves. Martin Luther worked to change this attitude toward work and he identified calling or vocation as being attached to a person’s station in life—meaning that all work, whether paid employment or not, could be considered someone’s calling (Hardy, 1990). Vocation is “the call to love my neighbor that comes to me through the duties attached to my social place or station within the earthly kingdom” (p. 110). When people pursue their callings, “the needs of humanity are met on a day-by-day basis” (p. 111).

Throughout its early history, social work, too, had a place for religious calling in helping practitioners and students determine what role their faith should play in their word, but also how spirituality and religious beliefs can be an important part of clients’ worlds and lives. A calling model for social work can be particularly helpful for Christian social work students and social workers today who are struggling through the same questions as the early professionals: How do my spiritual/religious beliefs inform my social work practice? Where does my motivation to practice social work come from? How can my faith sustain me through the sometimes difficult work ahead of me? A variety of definitions exist for both vocation and calling and while the history of these terms date back to the 1500’s, the more recent definitions are broader to include

both religious and non-religious ideas (Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010). While Hugen's (2012) definition clearly reflects Luther's ideas about calling being related to station in life, Schuurman (2004) also describes vocation in a religious sense arguing that all of life is infused with religious meaning. Sherman (2012) gives a broader definition of calling and talks about Christians being called to use their vocation to advance justice. By stewarding and prospering in our vocations, we can care for the development of the "common good" (p. 33). According to Sherr (2006), "Christian vocation refers to the divine calling where men and women divert their energies from all self-seeking irresponsible pursuits to one course in which faith in Jesus Christ can find mature fulfillment" (p. 68).

While the ideas of calling and vocation have their roots in religious and even Christian belief systems, some researchers are interested in looking at how the terms can be more broadly applied beyond religious circles. Dik and Duffy (2009) have studied calling and vocation in depth from a career counseling perspective. They developed a broad, working definition of calling in an attempt to bring together the variety of perspectives and ideas that existed on this topic. Their definition is stated as

a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation (p. 427).

This definition encapsulates three different dimensions of the word calling: external motivation, meaningfulness, and contribution to the "common good" (pp. 427).

While people formulate and define their vocational identity in a variety of ways, there is evidence that embracing a calling model or having a sense of calling to your profession or discipline has impact on a variety of areas including academic satisfaction,

life satisfaction, and self-evaluations (Duffy, Allan, & Bott, 2012; Hirschi & Hermann, 2012;). College students are often struggling with questions about identity and calling, but they are often looking at issues beyond just choosing a career; they often want to understand and live out their life's purpose and also contribute to the common good (Thompson & Feldman, 2010). This sense of calling seems to transcend all ages and genders, specifically when looking at college students (Eldridge, 2010).

In some situations, identifying someone's sense of calling can help them find meaning and purpose in their work and can also prevent disillusionment and frustration (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Much of the recent research has been focused broadly, working to understand people from all disciplines and professions and how they understand their calling (Duffy, Manuel, Borges, & Bott, 2011; Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2010; Steger et. al, 2010, Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). Calling is something those in religious professions such as the ministry or other positions have been interested in for many years, but the idea that someone could be called to a profession that has no ties to a specific religion or faith is a relatively new concept. Recent studies in business, medicine, and even on volunteerism have shown that individuals pursuing a variety of careers find meaning, purpose, and motivation in their work (Duffy et. al., 2011; Garland, Myers, & Wolfer, 2009; Logue, 2007).

Hugen (2012) argues that for Christians in social work the calling perspective provides a clear "framework for integrating Christian spirituality and social work both at the personal and professional levels" (p. 116). Chamiec-Case (2016) describes a calling approach that can be used to help social work students and practitioners ethically integrate their faith with their practice. He says, "for many, faith informs, drives,

confirms, or clarifies their decisions for choosing the vocation of social work as a career.” (p. 181). Students and practitioners who embrace a calling model often see their profession in social work providing a way for them to help those who are hurting and also to bring about “human flourishing in our world” (p. 181). This calling model also, according to Chamiec-Case (2016), can also help social work practitioners keep perspective and find reassurance when they are faced with some of the most “challenging and stressful times and circumstances” (p. 182). Social work can also be a way that both students and practitioners see themselves living out their call to faith in this life. The Bible includes over 2,000 verses calling Christians to care for the “quartet of the downtrodden, which includes the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the immigrant (alien)” (Wolterstorff, 2006, p. 125), therefore, for many Christian social workers, answering the call to social work is also a way of answering God’s call to follow his commands to care for others.

This research seeks to give a more thorough and complete picture of relationship between the social work profession and a calling model by providing three unique studies to the body of knowledge. The following three chapters look more deeply at the role of calling in social work education and practice. Each study has its own unique research question, hypothesis, and methodology and each provides findings which provide insight and implications for social work education and practice.

Chapter Two is a narrative literature review on research that has been done on calling and career choice. This chapter summarizes and synthesizes the research on this topic and lay the groundwork for the quantitative and qualitative studies which follow. First, the concepts of calling and vocation are fleshed out demonstrating the variety of

definitions that exist around both. Next, the researcher introduces a few studies on career choice and calling in specific professions such as nursing and medicine showing how people within those fields have identified their motivation and calling to their particular profession. This section also helps to give examples of what other disciplines have learned about utilizing a calling model within their frameworks. Finally, the researcher summarize and synthesize the research on calling and career choice within the social work field and also provide some direction for future research that could be helpful in furthering our understanding of the impact of calling in social work. Because a calling model seems to be a good fit for the social work discipline, the research will look at the impact of calling on various aspects of life, but will also attempt to better understand how people who chose social work as a major came to that decision.

Chapter Three is a qualitative study the researcher conducted by interviewing eight social work students or practitioners who were at various stages of social work education. All of the participants had completed or were working on completing a Bachelor of Social Work degree and some were finished with their Master of Social Work degree. Some were practicing full-time at the time of the interview and others were working in part-time capacities or doing various volunteer, mini-field, or full field experiences. This study provides a unique look at pathways to career choice in social work education and also how specific relationships shaped the experience of their choosing. The role of clients in the experience is highlighted and another key finding is the recognition that the experience of choosing and going through social work education is more than simply the transfer of knowledge and skill, but that it is about a transformative process formed through relationships.

The fourth chapter is a quantitative study which replicates a study previously completed by career counseling psychologists Dik & Duffy (2012). In this study, the researcher recruited a sample of 114 Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) students from nine Iowa liberal arts colleges. In this study, my main question of interest was the effect of potential moderating variables such as core self-evaluations, living one's call, and religiosity on the relationship between calling and life satisfaction. This study helps to fill the gap in the research on the impact of having a strong sense of calling on other areas of life. Research on students and practitioners in other disciplines has shown a relationship between calling and life satisfaction and has also identified some moderating relationships within those samples, but nothing similar had been done with students in social work education.

All three of these studies are helpful in giving us a more complete picture of potential roles a calling model can play in the field of social work and specifically within social work education. From these studies, we can better understand the role and impact of calling within specific helping professions including social work. We can also understand the unique experience of social work education and the experience of choosing social work along with the importance of relationships in the experience of choosing. Finally, we can understand the relationship between calling and life satisfaction with social work students and also the effect of religiosity, living one's calling, and core self-evaluations has on that relationship.

CHAPTER TWO

A Narrative Review on the Concept of Calling and its Role in Professional Occupations

Abstract

The concept of professional calling has broad and varied definitions ranging from applying only to the Christian's walk with God to one way an individual might view their work or occupation. Individuals who were working in the church historically were considered "called" to their line of work, but Martin Luther worked to change how individuals view calling. Therefore, today many individuals in very different lines of work consider their work as calling. Vocation is a word that is often used interchangeably with the word calling and while the concepts might overlap, they have distinctive differences. Research demonstrates that seeing one's work as calling can have positive impacts for both their work life and also professional life. People who are specifically religious or spiritual might be more likely to see work as calling, but individuals often cite both internal and external motivators for seeking their line of work. While having a sense of calling to work can have a positive impact on certain parts of life, there are also risks with calling. Helping professions such as nursing, medicine, and social work may have particular interest in applying a calling model to their professions. While limited research has been done on the role of calling in social work practice and education, there are studies exploring the particular reasons why social workers chose to pursue their field and these studies can give us a better understanding of how a calling model might benefit the social work profession. Key themes found in the literature on professional calling are identified and discussed, including the role of specific individuals

and the impact of religiosity on the sense of calling in specific helping professions.

Implications for this review include the consideration by professional programs of the important role of calling in educational and practice settings.

Introduction

In his book *Every Good Endeavor*, Tim Keller (2012) tells about a story written by J.R. Tolkien during a particularly challenging time he experienced while writing *The Lord of the Rings* books. Tolkien had spent years on his books, but had gotten frustrated with his lack of progress so he wrote a story about his struggles, but used a fictitious character, Niggle. Niggle, too, had gotten frustrated in his life's work—which was to paint a gorgeous tree he had envisioned—and he was only able to see his work come to fruition in the afterlife—heaven. Keller (2012) told this story to help all of us realize that the stories we are telling and work we are doing here and now, on this earth, are simply glimpses of the full, true reality we will finally come to experience and enjoy in the new creation. Keller says:

Whatever your work, you need to know this: There really is a tree. Whatever you are seeking in your work—the city of justice and peace, the brilliance and beauty, the story, the order, the healing—it is *there*... Your work will only be partially successful on your *best days*, in bringing that world about. But inevitably, the whole tree that you seek—the beauty, harmony, justice, comfort, joy, and community—will come to fruition. If you know all this, you won't be despondent because you can get only a leaf or two out in this life. You will work with satisfaction and joy. You will not be puffed up by success or devastated by setbacks. (Keller, 2012, p. 30).

Tolkien suggests in his story of Niggle that in this life individuals might benefit from seeing their current work as being part of some grander or larger purpose.

Although, like Niggle, it may be difficult to see this grander purpose, people working within specific professional careers often talk about experiencing this draw to their specific field and therefore being motivated to choose and continue in the pursuit of their career goals due in part to their sense of calling to that larger purpose. People who choose a specific helping profession such as social work or counseling psychology may

feel drawn to their career for reasons outside of themselves and often refer to it as “calling” (Yoon, 2015; Hall, Burkholder, & Sterner, 2014; Dik, Duffy, & Eldridge, 2009). Also, “those who truly perceive their work as calling view their work differently than those who simply believe their work is a good fit for their skills and interests (Duffy, Foley, Raque-Bodgan, Reid-Marks, Dik, Castano, and Adams, 2012, p. 293). Therefore, it is important to provide a thorough review of the literature on calling within these specific helping professions: nursing, medicine, counseling psychology, and social work.

This article will consist of a narrative review of the literature on calling, focusing specifically in the end on the literature on calling in social work. A narrative review is a “well-structured, synthesis of the available evidence pertaining to the topic, and convey(s) a clear message” (Green, Johnson, and Adams, 2006, p.106). Others call this type of review a “best-evidence synthesis” (p. 106) where the author takes the main ideas and findings from extant studies in the subject area and brings them together to form a piece of writing that provides the reader with an overview of the current state of a body of knowledge within that specific subject. In this chapter, I present a narrative review of research on professional calling within social work, medicine, nursing, and counseling psychology.

While the role of calling in the field of social work is something that has been written about and studied multiple times, this cohesive piece of literature could bring together all these varied pieces providing a comprehensive summary of what research has already been conducted in this subject area. Calling is also a topic of interest for other professions and comparing and contrasting the research conducted in those fields to the calling research in the field of social work can provide us with more insight into the

current view of calling in the included professions while also looking more specifically at the field of social work.

In this narrative review of the research and literature, I will attempt to better understand how and why people choose certain professions including nursing, counseling psychology, medicine, and social work with a specific focus on the social work profession. The purpose of this article is to review the literature and consider the following questions: What has research on the impact of calling in other professions told us? Does seeing work as calling make a difference to each of the included professions and in the field of social work? What have we learned from previous research about both the secular and religious sense of calling and how that affects specific professionals? Then looking specifically at calling and social work—what does the research tell us about why people choose and sustain professional involvement as a social worker? Specifically, from where does their “call” to pursue this helping profession come? Are there any potentially negative effects of seeing work as calling and if so, what might be some of the risks connected to having a sense of calling?

The purpose of this study will be to provide the reader with a broad overview on the topic of calling and work—telling the story of the role of calling among selected helping professions and then ending with a focus on the research specifically looking at social work and calling. The review of calling in the other professions will help inform the review of the research about social work specifically and provide a way to compare the social work profession to the others included.

The Concept of Professional Calling

Definitions

Individuals working in certain helping or service professions often identify feeling “called” to their specific field of practice (Prater & McEwan, 2006; Hirsbrunner, Loeffler, & Rompf, 2012; Yoon, 2015) and yet might easily get frustrated as they work on “painting their leaves (Keller, 2012, p. 32). Gustafson (1982) describes these “people” professions as requiring both strength in interpersonal relationships and also empathy—both of which might require, from time to time, the professional to experience a “sense of suffering with the client or patient” (p. 510). In some cases, behavior can be impacted by a professional not having or identifying their sense of calling. For example, a physician might be described as uninterested or rushed or a social worker might be seen as having little to no empathy with their client’s situation (Yoon, 2015).

In medieval times work was considered a necessary evil. People preferred to live a life of leisure rather than working for survival and they preferred a life of contemplation over a life that required hard work (Hardy, 1990). Today, this idea continues to pervade some perspectives on work as we see people living a “TGIF” lifestyle where work is something you endure until you can enjoy the weekend. People also work and save for their future retirement, often seeing work as something they will have to do now, but not forever. Many people long for the days when work does not dictate how they spend their time (Hardy, 1990). For others, however, work has a much deeper meaning than simply something they do in order to pay for their “play” or leisure time. Work can be seen as a vocation—a way of living out your purpose and a way to help you find meaning in the world.

The word vocation comes from the Latin word *vocere*, which literally means “to call”. The concepts of vocation and calling are often used interchangeably, but are not one in the same. Various professions perceive and define the ideas of calling and vocation differently. Within the field of physician medicine, the concept of calling has been described as “any strong sense of purpose that keeps motivation alive; nourishing a proper sense of self-fulfillment, and enables one to work with a vision” (Yoon, 2015, p. 190). The author defines calling as work that extends beyond the individual to affect “others, society, or a transcendent figure” (p. 190). The profession of nursing has had minimal discussion on the application of calling and vocation to their realm of the medical field, but some within the field see calling as a person being “chosen to perform certain services or tasks commonly aimed at helping others” (Prater & McEwan, 2006, p. 63). Finally, within the field of counseling psychology Dik & Duffy have done a significant amount of work on the topic of calling and vocation studying both the impact on students pursuing counseling and also those who are practicing as counseling psychologists specifically within career counseling. Their definition takes on a three-fold meaning including transcendent summons, prosocial orientation, and purposeful work.

According to Steve Garber (2014) in his book *Visions of Vocation*, “the word vocation is a rich one, having to address the wholeness of life, the range of relationships and responsibilities. Work, yes, but also families, and neighborhoods, and citizenship, locally and globally—all of this is seen as vocation, that to which I am called as a human being, living my life before the face of God.” (p. 12). Dik and Duffy (2009) see the concepts of calling and vocation as overlapping while being distinctive. They see calling and vocation attached to a specific life role, but vocation can be derived from a sense of

internal motivation while calling is, according to their definition, derived from an external summons whatever that might be. Others have identified vocation as a more specific application of calling with your job or career being a specific vocation that is a part of your broader calling which might be religious or more broadly what a person sees as their individual purpose or mission in life (Schuurman, 2004; Serow, 1994). The figure below is one way the two concepts might be visualized, but I also recognize that this is not how all scholars understand the terms or concepts.

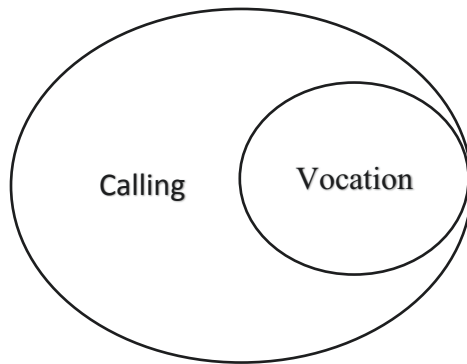


Figure 1

Concepts of Calling and Vocation

Therefore, within the helping professions specifically, calling might be a broad sense of wanting to “help people”, but vocation is then how you live out that calling whether it be through a professional career or through the church and/or community relationships.

Overall, the concepts of calling and vocation are difficult to define as many different professions, people, and measures see the concepts in different ways. The terms

seem at the same time both elastic and ambiguous with different measures including different pieces of the concept. New definitions and measures are continually created to represent a different perspective on the term. With so many different definitions and measures, all of them claiming to measure the concept of calling, it is challenging to draw cohesive conclusions about the concept, as each study seems to be measuring something slightly different.

The inclusion of a religious component in the definition is for some, an important piece of the definition while others see calling as something that can be purely secular. Some see this calling as being outside of oneself (Raatikainen, 1997) and that coming from a transcendent place, meaning the call is originating from something outside of the ordinary or normal human experience, is not a necessary part of the calling experience. Very few definitions identify calling as coming from anything other than this transcendent place and many of the measures currently created recognize this importance piece of the definition. Understanding and defining calling is difficult, as no one definition seems to encompass all of the pieces that various researchers and professions consider important. Therefore, to try to ascertain which aspects of calling are most important and should be included in the definition of calling. Further research is certainly needed for us to better understand the concept of calling as it applies to various individuals and professionals.

Religious and Social Science Perspectives

The concept of calling is often discussed in Christian circles, referring to God's call to certain persons to pursue a job within the church or as a missionary (Hardy, 1990). Martin Luther, however, started to change and broaden the concept of calling by speaking

of work as vocation or calling being connected to a person's station in life. While this station, for some, may be their job or paid work for others their station can be about their relationships or position to others in their life, such as the station of mother, father, sister or brother or volunteer (Hardy, 1990). And for some, their calling remained within the church or on the mission field doing ministry. Luther helped people see that all people can be called by God and that calling can extend beyond purely following Christ or practicing evangelism. While these are obviously important pieces of the Christian faith, Martin believed that through our work, both paid and unpaid, we can be involved in the redemptive work of Christ in His world. Therefore, even professions such as social work can be considered a calling for people (Wolters, 2005). This view of work as calling or a vocational view of occupation was transformational not just for individuals, but also transformed how most of the Western world viewed work and employment. Max Weber saw this shift in perspective as being key in the development of the Protestant work ethic we still see today (Weber, 1922).

Weber was also one of the first sociological theorists to take Luther's ideas about vocation and apply them to scientific or academic work specifically (Weber, 1922). For Weber, seeing academic work as vocation was not necessarily about any spiritual or religious motivation, but all the same one could find fulfillment in their scientific work and could therefore see it as their calling. Weber's thoughts on this topic are instrumental in shifting the concepts of calling and vocation away from only church work and into other realms of study and work and therefore moving the concepts away from a strictly religious definition.

Indeed, research indicates that people in many professions use the language of calling to describe their commitment to their line of work or occupations. Greenwood (1957) went on to write about the attributes of the profession and he identified five attributes possessed by all professions: systematic theory, authority, community sanction, ethical codes, and a culture. According to Greenwood (1957), part of the culture of the professions is the idea that a professional career is “essentially a *calling*, a life devoted to ‘good works’. Professional work is never viewed solely as a means to an end; it is the end itself” (p. 53). Therefore, Greenwood saw professional calling as something that could, and perhaps should, be separated from a religious sense of calling. Choosing a profession, says Greenwood (1957), is like choosing a way of life and in many ways “to the professional person his work becomes his life” (p. 53). One rarely chooses a profession in order to serve themselves, but most professions and professionals are called to service.

There is no consistent definition for the concept of calling, but Luther (Hugen, 2012) focuses on the Christian call and describes vocation as “the call to love my neighbor that comes to me through the duties attached to my social place or *station* within the earthly kingdom” (p. 76). This type of calling, according to Hardy (1990) can extend to the workplace, but also, similar to Martin Luther, this calling can be also within the home and community as well, through volunteer work and unpaid service. Duffy & Dik (2013) have identified how the neo-classical and modern definitions vary in terms of their focus. The neo-classical definitions tend to “reflect how the terms have been understood historically and emphasize a sense of destiny and prosocial duty. In contrast, modern approaches generally focus on an inner drive toward self-fulfillment or personal happiness” (p. 429). After extensive research on this topic, Dik and Duffy (2009) have

composed a three-fold definition that includes an external summons, alignment with life purpose, and prosocial orientation:

a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation (p. 427).

