



The experience of career change driven by a sense of calling: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach[☆]

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ABSTRACT

This study used a qualitative methodology to examine how a sense of calling is related to the career change process. Interviews were conducted with eight career changers who perceived their career transition as a way to fulfill a calling. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), eight super-ordinate themes were elicited that described the various elements of the change process: activity prior to the career change, activity during the pre-transition period, activity during the process of discerning a calling, definition of calling, challenges of pursuing a calling-infused career, ways of dealing with challenges, impact of a calling-infused career change, and unique aspects of a calling-infused career change. Generally, participants were satisfied with their calling-infused career transitions and reported greater levels of well-being at work and in their lives as a whole. In-depth self-exploration and making meaning from past experiences were described as primary ways to discern a calling. Interviewees defined calling as a source of fulfillment, a way to serve the greater good at work, a spiritual conviction that one is doing what one is meant to do, and as an important part of one's identity. As unique characteristics of career changes motivated by a sense of calling, participants indicated that their transitions were prompted by altruistic motives and the pursuit of intrinsic rewards. Interviewees also reported feeling blessed to live out their calling and viewed pursuing a calling as an ongoing process.

1. Introduction

Career development is a lifelong and ongoing process. In today's world of work, change is the norm; careers that unfold over decades within a single occupation or organization are the exception rather than the rule. A recent study revealed, for example, that the Americans hold an average of nearly 12 jobs between the ages of 18 and 48 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Super (1990) defined "career" as a series of positions occupied by a person across one's life span. He postulated that an individual becomes mature as she or he goes through diverse life changes, and develops a self-concept by accomplishing key developmental tasks at various stages across the life span. As experiences become elaborated with an increased awareness of the world of work, a more sophisticated vocational self-concept is formed (Zunker, 1994). In this perspective, career change is regarded as a personal growth process of finding a better job that more satisfactorily permits one to express a maturing vocational self-concept.

In one of the few examples of a theoretical model of career change, O'Connor and Wolfe (1987) proposed that adult career transitions typically follow five stages: stability (pre-transition), rising discontent, crisis, redirection and adaptation, and re-

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stabilizing. By conceptualizing a career transition as the process of coping with changes in the self and the environment, they suggested that the transition should be regarded as natural and inevitable, rather than a detour. Even so, changing one's job is a challenging and often an unwanted life experience, particularly given that such transitions are often tied to periods of unemployment and job insecurity. Also common in such transitions is a move to a less desirable and satisfying opportunity than one's previous position (Wanberg, 1995). Relatively little is known about the factors that predict positive outcomes associated with a career transition. Furthermore, previous studies on career change have mostly examined intent to leave a job or one's organization, and empirical research collecting actual data of career change behavior is sparse (Blau, 2000; Blau, 2007; Rhodes & Doering, 1983).

1.1. Factors leading to career change

Carless and Arnup (2011) defined a career change as a transition from one work position to another in a different field that is largely unrelated to previous work skills or responsibilities. Previous attempts to identify factors that may prompt a career change have included reduced job satisfaction, burnout, and job insecurity (Blau, 2000; Burke & Richardsen, 1993; De Lange, Taris, Kompier, Houtman, & Bongers, 2004; Grandey, Fisk, & Steiner, 2005; Kinnunen, Mauno, Natti, & Happonen, 1999; Kinnunen, Mauno, Natti, & Happonen, 2000; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Mauno & Kinnunen, 1999; Rhodes & Doering, 1983). Furthermore, research examining personality traits related to career change has found that voluntary turnover is negatively linked to emotional stability and conscientiousness (Barrick & Mount, 1996; Judge, 1992).

Likewise, conventional wisdom holds that career change usually happens in negative contexts when personal traits and environmental work conditions do not fit well. However, an alternative approach has recently emerged highlighting factors that make career change a beneficial life experience. Williams and Forgasz (2009) found that intrinsic and altruistic motives were more important than extrinsic rewards such as pay or work conditions among students who initiated a career change to pursue teaching. These results indicate that a desire to fulfill important personal values is a crucial factor for voluntary career change, and that one's personal meaning-making system needs to be considered in understanding how career changes can foster career growth. In summary, previous studies have predominately focused on involuntary turnover caused by negative factors such as job dissatisfaction, work stress, burn out, negative evaluation at work, and layoffs (Blau, 2000; Burke & Richardsen, 1993; Shaw, Delery, Jenkins, & Gupta, 1998; Tayfur & Arslan, 2013). Relatively little is known about career changers who decide to voluntarily change their jobs and what psychological resources lead to experiencing this career transition as a meaningful turning point during one's career path. As labor market instability has increased, career change has become an increasingly normative event that can happen to anyone at any time for a wide range of internal and external reasons. Therefore, an important next step for research is to investigate career changers who are satisfied with their new career path, to examine how they approached their career change decisions, and to identify the factors that helped to facilitate the transition process.

1.2. Calling and career change

Discerning a sense of calling may be one of the antecedents leading to positive career transitions. Researchers have argued that a sense of calling is inseparably intertwined with one's identity (Berg, Grant, & Johnson, 2010), and that individuals may develop the feeling of being drawn into a certain area in which they have engaged in various activities and satisfied particular interests (Schwartz, 2004). Approaching one's career as a calling involves a sense that one is driven to pursue a particular career path by a transcendent summons, motivated by a sense of purpose with a pro-social orientation (Dik & Duffy, 2009).

Over the past decade, a rapidly increasing amount of research in vocational psychology, organizational behavior, and management has shown that approaching one's career as a calling is positively linked with career and well-being outcomes (Duffy & Dik, 2013). For example, a sense of calling predicts higher levels of career maturity, intrinsic work motivation, work hope, career decision self-efficacy, and academic satisfaction among college students (e.g., Dik, Sargent, & Steger, 2008; Duffy, Allan, & Dik, 2011; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010). Studies with adult workers have found that those with a sense of calling exhibit increased job satisfaction, greater levels of occupational identification, higher career commitment, and a stronger sense of that their work is meaningful (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Duffy, Dik, & Steger, 2011; Duffy, Foley et al., 2012; Peterson, Park, Hall, & Seligman, 2009; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). Furthermore, fulfilling one's calling strengthens relationships both inside and outside work (Cardador & Caza, 2012) and promotes a sense of social connection by helping workers feel that they are contributing to society in a positive way (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). The benefits of approaching work as a calling have been examined with diverse occupations including administrative assistants, zookeepers, academics, and psychologists, among many others (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Duffy, Foley et al., 2012; Oates, Hall, & Anderson, 2005; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). The role of a sense of calling in career development has also been investigated internationally (e.g., Domene, 2012; Douglass, Duffy, & Autin, 2016; Praskova, Creed, & Hood, 2015; Rothmann & Hamukang'andu, 2013; Shim & Yoo, 2012; Zhang, Dik, Wei, & Zhang, 2015), yielding results that are largely consistent with those found in the earlier studies described above.

