

LIFE CALLING & VOCATION: AN EXPLORATORY QUALITATIVE
ANALYTICAL EXAMINATION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

This study is a qualitative exploration of the meaning of life calling among university students. Life calling is defined as peoples' expression of the essence of their sense of self through the work they engage in. Although some research has delineated the nature of life calling in adults looking back on their lives, no previous study has explored the experiences of those who are embarking on living out their life calling, during young adulthood. The sample consisted of seven female, Christian university students, aged 18 - 25, who were purposively selected for having a strong sense of life calling. These participants were interviewed about their sense of life calling through semi-structured interviews. Interview transcripts were then analyzed using Richards' (2005) qualitative analytic coding scheme. External auditing and member-checking were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the process. The major emergent themes were categorized into four broad areas: (a) underlying concepts of life calling, (b) emergence of life calling, (c) shared attributes of those being called, and (d) nature of life calling. Examples of specific themes within these areas included: participants having an ultimate calling, the supportive role of others, being proactive and tenacious, and having an altruistic focus to their callings, respectively. Overall, the findings suggest that life calling is a distinct phenomenon with common attributes that together culminate one's interests, personality, abilities, worldview, and search for fulfillment. Given the results, individuals, parents, and educators are urged to expose young people to a life calling perspective through dialogue, personal experience, and modelling.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Vocation, when defined as calling, is traditionally understood as being applied to clergy or other religious groups (Dawis, 1996). Historically, vocation has been represented as experiencing a vision, a visitation of a divine spirit, and/or hearing God's voice; followed by an initiation into public ministry (Eliade, 1987). However, recent scholarship on vocation as calling has defined it more broadly, referring to individuals' choices about how to express the essence of oneself in life and through one's work; that is, work that one is naturally inclined to do and in which one finds personal expression of the self (Fox, 1995). For some, life calling describes the intersection of the deeply personal with that which is socially purposeful, meaningful, or necessary (D. Hansen, 1995; Rehm, 1990). It is a "place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet" (Buechner, 1993). This perspective suggests a deep interconnection between the meaningfulness of our lives and the meaningfulness of the work we do (Whyte, 2001).

Due to the interchanging usage of the terms calling and vocation in the literature, background will be provided on both perspectives. However, in this study, the terms *life calling*, *calling*, and *vocation*, will be used broadly, to address the concept of expressing the essence of oneself in the work one does. A specific definition is not being provided because of the exploratory nature of the proposed study, which is designed to reveal the definitions, understandings, and experiences of the concepts at hand.

P. Palmer (2000) submitted that vocation, at its deepest level, "is something I can't not do, for reasons I'm unable to explain to anyone else and don't fully understand myself but that are nonetheless compelling" (p. 25). He proposed that being guided by vocation involves learning to listen to the deep but powerful messages that life sends individuals

through the ways in which calling manifests itself in their lives. That is, it represents an active stance toward the meaning of one's life and outer work, a form of ongoing learning and inner work (Kovan & Dirks, 2003).

Vocation defined in this way, and the nuances attached to it, have only begun to be explored. Researchers examining vocation in this broader sense know little about how passion, vocation, and commitment are sustained within the lives of individuals who view their work from the perspective of life calling. What little is known suggests that an openness to change is at the heart of sustained commitment, along with personal evolution, integration, and reflection. Being guided by life calling and sustaining commitment and passion appear to be linked to the inner work of the self (Kovan & Dirks, 2003).

Studies on work for the common good underscore the importance of this sense of vocation or calling (Colby & Damon, 1992; Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996; D. Hansen, 1995; Lashley, Neal, Slunt, Berman, & Hultgren, 1994), and suggest the need to understand more clearly the relationship between who one is as a person, and the commitments one makes to the world. Daloz et al. argued that social commitment and vocation are closely intertwined, implying that life calling benefits both the individual who experiences it, and those who are impacted by the life of that individual.

The idea of individuation encompasses one's vocational identity, as the clearer one's sense of interests, goals, and values are established as they pertain to career planning (Lopez, 1989), the further one is in the process of individuation and in the formation of one's vocational identity. It is proposed that discovering one's life calling links one's true expression of their sense of self and the world of work. Given these diverse definitions of life calling in the literature, it is clearly premature to impose a single definition for the purposes

of this study. Moreover, it should also be evident that further research needs to be conducted to reach a complete understanding of the nature of life calling.

The terms and vocabulary that surround life calling in the literature include: meaning, individuation, purpose, necessary, focused on the common good, and life tasks that cannot be left undone. All of these terms suggest that life calling is an overwhelmingly personal experience. Thus, life calling is perhaps best conceptualized from a constructivist perspective that is concerned with uncovering the personal meanings and experiences of individuals who report experiencing a sense of calling. The nature of life calling has only begun to be examined at the macro level, and primarily for individuals who have been in the world of work for multiple years (Elliott, 1992; Gareau, 1984; Green, 2003). A necessary next step is to examine the meaning of life calling more specifically, as it is manifested in different populations, ages, ethnicities, and other demographic groupings. Such explorations are expected to reveal whether life calling manifests itself in different ways for individuals with diverse backgrounds and in different stages of their lives.

In the context of the multiple definitions of life calling that exist, and the scarcity of psychological research about it, the purpose of this study is to expand the present knowledge about life calling, as it was experienced and lived out in a group of university students who were defined as having a strong sense of their own life calling. The specific research questions for this qualitative study are: (a) How does life calling manifest itself among university students who report having a strong sense of life calling? (b) What is the experience and meaning of life calling as it is manifested in those students' lives?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter the history of the concept of life calling will be discussed, beginning with the universal history of calling, calling in Asian traditions, the historical Christian views of calling, modern secular views of calling, and finally psychological views of calling. Exploring these different perspectives on the concept of life calling will reveal that there is yet to be a definitive and commonly agreed upon understanding of its nuances, traits and attributes.

Universal History of the Concept of Being Called

The experience of calling exists across many different cultures (Green, 2003). Eliade (1958,1987) traced the experiences in diverse cultures and identified religiously gifted individuals who claim a divine call to specific vocations in all major faith traditions.

In early tribal religions, the call, constellated by superhuman beings, impels a member of a tribe to become a medicine man, medicine woman, or shaman. This experience of calling has several stages that are identifiable across different early faith traditions: (a) a person passes through some initiatory crises, such as an illness or accident; (b) has a vision of a transcendental nature; (c) experiences states of ecstasy; (d) accepts the responsibility to be a medicine man or shaman; (e) embraces “the quest” of the journey required; and (f) seeks religious powers for the greater good of the tribe or group (Eliade, 1958). He or she is thus consecrated for his or her vocation. In his later work, Eliade (1987) describes four traditional elements of how a life calling manifests: a vision, a visitation by a divine spirit, hearing a voice from the gods, and a subsequent initiation into public ministry. He holds that the experience of being called in this context is one of rebirth, including a sense of dying, meeting superhuman beings, being given a new nature, and returning to life.

According to Eliade (1987), callings most often come to persons on the outside or fringe of established institutions. Calls are commonly heard in times of social or personal crisis and provide remedies for the distress or disorder. At other times, individuals who may not be in personal crisis at the time of the call may become acutely agitated following the intensity of the experience of the call itself. For example, Muhammad, following a nocturnal vision of Allah, believed himself to be mad. Eliade notes that the calling may be manifested in a variety of ways, including voices, visions, dreams, exceptional accidents, severe illness, absentmindedness, insanity, or epileptic seizures. At times, a calling occurs concurrently with unusual cosmic or terrestrial phenomena (solar eclipses, earthquakes, or lightening), and following these experiences the called person is provided with a special knowledge or zeal that is often lifelong. Shamans of various Asian and North American tribes have experienced extraordinary experiences that carry messages from the divine source through the variety of media described (Eliade). Two elements seem to appear along with the calling: (a) the promise and assurance of protection and assistance in carrying out the call, and (b) a total commitment of the person to the calling that they have received (Lewis, 1989).