The various definitions of the word calling demonstrate both the similarity and complexity that exists around the concept. While Christian conceptions identify the “call” to a certain occupation or station in life as coming from God, many non-religious definitions also identify a summons originating outside of oneself (Schuurman, 2004; Dik & Duffy, 2009; Hardy, 1990; Prater & McEwan, 2006; Yoon, 2015). Therefore, some might say that it does not matter so much where the call comes from, but what matters is that the person experiencing the call identifies that it is coming from somewhere outside of themselves. Not all definitions identify the call as coming from outside the self, however, as some view calling as a “deep internal desire” (Raatikainen, 1997). Some might identify their calling as originating in particular experiences both with circumstances or individuals that may have shaped or even initiated their sense of calling (Haney, Loehlein, McKenna, Robie, Austin, & Ecker, 2015). While the content or context of their initial sense of calling may have been diverse, many identified spiritual or religious reasons for being confirmed in their calling.

The definition proposed by Dik & Duffy (2009) includes “purpose or meaningfulness” (p. 427) meaning that individuals often feel called to work that gives them purpose beyond just making a living, but that feel they are fulfilling and pursuing a broader purpose in their work. They call this “purposeful work” and Raatikainen (1997) sees calling as tied to work that the worker considers both valuable and “her own” (p.

1111). Some view this as a duty to which one must respond and this correlates with the command in the Christian faith to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Hardy, 1990), but for most definitions purpose and duty are not one in the same. Instead, it may be perfectly acceptable to have a calling which leads to a certain amount of self-fulfillment (Yoon, 2015).

The third piece of Dik & Duffy’s (2009) definition is the prosocial orientation. Within a Christian conception of calling, individuals are “called” to care for their neighbors and to be concerned with the well-being of the “quartet of the downtrodden” (Wolterstorff, 2006). Secular conceptions of calling also identify the “other-oriented” (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 427) focus, but that desire to help someone else comes from a desire to do good and not from a religious commandment. Overall, there are many similarities and differences in both the secular and religious conceptualizations of calling. Keeping those in mind, the concept can help inform how various helping professions apply the concept within their specific discipline.

Research on Professional Calling in “Helping Professions”

The researcher made searches using SocIndex, PsychInfo, Academic Search Premier, and Sage Journals using the key words calling, helping professions, vocation, meaningfulness, and purpose. Articles were included in the review if they were peer-reviewed and also had been written within the last twenty years (1996-2016). The researcher decided to set these parameters due to the fact that she was particularly interested in more recent research and discussion about calling in the helping professions—namely counseling psychology, medicine, nursing, and social work. Because this research question is broad, the amount of research already done is fairly

limited, and because the researcher was concerned both with the conceptualization of calling and also its impact on work, she was fairly generous in my inclusion of studies for this review. Therefore, the researcher included both religious and non-religious definitions of the concept of calling and she also included studies that use different and varied definitions.

Quantitative studies were included if the research questions were around the relationship between calling and work. The researcher also included them if they helped to further delineate and define the concepts of calling and vocation. Because this study is exploratory in nature, a variety of studies were included ranging from cross-sectional exploratory studies to those that included an experimental or quasi-experimental design. The researcher evaluated these potential studies in terms of validity and reliability and that criteria were further used to determine the inclusion of specific articles.

Qualitative studies that focused on the broader questions surrounding calling and vocation were included if the focus was at least somewhat focused on the professional workplace. The researcher also evaluated the reliability and verification strategies of the qualitative studies before deciding to include them in this review.

Serving as a foundation for the exploration of calling and career choice to specific professions, in this section the researcher explored some formative studies which have been completed on how people view their work. Included are a broad range of studies that look at work and job motivation along with studies that helped develop the concept of calling as it relates to career psychology.

Lips-Wiersma (2002) sought to better understand the spiritual and religious connections people make with their career and work. She conducted interviews with 16

individuals over the course of three years and through questioning heard the “career stories” of these individuals looking for deeper meanings and connections each individual might have made to their work. The participants in this study worked in a wide range of occupations, but included a community organizer and a manager of an aid organization. From this research, specific themes emerged such as the importance of developing and becoming self, being able to express yourself and your spirituality through your work, and also being able to serve others through work. While this study did not focus directly on calling, it does identify some ways in which people connect their spirituality to their work and how that shapes the ways they decided which projects and jobs were worth their time and which were not. It was suggested that future research examine in which types of jobs employees might be more prone to see spiritual connections and identify spiritual motivations.

Wrizesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz (1997) were also interested in how people viewed their work and hypothesized that people see their work one of three ways—as a job, as a career, or as a calling. They conducted a quantitative study with 76 employees of a major state university student health service and also 162 non-faculty of a small liberal arts college, for a total of 196 respondents. The primary measure used was the University of Pennsylvania Work-Life Questionnaire which did not specifically use the terms “job”, “career”, or “work”, but instead described these concepts more broadly and asked participants to identify themselves under those characteristics. The questionnaire also included some true-false questions along with a self-rating for life satisfaction. The researchers found that those who identified their work as a calling had higher incomes, better education, and high self-perceived and objective prestige levels.

The participants who seemed to feel “called” to their work also scored higher on their life and job satisfaction scales than those who saw their work as simply a job or career. This was a statistically significant difference and was also true when the researchers controlled for income, education, and occupation.

Other research has identified a connection between calling and other constructs such as “dispositional zest” (Peterson, Park, Hall, & Seligman, 2009). Working adults, some of whom were employed in specific professions like medicine, dentistry, and law, who felt a sense of calling to their work were also found to experience decreased stress levels and depression (Treadgold, 1999) and were also likely to having greater ability to cope with life stresses. This is similar to finding by Oates, Hall, & Anderson (2005) which identified working mothers who have a strong sense of calling also have greater coping abilities when it comes to stress.

Gustafson (1982) identified the importance of calling within the professions, specifically focusing on the professions where direct service to people was required. He argues that those working within a profession need a calling and a calling also conversely needs to be attached to a profession or the profession becomes “inept” (p. 501) and also “lacks moral and humane roots, loses human sensitivity, and restricts the vision of the purposes of human good that are served” (p. 501). While Martin Luther proposed that the word calling be extended to all occupations and stations in life (Hardy, 1990), Gustafson (1982) thought that this might weaken the significance of the word calling or *beruf*, but ultimately promoted the continued pursuit of seeing professions as callings.

Calling in Helping Professions

Helping professions such as nursing, medicine, and counseling psychology have taken a particular interest in exploring how a sense of calling affects people within their field. As one of the oldest helping professions, nursing has a strong history of women and men dedicated to working with people to address their physical concerns and improve health conditions. Nursing researchers have studied the concept of calling with a particular interest in how motivation to pursue their career affects perceptions of their work. Prater & McEwen (2006) conducted a study with 212 upper-level nursing students utilizing six open-ended questions which were intended to help them better understand the students' motivations for and beliefs and feelings about why they chose nursing. They found that over half of the students identified wanting to "serve and help" (p. 66) as one of their main reasons for pursuing the nursing field and two-thirds of the respondents said they felt "led" or "called" to nursing. The researchers also identified some key personality characteristics in the participants such as being caring, compassionate and also demonstrating love and empathy to others. Many of the participants had had previous and personal experience with the health care system that led them to decide on nursing as career in high school or early on in their college careers. Similarly, Raatikainen (1997) identified nurses seeing their pursuit of social work as motivated by a "calling from God" (p. 1112) and part of a "divine plan" (p. 1114).

A sense of calling has an impact on the quality of work demonstrated by nurses. Raatikainen (1997) found that nurses who viewed their work as calling demonstrated a stronger sense of self-efficacy and confidence in their ability and knowledge of "aches and pains, long-term depression, and importance of family relationships" (p. 1113).

Seeing work as calling affected the interactions nurses had with their patients and their sense of ability to do their work. Having a sense of calling also gave nurses a stronger sense of purpose, direction, and reason for their work (1997). They were motivated by a desire to care for others or what Raatikainen (1997) calls their “neighbors” (p. 1115). The nurses with a strong sense of calling were both satisfied with their work and reported a high sense of well-being. The nurses who identified having a calling worked at a “high professional level” (p. 1114) and felt better able to give spiritual support to both patients and their families. In the helping profession of nursing, having a sense of calling has a direct impact on nurses’ confidence in their abilities including their ability to provide spiritual support while also improving their sense of well-being and providing them with a direct motivation to serve others through their work.

The field of medicine is another helping profession where research on calling has demonstrated the impact of such a perspective on physicians and their work. Recently, Yoon (2015) conducted a large-scale cross-sectional study of physicians, both primary care doctors and psychiatrists and asked questions about medicine as calling. Participants were asked about their agreement or disagreement with the following statement, “For me, the practice of medicine is a calling” (p. 190). This study showed a strong connection between calling and religious affiliation and spirituality as physicians who identified as religious also typically had a strong sense of calling. However, even the least religious physicians still agreed somewhat that the practice of medicine is calling demonstrating that the concept of calling has broadened beyond just religious circles. Yoon (2015) also cited that calling for physicians is about being “other-oriented” (Dik & Duffy, 2009) in

that physicians are often serving “suffering and vulnerable populations (Yoon, 2015, p. 193).

Borges, Manuel, & Duffy (2013) looked at calling in first-year medical students and found that those who were interested in primary care were more likely to endorse the presence of calling than those who were interested in non-primary care. The researchers hypothesized this was because those working in primary care would have more opportunity to work directly to help others. These same first-year medical students also scored more strongly on the presence measure for calling than the search subscale. This finding seems to support the fact that these medical students have endorsed and found their calling and therefore are no longer searching for it.

Similarly, in a comparison of first-year and third-year medical students, Duffy, Manuel, Borges, and Bott (2011) found that first-year students had high levels of calling, but when they revisited the same students in their third year those same students had significantly lower levels of both calling and life satisfaction. This study included two other variables, vocational development, which measures development tasks within medical students’ career and includes crystallization, specification, and implementation and meaning in life. While overall sense of calling decreased from first year to third year, medical students who saw their lives as more meaningful over time also attained higher levels of vocational development and endorsed higher levels of career calling by the third year measurement. This study also demonstrated that with this group of medical students their vocational development and life meaning preceded their sense of calling and not vice versa. Calling seems to have an important role in both the

preparation of future physicians and in the connections practicing physicians make between their religious and spiritual perspectives and their work.

A third helping profession that has taken an interest in calling and its impact on the education and development of its students and professionals is the field of counseling psychology. Hall, Burkholder, & Sterner (2014) surveyed 476 master's-level counseling psychology students and found that the students identified feeling called to their profession because they had a "strong sense of purpose" (p. 12) and found meaning in their choice of a future profession. This study also demonstrated a predictive relationship between the participants' existential and religious well-being and their sense of calling. While both religious and existential well-being were predictive of sense of calling, existential well-being was the strongest predictor which may imply that calling, for those students, is more connected to their purpose in life than to a relationship they may have with an outside spiritual being.

In a qualitative study practicing counseling psychologists, Duffy, Foley, Raque-Bodgan, Reid-Marks, Dik, Castano, and Adams (2012) found calling meant different things for each of the participants, but they also identified three themes in their interviews. The first theme was that of "calling as process" (p. 304) as almost all of the participants described determining their calling as something that contained struggles, self-realization, and support. The participants, however, did all identify an external source of their calling and reflected Dik & Duffy's (2009) definition of calling as "transcendent summons". The second theme identified by Duffy et al. (2012) was that of "calling impact" and the participants resoundingly saw their calling as having a positive and not negative effect on their lives. They reported being satisfied with their jobs and

lives and many of them reported feeling a sense of fulfillment. The counseling psychologists who viewed their work as calling “exuded a sense of enthusiasm and vigor for the work they were doing that tied directly to their calling and specifically discussed how well their job fits with their personality” (p. 304).

Finally, the researchers asked the participants to talk about how they maintain their sense of calling. The participants discussed seeing their calling as always evolving and talked about being open to finding new ways to live out their calling both professionally and personally. This resonates with the piece of the Dik & Duffy (2009) definition that describes both the “presence of” and “search for” (p. 305) calling and helps support the fact that these are not mutually exclusive.

Measurement

Much work has been done on the concept of calling and its impact on various aspects of professional and personal life (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Much of this research has been based on the conceptualization of calling proposed by Dik & Duffy (2009) and many of the studies have utilized their Brief Calling Scale (BCS) or the Calling Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ) which assesses “external summons, prosocial motivation, and meaning/purpose” (p. 430). Other scales have been developed (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Hagmaier & Abele, 2012) to measure calling and vocation, but overall the consensus seems to be that calling is a multi-dimensional concept that cannot be “meaningfully summarized in a unidimensional total score” (p. 430).

In a narrative review, Duffy & Dik (2013) identified six key things learned about calling from research published until 2013 when their review was conducted. These included prevalence, career maturity, work outcomes, domain satisfaction, well-being,

along with a perceiving/living distinction. In regards to prevalence, it is difficult to attain a specific number, but several studies show that between one-third to two-thirds of all work adults view their career as calling. Career maturity is most often a concept used in studying college students, but refers to how they approach their specific career or calling. Students who saw their future career as calling tended to be more “planful, confident, and decided in their career decisions” (p. 431). Their review also noted that those with a calling view of their work also had strong commitment to their work and a sense of meaning. These individuals tended to be more satisfied with their work in general and while perceiving a calling is important, in their review of the research, living one’s calling seems to be a powerful predictor for the benefits coming from viewing work as calling.

Using the Brief Calling Scale (BCS), two research studies (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Bott, 2013) found that around 45% of participants identified having a “calling to a particular line of work” (p. 430). In another study (Duffy, Dik, & Steger, 2011), employees in a university setting stated they viewed their work as a calling and when they surveyed college students almost two-thirds said that the concept of calling had been helpful to them in deciding upon a career (Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2010).

Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas (2011) developed a 12-item scale to measure calling across four different domains: music, art, business, and management. They theorized that calling can be a personal orientation, a place, the work itself, or can also be an external pull in a certain direction and they defined calling as a “consuming, meaningful passion people experience toward a domain” (p. 1004). With this broad definition and by

not tying calling only to work, the authors of this scale have provided the opportunity for use across broad sectors and contexts.

Seeking to evaluate the existing calling scales, Duffy, Autin, Allan, & Douglass (2015) provided an overview and critique of the Work-Life Questionnaire (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997) (WLQ), the Brief Calling Scale (BCS), the Calling Scale (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011) (CS), and also the Calling Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ) developed by Dik & Duffy (2009). The Work-Life Questionnaire is described as assessing calling in a categorical fashion looking at “how well participants fit with a particular prompt concerning their attitudes toward work” (Duffy et al., 2015, p. 352). They described the BCS and CS as being unidimensional measures of calling and identified the CVQ as being the only multidimensional measure of calling as it utilizes four subscales to measure the overall concept. Overall, only a few measures exist to assess levels of calling and while each of the measures is unique in its design and overall structure, the measures tend to be “more similar than different and com close to reflecting one underlying concept” (p. 363).

Other studies have tried to identify the connection between calling and work related outcomes in employed adults. Results from five studies (Duffy, Allan, & Dik, 2011; Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey, & Dik, 2012; Duffy et al., 2013; Cardador, Dane, & car, 2011; Hirschi, 2012) suggest “working adults are more likely to perceive their job as a calling tend to be more committed to their jobs and organizations, feel their work is a strong fit with their personal preferences, and are more likely to find meaning at work” (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Other studies have shown a distinct difference between just perceiving a calling over actually living out that calling (Duffy et al, 2013). Living a

calling, compared to perceiving a calling, was “more strongly correlated with career commitment, work meaning, and job satisfaction” (2013).

While studies on the topic of work and calling are more common today, there is still a need for new research on the role of calling in the professional workplace. The preliminary research seems to say that having a sense of calling to your work has a positive impact on other aspects of life including life satisfaction and commitment to the profession. Prater & McEwan (2006) also make a connection between career choice and calling identifying specific personality characteristics that were common to the students who chose nursing. Yoon (2015) found a strong correlation between religiosity and spirituality and calling in physicians, but Dik & Duffy (2013) found that having a calling perspective about your work or your future work transcends religious or spiritual lines.

While the studies on calling in general have led to the development of a number of scales to measure the concept, the research seems to say that categorizing a multi-dimensional concept such as calling into a unidimensional score is a difficult if not impossible thing to do. Therefore, it seems that more qualitative research is needed in this area to help flesh out the depth and complexity of a concept such as calling. What are the various ways people think of calling and how do they apply the concept to their life? How does having a sense of calling affect how they see their work? Based on the research, having a calling seems to have an impact on other areas of life, but more research is needed to understand how people see themselves as called and how they see their calling affecting their life and work.

Critique and Synthesis

For professionals and students in the nursing, medicine, and counseling psychology fields, the studies included above demonstrate that having a calling directly impacts not only the work they do, but also the way they view their work and the reason why they have pursued that profession. In short, having a calling or viewing one's work as calling makes a difference. Those with a calling are generally more satisfied with their lives and work (Hall, Burkholder, & Sterner, 2014; Raatikainen, 1997; Prater & McEwan, 2006; Duffy et al., 2011) and also demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy and self-confidence in the tasks they face in the course of their profession (Raatikainen, 1997).

These studies also supported parts of the three-part definition proposed by Dik & Duffy (2009) in that every study identified calling as coming from a "transcendent summons" whether that summons be from God or from the person's spiritual higher power or from having developed and articulated a purpose in life (Hall, Burkholder, & Sterner, 2014). These studies also helped support the piece of the Dik & Duffy (2009) definition of calling that includes "purposeful work" and nurses, physicians, and counseling psychologists identified deriving purpose and meaning from their work. How and when that calling to purposeful work developed depended on the profession and their progress through their education and then career (Borges, Manuel, & Duffy, 2013). The third part of the definition describes a "prosocial orientation" or "other-oriented values and goals" (Hall, Burkholder, & Sterner, 2014, p. 6) and this is also demonstrated by professionals within counseling, nursing, and medicine as the participants in these studies have described being motivated

Overall, research on calling within each of these fields is limited and while a longitudinal study on calling has been conducted with medical students, it is one of the only studies that looks at calling long term and how it might change or progress throughout one's educational and career journey. Most of the research that has been conducted has been cross-sectional not allowing us to understand the potential causal relationships which might be present between a sense of calling and other potential variables. Many of the research studies included had small sample sizes and were not necessarily representative of the larger populations of professionals working within the specific field of interest. More research on calling and its impact and effect within these fields is needed to help educators and employers more clearly understand how to both promote and sustain a sense of calling within their students and employees. Because calling has a direct impact on those being helped by the above helping professions, it would be useful to know more about how it might be further developed.

Calling can also be, however, a double-edged sword leading to professionals with a strong sense of calling to be overly exerted and maybe even abused in their pursuit of their calling (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). Some reference calling as a privilege of western culture and believe it has led to many workers expecting the workplace to fulfill their expectations as a place to carry out their calling fully (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015). Calling, in its again more historically secular context, seems "to privilege paid work, to stratify society, and to limit agency" (p. 172). Taking a discursive look at calling "helps uncover causes of calling's downsides as well as its rehabilitative possibilities by neither dismissing nor idolizing calling" (p. 173). Some critique a calling model arguing that using it can lead to students (and eventually workers) becoming

“narcissistic and elitist” (Waalkes, 2015, p. 146) or encourage employees to treat their career as an idol where people’s importance often gets reduced to the answer they give when asked “what do you do?”.

The implications of calling in the workplace and in specific professions such as nursing, medicine, and counseling psychology can have implications for professional social work practice. Perceiving and living calling in your occupation can help people be more committed and satisfied in their work (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010), but it can also lead to unrealistic expectations on the part of employees and may be, in part, a privilege to which only certain groups of people have access (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015). Overall, the research seems to say that having a sense of calling can have positive benefits for employees and employers alike, but is that true for social workers as well? Even with the potential pitfalls of embracing a calling perspective, social workers, who are “intrinsically more directly in service of neighbors” (Garland, 2015, p. 9), might be motivated to their highly service-oriented career in part because they perceive a calling to the profession. What does the research tell us about why students choose to follow the “call” to social work? What role does their religion or spirituality play in their decision?