The links between the presence of a calling and both career-related and general well-being have been consistent, yet there is also more to the story. Specifically, evidence suggests that the benefits of a calling are most pronounced among individuals who feel they are living their calling through their current occupations compared to those who only perceive a sense of calling (e.g., Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey, & Dik, 2012). Whereas perceiving a calling refers to the degree of which an individual feels called to a certain career, living a calling refers to the degree to which an individual is actually engaging in work that aligns with her or his calling (Duffy & Autin, 2013). Living a calling and perceiving a calling are empirically distinct constructs, and living a calling is more closely

associated with well-being variables than perceiving a calling (Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Bott, 2013; Duffy & Autin, 2013). Living a calling has been shown to moderate the associations between perceiving a calling with work meaning and career commitment, such that those relations are stronger when people feel they are living a calling (Duffy, Bott et al., 2012). Living a calling has also been identified as a mediator, explaining the link between perceiving a calling and life satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2013). Participants are statistically equivalent across income and educational levels in the extent to which they perceive a calling, but those with a higher income and more education are most likely to feel they are currently living a calling (Duffy & Autin, 2013). Sadly, participants with “unanswered callings”—those who are not currently living a calling—often report regret and stress (Berg et al., 2010). Similarly, Duffy and Sedlacek (2007) demonstrated that searching for a calling was linked to high levels of discomfort, indecision, and identity confusion. Recently the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT; Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016) proposed that most people face substantial barriers hindering the ability to pursue a fulfilling career. PWT addresses how contextual, psychological, and economic factors influence on a person's career choice, and framed the ability to secure “decent work” as a key construct of the model (Duffy et al., 2016).

Moreover, most calling research has been conducted with college students and employed adults. The construct is developmentally relevant for traditional college students, but their relative lack of work experience makes it reasonable to assume that for many, their sense of calling may change in the years after graduation as they navigate the world of work. Other studies of calling with adult participants have predominantly investigated employed samples, focusing on how their sense of calling is linked to their current job. This body of research does not provide a full picture of how calling develops across time, because research is sparse on people who are looking for a new calling or dealing with an unanswered calling that does not fit well with their current work experience. Therefore, examining the experience of changing one's career into a new field as a way to pursue a sense of calling represents an important contribution of this study within the career development and calling literatures, in that it sheds needed light on the possible mechanisms through which an individual discerns a new calling, develops the calling across time, and then takes active steps to live out the calling.

1.3. *The need for qualitative inquiry*

Although there is a growing literature on calling, most research has been dominated by quantitative methods. Some qualitative studies using interviews have emerged, investigating, for example, female Christian college students (French & Domene, 2010), counseling psychologists (Duffy, Foley et al., 2012), Christian mothers in academia (Oates et al., 2005; Sellers, Thomas, Batts, & Ostman, 2005), Germans with Ph.D.s in diverse fields (Hagmaier & Abele, 2012), zookeepers (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009), and adults perceiving a religious or spiritual calling (Hernandez, Foley, & Beitin, 2011). These studies were conducted with participants who already perceived or were living their calling. Researchers have yet to study how a sense of calling develops across the span of one's career, the internal process involved in pursuing an unanswered calling, or how careers driven by a calling may be distinguished from careers that are pursued without a calling. We took a qualitative approach to establish a better understanding of the role that a sense of calling may play in people's career transitions. A qualitative approach is particularly beneficial in the beginning stages of research on previously unexplored topics (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1992; Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997), rendering it a useful strategy to employ in the present study.

Among the various qualitative methods, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) was used in this study. IPA is a qualitative analysis method focused on exploring a person's direct experience and the person's ideographic interpretation of the live experience (Smith et al., 2009; Taylor & Murray, 2012). Previous calling studies utilizing a qualitative approach highlight that the processes in which individuals discern and interpret their callings are likely unique and complex depending on the life and work experiences they have been through (e.g., Duffy, Foley et al., 2012; Sellers et al., 2005). IPA addresses the unique experiences of each individual and the distinct contexts in which those experiences happen (Eatough & Smith, 2008). For this reason, IPA was considered an appropriate approach for this study, given its aim to capture each individual's subjective experience of a calling and its impact on career change, as well as to identify general themes encompassing each individual's unique story.

1.4. *The present study*

The purpose of the present study was to explore how a sense of calling is related to the career change process among working adults by focusing on the subjective experiences of career changers. To explore this phenomenon, we used the IPA method (Smith et al., 2009). Specifically, we sought to conduct a qualitative study with adult workers who changed their careers or who were currently involved in career transition in a way that was motivated by a desire to pursue their callings. The study also aimed to explore both positive and potentially negative aspects of a calling-infused career change. The central research questions of the present study were: 1) How, specifically, does a sense of calling influence the career change process? Put another way, how do individuals discern their callings, and what impact does this have on their experience of a career change? 2) What positive and negative experiences do people report as they navigate a career change motivated by a sense of calling? 3) In what ways does a career change motivated by a sense of calling differ from prior career changes that may have occurred for other reasons?

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Religion	Level of education	Former career	New career
Sue	33	F	Atheist	Masters	Engineer/business consultant	Student affairs
Jim	32	M	Atheist	Masters	Food service	Student affairs
Jeanne	33	F	Buddhist	Masters	Teacher	Designer
Tom	46	M	Christian	Pursuing Ph.D.	Software industry/photographer	Student affairs
Alice	44	F	Christian	College	Office management	Flight attendant
Monty	31	M	Christian	Pursuing masters	Marine	Social work/law enforcement
Nick	31	M	Atheist	Masters	Hospitality	Outdoor gear product development
Bill	29	M	Atheist	Pursuing bachelors	Soldier	Diplomat

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants consisted of eight individuals who self-identified as having engaged in a career transition prompted by a sense of calling, and who resided in a Western region of the United States. Six participants self-identified as White, and two participants self-identified as multi-racial (Hispanic/Indian and Asian/White). The average age of the sample was 34.5 years, with a range of 29 to 46. Three participants identified as female and five as male. All participants had attained at least a bachelor's degree, and represented diverse occupational fields, both in their previous and current career paths (see Table 1). Two participants had a full-time position in their new career path, and four participants had a part-time position while pursuing a higher degree in their chosen field. Two participants were full-time students who went back to college to earn a degree in the fields to which they felt called. Additional demographic information about participants is presented in Table 1, with pseudonyms.