Calling in Asian Religions

Although the notion of being called is perhaps most well known within the Christian faith tradition, it is by no means exclusive to that religion. Sinetar describes a similar concept that is found in Buddhism: *right livelihood*, which “embodies self-expression, commitment, mindfulness, and conscious choice” (1987, pp. 9-10). This concept defines calling as work consciously chosen, done with full awareness and care, and leading to enlightenment. Bogart (1993) states that, at the societal level, vocation refers to one’s sense of a socially mandated role, function, or profession: there are many different tasks and work that must be fulfilled to

ensure that a society runs smoothly, and each of these tasks must be accomplished by the members of that society. At the individual level, a person's sense of vocation refers to his or her sense of being called to a particular project, task, or activity. At the transpersonal level, vocation refers to being called by beings or forces or the way of things beyond the individual's will or identity; or, in its specifically Buddhist sense, being called to act in service of others or the world, in ways that are called forth by the *dharma* (or truth) of egolessness and the interdependence of all beings. Zen Buddhist beliefs recognize the uniqueness of each person and the importance of "becoming" (Kroth, 1997). Zen master Suzuki said, "Each one of us must make his own true way, and when we do, that way will express the universal way" (1973, p. 111).

The concept of *dharma* is also found in the Hindu tradition, where it is described as "the assignment of each man of a place within the world order which he must fulfill in order to have a higher chance in another life" (Erikson, 1969, p. 79). The term generally refers to moral law and spiritual order, and to the moral conduct of the individual, comparable to the western view of one's conscience (Bogart, 1993). Gandhi himself often acted upon his inner voice which would unexpectedly speak to him and then insist on his commitment (Erikson).

These spiritual concepts and experiences that surround the idea of calling can be interpreted in many ways: as a sense of who a person is or where he or she is going, as a changeless personal constitution, an inner voice, or as work consciously chosen (Kroth, 1997). Although the Buddhist and Hindu faiths may not use the word calling, the possibility of having a sense of life calling is clearly found within these religions.

Christian Views of Calling

As stated, the term calling has strong Judeo-Christian roots. It occurs in multiple

forms over 700 times in both the Old and New Testaments. It derives from the Hebrew root *gr'* and the Greek word *klesis*, meaning calling (The Illustrated Bible, 1980). In the Old Testament, calling referred mainly to the special relationship between God and his people. During that period, callings were directed primarily to individuals who were tasked with gathering a people dedicated to God, and to preserving that relationship with him. For example, the Old Testament prophets Isaiah, Ezekial, Jeremiah, Jonah, and Samuel all received divine callings from God through a variety of experiences: seeing visions, hearing voices, or being filled with a divine spirit, and were directed to carry out God's will amongst the people of Israel.

In the New Testament, the concept of calling expanded, and individuals were called to new ways of life (Elliott, 1992). The goals of calling were specified as salvation, holiness and faith (2 Thessalonians. 2:13f.). Other callings included the goals of fellowship (1 Corinthians 1:9), service (Galatians 1), and eternal life (Hebrews 9:15). Green (2003) recalls that the dominant New Testament theme was God's call to convert others to a new system of values through the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah and to preach the gospel, and that the story of Saul's vision that characterized his conversion to Christianity and preaching the "good news" is a predominant example of a New Testament call.

In later Christian church history, the concept of calling was broadened to include the idea of sanctification (the process of becoming holy), service (providing labour for others in need), and engaging in other specific forms of Christian ministry (Elliott, 1992).

Since the days of the early church, a controversy has existed within Christendom over the nature of the Christian calling. Augustine argued that the contemplative life of the community was of a higher order than the active life of the worker. His influence was evident

in the medieval world's perception that the highest Christian calling was a monastic or priestly one (Bernbaum & Steer, 1986). The medieval ideal of vocation also involved a life dedicated to contemplative prayer and was a reflection of the wider sensibility of the times, where contemplation was held to be of greater worth than the world of productive work and manual labour (Applebaum, 1992; Arendt, 1958).

Vocation is also a term with deep religious roots and associations in its origins. One of the earliest usages of vocation is connected to the Christian monastic tradition established in the Middle Ages (Applebaum, 1992; Beder, 2000; Goldman, 1988; Hardy, 1990; Haynes, 1997). Derived from the Latin term *vocatio*, it was a term used to describe a call away from the world of productive activity, in order to dedicate one's life to prayer and contemplation. "A vocation or calling originally referred to the work of monks, nuns and priests who served God by removing themselves from daily life and serving the church. In this way they could achieve salvation and attain God's grace" (Beder, p. 14).

Throughout the Middle Ages, calling remained within the contexts of sanctification, service, and Christian ministry. However, with the Renaissance a pivotal turn was made and callings began to be experienced as a source of self-realization. The Renaissance fostered a belief in God as a craftsman who created the universe. With this belief and the conviction that humans were created in his image, a literal interpretation of God and work emerged. This development was most obvious in the highly revered and religiously valued areas of the arts and craftsmanship (Green, 2003).

Beliefs surrounding calling also changed as a result of Martin Luther's influence. In his thesis on justification through faith, Luther claimed that no particular work was more holy than any other. Thus, Christians were encouraged to view their occupation at the time of

their religious conversion as their unique religious and vocational call (Wingren, 1957). This shift in vocational thought, while allowing Christians to view their occupation as a calling, also justified the existing social order and could be interpreted as an attempt to maintain social stability. In this way, calling to a particular work or role in society came to be understood in much the same way that it is understood in the Buddhist and Hindu faith traditions.

The next shift was a result of John Calvin's teachings, which held that one's work was predestined by God. Thus, during the Reformation, work became a direct response to God's call and demanded respect (Middleton, 1986; Boggs, 1962). Although work as a response to God's directive continued as a dominant religious belief into the 18th and 19th centuries, with the industrialization of Western Europe and the general questioning of religion that accompanied the Enlightenment, the concept of being called by God to a religious occupation began to weaken. The notion of being called became increasingly secularized (Green, 2003). According to Boggs it came to stand for "little more than worldly activities pursued for the sake of worldly rewards" (p. 61). This interpretation contradicted Luther's and Calvin's notions of calling, who both claimed it to be of divine appointment.

Materialist constructions of calling were consistent with the milieu of work during the 19th century. With the rise of industrialization and capitalism in Europe, work and financial gain became acceptable as a religious value. During this period, it was only the Puritans who elevated hard work to a religious virtue, and viewed callings as vocations ordained by God and imposed on persons for the common good (Michaelsen, 1953). At this time in history, industrialization became the means to obtain wealth, and this emphasis on financial gain became the driving force in people's lives; having a calling became unimportant (Elliott,

1992).

One contemporary Christian perspective on calling and vocation is that work is an integral aspect of God's plan for human life (Green, 2003). In this regard, work provides Christians with a vehicle to practice the commands of loving God with all of one's heart, soul and mind, and loving one's neighbour as his/herself. Thus, this current perspective presents a much more inclusive view of the kinds of work that one's calling can be lived through, in comparison to the past views of the monks and Puritans. It also separates calling from career, in the sense that the calling to love God and others can be lived out in any occupation as well as outside the domain of work.

Modern Secular Views of Calling

Green (2003) describes the current degree of confusion in secular views of calling in the following way:

Given the evolutionary span of this phenomenon, from a mystical event to meaningful work, it is not surprising that the term carries a multiplicity of meanings. Even as religious and secular usage of the notion has preserved, clarification has not been forthcoming. (p. 21)

Wise (1958) argued that there was not a sufficiently clear distinction between a psychological and religious call. However, two researchers, Gareau (1984) and Elliott (1992), have conducted studies attempting to clarify the meaning of calling within a secular context. Gareau studied the experience of callings outside of a religious context and defined calling simply as things to which one "feels called" (1984, p. 46). He found that calling has a history of experiences in which one feels called, revealing itself historically as a dynamic phenomenon with varying intensities and modes of presentation. Due to his findings, Gareau

(1984) proposed four essential elements of being called: (a) an attraction to a compelling possibility, (b) feelings of certainty and assurance, (c) a heightened sense of self-fulfillment and (d) a mysterious nature. Gareau suggests that people may feel more in touch with their destiny, and come to believe that they must do that which they find so compelling, in order to be themselves and fulfill their purpose in their life. From that point onward, they begin to face the choices that must be made, in order to live that which is experienced as a call.

Elliott began her study by tentatively defining calling as “work that provides extraordinary satisfaction; something you would do even if you didn’t have to work” (1992, p. 5). After interviewing 25 people (ranging from their late twenties to early seventies) who self-selected as fitting this description, she identified five themes that helped to define calling and six issues related to her definition of life calling. According to Elliott (1992) a secular vocational calling is an experience of work which involves:

1. A sense of doing what you were meant to do
2. A compelling sense that you must do this work
3. A level of intensity not found in other work
4. A desire to share the results of the calling with others
5. A determination to do it even if work were not financially necessary.

These five themes led Elliott to suggest that the concept of callings does, in fact, extend to secular vocations. This modern conceptualization of calling is supported by Bellah et al. (1985), who advocated for a transformation of American culture in which the idea of calling would be reappropriated. It would involve a values shift, in which people would choose work for its intrinsic interest and value to the person and for the fulfillment of knowing one is doing what one was meant to do.