Professional Calling in Social Work

By seeking to understand how and why people have chosen social work as their major or career, we can understand the motivations, either internal or external, that have guided them in their decision-making process. While choosing a specific career is quite different from viewing work as calling, the review of why students choose social work can help us understand the movement from motivations to view of work as calling.

Educators and employers can tap on those preliminary motivators and work with students and employees to further develop their sense of calling based on those motivators.

In her book *Why I Am A Social Worker* (2015), Diana Garland tells the stories of twenty-five Christian social workers and explores their specific motivations for pursuing social work, but also what keeps them motivated to continue practicing. These stories can give us a glimpse into the journeys of social workers into and through the profession. In her introductory chapter, however, Garland focuses on the concept of calling throughout history—both church and social work—and she maps the changing definition of calling as it has moved both in and out of the specific realm of “church service” (p. 7).

Social work students’ sense of calling to the helping profession can also be a primary way they see to contribute to the common good, whether that be religiously motivated or not. Some of the first social workers saw their work with vulnerable people as being a distinct way they could answer the call from Jesus to care for “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40). Today, social workers might feel called to the field for a variety of reasons, some in response to their religious or faith beliefs and others because of their desire to help bring about social justice or help those in need (Reamer, 1987). It does not seem, based on the research, that students choose social work haphazardly or without thought, but instead that they have key reasons for choosing the profession. Students often identify having direct personal connections to the profession of social work.

There are few specific studies on the role of calling in the field of social work or social work education, but based on the studies that have been completed we can draw some general conclusions about what motivates students to pursue the field of social work. What follows are three key themes around why students feel called to social work.

I drew these themes from a handful of studies that look at student and professional calling and point to the three-part definition of calling proposed by Dik & Duffy (2009) which includes transcendent summons, prosocial orientation, and purposeful work.

First, several studies found that people often have a religious or spiritual motivation for pursuing social work indicating a motivation which Dik & Duffy (2009) call “transcendent summons” . Freeman (2006) studied the relationship between students’ religious call to social work and their ability to undergo the transformative process of social work education. Based on the findings of this study, Freeman hypothesizes that students in social work are open to transformation and educators must facilitate the transformative process.

Freeman found that students in social work displayed certain characteristics recognized in Jung’s twelve archetypes that provide direction for social work educators seeking to help students further develop their identity in and call to the social work profession. Based on Jung’s theory that everyone has latent energy, which guides their unconscious and conscious behavior, Pearson developed a model that includes twelve symbolic images which represent Jung’s twelve energy archetypes (1990). These twelve symbols can be found in individuals in the Ego, the Soul, and Spirit levels and were assessed by Freeman (2007) in his study. The social work students who participated in Freeman’s (2007) study identified most closely to the archetypes at the spiritual level demonstrating that social work students may be more open to transformation at that level than the other two. Therefore, social work students seem to be open to spiritual transformation through the education process and therefore, educators can emphasize this potential relationship either with a religious or non-religious calling model because both

focus on the “transcendent summons” as a significant part of their calling (Duffy et al., 2012).

Students who have higher levels of religiosity or spirituality also tend to be more likely to view social work as calling. Hirsbrunner, Loeffler, & Rompf (2012) found a positive correlation between high levels of spirituality, as measured by the Santa Clara Abbreviated Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire, and viewing social work as calling. The top four reasons students reported choosing to pursue social work were to help others, follow a spiritual calling, serve disadvantaged populations, and interact with people. Only 54.3% of participants identified a spiritual calling as one of their top motivators, but using another measure, a total of 82.8% of participants identified their religious/spiritual beliefs as being either “very important” or “somewhat important” in their career choice.

Although all of the participants in Singletary et al.’s (2006) study were of a Christian belief system, they had different theological orientations and articulated their sense of calling to social work each quite uniquely, but with some key themes. Some students identified their call to social work as feeling that it was something God was leading them to. Many of these students referenced their sense of being called to social work practice as a primary purpose for choosing the “journey to social work” (p. 130). Others talked about how well the core values complemented their own specifically religious ideals and values. Some even identified seeing Jesus as one of the first social workers, before there was such a term (Singletary et al., 2006).

Rompf & Royse (1994) in trying to explore motivations for pursuing social work found that 87% of their respondents identified “very strong” or “moderate” influence of

religious values during their childhood, but this was not a significant difference when compared to nonsocial work majors. Wilson & McCrystal (2007) found similar results with 63% of respondents stating that religious beliefs were either “very strong” or “strong” during their childhood, while only 10% reported “weak” and 4% “very weak”.

The second part of Dik & Duffy’s (2009) definition of calling refers to the “prosocial orientation” and this refers to the sense of altruism and “other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation” (p. 470). Social work students and professionals articulate this theme citing their desire to work with people—specifically vulnerable and hurting people (Hirsbrunner et al., 2012; Wilson & McCrystal, 2007; Rompf & Royse, 1994)—as a major reason for feeling called to social work. Wanting to help others and serve disadvantaged populations is a common reason students identify for wanting to work in the social work profession. Many of the participants in this study cited seeing the mission of social work as being altruism and identified this mission as a motivating factor toward choosing social work.

Preliminary or extensive experience with clients can also affirm a student’s desire to pursue social work (Scales, Harris, Myers, & Singletary, 2012). They want to be able to make a difference in the journey or life of their client. Through social work education, they learn and experience what it means to come alongside someone through the social work relationship, while allowing them to be the expert of their own lives is a valuable experience that often confirms a student’s choice to get a social work degree.

The third piece of Dik and Duffy’s (2009) definition of calling is that of “purposeful work” meaning that those with a sense of calling derive some “purpose or meaningfulness” (Hall, Burkholder, & Sterner, 2014, p. 6) from their work. Rompf &

Royse (1994) found, in a study of 243 undergraduate social work majors, that students were often motivated to want to help people because of their own personal experience with a traumatic event. Such an event might include the death of a loved one, divorce, illness, child abuse or neglect, alcoholism or drug abuse, or emotional problems. A personal experience with one or more of these events often leads to an increase in empathy for others suffering from personal problems and often spurs individuals to want to help and gives social work students and practitioners a purpose and meaning for their work. Wilson & McCrystal (2007) found similar results with their sample of MSW students in Northern Ireland, with 54% of participants having experienced a traumatic life event, which could include anything from “emotional problems” to “child abuse & neglect”. Students in both studies stated that their childhood family experience was influential in their choice of a major, but they also identified volunteering, influential relationships, and religious beliefs as also being key.

Also affirming Dik & Duffy’s (2009) inclusion of “purposeful work” in the conceptualization of calling is a study conducted by Guo et al. (2014) with 270 undergraduate social work students in China. Social work students in this study who demonstrated both career concern and career curiosity would also likely describe having a higher sense of professional competence and this was mediated through calling. Career concern and curiosity means that these students have made purposeful decisions based on life experience and a clear understanding of the profession. Therefore, students who have thoroughly considered their place in the profession will perform better in their jobs if they also have a strong sense of calling.

Seeking to describe how social workers integrate their Christian faith with their practice, Chamiec-Case (2012) developed a calling model as one way in which Christian social workers identify their decision to pursue the profession. Within this calling model, students and professionals sense a “beckoning into” (Garland, 2015, p. 12) social work. This calling then “motivates, nurtures, and sustains their commitment to meet the rigorous demands of social work practice” (Chamiec-Case, 2012, p. 342). According to Chamiec-Case (2012), this calling perspective provides answers for social work students and practitioners who have questions about their purpose and meaning in life. This, too, seems to resonate with the three-part definition of calling proposed by Dik & Duffy (2009) and speaks to the “purposeful work” piece of the definition. In her qualitative work with twenty-five social workers, Garland (2015) found that not all sensed the call to social work before choosing to pursue it, but that some only realized they had been “called” after looking back on their journey into and throughout the profession. Calling has an important role in the field of social work as a helping profession, but what that calling looks like and means to those studying and practicing within the field may look different depending on each individual experience.

Critique and Synthesis

Overall, the research thus far on calling within the social work field has been minimal and further research is needed to determine the role of calling within this helping profession. Choice of social work as professional career remains a primary focus for many research studies and while this information is important, looking at social work from a calling perspective might help us more clearly understand the underlying motivations of those choosing the field. Most of the studies conducted on calling in

social work have specifically focused on religious students and look at calling only from a Christian perspective, excluding those who might have a calling that is not specifically religiously motivated. While there is a strong correlation between religiosity or spirituality and calling, these are not the only reasons why people are motivated to pursue social work. It would be an important avenue for future research, however, to look at the motivations articulated by social work students who are both religious and non-religious.

Most of the research in this area relating to social work is studies that are cross-sectional and with a small sample of social workers or more commonly, social work students. There are almost no studies which have been completed with social work practitioners in regards to their sense of calling and its potential impact on both their personal and professional lives. The studies which have been completed give us a glimpse into the role of calling and career choice in the social work field, but there are still many avenues available and important for future research endeavors.

Overall, social work students and practitioners seem to exemplify the three parts of Dik & Duffy's (2009) definition including prosocial orientation, purposeful work, and transcendent summons. The studies included in this review exhibit the unique ways social work students and practitioner articulate and view their call to the social work profession. Social workers are often drawn to the profession out of a desire to want to help others or to make a difference in the lives of others. Another reason cited for choosing social work is the desire to do something worthwhile or have a job that gives them purpose or meaning. The research also shows that for many people this desire to pursue social work also comes from a calling that is outside of themselves or what Dik & Duffy (2009) call the "transcendent summons". This summons can come from a variety

of sources, but as much of the research demonstrates, for many this calling is religious or spiritual in nature.

One key theme in the research on calling in social work as well as the research on calling within the other included helping professions is the role of empathy in working within these fields. Empathy seemed to be an important result or consequence of operating from a calling perspective (Yoon, 2015; Rompf & Royse, 1994; Wilson & McCrystal, 2007; Prater & McEwan). It is difficult to determine if empathy was a precursor to calling or vice versa. Therefore, further research is needed to better examine the potential relationship between calling and empathy.

While calling is a positive thing for many social workers, it can also have a complex meaning when thinking about how it relates to clients and their relationship with work. Some of stated that calling is a privilege only afforded to certain groups of people and that thinking of work as calling is not always a possibility for all people (Waalkes, 2015). This concept of calling as it relates to privilege should be of particular interest to social workers who, by the NASW Code of Ethics (2015), are encouraged to work toward promoting social justice for all people with a specific focus on underserved or vulnerable groups of people. If social workers do see and describe their work as calling, could this be further distancing them from the populations of people with whom they work? It seems that Martin Luther's definition of calling is broad enough to allow all types of work to fall under the umbrella of calling and therefore we could, as social workers, encourage them to think about their purpose or calling in life whether that be something connected to paid work or not. Further research is needed to determine the effect of calling on work with vulnerable clients.

Discussion and Implications

The concept of calling has an important place in the helping professions as the studies mentioned above have identified the way nursing, medicine, counseling psychology, and social work demonstrated Dik & Duffy's (2009) three-pronged definition. Having a sense of calling has a direct impact on the way in which these professionals both view their work and how they interact with vulnerable, hurting, or sick people on a day-to-day basis (Raatikainen, 2014; Garland, 2015; Hirsbrunner et al., 2012). Professionals who view their work as calling are often more self-confident and have higher levels of overall self-efficacy (Raatikainen, 2014; Prater & McEwan, 2006; Duffy et al., 2012).

Students also identify religious and spiritual motivations and a sense of calling as a main reason they chose, social work as a profession. Within the educational context educators, but also career services professionals and college chaplains and pastors should also be available to help students best understand how their religious and spiritual beliefs inform their desire to practice social work. Students are often ready for a transformative educational experience when they enter social work (Freeman, 2007). While many of them enter the field innately empathetic with the oppressed—the educational experience can help them further transform into someone who can “advocate and challenge social injustice” (p. 294) while also learning to “let go of previously held perspectives that may be contrary to social work values and principles” (p. 294).

Including a discussion of the role of calling in other professions provides a source of comparison for a review of the research specifically on career motivations, calling, and social work. Nurses and doctors are likely to see their work as calling and the same could

be true for social workers. By replicating studies similar to those conducted by Yoon (2015) and Prater & McEwan (2006), the social work profession could have a better understand of which social workers are likely to see their work as calling. Educators and employers can tap the internal and external motivators people often cite for choosing social work and work to further develop them. This is not meant to be used as a way to exploit workers, but as way for them to “remember their why” when things get difficult in their field of practice whether that be social work, counseling, nursing, or medicine.

Further research is needed to determine if social work students and social workers are more likely to identify perceiving or living out their calling both within the educational and workplace setting. Cross-sectional and also longitudinal studies are needed to further explore how a sense of calling changes as students move out of the academic setting and into the “real world” of social work practice. Some areas of question for future research include: Do social workers who perceive and live out their calling in the workplace experience higher levels of job and life satisfaction? Are they more committed to their work? Or, do social workers experience that double-edged sword of calling and and their work and clients an idol which could potentially lead to higher levels of burnout?

Conclusion

The concept of calling has taken journeys in and out of religious and secular camps of meaning since the beginning of the church. Currently, many people embrace their “station in life” which typically includes their occupation or career (Hardy, 1990) as either a religious or non-religious calling that comes as a “transcendent summons” (Dik & Duffy, 2009). Still others criticize the overuse of the concept of calling or vocation,

stating that it is something for privileged and can often lead to work being treated as an idol (Berkelaar & Buzzanell, 2015). Social workers and social work students, especially those who identify as highly religious or spiritual, might feel “called” or motivated to pursue the profession because of its service orientation and their ability to serve the common good within their places of employment (Canda & Furman, 1999). From previous research, one overarching theme and three connected key themes were identified. Based on previous studies, students might decide to pursue social work for the following reasons: religious or spiritual motivations, wanting to “work with people”, personal or familial encounter with a social worker, and also interactions with individuals who were influential in helping them decide upon a major. Knowing why students choose social work can help educators, both in high school and college, connect students’ calling and passion with the discipline that seems to best fit their motivations and interests.

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CHAPTER THREE

A Qualitative Study on the Decision to Pursue Social Work

Abstract

This qualitative study was designed to better understand how and why certain people chose social work as their future profession. Students have often sought advice and input from a variety of people and experiences as they consider what future line of work to pursue in college. Students who choose to pursue social work may have unique factors influencing their decision to pursue the helping profession. This study attempted to better understand what factors played a role in helping students pursue either or both undergraduate or graduate social work. The participants talked often about relationships with friends and family, faculty, advisors, field supervisors, and clients. The field of social work is founded on six core ethical principles—one of them being “the importance of human relationships”. This study seems to confirm the importance of relationships in helping students determine and workers confirm that social work is the correct profession for them.

Introduction

Many students come to college thinking they need to have their life planned and a big piece of that plan includes what major they will pursue and what job they hope to hold in the future. This process of considering and then choosing and then sometimes re-considering a major and future career can be a time of reflection about personal values and gifts and talents, while also balancing this with practicality. In this study, I will explore what factors played a role in helping students choose to pursue social work as an educational path and future career. Students often feel a pull toward a specific career field, but then through various relationships and experiences they begin to put a voice to their “call” to that specific field or profession.

Social work is a unique profession where people are called to “help people overcome some of life’s most difficult challenges: poverty, discrimination, abuse, addiction, physical illness, divorce, loss, unemployment, educational problems, disability, and mental illness. They help prevent crises and counsel individuals, families, and communities to cope more effectively with the stresses of everyday life” (National Association of Social Workers, 2016). How do people decide to pursue such a profession? What is the experience of choosing the social work profession like for students? How do some social work professionals reflect upon the experience of choosing social work as a major now that they are in the “real world” of professional practice?

Literature Review

Choosing a college major can be a particularly stressful event for some students, but others may go through the experience very smoothly and with little concern or stress

(Galotti, Ciner, Allenbaumer, Geerts, Rupp, & Woulfe, 2006). This difference in experience could be in part due to individual differences around decision making altogether, but it could also do with some external factors and experiences which shape student decisions. Some students decide on a major with very little thought or worry, while others persevere on the decision continuing to wonder if they have made the “right” decision or if they should switch majors and pursue another discipline.

Because our “work” constitutes a large part of how we spend our lives, students often take this decision very seriously and might second-guess if they have made the right decision. Work has different meanings for different people. While some people view their work as providing meaning and purpose to their lives, others see it simply as a means to an end—a way for them to enjoy “the good life” and something they have to suffer through in order to have the comforts and safety a stable income can provide.

In medieval times, work was considered a necessary evil. People preferred to live a life of leisure rather than working for survival and they preferred a life of contemplation over a life that required hard work (Hardy, 1990). Today, this idea continues to pervade some perspectives on work. People live for the weekend and save for retirement. They live for the days when work does not dictate how they spend their time. For many however, work has a much deeper meaning than simply something they do in order to pay for their “play” or leisure time. One way to think about people’s pathways to career choice is consider their motivation to pursue a specific career and sometimes this takes the form of calling or vocation. Martin Luther spoke of work as vocation, which he believed, was connected to your station, or place, in life. While this station or current placement, for some, may be their job or paid work for others, their station can be about

their relationships or position to others in their life, such as the station of mother, father, sister or brother or volunteer.

The word “calling” can mean different things to different people. Christians often think of themselves as being “called” by God or Jesus to follow Him. This is the broadest definition of the word calling and is often a calling most Christians identify as being important in their lives. Historically, calling described those who pursued ministry either within the church or on the mission field—therefore calling extended to specific occupations, but only those which were religious or church related. Only recently have career psychologists and individuals in some specific fields and professions started to talk about people being ‘called’ to practice within a specific field. No longer is calling just defined as something that only Christians can experience, but others, too, identify various “external summons” (Dik and Duffy, 2009) which motivate them to choose specific careers and view them as a calling.

Students often think of their choice in major as their “calling” or “vocation” (Rompf & Royse, 1994; Prater & McEwan, 2006; Singletary, Harris, Myers, & Scales, 2006) and social work students, too, have specific reasons, both religious and non-religious, for wanting to pursue the profession. Social work students are no different in that some students come into the major encountering “major obstacles” (Scales, Harris, Myers, & Singletary, 2012, p. 136) both while deciding upon their major and also after the initial decision has been made, while others experience a fairly smooth journey. Student “journeys” (p. 136) into the social work major were impacted by a variety of people and experiences, identifying and sharing their “stories of seeking God’s plan, dealing with obstacles, and seeking companionship for the journey” (p. 130). They use

the word “calling” to describe how their participants viewed their decision to pursue social work and this article will continue this conversation attempting to understand how students more clearly understood their call to social work through the relationships they experienced along the way.

The previous research studies on the role of calling in the journey to social work pointed to a need for a study such as this one. Social work students and practitioners cite a variety of reasons for choosing social work, but relationships with other people appears often in the literature (Rompf & Royse, 1994; Sherr, Huff, & Curran, 2006; Singletary et al., 2006). The review that follows includes an overview of the previous research on the broad topic of calling, followed by a discussion and previous research on the role of calling within the social work profession. I will end by looking specifically at the role of mentoring relationships and their impact on the process of developing and identifying a calling within higher education.

Research on Calling as a Pathway to Career Choice

Dik and Duffy (2009) have studied calling and vocation in depth from a career counseling perspective. They developed a broad, working definition of calling in an attempt to bring together the variety of perspectives and ideas that existed on this topic.

Their definition is stated as

a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation (p. 427).

This definition encapsulates three different dimensions of the word calling: external motivation, meaningfulness, and contribution to the “common good” (pp. 427).

According to Sherr (2006), a Christian definition of calling is “where men and women

divert their energies from all self-seeking irresponsible pursuits to one course in which faith in Jesus Christ can find mature fulfillment” (p. 68). These two definitions encapsulate two parts of the word calling—that it can pertain to finding a general purpose or meaning in life or that one might be called to follow Christ and live as a Christians. For this study, however, I will argue that calling can mean more than just following Christ or having a general purpose or meaning, but that calling can also be attached to a specific career or job as well. Social workers, both as students and professionals, often identify their job or choice of major as a calling.