2.2. Research team

The research team consisted of three investigators: a 34-year-old Korean female, a 39-year-old White male, and a 20-year-old White female. One is currently a faculty member with expertise in vocational psychology, and one was a doctoral student in counseling psychology. The other member was an undergraduate student in a general psychology program who voluntarily participated as a research assistant, and who expressed an interest in the concept of calling. While conducting a qualitative study, it is recommended that researchers discuss their own assumptions and possible biases on the research topic (Hill et al., 1997; Morrow, 2005). All members were familiar with the notion that work can be viewed as a calling, and two members felt called to their current work. The other member believed that she has discerned her calling and was transitioning into living her calling. All members defined a calling as prosocial in nature, and two describe the sense of being driven into a career by some sort of summons as a distinct element of callings, relative to other similar career constructs such as a sense of purpose, meaning, or passion.

2.3. Recruitment

The criteria for participant selection was developed as follows: First, to minimize memory contamination during the retrospective recall of career change experiences, participants were required to either be currently in the process of changing a career, or to have done so within the past three years. Second, to establish a common criterion for what constitutes a “career change,” participants were required to have had at least two years of work experience before the change, and the change was required to occur between one career field and another, rather than from one job to another within the same career field. Finally, participants were required to have perceived that a sense of calling is or was related to their career change.

A purposive and snowball sampling strategy was used to recruit participants (Patton, 2002). Participants were recruited through emails to professional and personal networks and through an advertising flyer that provided information including study purpose, participant eligibility, researcher's contact information, as well as a \$50 cash reward for participation in the study. The flyers were posted at a large public university located in the Western region of the United States.

Potential participants who were nominated or voluntarily showed an interest in this study were contacted by the first author via email for screening. In an initial contact with candidates, the researcher provided information about the study and conducted a brief screening interview based on the participant selection criteria. Those who met the participant criteria were sent the interview protocol through email to ensure that they were able to answer the interview questions. During the initial screening process, two individuals were excluded from the study because they did not identify their new career as a calling. Finally, eight individuals agreed to participate in this research. This sample size was within the recommended sample size range for IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

2.4. Instrument

A total of 16 interview questions were developed based on feedback collected during pilot interviews with two individuals who met the eligibility criteria. The interview questions were aimed at exploring three principal domains of interest including participants'

life and work history (e.g., “Tell me about your career change experience.” “How has your past life/work experiences influenced the career change?”), their career transition experience (e.g., “What factors prompted you make such a career change?” “Was there a critical event that led you to change your career?”), and their personal experience of perceiving a calling. Example questions related to a sense of calling included the following: “How do you define a calling, in your own words?” “How can you be sure that your current career is your calling?” “What challenges did you confront in navigating this change? And what was helpful to overcome these challenges?” “What motivated you to take these risks in order to pursue your new career?” “What impact has having a calling had on your life?” “How would you describe the difference between a career change driven by a sense of calling, and a career change that happens for other reasons that don't involve a calling?” Such interview questions were intended to serve as stimuli for participant reflection, and follow-up questions were added as appropriate to encourage participants to articulate the personal meanings they have attached to the processes and contextual aspects that help frame their experience.

2.5. Procedure

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted. Participants were interviewed in person by the first author for approximately 60 to 90 min in a seminar room at the university at which the study was conducted. During the interview, they were administered an informed consent document. At the end of the interview, participants were invited to make any additional comments that were not addressed by the interview questions. All interviews were audio recorded (with participants' permission). Each interview was transcribed verbatim by two undergraduate research assistants. To preserve anonymity, all identifying information was removed during the transcribing process, and pseudonyms were used to keep all participants' information confidential.

2.6. Data analysis

Data were analyzed using the IPA method described by [Smith et al. \(2009\)](#). IPA focuses on exploring an individual's ideographic interpretation of a lived experience rather than eliciting an objective record of the experience ([Taylor & Murray, 2012](#)). Specifically, data analyses were conducted using the following steps ([Kowlessar, Fox, & Wittkowski, 2015](#); [Smith et al., 2009](#)): (a) reading the original transcript of each participant's interview to get a general sense of meaning, and making notes; (b) identifying repeated content, similarities, and possible associations; and (c) eliciting sub-ordinate themes that provided novel meaning and concepts. Within the list of themes, a color-coding method was then used to differentiate each theme via different colors. At this point, the original transcripts were revisited, and text that represented each theme was highlighted with the appropriate color. Next, (d) the emergent themes were grouped based on their relative similarity, and similar sub-ordinate themes also were clustered. This was followed by (e) development of super-ordinate themes that encapsulated the essence of particular sub-ordinate themes. For the purpose of maintaining sensitivity to each person's distinct experiences, each case was independently analyzed, without a conscious attempt to incorporate results from previously analyzed cases. As the last step, (f) a cross-analysis was conducted, and the list of emergent themes across cases was developed, resulting in 8 super-ordinate and 28 sub-ordinate themes (see the [Table 2](#)).

2.7. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to ensuring the methodological rigor and credibility of the data analysis in qualitative research ([Morrow, 2005](#)). Multiple strategies were used throughout the data analysis process to maximize trustworthiness.

2.7.1. Triangulation

Triangulation refers to using multiple measurements and sources to establish internal credibility ([Merriam, 2009](#)). Investigator triangulation was used for this study. For the first three transcripts, the first author and third author independently analyzed each transcript and compared the results to examine the validity of the first author's analytic procedures. Once consensus was achieved in a way that strengthened her confidence in the data analytic approach, the first author completed main analyses for the remaining interviews, and the third author audited the appropriateness of coding and emergent themes. IPA does not aim to find one single truth, but rather to elicit a legitimate account that effectively captures the words of the participants ([Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011](#); [Smith et al., 2009](#)). From this perspective, when discrepancies happen in internal and external audits, final decisions are made by reviewing the original interview data together. After the internal audit was completed, an external audit was conducted with randomly selected three cases. The three cases were validated by an external auditor, a postdoctoral researcher in social psychology who was knowledgeable in IPA. The external auditor reviewed the analyses and evaluated the validity of all of the coding results and elicited themes. Auditor comments were incorporated into the results and discrepancies was discussed. Finally, the results of sub- and super- ordinate themes were discussed with the second author. The second author reviewed all elicited themes with the original interview data corresponding to each theme, and the final list of emergent themes was made after consensus was achieved.