Life calling, defined according to these themes, emerged in six important ways in the participants' narratives. According to Elliott (1992), the key elements of calling to be addressed in any person's life are: (a) the source of the calling, (b) how the calling comes, (c) validation of calling, (d) who may be called, (e) what constitutes a calling experience, and (f) to what is a person called? She further suggested that the source of a calling, whether or not it is subjectively experienced as coming from a divine source, could simply be psychological. That is, the source of one's calling could be what Jung called "true personality" in the context of the process of individuation (1953/1983, vol. 17, p. 175). For Maslow (1971), the motivating source of a calling could be found within his hierarchy of needs; specifically, the innate drive to grow into a self-actualizing person. Erikson (1959) provides a similar rationale for one's source of a calling suggesting that all humans have an inherent basic drive to find meaning in their lives.

Elliott addresses the issue of what a person is called to by stating that "throughout history there have been a variety of tasks to which people have been called: from callings to religious renewal to callings to specific spiritual tasks; from callings to religious occupations to callings to secular occupations. "The time now appears ripe for the development of an understanding of callings in secular vocations" (Elliott, 1992, p. 150). She suggests that the claim by some that calling only emerges in order to serve the community, or for promoting social justice, is too limiting. She proposes that the intrinsic value of the vocation to the individual also needs to be considered.

Calling has traditionally been confirmed by individuals in two ways: through mental conviction and through external sources. Elliott (1992) expands upon these criteria, suggesting that calling can also be validated in spite of discouragement; citing the example of

artists whose work is unappreciated in their own time, but ultimately very influential.

In contrast to the perception that it is primarily individuals on the fringe of society who are prone to experiencing calling, Elliott's (1992) model suggests that anyone may be called, that those who have been called were quite unremarkable prior to their calling, and that there are others who lived out a calling without ever achieving great recognition. She proposes that there is a continuum of calling that embraces experiences ranging from visionary seizures to subtle hunches.

Wherever the calling falls on that continuum, it appears to bring to the recipient a sense of new aliveness, which has been described as rebirthing. This aliveness contains the passion and energy and conviction of rightness, along with the ability to do the task or work. (Elliott, 1992, p. 150)

Elliott's (1992) assertions regarding the existence of secular callings are supported by a number of other theorists. Rehm (1990), states that the personal call to pursue a direction is now often secularized, and that calling might be viewed as coming from any source that prompts or nudges a person to follow a certain direction true to the self and which enables fulfilling ways to manifest talent. Others have characterized secular life calling as doing work out of a strong sense of inner direction; or alternatively, work that would contribute to a better world (Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Lips-Wiersma, 2002a, 2002b; Wrzesniewski, 2003).

In these secular views, one's sense of calling comes from an internal motivation that is not driven by instrumental goal-seeking. Rather, it reflects a generalized form of psychological engagement with the meaning of one's career work (e.g., Dobrow, 2004; Hall & Briscoe, 2004; L. Hansen, 1997; Kahn, 1990; Lips-Wiersma, 2002a, 2002b; Wrzesniewski, 2003, 2004; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin & Schwartz, 1997). For

example, L. Hansen (1997) describes how a person's career self-assessment and development, often involves a self-reflection and a quest for personal and professional purpose. Although it is possible to pursue a calling through one's religious beliefs, such a set of beliefs is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for having a calling (Hall & Chandler, 2005).

The different views of calling and vocation across time and different faith traditions are summarized in Table 1. It is important to note that, in North America today, these different perspectives have not successively replaced each other, but have all come to jostle along together side by side. The relationship between vocation and work has shifted through a range of moral attitudes toward work as a dimension of human experience, as work itself has shifted from being a burdensome necessity with no positive moral worth, to being valuable in its own right (Dawson, 2005).

Psychological Views of Calling

Calling as a source of meaning in work has received increased attention, not only for those religiously inclined, but also for those without a faith tradition (Elliott, 1992). The sense of meaning provided by one's vocation has been expanded upon in the world of psychology, by theorists such as Jung, Maslow, and Erikson, all of whom identified meaningful work as being essential for the proper integration of the psyche in order to facilitate personal growth (Treadgold, 1996).

Jung (1953/1983) refers to meaningful work as a vocation within the context of individuation; a necessary, integrative process of maximizing one's unique potentialities. For Jung, individuation is the process of self-integration and the major component and center of the psyche is the self. The self is the sum of one's instinct potentialities, which he called

Table 1

Religious and Historical Views of Vocation and Calling

Religious & historical milieu	View of calling
Tribal religions (predating Judaism)	A 'mystical' vocation or 'quest'
Traditional Buddhism	Being called by the 'truth;' leading to 'enlightenment'
Zen Buddhism	Calling as the importance of 'becoming;' expressing the 'universal way'
Hinduism	Individuals called to their place in the world order
Old Testament Christianity	Calling as relationship between God and a chosen people
New Testament Christianity	Calling to 'salvation,' 'holiness,' 'faith,' and 'sharing the good news'
Medieval Christianity	Monastic life as the highest order of calling
Reformation Europe	One's current occupation is a calling
Industrial Age Europe	Calling to a 'strong work ethic'
Puritans	Hard work as calling to a religious virtue
Modern Christian model	Work as an integral aspect of God's plan for human life
Modern Secular model	Calling as expression of true self in the world of work

archetypes. However, the self resides within the realm of the unconscious and communicates its vital information only through impulses, fantasies, and dreams. Individuation is the process of integrating the self's essential but unconscious archetypal information into one's conscious ego. When this is done effectively, individuals have the chance to develop a healthy personality that allows them to realize their full potentialities (Treadgold, 1996).

Integrating the self with the ego requires a great deal of conscious effort. At the center of an individual's ego-complex is his or her core experiences of self, which act like a magnet, drawing to it constellations of psychic elements (ideas, opinions, convictions, etc.), which in turn allows that individual to manifest his or her feelings and emotions. When someone receives archetypal information from the self (impulses, fantasies, or dreams) that is compatible with the ego-complex, he or she can usually integrate that guidance without much conflict, even though it may require a change in behaviour. However, when a person receives archetypal information that is not compatible with his or her ego-complex, it often causes confusion, essentially creating an ego-complex in conflict with itself (Treadgold, 1996).

Jung described individuation as having two phases, with specific and separate goals. The first goal of individuation is the "stability of the ego and the strengthening of consciousness" (Jacobi, 1965, p. 27), which typically occurs in the first part of life. The second phase of individuation is characterized by a restriction and reduction of psychic activity, for the purpose of establishing an ego that is able to adapt to and succeed in the outer world. This inner- and outer-directed focus not only allows the ego to experience a reunion with the self, but guides it toward maximizing potentialities so as to live a life that experiences meaning and purpose (Treadgold, 1996).

Convinced that vocation is an integral element of the individuation process, Jung

(1953/1983) wrote:

What is it, in the end, that induces a man to go his own way and to rise out of unconscious identity with the mass? Not necessity, for necessity comes to many, and they all take refuge in convention. Not moral decision, for nine times out of ten we decide for convention likewise...It is what is commonly called vocation: an irrational factor that destines a man to emancipate himself from the herd and from its well-worn paths...He must obey his own law, as if it were a daemon whispering to him of new and wonderful paths. Anyone with a vocation hears the voice of the inner man: he is called. (vol. 17, pp. 175-176)

In this model, the actual work one does is not the important aspect of vocation; a calling to meaningful work is part of a higher calling to wholeness and realizing one's full potential (Treadgold, 1996). "True personality is always vocation," Jung (1953/1983, vol. 17, p. 175) concluded. Work becomes meaningful to the extent that it provides the opportunity for self-integration and expression.

Maslow (1971) conceptualizes meaningful work as a vocation that one feels called to perform as a part of the self-actualization process. Using his motivational model and hierarchy of needs, Maslow advocated being engaged in meaningful work in order to become fully self-actualized. Maslow theorized that humans are motivated by five levels of need: (a) physiological needs, (b) safety needs, (c) belonging and social needs, (d) esteem and cognitive needs and (e) self-actualizing needs (Treadgold, 1996). Maslow believed that everyone has an innate drive to grow into a self-actualizing person, as evidenced by what he called growth needs, such as the needs for truth, aliveness, meaningfulness, individuality, and

peak experiences (Goble, 1970). Those who allow themselves to be guided by their natural desire to grow are most likely to become self-actualizing and realize their full potentials.