People formulate their vocational identity in a variety of ways, but preliminary research on sense of calling and life satisfaction show that there is at least some relationship between the two (Duffy, Allan, & Bott, 2012; Hirschi & Hermann, 2012;). College students are often struggling with questions about identity and calling, but they are often looking at issues beyond just choosing a career; they often want to understand and live out their life’s purpose and also contribute to the common good (Thompson & Feldman, 2010). This sense of calling seems to transcend all ages and genders, specifically when looking at college students (Eldridge, 2010). Because college is a time when search for identity coincides with the search and determination of future career, college students are often trying to find how they can live out their purpose through their chosen major or discipline (Thompson & Feldman, 2010).

Calling is something those in specifically religious professions such as the ministry or other positions have been interested in for many years, but the idea that someone could be called to a profession that has no ties to a specific religion or faith or church is a relatively new concept. The concept of calling interests counseling

psychologists, specifically those interested in career counseling. Identifying someone's sense of calling can help them find meaning and purpose in their work and can prevent disillusionment and frustration (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Much of the recent research has been focused broadly, working to understand people from all disciplines and professions and how they understand their calling (Duffy, Manuel, Borges, & Bott, 2011; Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2010; Steger et. al, 2010). Recent studies in business, medicine, and even on volunteerism have shown that individuals pursuing a variety of careers find meaning, purpose, and motivation in their work (Duffy et. al., 2011; Garland, Myers, & Wolfer, 2009; Logue, 2007), but this study focuses specifically on the how and why the participants experienced the process of choosing social work as their major or profession.

Duffy, Allan, & Bott (2011) conducted a study of 472 undergraduate students whose majors were in Biology, Psychology, Nursing, Health Science, and Undeclared in an attempt to determine what moderating and mediating factors affect the relationship between calling and life satisfaction. In an earlier study Dik, Sargent, & Steger (2008) found sense of calling moderately correlated with meaning of life and that the relationship was higher and more pronounced for those with a religious commitment. Recent research has found weak to moderate positive relationships between calling and life satisfaction and also calling and life meaning (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010). Duffy and his colleagues (2011) in their study attempted to fill in the research gap by looking more specifically at the relationship between calling and life satisfaction while looking specifically at the effect of additional variables such as religiousness, academic satisfaction, self-evaluations, and life meaning.

Hunter, Dik, & Banning (2010) conducted an ethnography of undergraduate college students where they surveyed 340 undergraduate students who responded to a three-question email survey assessing the role of calling and how they define calling. The study found three major groupings of theme in the interviews. The first theme was that which the authors titled *guiding force* in which students wrote about pursuing something they felt was God's will to pursue their profession or they felt pushed by some unknown force or will. The second theme was *personal fit/eudemonic well-being* where the person felt that their career choice or choice of profession was a good match for their personal skills, abilities, and interests. The third theme the researchers found in their interviews was that of *altruism* where the respondents talked about feeling called to the profession out of wanting to help others or bring about good in society. Social work majors or those who are practicing in the field of social work may have a stronger sense of calling because they might talk about things that fall into all three of these themes. Little research has been done from a qualitative perspective on this topic.

According to Hardy (1990) the Puritans identified two different types of calling they referred to as the general and the particular. The general calling referred to the call to follow God—the call to be a Christian and to pursue the life of following Jesus' commands. The Puritans also identified a particular calling which referred to the specific occupation which a person was called—this was something that was not specific to all Christians, but each person had their own unique particular calling. Each of us is to consider what gifts and interests we have and then make a “vocational choice” (Hardy, 1990, p. 81) which also fulfills our religious worldviews. Therefore, the choice to pursue social work is the particular choice one makes in their pathway or journey that is based

on their broader calling to follow Jesus. While Hardy (1990) focused primarily on Christian definitions of the word calling, this way of describing and defining calling might be able to be applied to those who do not hold a Christian worldview. Perhaps, one's general calling, even outside of Christian circles, might mean just general orientation or guiding direction and then particular calling is what we pursue occupationally based on those gifts, interests, and passions.

Career Motivation, Social Work Education, and the Profession

Social work students seem to be in a better position to answer questions about their pathways to career choice as their calling to this helping profession can also be a primary way they see to contribute to the common good, whether that be religiously motivated or not. Some of the first social workers saw their work with vulnerable people as being a distinct way they could answer the call from Jesus to care for “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40). Today, social workers might feel called to the field for a variety of reasons, some related to their religious or faith beliefs and others because of their desire to help bring about social justice or help those in need (Reamer, 1987). Christians in social work are curious about the role of calling in the social work field.

Chamiec-Case (2012) identified a calling model as one way Christians in social work can and do seek to integrate their faith with their practice. Seeing social work as a calling can provide students and practitioners with a way to connect their faith with their professional identity and activity as a social worker and may provide an avenue for social workers to cope with particularly challenging client situations and job circumstances. Meaningful work or a sense of calling can lead to an increased commitment to one's profession even through particularly challenging cases and situations (Serow, Eaker &

Ciechalski, 1992). In a qualitative study, Scales, Harris, Myers, & Singletary (2012), spoke with students at a Christian university and determined that many of these students referenced their sense of being called to social work practice as a primary purpose for choosing the “journey to social work” (p. 130). Social work becomes part of our identity, but is only a piece of what we “are truly called to be” (Trulear, 2007),

While professional identity and career choice is only one part of what we might be called to be, this piece of calling So, how does social work become a part of a person’s identity and what processes take place to help students and early professionals see it as part of who they are? Previous research has shown that relationships are important in the “journey” to professional social work identity and practice (Scales et al., 2012; Singletary, Harris, Myers, & Scales, 2009). Could mentoring relationships with faculty, peers, and field supervisors be influential in the development of a sense of calling to the field of social work?

Mentoring and Career Development

Some fields of practice have begun to recognize the important role mentoring relationships can play in the development of a strong, reliable, motivated employee (Singh, Ragins, & Tharenou, 2009; Byrne, Dik, & Chiaburu, 2008), but little research has been done on the role mentoring relationships can play even earlier on in the career development stages. Singh, Ragins & Tharenou (2009) compared how mentoring relationships factor into career success as compared to other variables. They found that “mentoring added value above and beyond the other forms of career capital in predicting promotion, advancement expectations, and turnover intentions and that mentoring mattered more than human, argentic, and or developmental network capital in predicting

promotion and advancement expectations” (p. 63). Byrne, Dik, & Chiaburu (2008) found “that mentoring promotes successful networking by early career employees leading to objective career success”. If mentoring is important in the workplace, then it is possible that it might be successful in institutions of higher education and while the traditional advisor system may work well for academic advising, it often does not go beyond that.

In their critical review of mentoring programs in higher education, Crisp & Cruz (2009) found that mentoring programs should focus on individual development with various forms of assistance including professional and career development, role modeling, and psychological support. Traditional academic advising programs are not usually this broad, so formal mentoring programs could be developed to accomplish these specific goals.

Mentoring, however, need not only come from professors or academic advisors, but peer mentoring programs might also be helpful, as the participants in this study identified relationships with classmates and peers and, in some cases, upperclassmen as being influential as well. Most of the research on peer mentoring in the college classroom utilized students in community colleges or in freshman academic success programs (Berry, 2014; Miranda, 2011), but a similar program might also be helpful for all first and second year social work students who are processing and considering all their options within the college and the major. While many college students might identify a friend or classmate who is a mentor, having an upperclassmen mentor within their own major could have long-term impact on their ability to be successful both at the college level and even afterward (Singh, Ragins, & Tharenou, 2009).

Importance of Human Relationships

The National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2015) identifies six core values or principles that serve as the foundation for the ethical standards that guide the social work profession. These core values include “service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence” (NASW, 2015). From these come each of the ethical standards that serve to guide social workers’ practice decisions and help them determine how to resolve ethical dilemmas. Human relationships are important to the social work profession and while the code of ethics primarily focuses on the relationships between social workers and their clients, it seems that all relationships have a certain degree of importance, including the relationships social workers form as they are developing their professional identity.

While others have theorized that determining one’s calling is more about individuation and self-actualization, previous research points to the uniqueness of social work in that understanding your call to the profession often happens in the context of relationships (Treadgold, 1999). Social work students and graduates have identified important relationships in their “journey” toward uncovering and understanding their sense of calling (Scales, Harris, Myers, & Singletary, 2012) and social work students, in particular, have identified “fellow travelers” (Scales et al., 2012, p. 138) who became important and influential along the way. These individuals include faculty, classmates, and field instructors whom students spend a great deal of time with and the student participants were able to “recognize right away the importance of these relationships” (p. 141). Students identified faculty as important mentors in the discernment journeys they were taking toward determining their professional calling. Supervisors provide advice

and consultation during the various field experiences social work students experience during their education and students appreciated both the relationship and the learning that took place in that relationship. In this study, students also identified the importance of having colleagues who both shared and did not share their same faith perspective and how those relationships could be both challenging and supportive through the educational and field experience.

The students also identified clients as being important “fellow travelers” (Scales et al., 2012, p. 142) and recognized that relationships with clients are very influential in their journey into the profession. The students recognized that being in relationship with clients through the helping process is often very “reciprocal” (p. 143) in nature and as they help clients they themselves may also be changed in the process. Students often recognize the importance of self-determination, another key social work concept, when they experience their first true helping relationships with clients.

Steven Garber (2014) in his book *Visions of Vocation*, talks about helping people find and understand their sense of “proximate happiness” (p. 200) and “proximate justice” (p. 203). By this he means, understanding that we are living in the “already, but not yet” (Wolters, 2005) where we make peace with “something, rather than nothing” (Garber, 2014, p. 200) and “with the something, even if it is not everything” (p. 200). Practicing within the social work profession, we can see glimpses of God’s redemptive purposes at work, but we recognize that we are still living in a broken, sinful world that will not fully experience redemption until the second coming of Christ. One way that social workers, both students and practitioners, can learn to live in this proximate zone of justice and happiness is through relationship or, as Garber (2014) emphasizes, through

apprenticeship. Garber argues that people rarely learn things solely through reading books, that the “words must become flesh” (p. 121) In this way, relationships with other Christian social workers help social work students and practitioners look for promises and examples of the “proximate happiness”.

In conclusion, this study focuses on the role of relationships in the experience of social work students making their choice to pursue the profession at various levels of the educational journey. Previous research has demonstrated the importance of individual self-actualization in the process of determining one’s calling (Treadgold, 1999) and studies focusing specifically on social work students seem to demonstrate a theme on the important role of relationships in the experience of choosing social work as a major (Scales et al., 2012). The qualitative studies were completed with participants from one specific school and with students who were currently enrolled. This study included students who had attended or were currently attending three different colleges and the participants represented different educational stages and life experiences. By including a more diverse sample, this study sought to support the previous research while also taking a slightly different angle or perspective. This study goes deeper in trying to determine the role of specific relationships in social work student pathways to career choice both during their BSW education and as they reflected on their decision to pursue graduate education in social work.

Methods

Research Design and Question

The purpose of this study is to seek to understand the experience of both BSW and MSW social work students who have chosen social work as their area of study and

future career. Because the intent of the study is to understand an experience, the researcher used a phenomenological framework to shape the research design. Creswell (2013) suggests that qualitative research can be conducted from one of five approaches and for this study; this research followed a phenomenological approach recognizing that all of the participants had gone through a similar experience of choosing social work as their major. In a phenomenological study, it is essential that all participants have experienced the same phenomenon—in this study, that is choosing social work as a major at either the BSW or MSW level. The phenomenological approach informed the design, collection, and analysis procedures utilized for this specific study. The questions used in the interviews were formulated based on previous research on both career counseling as well as research on calling, vocation, and the role of mentoring relationships in the career decision-making process.

Overall, the primary research question for this study is what is the role of relationships in the experience of both BSW and MSW students deciding to pursue social work? To understand this experience, the following questions were used as a semi-structured format:

- How did you go about deciding on social work as a major?
- Who or what contributed to that decision?
- What or who has been/was influential in helping you understand and make sense of your major in social work?
- Have mentors been an important part of this journey? Who? How?

- In this school there are several people in different roles such as field instructors, faculty members, and field liaisons. Have any of these been or were they in an influential role for you throughout your social work education?

Sample

Interviews were conducted with eight either individuals who were current social work students at various stages (both BSW and MSW) in pursuing their education or current social workers who had completed either BSW or MSW education. Three of the participants had completed their BSW education and were about to start an MSW program or were currently enrolled in a program. Two of the participants had already completed their MSW and were currently practicing in the social work field. The researcher purposely chosen the eight participants from three different Christian BSW programs across the United States and all but one of the participants who had completed an MSW did so at a Christian college or university. The researcher chose these three Christian colleges because they represented diverse geographical locations—one college was located on the west coast, the second in the Midwest, and the third in the southern part of the United States. The three colleges also varied in size—both the size of the colleges overall and also in the size of the BSW programs at each. The researcher hoped to garner slightly different experiences for each of the participants based on what school they attended and when. Therefore, each of the participants, even if they attended the same college or university, was at a different stage in the program than the other participants from their same school.

The participants were determined to be a part of the purposeful, while also convenient sample (Creswell, 2013) if they were either a current student or a graduate of a BSW program. Eight participants were selected and this number was chosen based on Creswell's (2013) recommendation of anywhere from one to ten participants in a phenomenological study. Only two of the eight participants were male and both had recently completed their BSW degrees. This is a generally representative sample of the social work profession, which is around 85-90% female. The participants were all of Caucasian descent and ranged in age from 20-24 years of age.

Data Collection

Data collection methods used in this study were a combination of phone and face-to-face interviews. The digitally recorded interviews were semi-structured, in-depth, and open ended and lasted around one hour. At the conclusion of the interviews, the researcher and an assistant transcribed the interviews verbatim. The researcher uploaded the transcribed interviews into Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software that allows researchers to code, categorize the text, and further allows the researcher to make connections among the codes and develop specific themes. Two college and university Institutional Review Boards reviewed and approved the complete explanation of the study along with the interview guides, recruitment efforts, and consent forms.

The researcher also used the Rubin & Rubin (2012) responsive interviewing model, which allows the researcher to change the sequence of the questions to fit the particular flow and circumstances of each particular interview. The interview guide was also pilot tested on two current BSW students who would not go on to participate in the research study. Creswell (2013) recommends pilot testing the interview questions and

procedures to help refine the data collection plans and ensure the line of questioning is relevant.

Data Analysis

The first step of the analysis process was the open-coding of the eight interview transcripts. This process allows the codes to emerge from the data after the reading and re-reading of the transcripts by the researcher (Creswell, 2012). Both *in vivo* codes and descriptive codes were used, allowing the researcher to utilize both the words of the participants and use some interpretation of the interviews and transcripts. From these codes, I developed themes by reading and reviewing the codes multiple times.

The six steps for data analysis in phenomenological suggested by Creswell (2012) were used to begin data analysis for this study. First, the researcher worked to set aside personal experiences with the phenomenon by describing this experience in an attempt to set aside those to focus on the experiences of the participants. Second, the researcher developed a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping significant statements using “horizontalization” (p. 193). These significant statements were then grouped into larger units called “meaning units” (p. 193) or themes. Next, a “textural description” (p. 193) was developed, including verbatim examples of the phenomenon as described by the participants. The researcher then wrote a description of “how” the experience happened, or what Creswell calls a “structural description” (p. 194) where the researcher reflects on the context and setting where the phenomenon occurred. Lastly, both the structural and textural descriptions were put together to form a composite description which formed the essence of the experience telling what the participants experienced and how they experienced it.

Using a textural, structural, and composite description, the researcher looked more deeply at the specific experience of each of the participants as they reflected upon deciding to pursue social work. The researcher was also able to understand how that experience was shaped and influenced by their setting and context—namely their specific Christian college or university, by sharing specific descriptions of their experiences. The researcher also considered how the setting and context might have affected and influenced the experience of each participant individually and as a whole. Lastly, by including a composite description, the researcher was able to look closely at the *why* and *how* of each person interviewed and consider how both the textural and structural description may have impacted and affected the overall depiction of the phenomenon of choosing social work as a major. By including these three specific descriptions of the phenomenon in the analysis, I identified specific themes in the participants' experiences and then continued to describe the particular setting of each of the experiences. IThe researcher considered how those settings may have played a role in each participant's specific experience.

Results

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics identifies six key principles or values that guide and form the foundation for professional social work practice. One of these key principles is “the importance of human relationships” and describes this principle as

Social workers understand that relationships between and among people are an important vehicle for change. Social workers engage people as partners in the helping process. Social workers seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, restore, maintain, and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations, and communities.

As a vehicle for change, relationships are important at every stage of the social work relationship and even the educational journey of becoming a social worker is one that can and is influenced by relationships with a variety of people. One of the major findings from this study was the role of relationships in helping students begin the process of identifying their calling and becoming a professional social worker. This study demonstrated the important role relationships with different people played in the experience of choosing social work as a future career or profession. The participants in this study identified relationships with family and friends, faculty and field supervisors, and clients as being influential in their experience and decision.

Textural Description

I have identified four main themes that make up the textural description. These themes include the specific role different relationships played in the experience or phenomena of deciding to pursue social work. The first theme identified is the role of relationships with family and friends and the formative and influential nature of these relationships in the participants' experiences. Second, the participants articulated the important role their relationships with faculty, both within and outside of the social work program, played in their choice of social work as a major. Third, the field experience was very important and influential in confirming the participants' decisions to continue in the social work field. The relationships formed with colleagues and supervisors throughout this experience was an affirming one for many of the participants and for many of them, the field experience provided them with more direct interactions with clients. These relationships with clients, formed in the field experience, in previous work experiences, and in other volunteer or pre-field experiences, also provided the

participants with an arena in which they were further affirmed in their decision. Several participants talked about wanting to provide the best help and service to their clients and recognizing that without their social work education they were or would have been ill equipped to provide it.

Theme 1: Relationships with family and friends effects choice to pursue social work. For several participants, relationships with family and friends helped them determine their call to the profession. One participant talked about her dad and seeing him overcome his own personal challenges, which helped her realize the potential each of her clients holds.

My dad is a paraplegic, so I grew up seeing life a little differently, and seeing the experiences that he's had in his life, and how successful he's been and how that hasn't stopped him. This has changed my perspective on a lot of things, even for myself knowing that no matter what the circumstances are, there's always strengths and things you can grow from and things that you can do.

Another post-MSW participant who is practicing social work in a hospital talked about how her parents shaped the way she saw the world, which then, in turn, caused her to see social work as a good fit with her worldview.

My parents were very hospitable people, so we had a variety of people in our home throughout my childhood and growing up. One day my mom found a person living in a house that had been condemned for a while, and they were just living there during the winter to get out of the cold; she literally invited them in and that person ended up living with us for a while. They actually ended up living with us for a couple of years.

For two other participants, family members practiced in social work or other helping professions and their experiences helped shape their own view of the profession. One participant had a sister who received a BSW degree and then finished an MSW, but when this participant started college, she was not considering social work herself. Her sister was interested in macro practice, while she herself was more interested in working

directly with individuals and originally she saw herself in an elementary classroom as a teacher.

It blew my mind open to how much inequality happens in the world and just how that's not, like I was just thinking about my friends and how that is not fair. And so that kind of started to drive my passion of inequality and like how I can make a difference? And how can I reduce that and give those students a proper way of thriving in life and not just trying to hang on I guess, as they go through life? And then, so I kind of, that's when social work started being implemented into my mind instead of education.

Another student had a sibling who pursued both an undergraduate and graduate degree in a different helping profession and later regretted not choosing social work. She was encouraged to pursue social work because it would allow her to reach her career goals, but with significant less schooling than her sister had had to take. For one participant, it was learning that an older friend of hers had gone into social work that caused her to ask questions about what social work was and then she began to consider it as a possibility for herself as went to college.

Several of the participants commented on the relationships they built with friends and peers through their social work career, both in classes and through volunteer experiences and other campus events. Some were drawn to social work because they heard about the things being talked about in the classes their friends were attending and they wanted to be a part of those important conversations. Friends were also influential once they joined the major and these individuals experienced the same or similar transformational experiences and therefore better understood the professional development the participants were experiencing.

Relationships with family and friends and having a front-row seat to their family members' and friends' experiences were influential to the participants. These

relationships both encouraged them and, in some cases, discouraged them from initially pursuing social work. Participants were affected by watching family members overcome personal struggles or having family members with particular empathy and passion for vulnerable groups of people. Several of the participants had family members or friends who had chosen to pursue social work and as they learned more about the profession became more interested in considering it for themselves. Relationships and interactions with family and friends often played a role in students initially choosing to pursue social work and relationships with faculty become important once the student joined a class or joined the major.