2.7.2. Member checking

Member checking occurs when interviewees review their transcripts and provide feedback on emerging themes and analysis results ([Guba & Lincoln, 1994](#); [Morrow, 2005](#)). The first author invited each participant to participate in an in-person follow-up interview to solicit feedback on the accuracy of interpretation and elicited themes. Seven of the eight participants responded to the interview request and confirmed that the coding results and interpretation appropriately reflected their experiences.

Table 2

List of super- and sub-ordinate themes.

Prior to career change
Positive and integrative view toward the former career
Negative working experiences and viewing former career as a paycheck
Pre-transition period
Being proactive and taking actions
Process of discerning a calling
Self-reflection
Critical life event as a turning point
Finding a calling through the job that wasn't a calling
Identifying an innate calling
Finding a calling from deficits in the past
Finding a calling with others' help
Definition of calling
Fulfillment
Serving others
Spiritual or intuitive feelings
A part of self-identity
Challenges of pursuing the calling-infused career
Fears of starting over in a new career
Financial challenges
Ways of dealing with challenges
Self-validation
External supports from others
Impacts of the calling-infused career change
Fulfillment and passion at work
Greater happiness in general
A clear sense of direction and purpose in life
Positive self-concept
Unique aspects of a calling-infused career change
Valuing internal more than external rewards
Feeling blessed to live out a calling
Perceiving a calling as a privilege
There is a right time to pursue a calling
Post-rational aspects of decision-making
Pursuing a higher purpose beyond personal prosperity
It's process, not an event

Note. Super-ordinate themes are left-justified; sub-ordinate themes are indented.

3. Results

The list of super- and sub-ordinate themes is presented in Table 2. In this section, each theme is described and illustrated with quotes from interview narratives.

3.1. Prior to career change

The theme “prior to career change” referred to how interviewees described and perceived their past careers leading up to their transitions. Except for Bill, who perceived his former career as a calling as well as his new career, seven interviewees viewed their former jobs as work they carried out solely for a paycheck, and reported negative work experiences including a lack of fulfillment and enjoyment. For example, Jim explained, “I did not have that drive from the inside to do it. It was just a job to make money.” Jeanne stated, “It was not anything that really challenged me or anything I was really passionate about.” Similarly, Nick stated, “Beyond that (paycheck), there was not much about the job itself that made me want to keep doing it.”

Interestingly, they held positive attitudes toward their past career, and considered their former jobs as a meaningful part of their whole career path. For example, Sue noted how her past careers were interwoven and became a new calling:

I am looking to combine my engineering background with the business skills and my (interest in) student affairs. I have a really strong analytic background, (that) pulls my desire to work with engineering students going back to school for student affairs and I have the business savvy skills that I have learned as a consultant. So now I am working on pulling everything together and I am finally feeling like I am making my own (career) again.

3.2. Process of discerning a calling

The “process of discerning a calling” theme referred to how interviewees discovered, explored, and became convinced of their callings. Generally, interviewees noted that they were able to better understand their callings through in-depth self-exploration. Example quotes to illustrate this include the following from Sue: “It was a lot of reflection and also my pros and cons list. I am taking

everything in my background and pulling (it) together.” Tom put it this way: “The calling part to me was I finally realized what I was good at and what I loved to do and I was returning to what I thought I was kind of designed to do.” Monty’s response was similar: “I went through this transition period where I tried to figure out where my strengths were.” Participants stated that the more they were able to understand about themselves, the clearer their callings were.

Alice approached her calling from a different angle, describing how her burnout experience at her former job gave a chance to reconsider her career path:

I got to the point where I knew that I couldn’t come into work every day anymore. I couldn’t get out of bed anymore. When I said, “That’s it. I shouldn’t work in an office anymore because I’ve done it for so long, and I need something different.” And that’s when the light switch went off and I said, “I’ve always wanted to be a flight attendant. So why not?”

Six interviewees reported that there was a critical turning point that influenced their career change decision, such as geographical relocation (Sue), a new marriage (Bill), an unexpected meeting with an important person (Jim, Jeanne, and Tom), or a life-changing accident (Monty). For instance, Tom stated:

I happened to meet someone in a grocery store, she is a professor, a scholar in higher education, and we got into a conversation, just by chance. So you know over 20 years later I have this conversation with this doctor, and it made me think about why I wanted to work in a college before. The grocery store—just the light went on that point.

Bill expressed:

I got married and realized that I also needed to take care of my wife and if we ever wanted children I would not want them to grow up in a place where their father could go to war. Being married was a critical event in my life. I decided that I need to leave the military to pursue a new path in my life which was eventually to become a diplomat.

Monty, who experienced a traumatic injury, stated that this critical life event has caused significant changes to his life values, worldviews, work values, or purpose of life.

When I woke up in the hospital, I knew something was wrong. I knew that I am supposed to talk like this, but I can’t. I’ve never been brain damaged before so this was not acceptable and I started challenging myself to get back to where I used to be. That’s when the career change sort of idea hit me. I had to look at things outside of that lens of what can I do in the Marines, to what can I do in life. There was a lot of exploration of my interests, strengths, and my challenges. None of that would have happened had I not been injured, I don’t think.

Several participants expressed a strong emotional passion in a certain area that might be described using the words “instinct,” “innate,” or, “inexplicable sense of curiosity.” For example, Jeanne put it, “I would not say that there was a moment of discernment, it was just always there. Similarly, Bill stated, “I had an instinct, especially after I saw the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2011. That was when I really felt that calling to protect my country.”

Interviewees also reported that they were able to gradually ensure that the intense desire was a calling because it has been consistent and even became stronger over time. For example, Nick said:

It has been my experiences in my life in the outdoors. Through middle school, through high school, and into college, my appreciation for the outdoors and my desire to do outdoor activities just grew and grew.

Sue and Tom also illustrated that challenges they faced earlier in their lives were transformed into a pro-socially oriented motivation to promote benefits for those who are struggling with similar challenges. Sue put it this way:

I went to school for my bachelors and masters. I was the only female graduate in Aerospace engineering who did the thesis option. I want to be able to support engineering female students going back to school.

Tom reported the following:

I was a first generation student and my parents did not go to college. When I went to college, I did not know anything about how college worked. So college was really hard for me. As it turns out I could have gotten more financial aid and I would not have had to work quite as much. I want to help students. I felt that calling.