Moreover, Maslow (1971) believed that a vocation becomes a tangible expression of, and way to facilitate, one's growth needs. In his words:

I find that in all cases, at least in [Western] culture, [self-actualizers] are dedicated people, devoted to some task outside themselves...Generally the devotion and dedication is so marked that one can fairly use the old words vocation, calling, or mission to describe their passionate, selfless, and profound feeling for their work...Something for which the person is as natural, something that he is suited for, something that is right for him, even something that he was born for. (p. 291)

Similarly, Erikson (1959) asserted that all humans have an inherent, basic drive to find meaning in all areas of their lives, including in the work they do. He proposed that adults progress through several stages of development: (a) first creating a sense of identity as an adolescent or young adult, (b) then intimacy as an adult, (c) generativity at midlife, and (d) finally attaining the sense of integrity in old age. It is in the stages of generativity and integrity that one experiences the innate desire to find and express meaning in life. Erikson believed that the forces of generativity and integrity are operational in all areas of life, including the work individuals choose. As one engages in the phases of generativity and integrity, one's work is likely to reflect an inner calling to express caring, to transmit knowledge, and to be authentic (Treadgold, 1996).

Although calling was not the specific focus of these three previous theories, each refers to the vehicles of vocation and calling to which the height of human existence can be

lived out. Interestingly, none of these psychological perspectives link vocation to religious faith. In addition, the most recent psychological research on life calling has been directed towards the formation of conceptual and applied models of calling, for use in career development contexts. This includes the work of Wrzesniewski et al. (1997), Hall and Chandler (2005), and Kush and Kim (2004).

Surveying 196 participants from various occupations, Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) explored the nature and structure of people's self-reported career orientations. The first orientation was made up of participants who viewed their work as a *job*. This orientation included the individuals who focused primarily on the material benefits of work to the relative exclusion of other kinds of meaning and fulfillment. Within this orientation, work was simply a means to a financial end that allowed people to enjoy their time away from work, where they derived meaning and enjoyment from hobbies and other interests. The second orientation, labelled *career*, involved perceiving work as a means to reach rewards such as increased pay, prestige, and the status that accompanies advancement through an organizational or occupational structure. In the third orientation, *calling*, work was primarily framed in terms of the fulfillment that it brought to individuals and in the belief that one's work in some way makes the world a better place.

The major findings of this study included (a) the fact that approximately equal proportions of participants adopted each orientation, and (b) that this variation in orientations persisted within similar occupations and companies (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). These findings suggest that regardless of the type of work, there are quite meaningful differences in how people experience their work. Moreover, the calling orientation was associated with having a more rewarding relationship to their work, spending more time in

the work domain, gaining more enjoyment and satisfaction from work, and having higher life satisfaction than those with job or career orientations. In light of these findings, Wrzesniewski, Rozin, and Bennett (2003) propose that work is a wholly enriching and meaningful activity that is a passion in its own right, for individuals who perceive it to be a calling.

Hall and Chandler (2005) have examined the relationship between viewing career from a calling perspective and individuals' perceptions of psychological success. They operationalized calling as work that a person perceives as his or her purpose in life; that is, someone with a sense of calling will approach his or her work from a subjective, self-relevant view of meaning of career activities. They further suggest that the source and experience of a calling can arise from either a set of religious beliefs, or from an individual's sense of self and meaningfulness. Hall and Chandler's model posits that individuals with a sense of calling possess career metacompetencies (capacities that facilitate the acquisition of other, more specific competencies or skills) such as identity awareness and adaptability that, in the long term, assist them in navigating a complex career terrain. Their model also introduces self-confidence (the belief that one can successfully perform a particular task) as an important factor that promotes a person's adaptability and identity clarity.

Given these underlying factors, Hall and Chandler (2005) propose a cyclical calling model of psychological success, which delineates the relationships among a calling, self-confidence, goals and effort, objective and subjective success, and identity change. Their premise is that when people have a calling, they are aware of what goals they want to accomplish in the world of career, and given that they feel very strongly about their calling they are willing to exert much effort to achieve those goals. This high degree of effort

exerted results in the achievement of most of the goals related to their calling, which in turn promotes increased self-confidence and success viewed both from the self and outside sources. Finally, the process includes the change within and growth of one's identity, as the individual now views him or herself in a new light given the success that has been achieved. This process is perceived as a feedback loop, because each stage of identity change and growth is primarily followed up with the establishment of new goals, and the cycle then repeats itself.

Kush and Kim (2004) have proposed an applied integrative model of life calling, which incorporates several of the psychological, theological, and secular views of calling that have been presented in this thesis. Based on factor analytic evidence from university-aged samples, they propose that life calling is the degree to which one has a sense of personal self-efficacy related to three factors: the sense of (a) purpose, (b) identity, and (c) direction. Purpose is described as the discovery that one's life matters in an existential sense, that is, that life inherently has meaning and purpose, which can become known through metaphysical and spiritual pursuits. In their model, identity is the sense of who one is; that is, the degree to which a person is aware of his or her own talents, strengths, abilities, and individual personality. Direction is the culmination of the first two factors of identity and purpose, providing guidance towards areas of life that combine who one is and what his/her convictions may be. Kush and Kim describe their model as "applied" in the sense that it was developed to guide the practice of career educators and counsellors and, as a result, focuses specifically on areas of calling that can be modified and improved through interventions during young adulthood.

This overview of salient psychological views of life calling demonstrates the varying

models and conceptualizations that exist within psychological literature, spanning from founding theorists to contemporary applied researchers. It is evident from this breadth of perspectives that much remains to be understood about the phenomenon of life calling: although there is overlap among the various models, no consensus opinion has emerged within the literature about what life calling is, or how it manifests in people's lives.

Thesis Objectives

Despite having a lengthy history and varied conceptualization, empirical research on individuals' experience of life calling remains limited: few of the sources described in the literature review presented systematic empirical data to support their models. Additionally, there is a dichotomy within those studies between religious and secular experiences of calling, and between work-related and general life conceptualizations of calling. There has also been relatively little research that has examined the experience of calling in those who are younger in age; who are in the early stages of their careers (i.e., in post-secondary education and/or just entering the work force). This is unfortunate because examining calling as it manifests during the transition from school to work may be of greater practical use to career counsellors than examining calling as it was understood by people who are looking back upon their careers.

This thesis addressed some of these gaps in the literature, by exploring the experience of life calling among university students who report having a strong sense of their own life calling. This focus on individuals with a strong sense of life calling, rather than on the average university student, permitted an exploration of (a) what life calling has the potential to become in young people's lives, and (b) the life conditions that may be associated with the optimal development of a sense of calling.

A qualitative approach was judged to be the most appropriate way to explore these issues, given the fact that the empirical study of life calling is still in the early stages. Specifically, semi-structured interviewing and Richard's (2005) thematic qualitative analysis methodology was used to explore the experience of life calling in a sample of 7 female university students. In lieu of specific hypotheses (which are inappropriate in a qualitative study of this nature), the following guiding questions were used as a framework to explore the phenomenon of life calling:

1. How does life calling manifest itself among university students who report having a strong sense of life calling?
2. What is the experience and meaning of life calling as it is manifested in those students' lives?

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of seven female students from a small private Christian university in Canada. Participants came from a number of different undergraduate programs: two nursing students, two kinesiology students, one environmental studies student, one education student, and one criminology student. Their scores on Kush and Kim's (2004) standardized measure of sense of calling, the Life Calling Survey (LCS), ranged from 4.19 to 4.85 out of a possible range of 1.00 to 5.00. All seven participants were Caucasian, and described themselves as being Christian. Six of the participants were Canadian and one participant had dual citizenship with Canada and the United States. Four of the participants were in the second year of their programs (nursing, kinesiology, education, and environmental studies), one participant was in her third year of kinesiology, and one participant had recently completed her associate's degree in criminology.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria used for participants in this study were: (a) 18-25 years of age; (b) not studying in any of the seminary or biblical studies programs at the university; and (c) a score in the top ranges of the LCS. The first criterion was implemented to ensure that participants were in the appropriate developmental stage. The second criterion was implemented because the primary interest in this study was on individuals who felt called to areas outside of professional Christian ministry. The final criterion was implemented to increase the likelihood of obtaining participants who already have a clear sense of their life calling.