Theme 2: Relationships with faculty helps students choose social work and determine specific interests. All of the participants, both students and practitioners, identified how their relationships with professors had served to affirm their passion and interest in social work. A male MSW dual degree (MSW/MDiv) student talked about his relationship with one of his professors, “It doesn’t matter if they’re senior faculty or if they’re in their first year. They are willing to work with you and talk to you about anything and their doors are open for you. It’s just really helpful.” He also talked about faculty helping further cultivate his specific interest in social work within the congregational or church setting.

One participant, a female who, about to complete her BSW degree, talked about a professor outside of the social work department helping her confirm her desire to pursue the profession. This professor served as her freshman year academic advisor and was influential in her choice to switch her major from English and make social work her primary major along with a minor in political studies.

So probably who I would start with is my freshman professor-- he took an interest in me right away. He really pushes me, especially the social work side. He was very interested in how I saw the world. We talked a lot about poverty and he is really interested my personal experiences that led up to choosing social work and ultimately affirmed that throughout my first semester and throughout my entire college career. Everything was constant, also pushing me to pursue it more and more. He believes that not only do I need to go to graduate school but someday he wants me to get my doctorate and that has been incredibly affirming when I felt really insecure or unsure. He's been someone who can reflect back to me and show me how much I have grown and to remind me of it.

This faculty member, even though he was outside the field of social work, was significant in helping this student figure out that social work was where she was being called. As faculty get to know their students' gifts and talents and observe them directly, they can be influential in guiding and directing students toward their specific major or even a specific practice area within that broader field. Once they see their students' abilities and strengths, faculty can recognize how they have grown and developed and also sometimes, encourage students to pursue graduate education. Other participants noted the field liaison and field instructor as being influential in helping them make sense of their interest and call to social work. She says

One of my professors, who was my field instructor for my internship last year, which was at a disaster relief agency, was very influential and actually made me consider clinical work a lot more, which I never thought I would have considered before this. He was greatly influential and incredibly supportive, I just know that I can call him for anything, and I have. Even this year when certain clients, definitely laid on him for input and insight and advice on what to do how to handle certain things.

One student identified a particular faculty member in her MSW program who was impactful in helping her pursue play therapy. She had always had a passion for children and had wanted to learn more about play therapy, but it was not until she was connected with this particular faculty member who was trained in play therapy.

She was just so fired up about the profession... she had so much experience and passion for working with children who come from abusive homes and working with foster care and adoption. Just hearing her journey through the field was really encouraging too, and she was so passionate about play therapy. I really enjoyed all the classes I took with her. I think that's something that pushed me to a new area of social work that I didn't know that much about. I think that when you encounter someone who is so excited about what they do and what they teach, it's pretty contagious. So that was a really cool extra bonus of my program, having her as a professor.

Faculty encourage students to pursue areas of social work they had never previously considered and walk alongside them through the challenge of learning the skills and repertoire of another practice area. Walking alongside them through one specific challenging situation often means that students recognize that their faculty members can and will be present to help them through other areas of struggle. The paradox of faculty being both challenging and supportive seems to be something several of the participants appreciated about the faculty members with whom they developed relationships. Another female BSW student talked about how her instructor pushed her and challenged her.

I was really, kind of overwhelmed by her expectations at first; they were so different from my classmates, just everything that she wanted me and the girl I work with to do, but now I feel so prepared even for grad school. I would feel prepared for going into a job in the next few months if I wasn't going to grad school. Just the way she pushed me and got me to think about things and made me see things differently and think critically.

Participants cited relationships with faculty as an important reason for staying in the social work major and feeling challenged by professors both in and outside of the classroom was a main reason they valued those relationships. Participants identified how professors pushed them to think critically about the way they saw the world and how that worldview shaped their perspective on how to work with clients and address social problems.

Theme 3: Field experience helps affirm choice to pursue social work. Often called the “signature pedagogy” of social work education (Council on Social Work Education, 2008), the field experience seems to be an important part of both the BSW and MSW experience for the participants. One student identified a renewed interest in working in social work domestically rather than internationally. She stated, “That’s what I’ve loved so much about doing social work here in the community too I found that, I still love going on trips and would to go on more, but I can still have that fulfillment and those same feelings here, with people here.”

Another student talked about working together with her field placement to figure out what a social worker might do in that setting. She was the first social work intern they had ever accepted so it was a learning experience for both her and the church/agency.

When I came here, they told me, ‘I think this is what a social worker does. So were going to start you out with a couple families who would benefit from talking with you’, and they kind of connected me to those resources, but at the same time I have been able to be like, ‘I really think that this might be something worth exploring.’ So it’s been both, it’s been like this is what we think a social worker does in a church, but we’re willing and wanting to explore and see what that really looks like.

The female MSW student (BSW graduate) who learned of her desire to work with elderly talks about how her field experience challenged her to work with a new population of people—women and children in transitional housing. While this experience was not with the specific group of people she felt called to within social work the experience with this unique group of clients also confirmed her choice to pursue social work. She said “[it] opened my eyes to the cyclical pattern—how organizations whether small or big, can intervene, and they don’t have to fix the problem... but walk

alongside them and give them the tools. And then also knowing that we're not perfect people... but we have to have justice and also have grace when they do mess up." She also talked about the broad experiences she has had both with volunteering in social service organizations and through her field experience. "...it wasn't just the progress of the person, but it was the things I learned from them at the same time that reaffirmed my passion for working with people. I don't care what status you are. I don't care about your financial status or your religion... I can learn from you just as much as I can teach you things."

Theme 4: Interactions and relationships with clients helps students see need for social work skills. Feeling ill equipped to deal with the challenging needs and situations of the clients they came into contact with was an experience for most of the participants, but especially MSW students. One female MSW student talked specifically about working for a few years with women in Egypt.

I lived and worked in Cairo, Egypt for a couple of years and I worked at a sewing center that taught women how to sew. I really enjoyed that work and as I got to know these women there was just some really difficult stuff happening in their lives, a lot of abuse a lot of challenges with their children. Some of the women there had children with cerebral palsy and so they were earning extra income for their families because they had significant needs, and so as I was listening to their stories, and kind of walking with them in their lives, at least for those couple of years, I really realized that wow, I wish that I had more skills to be able to help or encourage them in a way that I felt I wasn't able to do at that moment. So that's what kind of sparked my interest in social work. You know, it's very broad and able to give me those skills that I would need to really holistically help women like this.

A male MSW student talked about working in a food pantry and how "we didn't really know what we were doing". He mentioned the challenging situations clients presented with would make him feel unprepared and he decided to pursue social work so he would have the skills to respond in a useful way to the clients' needs and challenges.

One male participant who is two years post-BSW remembers back to his decision to pursue social work and recalls telling someone how he “I want to be prepared to work with the poor”. Another participant, a female MSW student with a BSW student, talked about working with the elderly in a volunteer experience and truly realizing where her calling was within the social work profession. While she knew she wanted to pursue social work, it was not until a particular experience with a specific population of vulnerable people that she realized what area of social work she truly loved and where she felt called.

I always thought of elderly people as people who just sat around and really didn't do anything. So, seeing that side of them, um, really opened my eyes to just how much they wanted that social interaction and they were like me, and that was huge, and it brought down that barrier, of, I was afraid of talking to elderly before then, and now I'm like, alright, let's go. I just think they have so much wisdom and insight, and then just seeing them light up when they get to talk about their life and hearing about their family and just being able to provide for them. Whether it's relationally or maybe it's helping them to process psychologically, what can I do to help them thrive in those last few years of their life. So, that's kind of why that whole volunteer experience kind of opened my eyes to just a passion for the elderly.

This experience of volunteering with the elderly helped this participant realize that she had an interest in and a passion for a group of people she had previously ruled out in terms of her future professional practice. Experiences and relationships with new groups of people through volunteering or jobs can change the trajectory for student career paths or can provide alternative paths they had not previously considered.

One participant saw her clients as being the motivating factor for studying and learning as much as she could through her educational experience in social work.

I mean when I hear my friends talk about their majors and stuff like that and I try to think what if I was in that major. I just wouldn't feel so purposeful, I mean I could get the same job, but it wouldn't be anything that I want to do if that makes sense. I wouldn't have anything driving me, because people now, clients are what

drives me to do my job and do well in school and I would have a hard time being driven for myself. I do things a lot better when I'm doing things for people, not necessarily myself-- there's a difference in my classes and a difference in my grades even from freshman year till now. I'm more driven because I want to do well for my client, and I want to be the best that I can be for them.

Students are motivated to work hard and learn as much as they can during their BSW and MSW education so they can know how best to serve the clients they will eventually work alongside. Through volunteering, pre-field, and field experiences, students can work with agencies and come into contact with clients who, in some cases, can help them realize what they do not know and help them better learn the skills they need.

Discussion

Structural Description

Creswell (2013) talks about the setting and context making up the “structural description” of the phenomenological study. In this case, the context and setting for each individual participant was similar, but also somewhat different. Each of the participants was in a different place academically and therefore, had different experiences to talk about in relation to their distance or proximity to the academic setting. All of the participants in this study attended one of three Christian colleges or universities for their BSW study and therefore the context and setting of this specific phenomenon is particularly important. One of the participants was in her final semester of a BSW program and was in the process of completing her field experience. One participant had just graduated from her BSW program five months before and was not directly practicing in the social work field, but was utilizing her social work skills in the student services office at the college where she graduated. Two other students were alumnae of BSW programs and had also completed their MSW and were now practicing, both in

healthcare. One of the male participants was in the process of completing his MSW degree and the other had completed his BSW a year before, and was now practicing in a church youth ministry program.

Because of the variety in the current contexts of each of the participants, there is a variety in the amount of time which has elapsed since they went through the process of choosing their major they currently. For some it was as long as four to five years ago, for others it was a more recent experience as they decided to only pursue social work in graduate school at not at the bachelor's level. Four of the participants attended the same BSW program at a small Christian liberal arts college and therefore, the setting for their experience was somewhat similar though they were all a part of the social work program at different times. Three other participants attended a larger Christian liberal arts university in a different geographic setting and therefore, there are some similarities in the description of their experiences, but also some significant differences. The final participant attended a larger Christian liberal arts college in a very urban area and his experience seems to be similar to the others in some way, but he also identifies some differences.

The context and setting for each of the participants also carries a specific meaning that contributes to the overall picture painted by this study. For those participants who were still students at the time of the interview, either in a BSW or MSW program, the setting and context—namely their college or university—specifically shaped the perspective they had at the time. The college setting provided the context for almost all of their relationships—those with faculty, field instructors, and also friends. The college experience often carries specific meaning for people and students often go into college

seeing it as a time and period of self-exploration and further identity formation. Being in college or having gone through college shaped the participants' experiences by providing them with an environment that was well-suited for considering and trying to determine their purpose and how they could live that out through a specific discipline or major.

As a result, we can determine that for these participants the context of this experience was important in shaping their overall journey and search for determining their calling and then major. This is an important finding for colleges and universities to consider as we think about the role of advisors, faculty, peer groups, and client experiences in helping social work students determine their specific calling to the field. Social work professors working in the setting of higher education particularly should structure their programs and curriculum so that it includes many opportunities for conversations and experiences. Experiences with clients seem to be very shaping for students in the experience of understanding their call and purpose within the field of social work, therefore exposing and introducing students to many mini-field and pre-practicum experiences should be considered as essential to the social work curriculum.

The context of being in relationship with faculty is also an important for social work programs to consider. Faculty often serve as advisors and mentor so the students they serve, but social work program directors should work to ensure that both advising meetings and conversations in the classroom provide opportunities for students and faculty to have discussions about how and why students see themselves as being drawn to the profession of social work. Within Christian colleges and universities, faculty and administration should create an environment and providing opportunities where these relationships can be formed and can thrive. Social work faculty can make efforts to

create and foster a context that allows these relationships with faculty, peers, and clients to thrive. The context of the relationships, namely the college and the social work program, are important aspects of this experience, according to the participants, and therefore should be structured in such a way to foster the relationships and help them thrive.

Composite Description

According to Creswell (2013), the composite description should be the combination of participants telling both the *what* and the *how* the participants experienced, which includes both the textural and structural descriptions. First, the important role of human relationships is emphasized in the experience described by most of the participants and these relationships played an important role in helping the participants shape their experience of determining their call to the social work profession. Some of these relationships, particularly ones with potential clients or with people whom they were working alongside, helped them realize the discrepancy between what they knew and what they wished they knew and therefore encouraged them to pursue further education. Other relationships, like those with family and friends and practicing social workers, helped them realize that the social work profession matched their personal values and professional career goals.

The *how* of these relationships is also important and many of these relationships were experienced at various stages of the participants' lives. For many of them, the early influence of family was impactful in helping them determine what they wanted to do in terms of a career or job. Family members who had been in the helping professions or parents who themselves had embodied what it means to care for others were often the

how of the experience. For others, the *how* occurred once they actually began to study social work and also the first time they began to interact with groups of vulnerable people in a somewhat professional context. These interactions through early practicum experiences or through their field experience or even after finishing an undergraduate degree were often how the participants realized they needed more training or education to feel competent enough to practice.

In this study, participants talked about the important role many relationships played in their choosing to pursue social work as a major, either at the undergraduate or graduate level of study. Students cite a variety of different reasons for choosing a particular major, but in a profession that states “the importance of human relationships” (NASW, 2015) as one of their core principles or values, it is not surprising that social work practitioners and students talk about the role of relationships in their choice of major or profession. What is surprising, however, is the emphasis in this study on the relationships with clients and how that caused students to realize what skills they needed and for several, influenced and impacted them in their initial decision to pursue social work. While this study seems to support findings from other similar studies, the emphasis on the relationships with current or past clients seems to be a new theme identified by these specific participants. Five of the eight participants identified feeling somewhat unprepared to work with certain populations or groups of people after completing either a BSW or other baccalaureate degree. As they developed relationships with clients, either during a field experience or work experience, many of the participants felt urged to further develop the skills they needed to work with their clients competently.

Some of the participants had skills they learned in their undergraduate, but the experiences with clients motivated them to pursue graduate education in order to fine-tune those skills or focus their education on a specific population or skillset. Working with a specific group of vulnerable people led them to be more passionate about that particular group and helped them realize they wanted to pursue social work in order to better help that specific group of people. For some, their undergraduate degree was in something other than social work, but working closely with clients in missions, work, or volunteer experiences caused them to recognize they were lacking some specific skills they needed and they then considered social work education as a way to learn and develop those skills. This emphasis on the relationship of clients to the choice of social work as a profession seems to be a theme that was not identified in other similar studies, or at least not to the extent that it is emphasized by this specific research. This is why the experiential knowledge of social work is so important and should be emphasized in BSW and MSW programs. Getting students into contact with people and engaged with local agencies is an important for students to determine if social work is the right fit for them, but it also helps them understand the skills and knowledge needed to work competently with vulnerable people. Interacting with vulnerable and hurting people can become a motivating factor for pursuing social work and doing well in the classroom.

One significant implication that can be drawn from this study is the importance of field education. Field education has been called the “signature pedagogy” (Shulman, 2005) of social work education. Signature pedagogies operate within the professions as a way of educating students about and socializing students to the ways of the profession. Students are taught how “to think, to perform, and to behave professionally” (p. 52). As

this study demonstrates, the field experience provides one key context of social work higher education. In the field experience students are able to bring together their classroom knowledge with their passion and call to the social work field and in this experience they begin to learn how and what it means to be a professional social worker. The relationships they have had and continue to have with faculty, often serve as field liaisons, along with the relationships they form with field supervisors and instructors are important components of the professional development that occurs in field education.

While relationships with colleagues in the field and during the field experience are influential, a significant amount of professional development occurs within the field seminar, a course that students often take concurrently with their internships. The relationships formed or further developed during this seminar can also be important to the student's further commitment to the social work profession. Students are often further affirmed in their choice to pursue social work or also affirmed in their specific area of interest within the field. During the field seminar, the students, guided by their professor, discuss the day-to-day challenges and celebrations of their field experience. The group considers how they are applying the theories and skills learned in the classroom to this new setting and during this key piece of the "signature pedagogy", students are reciprocally being affirmed in their calling while also developing their professional identity.

Social work programs might consider how they structure their field experiences and what departments can do to further foster and maintain the relationships, which seem to be an integral piece. Field directors and faculty liaisons can work with field instructors and supervisors to help them recognize the important role they can have in the

professional development of students. Those who teach field seminar can structure the course in such a way to help students build on the relationships they likely have already formed with each other and use the time in seminar to encourage and challenge one another in professional social work identity development.

Both the textural and the structural descriptions of the phenomenon seem to emphasize the importance of context and experience of being in relationship with other people. All of the participants seemed to find the experience a positive one and cited people and places as being significant in their experience. Almost all of the participants cited relationships with classmates and faculty as being influential in their experience of choosing social work as a profession and major. Being intentional about developing these relationships between both faculty and classmates could be important in helping students further explore their sense of calling to the social work profession.

Steven Garber (2014) talks about education “over the shoulder and through the heart”, which implies more than just apprenticeship, but also a deepness of relationship that must be found in relationships within higher education. This means that social work students should not just “watch and learn”, but should be given a glimpse into the heart of their professors and field instructors to see their own motivations and reasons for choosing social work as their profession. Faculty and field professionals should be willing to demonstrate social work skills while also sharing their heart and passion for the field and people group in which they work.

The emphasis on relationships in this study affirms other studies which have found similar themes around the role of relationships in confirming a sense of calling to social work (Singletary et al., 2006; Scales, Harris, Myers, & Singletary, 2012). The

participants' experiences all seemed to be significantly influenced and impacted by significant others who "joined them" (Scales et al., 2012) on their journey to the social work profession.

Another important piece of the composite description is the college setting in which many of these relationships took place. This intersection is important to consider when seeking to thoroughly understand the essence of the participants' experiences in choosing a major. This setting is a significant component to the experience of choosing a major or determining one's "calling" because certain colleges provide specific courses or activities around students thinking and even writing about how they see themselves living out their purpose. For example, at one of the colleges included in this study, part of their "Kingdom, Identity, and Calling" course first-year students are asked to write three papers throughout their first semester. These papers are focused on helping them identify how they see themselves fitting into God's story—specifically how they see their story fitting with God's story of "creation, fall, redemption, and restoration" (Wolters, 2005). Social work students, too, may have specific conversations or assignments asking them to think about why they feel drawn to the profession and why they are considering it as a potential major. Conversations with faculty, advisors, and parents along with assignments such as these provide an important and influential piece of the setting and context in which these students are learning and living.

Another important contribution of this study is the finding that social work education in religious colleges and universities may be doing more than just providing students with a set of skills for professional practice. The phenomenon of receiving social work education with a distinctive Christian perspective seems to help students gain

a more thorough professional identity as a social worker. And the relationships that are intentionally formed in these colleges and universities are a key component to that identity development. Students in these settings and contexts are not only learning the skills needed to be a social worker, but are also learning how to deeply consider and evaluate why they want to pursue social work. In relationships with faculty, peers, and clients, that motivation can be both articulated and harnessed through the educational experience both inside and outside of the classroom. The setting seems to be an important component in student pathways to choosing social work as their field of study.

Limitations

While this study provides some valuable insights into the essence of the experience of choosing social work as a major and the pathways to getting there, limitations exist within this study. First, this study was small and intended to be exploratory. Therefore, the participants' experiences are not likely representative of all social work students or professional social work students, especially those who attended a secular or public college or university. The participants in this study attended only three different colleges and all of the participants in the study were Christians themselves and because of this were potentially more likely to see their choice of major as being a "calling". These students may also, in the course of their studies, be more likely to be encouraged by faculty, fellow students, or other advisors to think about their choice of profession in terms of their faith. This may or may not be the case for students who do not (or did not) attend a Christian college or university.

Another limitation of this study is the lack of diversity as all of the participants were of Caucasian racial identity. A person of color would likely describe the experience

of choosing social work as a major and the factors that went into that decision differently. While social work is still a professional chosen predominantly by females, the fact that this study only includes two male participants might also be a limitation. It is difficult to fully ascertain how the experience of choosing social work as a major might be different for males than it is for females based only on the experiences of two male social workers.