In two other cases, participants developed altruistic motives through others’ help, and it became a calling in the sense of wanting to “pay them back,” or “passing it to others.” For example, Jim and Monty described how the experience of getting support from others influenced their sense of being called to a similar field. As Jim put it:

I went to alcoholics anonymous and was given a second chance. They were willing to spend long days and nights with me on the phone when I just wanted to drink. So that selflessness inspired me to try and provide the same thing for other people. To kind of give back what I have been given in a way from those people who helped me recover and get sober and change my life, this is me paying that back.

Monty’s experience was similar:

It was life or death. I remember when I was in the hospital. Social workers were interacting with me and my family and providing that kind of support and those kinds of resources that were very important for us. I felt this obligation to do the same for the next. I

just sort of have this feeling like “It’s my turn to be on the opposite end, and help.”

3.3. Definition of calling

The “definition of calling” theme referred to how interviewees generally defined a sense of calling using their own words. Four sub-themes emerged: (a) fulfillment, (b) serving others, (c) spiritual and intuitive feelings (e.g., feeling driven to that particular work), and (d) a part of self-identity. All participants generally viewed a calling as something in which they experience enjoyment and fulfillment. While describing the definition of calling, interviewees frequently used words like “fulfillment,” “passion,” and “enjoyment.” For example, Monty stated that “The calling would be where I am fulfilled and where money doesn’t matter and the prestige doesn’t matter, but more of the value that you find in it that can’t be measured really, it’s not physical.”

Six interviewees also defined calling as serving the greater good or helping other people. Example quotes reflecting this theme include Sue’s statement that a calling means “Being able to contribute effectively to a team and benefit somebody.” Jim’s approach was similar: “It is the positive impact that I have on other people and that I feel fulfilled by it (Jim).” This theme was clearly evident among interviewees who were pursuing a helping profession, but Jeanne who pursued her second career in design also reported the form of a contribution to society through work. She stated that, “Calling is just something where you can really make an impact and also move other people, inspire other people.” She also expressed that the pro-social aspects of calling were directly linked to a sense of fulfillment.

Typically, interviewees also indicated that there was a strong, inexplicable force beyond the rational thinking process which led them to pursue their particular career. For example, Alice and Tom referred to “a higher power,” Jeanne and Tom each said, “I am just supposed to be ____,” and Bill suggested that “You hear a voice that tells you.” The following statement from Jeanne further emphasizes this theme:

It is sort of an inexplicable need to pursue this really curious feeling, and just the desire to see how it turns out. For me, it has always been kind of a feeling and something where it was like just as you know a bird is born with wings because it is meant to fly. I was born with this thing because I am meant to pursue it.

Two participants explained a sense of calling by drawing connections with their religious beliefs. For example, Tom explained it this way:

God calls you to do something. Not for anything, but for something specific. I have certain strengths and weaknesses that make me suitable for certain things and not so much for others. I was made a certain way and I have evolved over time into a certain kind of person and that was all on purpose so that I could do the things I was doing 20 years ago and the thing I am doing today. So I worked in software, and I should have worked software; that was what I was meant to do. But now I am doing helping students. This is where I believe I am supposed to be, and that for me has a religious connection.

Finally, interviewees addressed that the calling encompassed all aspects of who they are and what they have. For example, Jeanne said, “All of my layers and all of my characteristics have been sort of perfectly calibrated to pursue this calling. This was something just in me.” Sue reported that “A calling is being able to intersect personal and professional life in a seamless way where one is not completely overtaking the other.” In a similar vein, Jim expressed:

It has to do with integrity. So those things put together, the chance I needed to find in my life and these people willing to work with me and getting the job at (my local community college) came together to show me that I could do a little bit more than making foods.

3.4. Impacts of the calling-infused career change

Participants described their experiences of living out their callings, and how doing so impacts their careers and lives as a whole. All participants expressed higher level of satisfaction with their careers, and stated that they have never regretted changing their careers to pursue their callings. Along with greater fulfillment, participants indicated that they became motivated to learn something more in the calling-infused area, and the positive impact lasted even when they were exhausted or stressed out at work. For example, Jim reported that “I may feel super tired, but there is always that feeling that I am doing something right.” Tom said:

Before, I did not like Sunday nights; it meant the weekend was ending. I do not feel that way (now). Sunday nights are fine. I am perfectly happy getting up in the morning and going to work.

All participants also reported increased well-being and happiness in general and conveyed that they felt they were “on the right track.” Participants noted that having a clear life direction makes them feel more peaceful, balanced, stable, and self-assured about their future. Jim and Jeanne especially emphasized having greater self-worth because they took a risk to do what they really wanted to do. Jeanne put it this way:

Having taken this step and deciding that I am just going to do, it has almost made me respect myself more. Respect and kind of taking a sense of ownership of my decisions, and feeling like I am more of who I want to be and like I know more about who that is.

3.5. *The dark side of changing a career to pursue a calling*

Participants reported challenges associated with calling-infused career transitions such as a psychological burden about starting over in a new career and financial burdens after giving up a financially rewarding former career. “It is hard starting from the bottom and having to work all the way back up,” recalled Sue. “I didn’t even lay on the bottom rung. I fell to the floor.” Alice described how “The biggest challenge is the pay difference, from what I used to do to what I do now. It’s been difficult to pay our bills and get them paid on time.” Nick expressed similar challenges:

My former job pays a lot of money and there is a lot of prestige there, and it’s a big career move. It certainly made an impact to go from having some savings and having enough money to basically go do whatever I want to having to watch every penny and being on student loans and having spent all of my savings. It can be mentally challenging sometimes to look back at what I was doing.

As another challenge, participants indicated that a persistent lack of social support about their decision to change careers can create substantial stress. For example, Tom said:

I was a vice president and now I was the lowest. All the different people I work with on a pretty regular basis only three are older than I am. But there are a lot of people that have higher positions than me that are much younger. Many people don’t understand why I would give that up after 18 years of work, building that up into something very successful. So that was a big thing, having so many people telling me externally I was making the wrong decision.

Jim stated that he sacrificed other life domains by focusing on his calling-infused career: “Something has to be sacrificed for it. I have had to dedicate a lot of my time to my studies.”

However, as a way of coming to grips with these kinds of challenges, participants reported that internal rewards from the calling-infused career outweighed the costs. Nick put it:

I remind myself why I’m doing what I’m doing and that I wasn’t happy with my job. My sense of calling or sense of what I’m doing is strong enough that once I analyze everything in my head, I can convince myself that ‘Yes, I am doing the right thing.’