Screening Instrument

Kush and Kim's (2004) LCS was used solely as a participant selection tool, to

identify possible participants whose responses indicated a high sense of life calling. Life calling is defined broadly in this scale, as encompassing the wider life context to which a sense of calling may be applied; it is not defined as limited to one's work. The LCS is composed of 24 items, each scored on a 5-point Likert scale designed to assess different aspects of life calling. The underlying theoretical factors that the LCS is designed to assess are: identity (e.g., "I know who I am"), purpose (e.g., "I have discovered a purpose for my life that is meaningful, valuable and rewarding"), and direction (e.g., "I know where I am heading in life"). Full-scale scores were used to identify individuals with a strong sense of calling. Information on the LCS can be found in Appendix A.

The LCS was chosen as a screening tool because it was developed for use with a university student population, and there are no other standardized scales in the literature that are designed to assess life calling. Because the LCS is an instrument that continues to be refined, indicators of the validity and reliability of the instrument are still being developed.

Recruitment and Participant Selection

The participant selection process was as follows: First, potential participants were recruited via email that was widely distributed across the TWU campus (see Appendix B). Those who were interested were electronically administered the LCS as a screening instrument, along with a demographic information questionnaire (see Appendix C). Of the 469 undergraduate and graduate students who completed the screening phase, the 108 highest scoring individuals, who also indicated a willingness to be contacted for further research, were contacted via e-mail to request their participation in this study (see Appendix D for a copy of the recruitment script). Only 15 individuals who scored in the desired range responded positively to the invitation to participate in the study, and interviews could not be

arranged with four of those due to scheduling conflicts. Interviews were conducted with the remaining 11 individuals (consisting of three men and eight women). Unfortunately, three individuals (two men and one woman) exhibited a lack of clarity regarding their own sense of life calling during the interview process, possibly due to being motivated primarily by the incentives being offered for participation or because of an external framework for life calling (i.e., they may have come from traditions indicating that Christians should have life callings, and accepted that they did have a calling, without having any clear personal sense of what that calling was, or how it enters their lives). Consequently, these three interviews were significantly shorter in duration, with these individuals' responses to the interview questions being very brief, and containing little description of their callings.

This process of attrition and selection left eight interviews that reflected the experiences of Christian university students with a strong sense of life calling. Because seven of the eight participants were female, it was decided to shift the focus of the study to the experience of life calling in young women specifically, resulting in the removal of the remaining male interview. This process yielded seven detailed interviews, which provided information suitable for answering the research questions, at least as they apply to women's experiences.

Procedures

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview strategy, facilitated by a series of guiding questions to focus the conversation, but allowing the participants the freedom to lead the interviewer in new directions. The guiding questions that were used are presented in Appendix E, and are based on those presented in Elliott's (1992) preliminary study of individuals with life callings. All interviews were audio- and video-recorded. These

recordings allowed the researcher to return to the interviews repeatedly when the data analysis was conducted.

Once the information was gathered, the interviews were transcribed by the researcher, using a natural language transcription strategy. The underlying purposes for using the natural language transcription strategy was to maintain the clarity of the content while preserving the participants' original meaning. This consisted of removing superfluous parts of the speech (e.g., "um," or "er"), converting partial statements into sentences, adding punctuation and quotation marks when necessary, and omitting unnecessary pauses. Participants' names and other identifying information were also altered during transcription, to preserve their anonymity.

The method of analysis employed in this thesis was based on Richards' (2005) description of qualitative analytic coding strategies for textual data, which involves "coding that comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning" (p. 94). In this method, the researcher is "considering the meanings of data in context, and creating categories that express new ideas about the data, coding to gather and reflect on all the data related to them" (p. 94). This analytic strategy was used to identify relevant themes and patterns in the transcripts, by examining individuals' experiences, meanings, and ideas around life calling.

Information from the individual interviews and data analysis were then used to construct a depiction of the experiences, understanding, and identification of life calling that were present across the group as a whole. The analysis of the discourses surrounding life calling produced underlying concepts, as well as specific common themes. The recurrent themes and experiences that emerged from the data set were attended to, revealing a number of similarities and differences among the participants' experiences of life calling.

Rigour and Validation

Two procedures were undertaken to promote the fidelity of the researcher's interpretations. After each interview was fully transcribed and analyzed, feedback from the participant in question was obtained, to create an accurate depiction of their experience concerning life calling. This was accomplished by emailing a narrative summary of the themes that emerged out of the semi-structured interviews to the participants, requesting that feedback be given in regards to the accuracy of that summary, in terms of what was said, intended, and meant during the interviews. Participants responded to this member-checking process in a timely manner, with most of them agreeing with the interpretation of their life calling. Two participants requested changes be made to correct factual errors regarding their lives (e.g., sequence of classes taken in university), but no-one requested revisions to the description of themes that emerged from their interviews.

After all seven interviews were analyzed, an external expert audited the transcripts and narrative summaries of two of the semi-structured interviews looking for possible themes that may have been missed. The expert was a practitioner with a Ph.D. in organizational psychology. He has 15 years of experience in the field of career counselling, and his approach to counselling incorporates the concept of life calling. This auditor confirmed the existence of the themes that were identified by the researcher, in his own reading of the data. The degree of agreement between the analyst and the auditor was one hundred percent; however the auditor identified one theme in one of the transcripts that had not been described in the narrative summary for that participant. The theme in question, regarding the antagonistic role of the participant's mother, was one that had been identified within the transcript and included in the working list of common themes, but had simply been omitted

from the narrative summary.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The interviews yielded a wide range of salient themes, most of which can be divided into two distinct clusters: underlying concepts and specific themes. The underlying concepts describe more broadly how participants' sense of life calling spans the many areas of their lives, while the specific themes are organized into categories relating to (a) the emergence of life calling, (b) personal attributes, and (c) the nature of life calling. The underlying concepts are presented first, followed by the specific common themes.

Underlying Concepts

Ultimate calling. The first underlying concept is founded in participants' sense of having a calling that they considered to overarch and guide their life calling area. This calling was viewed by the participants as part of something that was larger than themselves, and something in which the participants' callings were intertwined with. This concept is demonstrated by the following participants.

Rachael was a participant who described having multiple callings, where one calling falls within another. There were two main elements of her sense of calling: (a) the natural expression of who she is as a person (an innate out-flowing of her being), and (b) being called by God to be a person of character (which includes a sense of duty towards others, as well as moral values):

I consider myself to have a calling in a few ways. My character naturally wants to help people. I find myself wanting to help people even in relationship... As a Christian I also find that I'm called to be a person of character, and helping people is part of how I develop that, it's a discipline that I'm trying to develop.

Heather, who felt called to become a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)

officer, also described the important 'ultimate' calling that lay underneath her specific calling:

You have to put your loved ones before yourself, and if that means giving up your career and your calling then that means doing that...putting things that you love before yourself, I think that's the most important thing that you have to remember is that's a calling, love is a calling! That's the only thing that matters, that's the only thing that's going to get you through and if being a cop is going to isolate me from my family, if its going to isolate me from my husband, then I'm not going to want to do it...there are things that are more important than a calling.

Penny, who was pursuing her calling in medicine, stated, "I think to have a life calling means to have some direction in where you're headed and for me it has a lot to do with my faith where my ultimate life calling is to follow whatever God wants." When asked if she felt a sense of duty as a future practitioner towards her patients, she replied with:

I'd have to say it's to God, first and foremost, because even in that situation where you'd be taking care of other people, your duty is to God to take care of his people. So I think ultimately that's the greatest calling.

The distinction between these broader, overarching senses of calling, and specific occupation-related callings that some of the participants described is evident in the following narrative provided by Rachael:

I think a career can be your job, but a life calling is who you are, becoming what you do. I'm really trying not to make these really cliché, quotable phrases, but yeah, it's who you are and allowing that to flow out to whatever you do. I don't know if you're called to a job...I never thought about that...I think that if I were to pick one side I

think you're called to be a person rather than called to a job. When you say life calling, I don't think someone's life calling is to work as an environmentalist, well maybe it is but, I think you're called to be a person that cares about the environment...I don't know, I never really thought about that actually, it should be a part of you, not so much just what your doing, but who you are.

Life calling lens. The next underlying concept was evident in participants' descriptions of how they often saw the world around them as relating to their life calling. Participants described their daily tasks, their relationships, and even how they spent their recreational time, as being lived out or viewed through their life calling.

Lynn reported that her life calling consumes the majority of her life, and that she spends a lot of time studying to prepare for the career to which she felt called. When she was asked how her life calling affects the different areas of her life, she replied, "Because I know where I'm going in the future, that affects all the decisions I make in the meantime, with relationships I make and places I go and things I talk about."