Areas for Future Research

One theme that seemed to be trying to emerge was the role of each person's faith in his or her decision to pursue social work. In future research, more questions should be asked along this topic. It became obvious through reading and analyzing the transcripts of those who had already been interviewed that the role of the participant's faith was something that was particularly impactful and should have been addressed through the interview process. Many of the participants talked about religious and faith motivations for pursuing social work and talked about how relationships with faculty and peers helped them in sorting through the implications of the integration of faith and social work.

Another important area for future research would be to further explore how interactions with and relationships with clients can help students determine their future career interests. Students who interacted with clients through practicum or volunteer experiences seemed to realize that social work would provide them with an avenue for learning how to be more skillful and knowledgeable. Additional research could look at how these interactions shape student perspectives on what major they want to pursue or more specifically, what populations of people they would like to work with within the field of social work. How do students' perspectives and career interests change after

practicum or field experiences? What types of experiences might be most influential for students in the early stages of their undergraduate or graduate experiences?

This study helped confirm the importance of human relationships, which is clearly identified in the NASW Code of Ethics as a key principle of the profession. Further research could be done on how this principle is exhibited through the early development of professional identity both in students and early practitioners. How can social work programs work to better develop those relationships that seem to be so influential for students and future practitioners? What types of relationships are most influential in helping students discern their career interests?

Conclusion

Millennial students and professionals are seeking careers and jobs that can bring meaning and purpose to their lives (Smith & Aaker, 2013). Social work students and professionals often have specific reasons why they chose the profession. This study has explored how and why students chose social work as their major and future profession. The primary purpose and question of interest was to better understand the role of relationships in the experience of both BSW and MSW students deciding to pursue social work. Participants in this study supported findings from earlier research, which emphasized the importance of relationships in the journey or pathway toward choosing social work. While participants identified relationships with faculty, friends, and family as important, this study also showed how interactions and relationships with clients are influential in the determination of specific interest in social work. This study reinforced the importance of human relationships, a key social work value and principle, as being essential even in the search for calling within the profession. Another key finding was

the setting and context for the phenomena of social work education and the experience of choosing a major. Participants identified learning more than just skills through their experience, but also experienced significant professional development in the context of their college and the relationships formed there.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Quantitative Study on Calling and Life Satisfaction in B.S.W. Students: Potential Moderating Variables

Abstract

Previous research conducted with various populations of people has linked a strong sense of calling to higher levels of life satisfaction. This present study explored the potential relationship between sense of calling and life satisfaction among 114 Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) students from nine different private liberal arts colleges across the state of Iowa. In addition, three potential moderators of the relationship—religiosity, living one’s calling, and core self-evaluations—were tested. With this particular sample, there was a strong correlation between calling and life satisfaction and the three proposed moderators were all found to significantly affect the strength of the relationship between calling and life satisfaction. The findings from this study have implications for social work educators and social work education and for practitioners. Social work students might potentially benefit from viewing their work as calling and that this relationship might be more true for those who have higher levels of religiosity, higher core self-evaluations, and also more opportunities for living out their calling.

Introduction

Researchers and educators in the field of social work have been interested in studying the role of calling in the field of social work (Singletary, Harris, Myers, & Scales, 2006; Reamer, 1987; Sherr, Huff, & Curran, 2006). Others theorized that using the concept of calling in social work practice and education might have direct impact on helping students and practitioners articulate their decision to pursue the profession (Hugen, 2012). Most of the research on the relationship between calling and social work has been theoretical or introductory and few quantitative studies have been completed on social work students or practitioners and their view of calling. Very few quantitative studies have attempted to show what impact calling might have on other areas of life, specifically when it comes to social work students. Social work is often cited as a high burnout career (Gillespie, 1987; Acker, 2012; Smullens, 2015) and helping students and future practitioners view their work as calling may help buffer the effects and maybe even prevent burnout. Identifying their call to the profession might help them determine how they are using their strengths, talents, and gifts for the greater good. Viewing their vocation as a calling might also help students and practitioners recognize their internal motivations when their professional practice gets difficult.

In this study, the researcher investigates the relationship between life satisfaction and calling and the potential moderating effects of intrinsic religiousness, living one's calling and core self-evaluations. Therefore, in this study the focus is specifically on the call to the particular vocation of social work and the effects on life satisfaction. In this exploratory study, the participants are BSW students from the nine social work programs located in private liberal arts colleges in Iowa, all of whom are a part of the Iowa

Consortium of Social Work program. This consortium meets two times per year to discuss challenges and issues pertinent to the four-year liberal arts BSW programs. The students were surveyed to understand the relationship between calling and life satisfaction and to examine how intrinsic religiousness, living out calling, and core self-evaluations moderated this relationship.

Calling

Definitions

Numerous definitions of the word calling exist in the literature. Historically, the word calling was considered a predominantly Christian term referring to the “call” someone would receive from God to pursue a profession within the church or mission field. Martin Luther was influential in broadening this early concept of call to include the “station” of life to which someone has been placed or decided to stay (Hardy, 1990). Over the last fifteen to twenty years, career counselors and psychologists have secularized the term calling and have started to identify how even non-religious people can feel a specific “summons” to their profession or career (Dik and Duffy, 2009). The term vocation is often used interchangeably with the concept of calling, but Hugen (2012) shows the connection between the two terms and defines calling as “the call to love my neighbor that comes to me through the duties attached to my social place or *station* within the earthly kingdom.” (p. 110). The term *vocare* literally means “to call” and vocation is living out one’s calling to love others through one’s specific station or place in life. Schuurman (2004) also sees calling and vocation in a religious sense arguing that all of life is infused with religious meaning. Amy Sherman (2012) gives a broader definition of calling and talks about

Christians being called to their specific vocations to advance justice and by stewarding and prospering our vocations, we can care for the development of the “common good” (p. 33).

All of the previous definitions listed above mention a religious or even Christian motivation behind the ideas of calling and vocation, but the term also has secular or non-specifically religious definition as well. In his lecture titled “Science as Vocation”, Max Weber (1946) introduced the idea that science or academic research and study can be a vocation. He uses the word *beruf*, which implies his understanding of career as both professionalism and calling. While Weber believed that science could and should be viewed as vocation, he also believed that science could never answer questions about how people should live their lives or teach them what to value. Therefore, Weber argued for a very strict division between faith and reason stating that both had important fields, but that those two fields should not cross. Weber saw calling as something that should not have religious undertones and he did not believe that religious belief systems should affect one’s work or professional behavior.

Greenwood (1957) went on to write about the attributes of the profession and he identified five attributes possessed by all professions: systematic theory, authority, community sanction, ethical codes, and a culture. According to Greenwood (1957), part of the culture of the professions is the idea that a professional career is “essentially a *calling*, a life devoted to ‘good works’”. Professional work is never viewed solely as a means to an end; it is the end itself” (p. 53). Therefore, Greenwood saw professional calling as something that could, and perhaps should, be separated from a religious sense of calling. Choosing a profession, says Greenwood (1957), is like choosing a way of life and in many ways “to the professional person his work becomes his life” (p. 53). One rarely

chooses a profession in order to serve themselves, but most professions and professionals are called to service.

As calling has taken on a more secular connotation, certain researchers have taken an interest in studying the concept from a non-religious perspective while still recognizing that for many their call originates from something outside of themselves (Dik and Duffy, 2009). Because this study will utilize a scale developed by Dik & Duffy along with their colleagues, Steger and Eldridge, their definition and conceptualization of the term *calling* will be what is used in this study. Dik and Duffy (2009) have studied calling and vocation in depth from a career counseling perspective and have developed a broad, working definition in an attempt to bring together the variety of perspectives and ideas that exist on

a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation (p. 427).

This definition encapsulates three different dimensions of the word calling: external motivation, meaningfulness, and contribution to the “common good” (p. 427).

Overall, the definition of calling is both ambiguous and elastic. It has stretched and will likely continue to stretch to include both religious and non-religious conceptualizations. While some may see calling, at its foundation, as representing being called by someone or something, newer definitions talk about the call as coming from inside oneself as an internal desire (Raatikainen, 1997). Other definitions and measurements clearly emphasize the “transcendent summons” (Dik & Duffy, 2009) as coming from something beyond oneself. Therefore, it is difficult to measure the concept of calling and while the three-part definition of Dik and Duffy (2009) may be currently

comprehensive, it may be that in the future the definition continues to morph and change to represent new research and new conceptualizations of the term.

Calling and Social Work

Social work students seem to be in a unique position to speak to their potential sense of calling as their calling to this helping profession can also be a primary way they see to contribute to the common good, whether that calling be religiously motivated or not. Some of the first social workers saw their work with vulnerable people as being a distinct way they could answer the call from Jesus to care for “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40). Today, social workers might feel called to the field for a variety of reasons, some related to their religious or faith beliefs and others because of their desire to help bring about social justice or help those in need (Reamer, 1987). Christians in social work are curious about the role of calling in the social work field. Sherr, Huff, & Curran (2006), after talking with focus groups of social work students from seven Christian universities, found that students value seeing faculty members living out their calling in the classroom. Based on that study, the Calling Vocation Model was developed which identifies four specific spheres which faculty can develop in order to promote a sense of calling with their students and within their classrooms. These four spheres include relationships with God, relationships with students, curriculum structured to include discussions around the integration of faith and learning, and finally, competency within the classroom.

Freeman (2006) studied the relationship between students’ religious call to social work and their ability to undergo the transformative process of social work education. Students in social work displayed certain characteristics recognized in Jung’s twelve

archetypes which provides direction for social work educators seeking to help students further develop their identity in and call to the social work profession. In a qualitative study, Harris, et. al spoke with students at a Christian university and determined that many of these students referenced their sense of being called to social work practice as a primary purpose for choosing the “journey to social work” (p. 130). Social work becomes part of our identity, but is only a piece of what we are truly called to “be” (Trulear, 2007).

Therefore, while certain research studies have attempted to look at specific areas within the social work profession where a calling perspective has been and might be applied—there is no quantitative research on the role of calling in undergraduate social work students specifically. Social work students could potentially benefit from seeing their profession as calling and this could have further implications for their education and future career. While studies have been conducted with other undergraduate students on the impact of calling in their lives, these studies were very broad and not focused on one specific discipline or profession.

Impact of Calling

Only recently have researchers started to investigate what role calling might have on other areas of life and well-being as well as specific work outcomes such as career commitment and job satisfaction (Duffy, Dik, & Steger, 2011; Duffy and Sedlacek, 2007). Some of the aspects of well-being that have been studied in correlation to calling include dispositional zest (Peterson, Park, Hall, & Seligman, 2009); levels of stress and depression (Treadgold, 1999); and greater coping mechanisms (Oates, Hall, & Anderson, 2005, Treadgold, 1999). Bunderson and Thompson (2009) also found links between

calling and life meaning and satisfaction in zookeepers. Dik, Sargent, & Steger (2008) also found moderate correlations between calling and life meaning among college students and the correlations were more pronounced in the students who also identified having high levels of religious commitment. Duffy and Sedlacek (2010) and Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik (2010) continued this line of inquiry and in studying college students found “weak positive correlation between calling and life satisfaction and a moderate positive correlation between calling and life meaning” (p. 471). Duffy et al. (2010) found very similar strength and direction when they studied medical students in their first and third years. In all, at least eight studies display similar themes—all show that high levels of calling are related to higher levels of psychological well-being. But it is unknown why this relationship exists and for which participants it might be more pronounced.

While much of the research on calling has been positive, there have also been studies identifying what some have called a “double-edged sword” (Berkelaar and Buzzanell, 2015). Others have said that such a pursuit of calling might lead to unhealthy expectations both for high school and college-aged youths who are trying to determine their future pursuits and for emerging professionals who may be disappointed when their initial landing in the workforce does not seem to match their sense of calling (Waalkes, 2015). Therefore, it is important that studies such as this continue to further explore the relationship between life and various other life characteristics.

Life Satisfaction

The concept of well-being is often broken down into two major components—emotions or affect and judgment or cognitive components (Pavot, Diener, Colvin, &

Sandvik, 1991). The judgment component is often referred to as life satisfaction and is a subjective description of personal well-being.

Life Satisfaction and Work

While not specifically focused on life satisfaction, Peterson, Park, Hall, and Seligman (2009) studied the relationship between zest and work. Zest is a term that is one of a handful of positive character traits. Zest does seem to encompass some of the same meaning as life satisfaction and the researchers describe zest as “the habitual approach to life with anticipation, energy, and excitement” (p. 162). Based on the measurement of life zest developed by Peterson, Park, & Seligman (2004), zest can also predict general life satisfaction. Having “dispositional zest predicts not only general life satisfaction, but also work satisfaction and the stance that work is calling” (Peterson, Park, Hall, & Seligman, 2009, p. 167).

Erdogan, Bauer, Truxillo & Mansfield (2012) describe life satisfaction using a “bottom-up or top-down” (p. 1041) approach. The top-down approach identifies life satisfaction as being a stable characteristic of personality, like zest, that then translates into more positive outcomes and interactions at work. The bottom-up approach sees life satisfaction as “a function of satisfaction with life domains” (p. 1041), meaning that life satisfaction is a response of the individual to satisfaction in the corresponding pieces of one’s life.

Erodgan et al. (2012) recognized that work satisfaction is only a small piece of life satisfaction, but that contentment with work and quality of work life are still a substantial piece of overall satisfaction with life. This satisfaction with work comes from satisfaction with job, satisfaction with career, and perceived job stress. In a review of the

literature on work and life satisfaction, the authors identified three main areas that work affects in employee's lives: need satisfaction, mindful activity, and tension. The second domain, mindful activity at work, however is what likely affects overall life satisfaction. Based on a review of the literature, work satisfaction is only one of three components that make up overall life satisfaction, but work remains as important a contributor as even non-work life.

Calling also makes a difference in terms of work satisfaction and contextual commitment and performance (Rawat & Nadavularkere, 2015) in that those who have a strong sense of calling to their work not only experience individual benefits, but the organizations where they work also reap the benefits. Working adults with higher career calling reported more work effort, had better emotional control, and used more career developmental strategies meaning that having a strong sense of calling can lead to positive outcomes for both the worker and the organization in which they work (Praskova, Creed, & Hood, 2015). Those with stronger sense of calling to their work also exhibited more outer congruence, which is the fit between their identity as a person and their surroundings or environment (Hagmaier & Abele, 2015). Recognizing this, colleges, other work-training programs have an important role in helping students, and trainees identify and articulate their callings. In addition, organizations and workplaces can help their workers develop a sense of calling to their work or can seek to hire those who have a strong sense of calling.

The timing of when a calling is identified can also impact future work choice and prospects. Developing a calling earlier in life, even in adolescence, can be more influential than personal talent in leading to individuals pursuing a specific field,

particularly one that is seen as being challenging or not particularly financially rewarding (Dobrow & Heller, 2014). Therefore, introducing and working with individuals, event adolescents, to help them understand and identify their calling may have significantly affect their future future job prospects and work life.

Life Satisfaction and Calling

As the topic of calling has become more popular over the past several decades, researchers have conducted to explore the relationship between calling and well-being. Although most of the studies found some relationship between calling and life meaning and satisfaction, the findings from these studies have been mixed ranging from weak to moderate correlations depending on the sample included in the study (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010; Duffy, Manuel, Borges, & Bott, 2012). In a qualitative study of counseling psychologists, Duffy, Foley, Raque-Bodgan, Reid-Marks, Dik, Castano, and Adams (2012) found that having a sense of calling to their work had both a personal and professional impact on participants' lives. They expressed "high levels of work passion, energy, and productivity (p. 302) in their profession, but also "were satisfied with their lives and/or felt blessed and typically endorsed a sense of fulfillment" (p. 302). The sense of life satisfaction upon recognizing one's calling does not seem to decrease over the short-term, but, at this point, little long-term research on calling and life satisfaction has been done (Hagmaier & Abele, 2015).

Having a sense of calling leads to higher levels of life satisfaction for both those who are employed and those who are voluntarily unemployed, but for those who are involuntarily unemployed the relationship does not exist (Torrey & Duffy, 2012). This is

likely due to the fact that work and a job provides a meaningful way for one to live out their calling and when that job is not available, the individual may have difficulty connecting with their calling. This may also be true for college students who are voluntarily unemployed or voluntarily employed in areas outside of their field of study until they complete their degree.

To my knowledge, there have been no studies completed to understand the nuances that might exist in the relationship between calling and life satisfaction. In the current study, the researcher examines whether the relationship between calling and life satisfaction exists for undergraduate social work students. Previous research has informed the specific moderators included in this study. Moderators will be used to help determine what specific traits and characteristics might significantly affect the relationship between calling and life satisfaction.

Moderators

Intrinsic Religiosity

Calling has often been tied to one's religious faith and is demonstrated throughout the literature and through the many definitional variations of Christian calling which exist. Although the focus of this study is on a secular conceptualization of calling, various studies (Dik and Duffy, 2009; Hernandez, Foley, & Betin, 2011) have demonstrated that calling is more prevalent among those who are religious. Religion often is defined and conceptualized as having both intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics (Allport & Ross, 1967). The extrinsic orientation of religion is "instrumental and utilitarian" (p. 434) and people who are oriented this way often note that religion is useful to them. The intrinsic orientation of religion is religion as overarching, perspective-shaping worldview. For this

person, religion is their “master motive” (p. 434). Based on the work of Allport & Ross (1967) Gorsuch & McPherson (1989) developed a scale to measure both the intrinsic and extrinsic levels of religiousness.

Living Calling

Being able to experience and live out your calling seems to influence the sense of calling for some people (Dik & Duffy, 2009). Calling seems to be more clearly articulated and sensed when one is able to live out that calling through their work or present station in life. Previous research has demonstrated that calling is usually more pronounced for those who are currently working and able to utilize their calling (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Peterson et al., 2009). In study of 553 working adults in the United States, Duffy, Allan, Autin, and Bott (2012) identified that living one’s calling may lead to higher job satisfaction and sense of life meaning which in turn, may promote higher levels of life satisfaction. Little research has been done on the concept of living calling and therefore, researchers have sought to conceptualize and measure this concept by developing a scale.

The importance of being able to live out one’s calling was also confirmed in a study with 171 individuals identified as being a part of a sexual minority (lesbian, gay, or bisexual). For this population and sample, having a supportive workplace climate provided them with opportunities to live out their calling and also then experience higher levels of both job and life satisfaction (Allan, Tebbe, Duffy, & Autin, 2015). Having workplace support was an important mediator in the relationship between living one’s calling and life and job satisfaction with this population. This finding could be true with

other oppressed groups of people and could provide insight into the role of workplace satisfaction and support on other areas of life for specifically vulnerable groups.

Core Self-Evaluations

Judge, Locke, and Durham (1997) conceptualized and developed an organizational psychology definition of core self-evaluations as a way of predicting job satisfaction. Core self-evaluations are characterized by four key traits—self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, neuroticism, and locus of control (Judge, Erez, Bono, and Thoreson, 2003). Core self-evaluations is about an individual's self-assessment of their "worthiness, effectiveness, and capability as a person" (Judge et al., 2003). Often the four traits of the self-evaluations were measured separately as individual characteristics, but recently research has shown that the four concepts could be appropriate to consider the four as a single concept.

Core self-evaluations are also dependent on an individual's current employment status (Torrey & Duffy, 2012). Individuals who are either voluntarily unemployed or employed and have a sense of calling not only have higher levels of life satisfaction when compared to those who are voluntarily unemployed.

Testing for moderation with these three variables can potentially provide further insight into the relationship between calling and life satisfaction. This study can provide some needed insight into a relationship that has been established in previous work and can be more fully explored utilizing a specific sample of students in the profession of social work.

Study Objectives

The current study was conducted to address these gaps in the literature by exploring the calling-life satisfaction relationship in greater depth and with a specific population of undergraduate students—social work majors. Previous studies have shown a link between calling and religiosity, with religious people consistently showing and identifying higher levels of calling (Dik and Duffy, 2009; Hernandez, Foley, and Beitin, 2011). Yet no study has looked specifically at whether the calling-life satisfaction relationship exists with social work students or also the role that religiousness might play in that hypothesized relationship specifically with students pursuing the social work profession.