Sue described a similar process:

It meant reassessing my life and being okay with taking an \$80,000 pay cut—knowing that I’m 10 times better and happier with that decision. So I keep going back to I’m happier and that kind of trumps the money.

Participants also stated that getting support from their closest relationships was helpful to overcome challenges during the career transition. For example, Alice described how helpful her husband has been in navigating the challenging financial situation her career change has created:

I can’t see doing this without the support of my husband. Every month, it’s been reworking the budget. Trying to find out where we can cut, and figure out how to fit things in there that are. But my husband is in charge of our finances, so he just sits down and figures it out.

Participants also noted that they were able to validate their decision through knowing that they shared the same values with their colleagues. Jim described it this way:

My supervisors, peers, mentors, and advisors. Getting positive reinforcement back from them. I feel much more drawn to higher education because I feel much more connected with the people that are here and we are moving toward common goals.

Tom’s experience was similar:

Not only do I feel like I am doing something that I’m meant to do, but I am in an organization with more people who think like I do. So that is also an important part of why I believe this was my calling and I’m in the right place.

3.6. *Unique aspects of a career change motivated by a sense of calling*

The unique aspects of a calling-infused career change referred to the participants’ descriptions of how they personally differentiate the calling-infused career change from other career changes that occur for different reasons.

All participants indicated that making money is not the driving force for changing their career, and they valued personally important internal rewards over external rewards such as higher positions, income, or prestige. Tom stated:

So from a money standpoint, I made a very stupid decision, and I definitely understand my older friends who saw me in that previous career. They either wonder why I would do such a thing, they do not think they could do it, or they just think I am crazy. That I need to do it because I was made to do it, and because I can make a bigger difference overall in this new career rather than the one I had before.

Participants felt blessed and fortunate to be able to pursue a calling. Several participants perceived being able to live out a calling as a privilege from the perspective that all psychological and external conditions were met to pursue the calling. They described that although they recognized their calling early, they were not able to pursue the calling until situational, psychological, and financial conditions were met. Specifically, Alice noted:

I do not think I would have pursued it 23 years later after I got married and started working in an office, because I was married young, and was raising my family. I kept my calling stuffed way down deep inside and I did not let it resurface until the right time.

Several participants also indicated that a career change motivated by a sense of calling is more of an emotionally-driven career decision than a result of a logical reasoning process. For example, Monty said: “There is that certain feeling that’s hard to describe but when you find it, I think it’s very powerful,” and Alice described it as “A recurring feeling that you should go in a particular direction.” For Tom, “Changing for a calling is about understanding and answering that call from inside of yourself about what you are supposed to do.” Jeanne also stated:

We live in this sort of logical world of bills. The calling is something that you are called to do, just like my decision. It might not make sense to everybody. It’s instinctual, more sort of on the emotional plane, I would say, rather than the logical thinking plane. But ultimately I feel like emotions are what actually drive people in their decision making.

Finally, participants typically noted that discerning and living the calling is an ongoing process, rather than a single choice-making event. They viewed a calling as an overarching theme that provides a direction rather than a certain specific job title or occupation. Nick stated:

If I go in and designing does not work for me, there are still other opportunities in the outdoor industry that I can pursue, and maybe my experience in the design has introduced me to people, and I will shift here and there. It is not point A all the way to point B, there is A and then there is B and C and D. You can not necessarily predict everything fifty years out. The calling was sort of developing, and I realized that this is what I want to do for a career.

4. Discussion

The primary aim of the current study was to conduct an in-depth exploration into how a sense of calling relates to the career change process. In this section, we place the major themes that emerged in the study within the broader context of the research literature, and also describe a path forward in ongoing research on callings and career transitions.

4.1. *The process of discerning a calling*

Participants indicated that they have a clearer sense of calling in conjunction with a better understanding of themselves, their interests, values, and skills. This finding supported a general person-environment fit model of the sort dating to Parsons (1909)—i.e., that understanding one’s self, learning about available opportunities, and using “true reasoning” on how these relate (e.g., finding a career that optimally matches one’s strengths) are essential in making a good career decision (Dik & Duffy, 2012). Having said this, it also seems evident that evaluating fit often goes beyond dispassionate analyses of one’s individual differences characteristics toward a deeper, more emotion-laden process. This suggests that subsequent research might be well-served to consider participants’ decision-making style (e.g., Scott & Bruce, 1995), in particular whether those with a calling are more likely to adopt a “gut feel” approach, or one that appeals to a deeper sense of purpose and values.

Participants also reported that challenging experiences in life became an opportunity to discern their calling. Most participants stated that negative work experiences helped them identify what they were dissatisfied with, what they really want to do, or what they are looking for through work. Given this, the development of a calling seems to be linked with an individual’s capacity to make meaning out of one’s experiences. Savickas (2005) suggested that career decisions are based on meaning and mattering. In other words, individuals choose a vocation that holds personally significant meaning while also mattering to society. A sense of meaning and mattering of a career choice can be facilitated by in-depth self-reflection and rich narratives. Discerning a calling is often described as a fairly time-consuming process, one based on reflective practice (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean, 2010; Gregory, 2013). In the present study, discerning one’s calling was often described as the product of an individual’s efforts to deal with life challenges in a meaningful way to promote self-growth. These results suggest that, for those who are currently dissatisfied with their work, a process of interweaving past careers, current challenges, and future hope may offer a pathway for discerning meaningful themes that connote a sense of calling. This points to the importance of career counseling strategies that facilitate in-depth self-reflection, including assisting individuals to elicit meaning from both pleasant and unpleasant work experiences.

4.2. *The definition of calling*

All participants described the fundamental characteristics of calling as feelings of fulfillment, passion, excitement, and working for its own sake. These results mirror the modern, secularized view of calling as an internal drive toward a certain work that fits well with oneself and facilitates internal happiness (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Dik & Duffy, 2012). As part of a secular view of calling, Novak (1996) stated that non-religious individuals are able to have just as strong a sense of calling as religious individuals without using the word “God.” Consistent with this perspective, an inward force pursuing a sense of fulfillment was the most frequently mentioned definition in this study.

Second, participants described their calling as promoting benefits to society or contributions to the greater good through their work. Notably, a participant who did not directly engage in a helping career also reported altruistic motives. This finding was

consistent with research suggesting that pro-social motivation is a prominent component of a sense of calling, regardless of one's particular job title, provided the work is morally legitimate (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Duffy, Foley et al., 2012; Hernandez et al., 2011; Wrzesniewski, 2003).