The same sense of interpreting all of life through the lens of calling was evident in the response that Becky gave to the same interview question:

I definitely think that I wouldn't have the life I have if I didn't have my life calling, so it definitely plays into everything I do. Even the things that don't involve physio or school or kinesiology, like the other things I do, I teach band and I tutor, and it all just fits in with that theme of rehabilitation of people. In whatever sense that means to that person, they may not even know, it just kind of works into what I'm doing. Somehow it just oozes out of everything I do! Because I feel called to the healing and rehabilitation of people, and teaching band for me is like working on that music,

working on those students and just seeing it come to full fruition, seeing it come to almost perfection, you see the students get better, you see the music get better, you see the teamwork get better, you see the whole atmosphere get better, and a band that wins first place competitions! And everyone gets along, and just everything I do fits in with that, and fits all my passions into that.

Life calling as a process. The final underlying concept that arose from the interviews was that life calling is process oriented, as opposed to manifesting as one specific moment in time where one feels called, and then begins the pursuit of that calling. The majority of participants described their callings as having developed over time, and increasing in clarity as they pursued their particular areas of interest. They recounted experiences where one particular event would lead to another, leaving the participants feeling more and more confident about their callings over time, as they followed their calling. For example, in response to the question of how she had discerned her life calling, Lynn stated:

I describe it as a process, a process of confirmations. It's a rare occasion where things just go 'ok I know exactly what God wants.' It's generally a process and sometimes it's not confirmed, but I know that because I have the intention of honouring God in my direction, if he wants to change it, he'll change it as I go. And so I just step out and say, 'ok, I'm trying to honour him with my life and if I'm making mistakes he'll show me.'

Kim, who felt called to encourage kids through teaching, described her process in a similar manner:

My parents are both teachers, so its kind of in my blood, and at first I thought, this is what I have to do because of my parents, but I think I was involved in my church and

I planned youth events, I was a youth coordinator and I also did a bible study at my church and at my school and so that was with teenagers and I really liked it. I could see that there were some moments that I was like, 'Oh, this is what I want to do' but there was something wrong though, something wasn't fitting. But when I started working with kids, the Rubik's cube fit together and I realized that this was what God wanted me to do, he wanted me to lead, but it wasn't with teenagers, it was with kids.

Although the seven participants in this study were all able to identify significant milestones that helped to define their callings, those milestones were framed as being embedded within the overall progression of their callings.

Specific Themes Related to the Emergence of Life Calling

Many of the participants described factors that influenced the process of life calling. The specific themes that emerged repeatedly across the sample were: (a) the supportive role of others, (b) experiences in and exposure to the life calling area, and (c) proposed ways of how to find one's life calling as suggested by the participants.

The supportive role of others. This particular theme contains within it several sub-themes. All the participants described their mothers as playing a formative role in the development of their life callings, though not always in a positive way. Many of the participants also described themselves as having supportive educators, and supportive friends. Other key supporters that were identified by at least one participant included extended family members, school counsellors, healthcare professionals, and personal role models and mentors. They generally spoke quite fondly of the people in their lives who had encouraged them both directly and indirectly in pursuing their callings. However, two participants provided examples that reflected a contrasting perspective about the support of

others.

The role of mothers was critical for each of the participants. Four participants reported that they experience a very close, friendship-like relationship with their mothers, who provided constant support and encouragement. Two of the participants talked about their mothers as being supportive, but in more of a parental role as opposed to a friendship role. One participant described the antagonistic role her mother plays in her life, but also described the way in which that antagonism motivated her to pursue her life calling.

An example of a close mother-daughter relationship that has helped to promote life calling was demonstrated by Rachael. She is pursuing a career in nursing, but also stated that her sense of life calling is to be a mother to her own children:

[Mom] was a huge director, just to work through what I wanted. She could tell by what I was expressing to her what I wanted to do, and she was trying to fit occupations for me, and she realized that I wanted to be a mom, but in the mean time what occupations would be suited to me, so she kind of directed me in that way, plus she was an occupational therapist in psychiatry, which is sort of like counselling, and I always found her job fascinating, listening and being with people and talking to them.

Another pattern that was evident within the sub-theme of maternal roles was that several participants were pursuing callings that are closely related to the vocations of their mothers. The aspiring teacher Kim stated:

My mom's very encouraging so she's probably one of those words of affirmation people, and that's helped. Because she's a teacher that's helped, and hearing her stories about how she was a teacher made me get interested in it at first... she challenges me

because she knows me best, she knows me better than anyone else, she's been there since I was a kid until now, and sometimes she knows me better than myself.

In response to the question of whether anyone had said something positive that has triggered her life calling, Becky answered with:

I have more of the opposite example! (laughter). My mother is the reality in my life and because of my injuries, any type of work I do is compromising my health and so she's like, "you know you're probably not going to be able to do physio for the rest of your life" and "you should seriously think about going into something else" and I'm like, "No, my life calling is to be doing this, and I want to be doing this and I'm going to make it work for me, because I know that I need to be doing it." So that is kind of opposite motivation for me.

Thus, it is apparent that mothers have played key roles in the development of every one of these participants' life callings, although there is considerable variation in how the mothers influenced their daughters' sense of calling.

An example of another person who played a supportive and critical role in helping to develop life calling is founded in Penny's statement of how she began to know she had a life calling:

It was in regards to marine biology and we had gone and done a beach study, and I remember I was actually failing grade two and my teacher said, 'Okay we have to spark her interest in something for some sort of project.' So we did the beach thing and that was going to be my final project and she was talking to my mom and saying that I needed to get at least a 'C' on it, or a high 'C' or preferably a 'B' for her to even consider passing me and I pulled a 99% on it, and that was just after I really enjoyed

it, and she approached me and she's like 'you know, you could do this for work some day,' and I was like, 'you can get paid for doing stuff on the beach,' (hahaha) you know, wow, what a concept. And so from then on it was just something that I had followed.

Becky, who spoke about the antagonistic role her mother plays, also commented on other family members and people in the community that have given her support. She also revealed a different side to this theme of support: for some people who are pursuing their calling, depending on others seems to go in hand with being able to depend on oneself. Becky reported that, in her experience, "It is God and me in this life, and I can't rely on others for the rest of my life." She reported that always having a goal and a plan creates security in her life, a security that is absent in her family. Becky has come to the conclusion that if she wants things done right, she often has to do it herself. When asked to describe the feelings associated with this self-made structure in her life she stated:

It's just not being lost. Like I can rely on myself, I don't have to rely on anybody else, I know I have those goals and I can attain them with work and I think it's more of a faith state with myself, just knowing that God will provide for me, but at the same time I have to take responsibility to work with that and to take the steps so he can work with me and make sure that I am following what I feel he wants me to do.

Another person who provided an experience that contrasted with the sense of being supported that most participants described was Heather. Throughout her interview, she reported that she has had to depend primarily on herself for support to pursue her area of interest. She was not encouraged by her family or by others to think about what she would like to do for a career; they assumed she would either be a waitress or a nurse like her

mother. Her deep interest in policing, which was present from a young age, seemed to go unnoticed by others, forcing her to rediscover this calling through “extensive trial and error.” It is apparent that Heather’s life calling has been self-made; that she has discovered it and began to refine it with little help from others, no particular role-models, and has taken the initiative herself in pursuing policing. When asked if she has ever had someone in her life to discuss her passion of becoming a police officer she replied as follows:

No. My parents split up and my mom works all the time, and I pretty much lived by myself during high school. She works nights and I went to school during the day, so no... I never had goals, I'm serious when I say that. When I was a kid we never talked about what do you want to be when you grow up.

Heather’s and Becky’s experiences revealed that, for some individuals, life callings may emerge from a process of recognizing that much of what they want in life will not be provided by others, and instead must be attained by themselves.

Experiences in and exposure to the life calling area. A majority of the participants experienced personal interests and exposure to the area of life that became their calling, well before their sense of calling had solidified. Heather, who was aspiring to be an RCMP officer, recalled becoming fascinated with the world of policing by watching *Cops* and other police shows, and was absolutely thrilled when a police officer visited her grade 2 class. Other participants grew up in homes where one of the parents had a similar occupation, and openly talked about his or her career, thus sparking the interest of their child. Two of the participants experienced the area that eventually became their calling in a very different way, in that their exposure to their life calling areas were involuntary and unpleasant. Both required serious medical attention, and yet their exposure to the world of medicine resulted in

a deep interest which subsequently developed into a strong sense of life calling. This experience is perhaps best encapsulated by Becky:

I have a life calling, and it's to rehabilitation, from personal experience and struggling with injury for a long time. I had three knee surgeries and just dealing with that after injuring myself during sports and seeing a future in that and then not being able to do that has redirected me and caused me think about, 'what is God trying to teach me here.' So I really liked being in the physio setting, after being in there for five years myself for treating my knees, I was like, I like this job and its relational with people which is one of my big strengths and it has a business aspect and a huge science aspect which I love, and so that for me gives me a goal and something that I see my strengths in, but God's taught me to see that. It was something that I hadn't seen before, so that is more of the calling part for me, it wasn't something that I had planned on, it just kind of has evolved into something that I've come to love, so that's how I've got there.