The current study has been modeled after a previous study conducted by Duffy, Allan, & Bott (2011), but with a unique population—namely undergraduate social work students from primarily private, liberal arts colleges across the state of Iowa. This study will focus on the potentially moderating effects of certain variables on the theorized relationship between life satisfaction and calling. As stated earlier, identifying the impact of calling on various other areas of life, specifically life satisfaction, may be important for social work students who often identify a religious or spiritual motivation for their work. Students who currently identify themselves as living out their calling may experience a stronger relationship between calling and life satisfaction. Finally, students who have more positive core self-evaluations would also seem to be more likely to have a stronger sense of both calling and higher life satisfaction.

Utilizing a calling as a way of viewing one's profession or career in work with undergraduate social work students as they journey through their professional identity

development may have broad implications for other areas of their lives both academically and professionally. Therefore, the primary research question of interest in this study is to explore whether the relationship between calling and life satisfaction exists for social work students and then investigate potential moderators and their influence on the hypothesized relationship between the two variables. This study is exploratory in nature, therefore I posit the following research questions of interest:

1. Will this population of social work students demonstrate a strong relationship/correlation between their sense of calling and life satisfaction?
2. Will social work students who have stronger feelings of religiousness demonstrate a stronger relationship between calling and life satisfaction?
3. Will students who indicate they are presently living out their calling also exhibit a stronger relationship between calling and life satisfaction?
4. Will the relationship between calling and life satisfaction be stronger for students who display higher or lower core self-evaluations?

The concept of calling has been broadened in definition to include not only religious motivations, but also secular ones. Weber (1946) first introduced the idea that vocation or *beruf* could be something that was not specifically linked to one's religious beliefs. Values and worldview should be separated from one's work and yet, as Greenwood (1957) stated professional work specifically, could be all-encompassing. The relationship between calling and life satisfaction has been established in previous studies (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010; Duffy, Manuel, Borges, & Bott, 2012), albeit a moderate correlation in some. Other studies have established that the relationship between the two can be moderated by

other factors including, but not limited to, academic satisfaction, meaning in life, and religiosity. No previous research had established the link between calling and life satisfaction with social work students or professionals and given the unique status of social work as a service profession, this is an important contribution to the literature.

Methods

In this study, calling-transcendent summons was the independent variable and was measured using the Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ) developed by Dik, Eldridge, Steger, & Duffy (2012) and the survey included items that attempt to measure both the search for and presence of a calling. Therefore, it is the definition proposed by Dik & Duffy (2010) in the Calling and Vocation Questionnaire that will be used to define the concept of calling. While the original intent of the study was to utilize the entire CVQ measure, my initial data analysis showed multicollinearity between two subscales-- prosocial orientation and purposeful work and life satisfaction. When only the transcendent summons subscale was included, then multicollinearity was no longer an issue. Therefore, the researcher measured the concept of calling, specifically transcendent summons, using only the eight items of the transcendent summons subscale.

The researcher measured life satisfaction using the Satisfaction with Life Scale. This is one of most commonly used short scale used to measure life satisfaction or sense of general well-being because it measures positive emotion states rather than negative emotion states (Diener, Emmons, & Larsen, 1985).

Sample

Each of the included schools has various levels of religious affiliation ranging from very strong religious identification to minimal. A total of 114 participants

completed this study and participants were recruited from 9 liberal arts colleges in Iowa. The mean age of the participants was 21.85 and 85.1% were female (N=97) and 11.4% were male (N=13); 85.1% (N=97) identified as white and 14.9% (N=17) identified as non-white. All of the participants were sophomore, junior, or senior status and enrolled in a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) program at one of the nine colleges included in the study. The participants were recruited through the Iowa Consortium of Social Work programs, a group that includes all private liberal arts colleges with BSW programs in the state of Iowa.

Table 1

Descriptives

Ethnicity	%	Age	%	Gender	%	Year in College	%
White	92	19-22	84.2	Male	11.4	Sophomore	27.2
Non-White	8	23-30	9.8	Female	85.1	Junior	28.9
		30 and over	5.4			Senior	38.6

The researcher recruited a sample of 114 Bachelor of Social Work from nine private liberal arts colleges across Iowa students who were either sophomore, junior, and senior status. All of the private colleges with BSW programs were included in the sample. The researcher chose to recruit in this way because of the personal relationship she had with each of the program directors or department chairs at each of these nine colleges. Our programs collaborate in a group called the Iowa BSW Consortium and together we help each other through issues related to student recruitment and retention,

reaccreditation, and other administrative or student-related questions that might develop. The schools involved in the consortium range in size from 800-3000 students and their BSW programs range in size from 30-150 majors at any given time. As stated earlier, the schools have varying levels of religious affiliation with some schools only having historical connection to a specific church or denomination while other schools seem very unabashedly religious in their orientation and perspective. All of the BSW programs were traditional and students generally can finish each of the programs in four years, but for most of the programs, students join the program as sophomores or juniors.

The researcher chose to only include sophomores, juniors, and seniors because often freshman have not been formally accepted into the BSW programs and they are often still trying to determine whether they want to pursue social work or not.

Instrumentation

To address both this research question and the gaps in the literature identified above, in this study, the researcher constructed a survey. This survey was made up of the Calling Vocation Questionnaire-Transcendent Summons subscale (Duffy et al., 2008), Living One's Calling (Duffy et al., 2011), the Core Self-Evaluations Scale (Judge et al., 2003), the Satisfaction with Life Survey (Diener et al, 1985), and the Intrinsic Religiosity scale (Gorusch & McPherson, 1989). The researcher received the permission of each of the scale authors to utilize their measures in my study. This survey was used to test the relationship between the variables to determine first what relationship existed between calling (independent variable) and life satisfaction (dependent variable) for this group of BSW students and then look at various potential moderating variables and their effect on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The Institutional

Review Boards (IRBs) at both Baylor University and Dordt College approved this study at an exempt status and the study received approval and exempt status from the IRBs at the eight other colleges which participated in the study.

Previous research also has shown a link between calling and well-being for those who are working in their specific field of calling, likely because they are able to live out their calling (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Peterson, Park, Hall, and Seligman, 2009). Therefore, the concept of living one's calling was measured by the 6-item scale that was developed by Duffy et al. (2012) for their study. The participants were asked items like, "I am currently working in a job that closely aligns with my calling" and "I am engaging in activities that align with my calling". The estimated internal consistency for this scale in its initial study was $\alpha=.85$.

The concept of calling was measured using the Calling Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ). The CVQ was developed based on Dik & Duffy's (2009) definition of calling as identified above and is a 24-item questionnaire that assesses for both a presence of and a search for a calling. The CVQ has three subscales that represent the three-pronged definition of calling set forth by Dik and Duffy. The first subscale is the Transcendent Summons subscale, which includes eight statements, intended to measure both presence of and search for the summons. The second subscale is measures both the presence of and search for purposive work and the third subscale measures both presence of a search for prosocial orientation. Due to multicollinearity between the prosocial orientation and purposeful work and life satisfaction, the researcher used only the first subscale—transcendent summons. The Transcendent Summons subscale utilizes eight questions from the larger Calling and Vocation Questionnaire and is intended to measure the piece

of calling that addresses the source of the calling, including both the search and presence for the calling. The items included in this subscale seek to measure the participant's beliefs about where their calling has come from and addresses whether they currently have that sense of calling or if they are presently searching for it. This transcendent summons is an important piece of the Dik & Duffy (2009) definition. The CVQ instrument as a reported internal consistency of $\alpha = .89$ and a one-month test-retest reliability of $r = .79$. For this study, the estimated internal consistency reliability for the Transcendent Summons subscale was $\alpha = .99$ and for the overall scale was $\alpha = .99$.

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) is the 5-item scale that includes items such as, "The conditions of my life are excellent" and "So far I have gotten the important things I want in life". In the initial development study, the SWLS had good internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$) and the two-week test-retest reliability was $r = .87$. For this study, the estimated internal consistency reliability was $\alpha = .85$. The survey also included the 8-item Intrinsic Religiosity scale developed and revised by Gorsuch and McPherson (1989) to ensure it measures an individual's personal commitment to their religion regardless of the extrinsic or intrinsic returns they might get from their religious beliefs. This scale has proven itself to be internally consistent and reports a score of $\alpha = .83$. For this study, the estimated internal consistency reliability was $\alpha = .87$.

The final two scales that were included as part of the survey are the Core Self-Evaluations scale and the Living One's Calling scale. The Core Self-Evaluations scale is a 12-item scale developed by Judge et al. (2003) addresses the traits of self-esteem, global self-efficacy, neuroticism, and locus of control. This scale was found to have

good internal consistency reliabilities that ranged from $\alpha=.81$ to $.87$. For this study, the estimated internal consistency reliability was $\alpha=.799$. The Living One's Calling scale was developed by Duffy et al. (2011) and then had an estimated internal consistency reliability of $\alpha=.85$. For this study, the estimated internal consistency reliability was $\alpha=.85$.

Data Collection and Analysis

I administered the survey electronically via Qualtrics and contacted and recruited potential participants via email. The Program Directors for each of the nine schools that participated provided an email list of all the sophomore, junior, and senior majors from their particular school. The surveys went directly from me to the participants via their email address and were not routed through the program directors from the BSW programs that participated. I sent out 350 surveys to the potential participants and the response rate was approximately 30% with 114 surveys returned.

In my analysis, the researcher first used linear regression with life satisfaction as the dependent variable and calling-transcendent summons as one of the dependent variables. The researcher also included religiosity, living calling, and core self-evaluations in the model to establish how each of those variables affected the overall model. Next, to test for moderation, the researcher created interaction terms for each of the potential moderating variables and the transcendent summons independent variable. The researcher used regression to test for moderation and created a separate model for each of the potential moderators—living calling, core self-evaluations, and religiosity.

Results

As seen in Table 2, correlations and descriptive statistics were computed for all of the variables and it was found that calling correlated with all of the variables, albeit some of them weakly. Calling very strongly correlated with life satisfaction, but then only moderately to somewhat strongly correlate with each of the proposed moderators: life satisfaction ($r=.62$), core self-evaluations ($r=.34$), living one's calling ($r=.77$), and intrinsic religiousness ($r=.86$). All correlations were significant at the $<.05$ level.

Table 2

Correlations of Variables

	CVQ	Life Sat	CSE	Religion	Live Call
CVQ-Transcendent Summons	-				
Life Satisfaction	.622	-			
Core Self-Evaluations	.339	.362	-		
Intrinsic Religiousness	.310	.411	.794	-	
Living Calling	.268	.357	.268	.764	-
<i>M</i>	29.45	27.34	39.55	33.68	26.45
<i>SD</i>	6.5	6.6	15.7	15.57	12.63

*All correlations significant at the $<.05$ level

Regression

As seen in Table 3, the researcher ran an initial regression model using life satisfaction as the outcome variable and including calling-transcendent summons, living calling, religiosity, and core self-evaluations as well. The overall model was significant at the $<.001$ level ($F=20.522$, $R^2=.44$). Calling-transcendent summons, $\beta=.554$, $p<.05$, was independently significant within the model. While including religiosity in this model did present multicollinearity for this particular variable, in testing for moderation each of

the potential moderators were included in individual models rather than in a single larger one.

Table 3

Regression Analysis Examining Moderators in the Relation of Calling and Life Satisfaction

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	95% <i>C</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	F
Calling	.561	.079	.403, .718	.554	<.001			
Intrinsic								
Religiousness	.085	.074	-.061, .231	.193	.252			
Living Calling	.055	.076	-.096, .205	.104	.475			
Core self-evaluations	-.025	.052	-.128, .078	-.057	.627	.444	.444	20.52

Moderation

One way of understanding more fully the calling-life satisfaction relationship is to see how other variables may explain variation in life satisfaction over and above that which is explained by calling alone. We can do this by examining potential moderating variables and their effect on the initial independent-dependent relationship. Examining moderating variables enriches our understanding of the relationship. Moderating variables “alter the direction or strength of the relation between a predictor and an outcome variable” (Frazier, 2004, p. 116). A moderator is really nothing more than an interaction in which the effect of one variable depends on the level of the other. Frazier et al. (2004) propose guidelines for testing moderation.

Based on the initially identified correlation between calling-transcendent summons and life satisfaction, the researcher further explored whether religiousness, living one’s calling, and core self-evaluations moderated the relationship between the two

variables. My selection of the moderating variables was informed by Duffy et al. (2011) and based on the literature; these variables seem to have the likelihood to influence the relationship between calling and life satisfaction for this sample of students.

As seen in Tables 4, 5, & 6, each of the hypothesized moderators—religiousness, living one’s calling and core self-evaluations-- were included in their own independent regression models where the outcome variable was life satisfaction and the predictor variable was calling-transcendent summons. Each regression included life satisfaction as the predictor variable and then calling-transcendent summons and the other respective outcome variable, including an interaction term between calling and either living one’s calling, core self-evaluations, or religiosity. Among these three proposed moderators, each was determined to be a significant moderator in the relationship between calling and life satisfaction. In the first step, both core self-evaluations and calling-transcendent summons were entered into the regression model. In the second step, an interaction term between core self-evaluations and calling-transcendent summons was created to test for moderation and it explained a significant increase in the amount of variance in life satisfaction, $\Delta R^2=.46$, $F(4, 103)=31.63$, $p= <.01$. Therefore, core self-evaluations was found to significantly moderate the relationship between calling and life satisfaction.

Table 4

Regression with Interaction Term for Core Self-Evaluations

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	95% <i>C</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	F
Core Self-Evals	.030	.035	-.039, .100	.069	.387			
CVQ-TS	.414	.088	.239, .589	.409	<.001			
CVQ-TSx CSE	-.013	.004	-.020, -.006	-.333	<.001	.477	.462	31.63**

p<.01

Table 5

Regression with Interaction Term for Religiosity

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	95% <i>C</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	F
Religiosity	.405	.076	.256, .555	.400	<.001			
CVQ-TS	.068	.031	.007, .130	.156	.030			
CVQ-TS x Religiousness	-.018	.003	-.025, -.011	-.389	<.001	.554	.541	43.04**

**p<.01

Table 6

Regression with Interaction Term for Living Calling

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	95% <i>C</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2	F
Living Calling	.088	.037	.014, .161	.168	.020			
CVQ-TS	.382	.081	.221, .543	.377	<.001			
CVQ-TSx LiveCall	-.022	.005	-.031, -.012	-.374	<.001	.533	.519	39.49**

**p<.001

To test the next potential moderating relationship, both religiosity and calling-transcendent summons were entered into a regression model. Next, I created an interaction term with religiosity and calling-transcendent summons to test for moderation and found that it, too, explained a significant increase in the amount of variance in life satisfaction, $\Delta R^2=.54$, $F(4, 103)= 43.04$, $p= <.01$. Religiosity was also a significant moderator in the relationship between calling and life satisfaction. Finally, I entered living one's calling and calling-transcendent summons into a regression model and then created an interaction term using the two variables. The interaction term was used in a regression model to test for moderation and was found to explain a significant increase in the variance in life satisfaction, $\Delta R^2=.52$, $F(4, 103)= 39.49$, $p= <.01$.

Entering the religiosity-transcendent summons interaction term into the regression model, however, did create some concerns with multicollinearity for the variables. Multicollinearity is two variables that are so highly correlated with each other they skew the results of the overall model making it difficult to determine the effect of each of the variables independently (Warner, 2013). This multicollinearity is not surprising considering the use of the transcendent summons subscale, which focuses primarily on the part of Dik and Duffy's (2009) definition of calling which describes calling as coming from something outside of one's self. I will discuss more about the effect of this collinear relationship in the limitations section of this chapter.

Discussion

Building on the previous work of Duffy et al. (2011), this study was designed to first establish the relationship between calling and life satisfaction among undergraduate social work majors and then to explore potential moderating variables' effect on that

relationship. First, I needed to determine if there was a significant relationship between calling and life satisfaction for this particular sample of students. Including all three subscales from the Calling Vocation Questionnaire caused an issue of multicollinearity with the variables of intrinsic religiousness and calling, but this was not true when I measured calling using only the transcendent summons subscale. Therefore, I decided to measure calling using only the one subscale. Using only this subscale still provided insight into the relationships between calling and life satisfaction in social work students, specifically about the source of calling for this group of students. In future studies, the full measure could be used with a different sample of social workers to determine the extent of the moderation.

The fact that the correlation between calling-transcendent summons and life satisfaction was statistically significant is of particular interest considering this particular finding has not previously established in any previous study. Social work students, similar to other professionals that have been studied in this context, seem to be more content and satisfied with their lives overall if they also have a strong sense of calling, specifically identifying their transcendent summons, to the profession. This finding is an important consideration for social work educators who can provide opportunities for students to fully explore their understanding of the concept of calling. Educators and advisors can give students the chance to think and write about how and why they feel called to social work. Similarly, if students do not identify as having a calling, knowing the positive impact of calling, educators advisors can work with students to identify their calling either within or outside of the social work field. Due to the existence of both religious and secular definitions of calling, both religious and non-religious social work

programs could implement a calling perspective in talking with prospective and current students.

Next, I tested the presence of a potential moderating impact of religiousness, living one's calling, and core self-evaluations on the relationship between calling-transcendent summons and life satisfaction. Duffy et al. (2011) surveyed 472 undergraduate students from a variety of majors and found that religiousness and living one's calling did not moderate the calling-life satisfaction relationship and that core self-evaluations did moderate the relationship, but in the opposite direction. Within this population and sample, there was a strong correlation between calling and religiousness, but multicollinearity makes it difficult to fully understand the nature of this relationship. Other studies have identified a strong correlation between religiosity and sense of calling and even though being religious is not a precursor to having a sense of calling, it does seem more likely that someone operating from a religious worldview would be more likely to see their work or future work as calling. While the term calling has moved out of specifically religious circles and there are some secular definitions of the term which have been developed, the connection between one's religious orientation and motivation or calling to their work seems to be strong.

Testing the potential moderating effect of living one's calling on the relationship between calling and life satisfaction showed a significant moderating effect meaning that as a student's with a stronger sense of living out their calling also then experienced a stronger relationship between calling and life satisfaction. This is particularly interesting as the sample was only college students whose primary responsibilities involve being a student and not often working in direct social work practice yet. The overall mean score

on the living one's calling scale (26.45) was just above the exact middle of potential scores meaning that overall the participants felt like they were able to live out their calling, at least in some capacity, in their current station which may or may not include direct social work practice.

This is an important finding for social work educators and others who work in with BSW students in the course of their training and education. Within these contexts, we should try to provide as many opportunities as possible for students to live out their calling. This could include more field or pre-field experiences, along with volunteering, but it might also mean a reframe from their professors to help them see their current calling as student as being one important way they can live out their calling to the social work profession. Both inside and outside of classes, professors can initiate dialogue to help students identify ways they are currently living out their calling as this may lead to a stronger sense of calling and also life satisfaction.

The findings in regards to core self-evaluations were different than the findings of previous studies and for this sample of social work students, core self-evaluations was also found to be a moderating variable in the relationship between calling-transcendent summons and life satisfaction. Meaning that students' self-evaluations had a significant impact on the relationship between their sense of calling and corresponding life satisfaction scores. Therefore, the students who felt more satisfied with their lives overall when they had higher levels of calling even when they had low self-evaluations and when they had high scores on the self-evaluation scale.

This also can provide direction for social work educators and field instructors. For students who have a strong sense of calling, we can also work to improve students'

sense of self-efficacy and helping them develop an internal locus of control should improve their overall core self-evaluations. By working to help students have a better overall picture of themselves, we are then also strengthening the relationship between their calling and life satisfaction.

This study provides some valuable insight for social work educators and those who advise students during the process of deciding upon a major. On the topic of calling, specifically the transcendent summons, and its impact on life satisfaction, we have learned that for social work students specifically the relationship between the two is very strong. Meaning for social work students with a strong sense of calling that comes from an external “beckoning onto” (Chamiec-Case, 2012) they are also more likely to experience or report high levels of life satisfaction. This is the first research of this kind with social work students and has significant implications for social work education and professional development.

This supports previous research linking calling and life satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2012) and has important meaning for those working with students both within and outside the social work major. Emphasizing and teaching utilizing a calling perspective when talking about motivation to pursue social work seems to have effects on other significant areas of life. This also has implications for social work practitioners and while this study was focused on students, other preliminary research has shown that those who view their profession as a calling will experience a higher sense of well-being and life satisfaction (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009; Duffy et al., 2012; Duffy and Sedlacek, 2010, Steger et al., 2010).