In support of Dik and Duffy's (2009) multidimensional definition of calling, half of the participants stated that an inexplicable force led them into a certain line of work. Experiencing an inexplicable force was not limited to religious participants (e.g., a calling from God), and its source varied depending on each participant's life experiences and beliefs such as "the needs of society," "a heritage," or "I was born with this thing." However, there were also a few participants who denied the existence of an external force. As suggested by Dik and Duffy (2012), a transcendent summons may not be a common component that is experienced by most individuals who discern a sense of calling. This result may imply that a sense of calling is identified differently depending on each individual's life experiences, family, cultural backgrounds, and belief systems related to work. Therefore, when implementing counseling strategies intended to facilitate a sense of calling, practitioners are advised to sensitively explore each individual's own definition of a calling, cultural contexts, and unique life experiences. Future research should examine what types of individuals experience an external force beyond the self, and whether a sense of calling functions differently depending on one's experience (or lack thereof) of a transcendent summons.

4.3. Impacts of a career change motivated by a sense of calling

Regarding work-related domains, most participants reported a strong sense of passion, vigor, and feelings of fulfillment within their new career. Although some participants had to sacrifice some financial benefits as a result of pursuing their calling, they reported high levels of satisfaction with their career change decision. Furthermore, most participants indicated that increased well-being at work was connected to greater sense of well-being in life as a whole. These results were consistent with previous findings that approaching a job as a calling is associated with greater life satisfaction and job satisfaction (e.g., Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Duffy & Dik, 2013; Hirschi, 2012). These results also converge with evidence that a sense of meaning in life helps explain why a sense of calling is significantly associated with positive career-related and general well-being variables (e.g., Steger et al., 2010).

Participants also reported increased self-worth stemming from their choice to pursue their callings instead of more externally rewarding jobs that did not align with their callings. They also revealed that a calling provided an overall future direction aligning with their purpose in life, and helped them feel at ease during the transition process. It appears that by choosing their calling, participants felt that they chose a career that they really wanted to do, rather than one that satisfied other peoples' (or society's) values. The perception that they are getting close to their dream job appeared to link to greater self-respect.

Finally, participants noted that doing good for others made them feel good about themselves. These results are consistent with evidence that altruistic motivation is positively associated with well-being (Post, 2005), career commitment (Nesje, 2015), and self-esteem (Crocker & Park, 2004). Individuals with a calling tend to approach work with a prosocial orientation, and altruistic attitudes appear to lead to greater self-respect by promoting positive perceptions that they are doing something good for others or for their community.

4.4. The dark side of a calling-infused career change

Also in support of previous research, participants described costs of pursuing a calling (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Duffy & Dik, 2013; Duffy, Foley et al., 2012; French & Domene, 2010). Participants reported challenges associated with calling-infused career transitions such as a psychological burden about starting over in a new career, sacrifices in other life domains, financial burdens after giving up financially rewarding former careers, and the lack of social support directed toward their career decisions. In particular, participants who had to take a significant pay cut to pursue their calling reported that there were "mental battles" to decide whether the career change was worth enough to take the risks.

As a way of dealing with the challenges, participants reported a strong focus on internal rewards from the calling-infused careers, which they found outweighed the costs. Participants in this study tended to highly value meaningfulness, intrinsic satisfaction, and fulfillment after feeling dissatisfied with their former working experiences.

Interestingly, the lack of social support was a challenge, but its presence was a very helpful factor during the career change process among participants who experienced it. In the relational-culture theory, Schultheiss (2007) described the influence of family and work experiences within relational contexts as central factors in the career development process. From a neurobiological perspective, relational experiences have long been known to support the brain's process of "controlling the creation of meaning, the regulation of body states, and the modulation of emotion, the organization of memory, and the capacity for interpersonal communication" (Siegel, 1999, p.21). Similarly, participants in this study stated that lack of social support caused self-doubt about their career change decision, and one of coping strategies toward the self-doubt was family supports and emotional connections with colleagues in their new career. These results support that there are reciprocal interactions between relationships and career development (Blustein, 2001, 2011; Hall et al., 1996; Schultheiss, 2007). In the calling literature, social support is consistently observed as an important factor in searching for, maintaining, and pursuing an unanswered calling (e.g., Duffy, Bott et al., 2012; Duffy, Foley et al., 2012; French & Domene, 2010). For these reasons, and in light of meta-analytic evidence that support-building is a critical ingredient in effective career development interventions (e.g., Brown, 2017), counseling strategies intended to facilitate a sense of calling or assist clients in navigating a career transition should work to leverage their networks of support, and/or build additional support. Doing so while also helping clients proactively explore potential career barriers may assist them developing effective strategies for coping with the challenges they may confront.

4.5. Unique aspects of a career change motivated by a sense of calling

Consistent with most conceptualizations of calling in the literature (e.g., Dik & Duffy, 2009; Elangovan et al., 2010; Hagmaier & Abele, 2012), participants valued higher-order variables such as a sense of fulfillment, internal pleasure, work meaning, and making a valuable contribution to society. For all participants, their calling-infused career path seemed to match well with their value system for preferring intrinsic to extrinsic rewards. Simply put, the findings suggest that participants found it important to be aware of their most essential work values, and to carefully assess how much a new career path can satisfy those values.

Some participants reported that “There is no good time to pursue a calling,” implying that waiting to make a change until it is convenient to do so may result in never making the change. Specifically, participants indicated that they had urgent practical needs and the former career fulfilled those needs better than other options did. However, at a certain point, the desire to pursue a more intrinsically meaningful path simply outweighed whatever extrinsic benefits that the former career offered. Participants also described that being able to live out a calling is related to privilege in that having resources necessary for the career change (e.g., education, social networks, financial stability, family support, and self-confidence) increases the odds of a successful transition. Blustein (2006), channeling Maslow, suggested that individuals fulfill three core needs through work: (a) survival and power, (b) social connection, (c) self-determination. Findings of this study also seemed to mirror the need hierarchy theory, suggesting that the basic functions of work need to be met prior to individuals being able to actualize themselves and pursuing meaningfulness in their work. Given this, practitioners are advised to assist clients in anticipating potential barriers and proactively identifying ways of acquiring resources necessary to live out a calling.