How to find one's life calling. Near the end of the interviews, participants were asked what they would say to someone who wanted to know how to begin to find their own life calling. A varied array of responses was provided, but there were some common suggestions. One idea was to place oneself into new situations, exposing oneself to new and varied experiences that may not have been of interest previously. Some of the participants suggested specific ways to do this, including enrolling in classes at an educational institution, and gaining experience in a different field of work. Participants also declared that individuals seeking their calling should be patient and allow the process to unfold, because developing a strong sense of calling is not something that can be artificially pushed. Other suggestions

included following one's interests, exploring others' vocations, volunteering, serving others, and praying. Another perspective was given by Becky, who is training to be a physiotherapist:

I would say, try to reflect and look at what's happened in your past. Why do you feel compelled to do certain things? What are the times in your life that have really made you happy, that you've really felt satisfied with yourself? And look at those times and what kinds of characteristics do they embrace, and how are you going to make that happen in your life, and what's going to make you happy in the future?

Specific Themes Related to Shared Personal Attributes

This second set of specific themes revolved around the attributes of the participants themselves. Although each participant was unique in providing her own experiences and meanings of life calling, the themes of (a) being pro-active and tenacious, (b) resiliency, and (c) sense of identity, were evident in many of the narratives.

Proactive/tenacious. This was one of the themes that was most frequently and intensely described by the participants. They used language such as “being determined,” “tenacious,” “all or nothing,” “a fighter,” as they expressed being willing to push through any and all obstacles.

Their tenaciousness and determination was most clearly revealed in the extensive amounts of research, investigation, and involvement in their life calling areas that were reported. It became apparent that the life callings of this group of people were not mystically happened upon, but instead emerged from diligent pursuit over time. For example, Becky shared that:

I'm a research person, I did a lot of research. Because before I really wanted to go into

banking and administration, which is totally not me anymore (laughter), and I did a lot of research on it, because I wanted that stability in my life, and where am I going to find it and am I going to find it, so I did a lot of research behind it first and researched a lot of options of where I want to go and what I want to do... Probably when I was seventeen, in grade eleven, I started looking seriously into physio schools and different programs I could get into for rehabilitation, and started researching different organizations that I could work for, I really want to work in Africa, so looking into the logistics of moving there, and I really want to open up my own practice, so learning the business side of it also.

The other side of this theme of proactivity was the participants' choice to be actively involved in activities related to their life callings. Jennifer (who hopes to be an RCMP school liaison officer) described her extensive involvement in the area of working with kids by saying:

I'm still doing things with the church or in the community and extra-curricular activities and part-time work, I think that's all part of leaning towards what I want to do... because its helping me to prepare for what I want to do in the future and what I'm looking forward to, so I think I'm totally working towards that now. Like I want to do kick boxing and do volunteer work for the RCMP...so yeah, I think that's a big part in working towards life calling.

Similarly, Heather recounted her involvement in activities related to her calling of being an RCMP officer, "I want to work for it so bad...I've volunteered [with the RCMP] over a thousand hours in the past couple of years doing everything possible in my spare time to volunteer." These examples clearly illustrate how the participants' driven, tenacious, and

proactive approaches have allowed them to live out and continue to pursue their life callings.

Resiliency. A separate but related theme is that of resiliency. This theme was evident in the participants' depictions of their ability to continue to press forward tenaciously even when faced with trials and adversity. Although different participants faced obstacles that were of varying degrees in intensity and duration, the common element in their stories was their experience of being able to overcome what lay before them.

When Lynn's parents initially opposed her going to Africa to provide humanitarian aid, their opposition simply motivated her to work harder, and to obtain more informational ammunition to show her parents that going to Africa was both safe and an important part of her life calling journey. The end result was that:

By the time I left they were both for certain behind me. After the first time I sat down and told them and I was all scared and stuff, they started to get real quiet...my dad's not a big one for sharing what's going on in the inside, but as time progressed he became more confident as he saw me showing responsibility in booking my tickets, applying for visas, getting my shots done, getting all my stuff prepared and together, talking more about learning from my host about the surroundings I would be in, so just continually informing them about what was going on.

Heather described the many obstacles that she overcame during her pursuit of her calling to be an RCMP officer. These obstacles included spending four years in university taking general studies, spending each year searching for a program that she felt passionate about, and becoming more and more discouraged as time went by leaving her empty handed. At the same time, however, Heather revealed that she had the resiliency to continue to push through and eventually discover the area of criminology, which ignited a passion that she had

never felt before.

Perhaps the most compelling example of the theme of resiliency was experienced by Penny, whose story is worthy of particular attention. The theme of life calling being refined through resiliency in the face of trials (medical, familial, academic) was very potent within her interview. Medically, Penny was an anomaly that had puzzled several medical experts in various specialties. She has been diagnosed with a learning disability, a severe case of attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder, heart arrhythmia, life threatening allergies, epilepsy, thyroid cancer, and has experienced a wide range of complications due to these concurrent conditions. Academically, Penny scored very well on standardized testing but struggled very much in grade school and needed to be home schooled. During a challenging first year at university, she also experienced several significant deaths in her family, lost her family pet, her younger siblings cut off all contact from the family, and she experienced a falling out with her best friend. She felt overwhelmed to the point of considering suicide when she cried out to God for help, and received what she interpreted as a miraculous intervention that allowed her to continue her educational path. Amazingly, Penny reported that it was through these continued trials that she was able to refine, clarify, and focus her life calling in line with God's will and her own personal interests (medicine). When asked how all of her trials so far have influenced the development of her life calling, she replied:

I would have to say that I have a definite sense that everything was experienced for a purpose. I mean I don't always know what that will be, it might be years, and I might never know why God allowed certain things to happen and when, but I think ultimately like I said, the ultimate life calling is to follow his will and what he has despite everything I've been through.

Penny's resiliency and the unsinkable approach of many of the other participants, reveal their steadfast nature of being able to overcome adversity.

Sense of identity. Another theme relating to the personal attributes of the participants was the clarity of their personal identity. Participants often spoke about feeling secure and stable in their knowledge of who they are and which directions they are headed in with their lives. The interconnectedness of the different themes around 'shared personal attributes' is evident in the fact participants' high degree of resilience appeared to emerge partly out of their strong sense of personal effectiveness and identity.

One example of the theme of identity is demonstrated by Kim, who reported feeling a greater sense of connection with herself, God, and others through her life calling. She stated that, because she knows what God wants her to do, she has been able to discover who she is. In contrast to her friends who were going through identity crises, she felt more connected inwardly and with other people, because of her strong sense of life calling. She also reported that her sense of identity and purpose allows others to know her better, citing examples of family members who know that her life calling is to teach, and are thus able to relate to her through her calling.

Rachael worked through this theme during her interview, and demonstrated how knowing oneself and discovering one's life calling are linked:

Part of my life calling to be a nurse is because it just felt like it flowed out of who I was. It wasn't like a bizarre, "I feel like I should do this..." It flowed out naturally... Life calling is such a big term, what you do should flow out of who you are, so I think that my life calling is sort of who I was and am...I think a career can be your job, but a life calling is who you are, becoming what you do... it should be a part of you, not so

much just what your doing, but who you are.

Having a strong sense of identity (that is, awareness of one's interests, skills and abilities), appears to result in a higher degree of confidence in oneself, when living consistently with one's sense of calling.

Specific Themes Related to the Nature of Life Calling

Just as there were common themes in the participants' emergence of life calling and in their shared personal attributes, commonalities were also evident in the nature of the participants' callings. The specific themes dealing with the makeup of their callings included: (a) an altruistic focus, (b) a sense of flow, (c), a deep passion for the life calling area, (d) helping others find their life calling and (e) the burdens of life calling.