The participants in this study all attended private liberal arts colleges many of which have some religious affiliation, we would therefore expect that the participants all have varying degrees of religiosity. The mean score on the religiosity scale for this sample of students was 33.68 out of a possible 56 meaning that overall the participants were moderately religious, but not overly so. The study identified a strong correlation between sense of calling and levels of self-identified religiosity and when religiosity was added as a moderator, a moderating effect was found. The multicollinearity issue with the religiosity variable, however, calls this finding into question. Therefore, for this sample, it is difficult to determine religiosity's impact on the relationship between calling and life satisfaction. Further research with a different sample could provide further insight into the effect of religiosity on this specific relationship.

Another important finding which can help inform social work education and training is the fact that living one's calling was a moderator in the relationship between calling and life satisfaction. Even though the sample in this study was undergraduate college students and many of them are likely not in direct practice, they still identified feeling as if they were living out their calling in the educational setting. This may be due to the field or other practicum experiences provided in social work education or may be representative of students feeling that their educational experience is how they are currently living their calling.

The findings from this study also indicate that with this sample those students who had higher self-evaluations and viewed their major as calling also experienced higher levels of life satisfaction. This means that as educators, again, an emphasis on

viewing social work as calling and exploring what that might mean could have significant impact for a wide variety of social work students.

Limitations

While this study provides some valuable insights into the role of calling in social work education, it is also important to consider the limitations and potential avenues for further research. First, this study was cross sectional and therefore causality cannot be inferred from the present study and current data, my findings suggest several important impactful characteristics that could potentially influence the relationship between calling and life satisfaction. Future longitudinal research that perhaps can make more inferences and look at calling in social work students over a period of time would be good way to follow up on the findings of this study.

Second, the population sampled was limited and included undergraduate BSW students in Iowa. This study did not include graduate students or practicing social workers who might be a little more experienced and give more insight into living their calling through their practice. Surveying a more diverse population of social work students, both BSW and MSW, as well as practitioners would provide more insight into the relationship of calling and life satisfaction within the social work field. It would also be useful to survey students outside of Iowa and students who attend larger universities instead of just students from small liberal arts colleges. This group of participants, because all of them attend college or universities who are at least loosely religiously affiliated, may have higher levels of religiosity than students elsewhere. The fact that they were attending these specific schools may also have affected their view of work in general.

Finally, the variable of religiosity demonstrated significant multicollinearity with the calling-transcendent summons variable. The intrinsic religiousness scale not measuring exactly what was intended could in part explain the multicollinearity. Using a different measure for religiosity could mediate this issue or this concept could be measured instead by studying spirituality.

Conclusion

Helping college students better understand what they are called to do has been a goal for both secular and Christian colleges alike as of late. No longer does the word calling have specifically religious or spiritual connotations. Career counselors and advisors have wondered if helping people determine their calling might have a ripple effect to other areas of their life satisfaction and self-concept. The results of this study further support the notion that calling does not necessarily have to be religious in nature as students, but can be used with students who do not have strong feelings of religiousness. Academic advisors can also help students who evaluate themselves and their lives more harshly to develop a strong sense of calling because this could potentially improve their sense of satisfaction with their life overall. Overall, this study seems to support working with social work students to help them better understand and determine their sense of calling to the profession. It may have broader effects in other parts of their lives, but it also can provide them a framework from which they can carry into their future practice and help them persevere through difficult times and help them navigate potential burnout and its effects. Researchers should continue to focus, however, on determining how this work on calling might have broader implications for various aspects of their life and professional work.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Purpose

In 2005, the Lilly Endowment, Inc. set aside grant money earmarked for colleges and universities to use to more fully explore the role of calling and vocation on their campuses. They recognized that emphasizing such a model in Christian colleges and universities might help students find a better way to recognize the connection between their faith and their future work. The words calling and vocation were historically only applied to jobs within the church, but since the time of Martin Luther, these concepts have broadened to include all “stations of life” (Hardy, 1990) both paid and non-paid.

While the calling model has been seen as a viable and useful model for social work students and practitioners in providing them with a framework for the integration of their faith and practice, research is only preliminary on how such a model might already be utilized and what impact the model might have on both students and practitioners. And while the terms of calling and vocation have historically been Christian concepts, these ideas are now being used in non-religious settings as well and new definitions are being put forth to broaden the terms beyond religious circles.

Review of Methodology

The study of calling in social work education and practice is a fairly new area of research interest and yet preliminary studies indicate its importance to the profession and especially how we socialize, train, and develop future professionals. While the idea of calling has religious roots, specifically Christian roots, it has been secularized by certain

proposed definitions and applications of the concept (Hardy, 1990). Therefore, currently many definitions and conceptualizations in existence regarding the words calling and vocation and often both terms get used interchangeably, when they are in fact overlapping and still unique (Schuurman, 2005; Dik & Duffy, 2009). Because social workers often have specific reasons why they have chosen to pursue the profession, social work as a profession lends itself naturally to a consideration of the role of calling and its impact on both students and professionals. Why do social work students choose to pursue the profession? What motivators and experiences do they identify as being influential? What does previous research say about the role of calling in helping professions and especially in social work? Lastly, does having a calling make a difference in terms of overall life satisfaction and how do factors such as core self-evaluations, living one's calling, and religiosity influence that relationship?

In order to provide some insight into these questions, I conducted three different studies on calling in the field of social work. Each of these chapters provides a unique perspective on the role of calling in the field. The research includes a thorough narrative literature review, a qualitative study with social work students, and a qualitative study with social work students and graduates.

Contributions

Narrative Literature Review

In Chapter Two, I completed a narrative literature review giving a survey of information found in articles on calling and vocation within the helping professions of nursing, medicine, counseling psychology, and social work. The questions of interest in this particular study included the following:

1. What has research on the impact of calling in other professions told us?
2. Does seeing work as calling make a difference to each of the included professions and in the field of social work?
3. What have we learned from previous research about both the secular and religious sense of calling and how that affects specific professionals?

The researcher first focused on the concept of calling within social sciences in general, seeking to explore and explain some of the various definitions of these terms currently being used. Next, the researcher looked within nursing, medicine, and counseling psychology to establish how these particular disciplines have studied calling and then synthesized and critiqued their findings. The researcher did this critique and synthesis specifically to provide some comparison for research on calling within the social work field, but also to provide insight into the role of calling in four unique helping professions. Finally, within the narrative review, the researcher focused on research about calling within the social work field. The findings were tied to Dik & Duffy's (2009) three-part definition which includes transcendent summons, prosocial orientation, and purposeful work. For many in social work and the other helping professions the transcendent summons included religious or spiritual motivations, but some identified this summons as coming from outside of specific religious or Christian beliefs.

The second part of the definition is prosocial orientation representing "other-oriented values and goals" (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 425). In the literature on calling in all the helping professions, participants talked about wanting to "work with people" and specifically for those who expressed a stronger sense of calling there was a desire to work with specific groups of vulnerable, sick, or hurting people. Finally, the third part of the

definition is summarized as “purposeful work” meaning that individuals who have a sense of calling to a specific profession also want their work to have meaning and to be able to find part of their purpose in their work. These themes reflect some similarities and differences from those found in the review of calling and vocation in other majors or disciplines. This narrative review can provide some direction for future research on calling within the helping professions by summarizing, synthesizing, and analyzing completed research. This research can be helpful for high school and college advisors who are seeking to know how students identify and understand their calling to nursing, medicine, counseling psychology, and social work professions.

Except for one completed with medical students, the studies included in the narrative review from all of the disciplines were all cross-sectional and were conducted with relatively small sample sizes. None of the studies included were experimental and therefore, it is impossible to draw any causal inferences from them. While some of the studies in counseling psychology, medicine, and nursing included working professionals, many of the studies included and reviewed involved only social work students. The direction for future research in all of these helping professionals should include both longitudinal research and also research with those already practicing within the fields identified.

Qualitative Study

In Chapter 3, the question of interest was around the pathways to career choice and calling in current and former social work students. Using qualitative interviewing, the researcher identified eight individuals who were either currently in BSW or MSW programs or had completed either degree (or in some cases both degrees). This study

focused on the experience of choosing a major and through semi-structured interviews, the researcher sought to better understand the how and why of this experience. The participants in this study emphasized the importance of relationships with clients, family and friends, faculty, and field supervisors in helping students determine their specific career interests—namely social work. In previous research, students had not identified experience with clients in practicum or field experiences as being influential in their decision to pursue social work. Some of the participants also cited interactions with clients as one of the reasons why they chose to pursue an MSW degree after their undergraduate experience.

Quantitative Study

Finally, in Chapter Four, the researcher attempted to better understand the role and impact of calling, specifically the piece of calling referred to as “transcendent summons” (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 425), in the lives of BSW students. The study objectives in this particular study were as follows:

1. Will this population of social work students demonstrate a strong relationship/correlation between their sense of calling and life satisfaction?
2. Will social work students who have stronger feelings of religiousness demonstrate a stronger relationship between calling and life satisfaction?
3. Will students who indicate they are presently living out their calling also exhibit a stronger relationship between calling and life satisfaction?
4. Will the relationship between calling and life satisfaction be stronger for students who display higher or lower core self-evaluations?

Current social work students completed surveys about their sense of calling, life satisfaction, core self-evaluations, living out their calling, and their levels of religiosity. This specific population of social work students demonstrated a strong correlation between the transcendent summons measure of calling and life satisfaction. Although the relationship between calling and life satisfaction was established with other populations, this is the first research demonstrating this relationship in social work students. Through this study, the researcher identified that both religious and non-religious social work students can experience strong levels of calling, specifically the transcendent summons. Religiosity does not have to be a precursor to someone experiencing the positive effects of having and identifying a calling. Faculty and student advisors both in college and high school, should be working with students to help them better understand what their calling might be and also help them identify how social work might help them live out that calling. This, again, can be important for both students who have strong religious beliefs and for students who do identify as having very weak or no religious beliefs.

Dissemination Plan

Because each of these studies is unique and may be suitable for different audiences, the researcher has determined a specific dissemination plan for each of the three studies completed. First, the researcher will work with specific faculty within the Garland School of Social Work to prepare articles for publication. The researcher plans to submit the narrative review to the *Social Work & Christianity* journal for review and potential publication. The researcher co-author the final product for publication with Dr. Myers and Dr. Polson within the School of Social Work. The researcher also plans to present the findings of this review at a national conference and also will share the

research findings with her colleagues at Dordt College. The qualitative study, with its focus on pathways to career choice and calling, will be finalized and submitted for publication in the *Journal of Social Work Education*. The researcher hopes to work further on preparing this article for publication with possible co-author, Dr. Singletary. The findings from this study will also be shared at a national conference and also with the researcher's local colleagues and constituencies at Dordt College. Finally, the author plans to submit the quantitative study for publication at the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. This journal has previously published much of the work on which this study was based and seems like a good audience for this addition to the body of knowledge in this area. The researcher will ask Dr. Myers and Dr. Polson to work further with this article and to also co-author this article as we prepare it for publication and will work toward presenting this research at a national conference.

Future Directions and Recommendations

These three research studies and this cohesive project provided the researcher with directions for future research. We are still in the preliminary and introductory stages of understanding the area of calling and career choice in the field of social work and therefore, there is still much work and research to be done. First, of particular interest to the researcher is the relationship between empathy and calling as several studies included in the narrative review indicated some relationship between these two variables. Individuals with a sense of calling, in some of the studies, were able to demonstrate more empathic behaviors with their clients or patients than those who did not identify a sense of calling. This is an interesting and important direction for research in both social work, but also within the other professions identified. In the future, the researcher would like to

study this further, likely in the form of a quantitative study with social work practitioners or possibly with social work students.

Second, the researcher is interested in developing a longitudinal study starting with social work students and identifying their sense of calling and corresponding levels of life satisfaction. The researcher would then follow these individuals two years post-graduation and then again five years post-graduation to see how this potential relationship between these two variables might change as one moves from education into professional practice.

Finally, the researcher would like to follow up the qualitative study included in this dissertation with another study on pathways to career choice within the social work field. The researcher would like to interview a larger number of individuals to see if the themes identified in this study might also be identified within a larger, more diverse sample of individuals. The sample included in this qualitative study was relatively homogeneous and therefore, the themes identified by people of other ethnicities and genders and ages might be significantly different than those identified here. There are many different areas for future research that have been identified within these three studies. One could even replicate the quantitative study with a much larger, national sample of social work students or social work practitioners and this would provide some valuable insights into the role of calling and life satisfaction for social workers.

Further research might also help us clarify what we mean by the terms calling and vocation within the social work field. Because such a wide variety of definitions currently exist, it is difficult to clearly measure this concept accurately and various studies measure the concept in different ways. These three studies provide a variety of

important insights into the role of calling in the field of social work, specifically social work education. Students in the sample from the quantitative study demonstrated strong relationships between their sense of calling and levels of life-satisfaction which should be of key interest in providing directions for practice, research, and policy. Within the field of practice, workplaces should allow their employees within the helping professions to continue to develop and identify their sense of calling. Once they have helped them identify the direction of their calling, the employee and employer can together work to seek out ways each individual can live out their calling within the workplace.

Limitations

While these three studies provide some valuable insights for the social work profession, there are significant limitations to each of the studies which limit our ability to make clear inferences from each of their findings. First, the quantitative study was conducted with a very limited sample of social work students and the sample was very homogeneous with a large number of traditionally-aged, female, and white college students surveyed. Therefore, it is difficult to predict if a more diverse and larger sample of students might draw similar results. The same is true for the qualitative study in which the eight participants were all very similar in terms of gender and ethnicity and age.

While the themes identified provide some valuable insights, we cannot assume that a similar study with a more diverse sample would draw the same conclusions. Similarly, including students who attend public colleges and universities might also diversify the religious or non-religious orientations of the sample. This would provide some comparisons between religious and non-religiously oriented students in terms of their sense of calling and life satisfaction along with the other variables.

It is very unlikely that the narrative review found every important study on the role of calling in the four helping professions included. Again, we can learn some valuable things about the role of calling in these fields and by including four helping professions we can make some important comparisons among these helping areas.

Integrated Summary and Conclusion

Overall, calling and vocation seem to have a distinct role in social work education and professional practice. Educators should help students first identify why they have chosen to pursue social work name their calling. This can have a direct impact on other areas of their lives, but it is also important to recognize how students experience that calling and choice to pursue social work. Social work as a profession identifies “the importance of human relationships” as one of its six core values (NASW Code of Ethics, 2015) and we can see how students and professionals alike seem to value relationships both with friends and family, but also with faculty, colleagues, and clients as well. Both Christian and non-Christian colleges alike would do well to continue to explore how a calling model can be effective for all majors, but especially for students choosing to pursue the helping careers including and particularly social work.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Baylor IRB Approval



BAYLOR
UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

One Bear Place #97310 Waco, TX 76798-7310 • (254) 710-3763 • FAX (254) 710-7309 • WEBSITE: www.baylor.edu/research/irb

DATE: 07/09/2014

TO: Erin Olson, MSW

FROM: Office of the Vice Provost for Research, Research Compliance
Baylor University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: Finding Meaning in Work: Calling and Life Satisfaction
Among Undergraduate Social Work Students

IRB REFERENCE #: 626385

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: 07/09/2014

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)

Thank you for your research study submission. Your research has been determined to be EXEMPT from IRB review according to federal regulation 45 CFR 46.101(b):

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public

behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

This exemption determination is based on the protocol and/or materials submitted. If the research is modified, you must contact this office to determine whether your research is still eligible for exemption prior to implementing the modifications.

If you have any questions, please contact Deborah Holland at (254) 710-1438 or Deborah_L_Holland@baylor.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Deborah L. Holland". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Deborah L. Holland, JD, MPH
Assistant Vice Provost for Research
Director of Compliance

APPENDIX B

Calling and Vocation Questionnaire

Directions: Please indicate the degree to which you believe the following statements describe you, using the following scale. Please respond with your career as a whole in mind. For example, if you are currently working part time in a job that you don't consider part of your career, focus on your career as a whole and not your current job. Try not to respond merely as you think you "should" respond; rather, try to be as accurate and as objective as possible in evaluating yourself. If any of the questions simply do not seem relevant to you, "1" may be the most appropriate answer.

1	2	3	4
Not at all true of me	Somewhat true of me	Mostly true of me	Absolutely true of me

1. _____ I believe that I have been called to my current line of work.
2. _____ I'm searching for my calling in my career.
3. _____ My work helps me live out my life's purpose.
4. _____ I am looking for work that will help me live out my life's purpose.
5. _____ I am trying to find a career that ultimately makes the world a better place.
6. _____ I intend to construct a career that will give my life meaning.
7. _____ I want to find a job that meets some of society's needs.
8. _____ I do not believe that a force beyond myself has helped guide me to my career.
9. _____ The most important aspect of my career is its role in helping to meet the needs of others.
10. _____ I am trying to build a career that benefits society.
11. _____ I was drawn by something beyond myself to pursue my current line of work.
12. _____ Making a difference for others is the primary motivation in my career.
13. _____ I yearn for a sense of calling in my career.
14. _____ Eventually, I hope my career will align with my purpose in life.
15. _____ I see my career as a path to purpose in life.
16. _____ I am looking to find a job where my career clearly benefits others
17. _____ My work contributes to the common good.
18. _____ I am trying to figure out what my calling is in the context of my career.
19. _____ I'm trying to identify the area of work I was meant to pursue.
20. _____ My career is an important part of my life's meaning.
21. _____ I want to pursue a career that is a good fit with the reason for my existence.
22. _____ I am always trying to evaluate how beneficial my work is to others.
23. _____ I am pursuing my current line of work because I believe I have been called to do so.

24. _____ I try to live out my life purpose when I am at work.

Transcendent Summons Subscale (Presence & Search): 1, 2, 8, 11, 13, 18, 19, 23

APPENDIX C

Satisfaction with Life Scale

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

- 7 - Strongly agree
- 6 - Agree
- 5 - Slightly agree
- 4 - Neither agree nor disagree
- 3 - Slightly disagree
- 2 - Disagree
- 1 - Strongly disagree

_____ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

_____ The conditions of my life are excellent.

_____ I am satisfied with my life.

_____ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

_____ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

APPENDIX D

Intrinsic Religiousness Scale

Directions: Please respond to the statements with the scale below.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Slightly Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

1. _____ I enjoy reading about my religion.
2. _____ It doesn't matter much what I believe in so long as I am good
3. _____ It is important to me to spend time in private thought and prayer.
4. _____ I have often had a strong sense of God's presence.
5. _____ I will try hard to live all my life according to my religious beliefs.
6. _____ Although I am religious, I don't let it affect my daily life.
7. _____ My whole approach to life is based on my religion
8. _____ Although I believe in my religion, many other things are important in life.

APPENDIX E

Living One's Calling Scale

Directions: Please answer the following items if you currently feel a calling to a particular job or line of work. Please answer using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Slightly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable

1. ____ I have regular opportunities to live out my calling
2. ____ I am currently working in a job that closely aligns with my calling
3. ____ I have a calling, but I'm not able to live it out right now.
4. ____ I am consistently living out my calling.
5. ____ There are obstacles that prevent me from being able to live out my calling.
6. ____ I am currently engaging in activities that align with my calling.
7. ____ I am living out my calling right now in my job.
8. ____ I am not yet able to live my calling on a consistent basis.
9. ____ I am working in the job to which I feel called.'
10. ____ I have not yet completed the education or training needed to live out my calling

APPENDIX F

Core Self-Evaluations Scale

Directions: Below are several statements about you with which you may agree or disagree. Using the response scale below, indicate your agreement or disagreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. _____ I am confident I get the success I deserve in life.
2. _____ Sometimes I feel depressed. (r)
3. _____ When I try, I generally succeed.
4. _____ Sometimes when I fail I feel worthless. (r)
5. _____ I complete tasks successfully.
6. _____ Sometimes, I do not feel in control of my work. (r)
7. _____ Overall, I am satisfied with myself.
8. _____ I am filled with [doubts](#) about my competence. (r)
9. _____ I determine what will happen in my life.
10. _____ I do not feel in control of my [success](#) in my career. (r)
11. _____ I am [capable](#) of coping with most of my problems.
12. _____ There are times when things look pretty bleak and hopeless to me. (r)

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