Most participants also showed that they made a gradual career change by starting a part-time job, volunteering, or going back to school. Proactive attitudes and behavioral attempts were commonly observed in the process during which participants pursued their calling. According to Duffy, Allan, Bott, and Dik (2014), taking an active approach is required to actualize a calling even among individuals who feel a calling through an external summons or sense of destiny. Dik and Duffy (2012) suggested that a sense of calling can be actualized in various ways depending on a person's individual circumstances. For those who are not currently able to follow their calling, practitioners may explore ways of helping clients shape their work environment until it aligns more closely with the client's interests and values. For others, encouraging the client to consider adopting ways to live out the calling outside of work may be more appropriate.

Participants in this study described a process in which pursuing a calling is an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. This converges with conceptual treatments of calling (e.g., Dik & Duffy, 2012) and also other empirical evidence. For example, the seeking and perceiving subscales of the Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (Dik, Eldridge, Steger, & Duffy, 2012) are strongly positively correlated, suggesting that part of perceiving a calling means that one is continually seeking to deepen or expand that calling. In a longitudinal sample, Dobrow (2007) found that a sense of calling among young musicians was developed with progressive behavioral involvement and social encouragement in the calling infused career. Participants in the present study also addressed the importance of being open to new opportunities, taking a proactive stance, and engaging in continuous self-reflection as ways to facilitate the ongoing process. Examining the process holistically, participants viewed callings as an overarching theme that provides a general direction and transcends any particular job title.

A few participants in the present study mentioned age as an important factor in the process of pursuing a calling. In support of Weiss, Skelley, Haughey, and Hall's (2004) suggestion that a calling is a process of self-realization, a sense of calling may develop in relation to one's general maturity level, evolving by integrating meaningful life and work experiences. From this perspective, a calling might be a particularly salient factor for middle-aged and older adult groups who may tend to have greater self-awareness rooted in their more extensive life and work experiences. These age cohorts are currently understudied within the calling literature. Future research may attempt to further investigate the concept of calling for participants in mid- or later-life, and in relation to retirement or bridge employment; only two studies have done so thus far (Bengtsson & Flisback, 2017; Duffy, Torrey, England, & Tebbe, 2017), both pointing to the value participants place on extending their callings into retirement.

Finally, some participants indicated that their career transition was not guided by a rational decision-making process pointing to the best “on-paper” solution, but instead was a result of following inexplicably intensive intuition or strong feelings. They considered their emotion-laden drive for fulfillment as evidence showing them what they are made to do. However, this intensely emotional component of the process sometimes caused difficulties in obtaining social support, because their career change decision did not logically make sense to other people. In some ways, this non-logical component seemed to resonate with the transcendent summons dimension of Dik and Duffy's (2009) conceptualization of calling, or Bunderson and Thompson's (2009) notion of a calling invoking a sense of destiny. There is disagreement surrounding these concepts, because the idea of an external source is sometimes viewed as ambiguous, non-universal, and as a factor that prompts a passive role in career decision making (Dik & Duffy, 2012). The non-logical component in career decision-making is not well-captured by (or advisable within) prevailing career theories emphasizing rational processes in career decision making. However, Krieshok, Black, and McKay (2009) offered a trilateral model in which rational and intuitive processes mutually intertwine in making a satisfactory career decision. Gelatt (1989) also emphasized an acceptance of uncertainty, tolerance for ambiguity, and an embracing of intuition in career decision making. Indeed, some participants of the present study also described their career change decision as involving a sense of trust in an outward or inward voice in spite of uncertainty. These intuitive processes find support among other qualitative calling studies such as being driven by inexplicable forces, transcendently being called, or inexplicable intuitions (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Duffy, Foley et al., 2012; French & Domene, 2010). Based on the consistent findings, calling-infused careers seemed to have intuitive components some extent, at least for the participants in this study.

4.6. Limitations and future research directions

This study represents the first attempt to examine how a sense of calling relates to career change experiences. The results offer a better understanding of how a calling is discerned, developed, maintained, and actualized as an actual career behavior among adults who have recently encountered (or are currently in the process of) a career change. However, the results need to be interpreted with caution in light of a few key limitations.

First, this was a qualitative study that focused on eight individuals who changed their careers because of a sense of calling. While the findings provide a thick description with rich data offering an insightful window into the subjective experiences of these participants, the results do not generalize to the population in a traditional, post-positivist sense. There is a need for follow-up quantitative research that gathers more information about how calling relates to career change decision or vocational behaviors. For example, regarding the source of a calling, some participants addressed non-logical components such as intuition or an inexplicable force, while others emphasized the rational thinking process that reassesses their interests, skills, and abilities. Therefore, future research may explore whether significant differences exist in identifying the source of calling based on an individual's career decision-making style.

Second, although efforts were made to ensure diversity in participants' recruitment, most had completed their Bachelor's degree and identified as White living in a Western region in the United States. Recently, a few studies have suggested that living a calling may be linked to vocational privileges such as financial freedom, educational attainment, and socioeconomic status (Duffy & Autin, 2013; Duffy et al., 2013). Regrettably, this study did not deeply examine the impact of participants' socio-economic levels, or the extent to which their socio-economic status facilitates or hinders their calling-infused career change. Future research would be wise to examine the role of socio-economic status in pursuing a calling, and include more diverse individuals with various socio-economic backgrounds. Specifically, future research might benefit from examining how a sense of calling is actualized among less privileged groups, and from identifying factors that may be leveraged to support their career development in beneficial ways. The present study also did not assess participants' family of origin or current family make-up, factors known to influence career development in important ways (e.g., Whiston & Keller, 2004). Subsequent research should make a point of attending to these variables, as doing so would establish a richer context for interpreting participant responses.

Third, although the questions in the interview protocol were revised multiple times to incorporate feedback from pilot interviews with participants who met the study criteria, some may have reflected a subtle positivist bias in their phrasing. For example, "How has your past life/work experiences influenced the career change?" may imply an assumption that reasons for behavior can be discovered, and that past experiences do influence one's career change. Although we found that such questions nevertheless appeared to serve as effective stimuli for prompting participant reflection and expression of personal meanings related to the phenomena of interest, subsequent qualitative research should work to avoid such phrasing.

Finally, most participants had changed their career relatively recently (i.e., within the last three years), and were at the beginning stage of their new career. Therefore, the high levels of satisfaction might partially come from the excitement of starting a new career and/or rationalizing the decision to leave a previous career. Moreover, as suggested earlier, a calling is probably best conceptualized not a one-time event, but an on-going process. Therefore, longitudinal research is needed to fully understand how a calling is actualized across time; a preliminary step may also be to investigate individuals who are further along in the career change process, or who have already transitioned into their new career.

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