Altruistic focus. Each participant reported that helping others was a central part of her sense of calling. This altruistic aspect of the participants' life callings were varied, and included feeling called to (a) help children through education and parenthood, (b) help medical patients via nursing, physiotherapy, and medicine, and (c) help the community by offering support through policing. Many of the participants described themselves as caring and nurturing, and they desired to express those aspects of their lives through helping others. Jennifer spoke about her strengths in regards to helping others:

I like that my calling lets me express all my good qualities, you know, my gifts and talents, whether its working with people or being active, being able to converse with others, and caring about people... I like to talk with people and listen to them and help them out, and my friends describe me as emotional, and I care about people, my friends tell me that I am a caring person, and I'm very emotional and empathetic and sympathetic for others, and I can feel what my friends are going through, when

they're going through tough times.

Kim described being called to work with children, and is working towards a teaching degree. She feels called to influence children's lives in a positive way, and to make them feel special and valued as human beings. Kim's desire to positively influence others may be focused on children, but its scope widens to include her friends, family, and almost anyone who comes into contact with her. Kim reported that she has a gift of being able to make others feel greatly valued and cared for. She stated that it is her goal to offer others full attention, interest, acceptance and care, which has resulted in many people feeling quite close to her. Kim described this connection between her strengths and her calling in the following way:

One of my friends was telling me that I have this gift, that if I'm alone with a person I can make them feel like they're the most special person in the whole wide world. And then another friend of mine said, 'Kim you know what, I hung out with you for two hours, but you focused on me, you listened, you actively responded, and you cared about me, and for two hours I was your world,' and it seems like in life we all need that. So I think I can use this gift as a leader, as a teacher, with students because a lot of students will come in and feel hurt from home and just need to feel special.

Although every participants' mode of helping others varied from one another, it became clear across their narratives that all of their callings had an altruistic, people-helping focus. Whether this focus was for individuals, groups, their local communities, the young or the elderly, all the participants linked their sense of calling to making a positive difference in the lives of others.

Unique intensity. Another common aspect of the participants' callings was the

experience of a unique intensity when acting within their life calling area. Specifically, many of the participants reported feeling a heightened degree of ease, energized focus, being fully immersed in their work, or even a spiritual presence, when completing tasks within their life calling areas, an intensity that is not there in other parts of their lives. Lynn described her experience as follows:

It's exciting, when I have a chance to study something in nursing, it's something that I'm very excited about, that I can sit down for hours and read through all these complicated journals. Like at the beginning, last term when I was doing preparation for my nursing labs, I had a medical dictionary that I had to flip through looking up terms and I would get distracted by all these pictures wanting to stop and read them all and I guess it's my excitement, and interest.

Kim described a similar experience when working within her life calling area of helping children; she was able to remain energized and immersed in her work despite having to exert extensive amounts of time and effort:

I never directly worked with kids one on one until this summer and I would feel like, I don't know, it's something, there's an emotion behind it, and there'd be nights that I was up late talking to kids and up early in the morning praying with their mom and dad about their kids and I wouldn't be exhausted, I'd be going on two hours of sleep a night but I'd still have energy in the day and I don't know why, but I think that's how I realized that this is what's feeding me, that this is what I would like to do.

Kim went on to report experiencing a significant spiritual presence during times that she is acting out her life calling. She described this feeling as she experienced it at camp during the past summer:

It's like this overwhelming feeling, like everything's starting to lift up, you feel like you're connected to a person, it would be the nights that I'm connecting with people or I had a good talk with someone or I had a good lesson sharing with the bible, and I'd come back and people would ask 'how did it go?' and I'd be like, 'man, I just feel like, you can kind of feel like this holy presence around you.' There'd be times where I'd feel like I had God's arms just wrapping me when I'm walking back and I'd feel like I could float and jump, and right now I can already feel like a little bit of it, just like a bit of a lighter glow almost. It's a weird emotional feeling, it's not like winning the lottery, I don't know there's just something, you feel warm inside because you feel like you've touched someone, but you feel like God used you to touch them, so God actually touched them through you, so that's how I'd describe the feeling, just warm and energized. It's like an adrenaline rush, but different because I don't have adrenaline going through but I definitely feel energy going throughout my whole body, like everything's awake, I was totally tired before, but just talking about this right now, I'm totally awake.

Deep passion for the life calling area. The participants also spoke of their life calling areas with great fervour and enthusiasm. Each participant perceived her life calling as much more than simply something of interest; it was something that had completely captured her. Lynn, who aspired to pursue nursing in Africa, talked about when she first became aware of her passion for her career path:

I think I had some sense when I started studying the human body. You know how some people are just so interested in something and you just can't understand it because you have no interest in it at all whatsoever, and they almost can't explain why

they're interested, well I had that sort of interest in figuring out how the human body worked and how all the different parts are put together. So because that became an inexplicable passion of mine, I knew that that would be where I was going.

Heather, who spent 4 years in university searching for some career that would be of interest to her, describes what it was like when she was finally introduced to her life calling area:

Then I looked at criminology, and I was like, 'That sounds so fascinating! I really want to do that!' So I thought, well that's exciting, I don't know why I'm going to do this but I'm going to... I was so excited, I was very excited, because it's a real job and it makes money and I want to help people, it's something that I just, I have to do it!

I'm going to go crazy if I can't do it!

Penny, the aspiring doctor, spoke quite logically about her life calling area, but with a similar degree of interest and conviction saying, "I think it was just a combination of something that I just really enjoyed doing and somehow it just clicked and I found the information easy to remember and it was different from everything else we had been doing. It captured me."

Helping others find their life calling. Another theme that emerged was a desire to help others discover and refine their own callings. It appeared that participants either took the initiative in offering aid to others in this way, or had been approached by others (friends and family primarily) who were aware that they already had a strong sense of calling. Becky talked about her role in helping her friends find their own callings:

All my friends know that I'm there to help them find their life calling, because I've always kind of been the person whose known what I'm doing most of the time and

along with that I'm very organized and I've always been the organized person in my group of friends, always (laughter). So they kind of expect me to know what I'm doing and I plan everything for them, so that's just kind of been my role and they embrace it and they fill in all the other gaps where I am not as strong.

Similarly, Penny spoke about how she wanted to demonstrate that a life calling is attainable for her younger brother and sister as well:

I feel especially for my younger two siblings, I feel that sense of setting an example for them, because my older three sisters, none of them have completed high school or done any of that, and so that's something that I really want for the younger two and so yeah, just trying to stick with that, get through school so that they have something to kind of look at, and see that they can accomplish stuff too.

Burdens of having a life calling. Not all of the themes that emerged from the interviews were positive. Participants mentioned a number of different costs and burdens associated with having a life calling. They frequently mentioned that pursuing their calling involved sacrificing other things in life, such as social recreation, other areas of interest, and personal relationships. Two recurrent sub-themes in this area were founded in (a) participants experiencing feelings of isolation due to their calling, and (b) the mistaken perception of others, who viewed them as having an easy life, when in reality a lot of hard work was involved in pursuing their calling.

Rachael expressed that some of her feelings of isolation were the result of her relentless pursuit of her life calling, and how much time and energy she spent on such things as studying, reading, and simply being at university, instead of working or being with friends. Because of her dedication, motivation, and determination, Rachael reported often

being left with little time to spend with others. When asked how her life calling has affected her relationships, she replied as follows:

It would definitely be described as isolating. You have to sacrifice stuff to do what you're doing, like being in school, so I've had to sacrifice spending time with friends as a result of school. There were two other girls that I used to hang out a lot together with, but now that I'm going to school and they're just working, they hang out all the time, and I'm at school and they always go, 'I never call you because you're so busy,' and I'm like, 'well you can call anyway,' so yeah, being different probably has affected my relationships and not being able to give them as much time.

Jennifer expressed her ambivalence towards pursuing her calling, revealing her fears of missing out on other aspects of life, and the danger of trying to succeed in primarily one area:

It makes me nervous that there is only one life, and that maybe I'm not going to experience everything, say if my life is cut short you know, or something might happen. I'd have to say the thing that I don't like about it, is the fear, the not knowing what's going to happen, not knowing for sure, or just thinking that, I could fail.

Maybe that's the thing, I could fail, and not pursue the goals that I want, or possibly not achieve the goals that I'm striving towards.

At the end of Kim's interview, when asked if she would like to add anything else, she described her life calling experience by saying:

Just that it's not always easy. I think that some people can think that because I know what I want to do with my life, it doesn't always mean that it's easy. There are some people who are like, 'Kim you aren't meant to do this, you can't do this, you're not a

good teacher because the students are taller than you', or 'you're just not good' there are definitely times like that, or there are students that you don't get along with, but those are the times, the people that don't want you to do this, or the students that you don't get along with, that push you and prepare you even more for your life calling. So I'd say just because I know what I'm doing doesn't mean that everything goes perfect.

The Interview Process

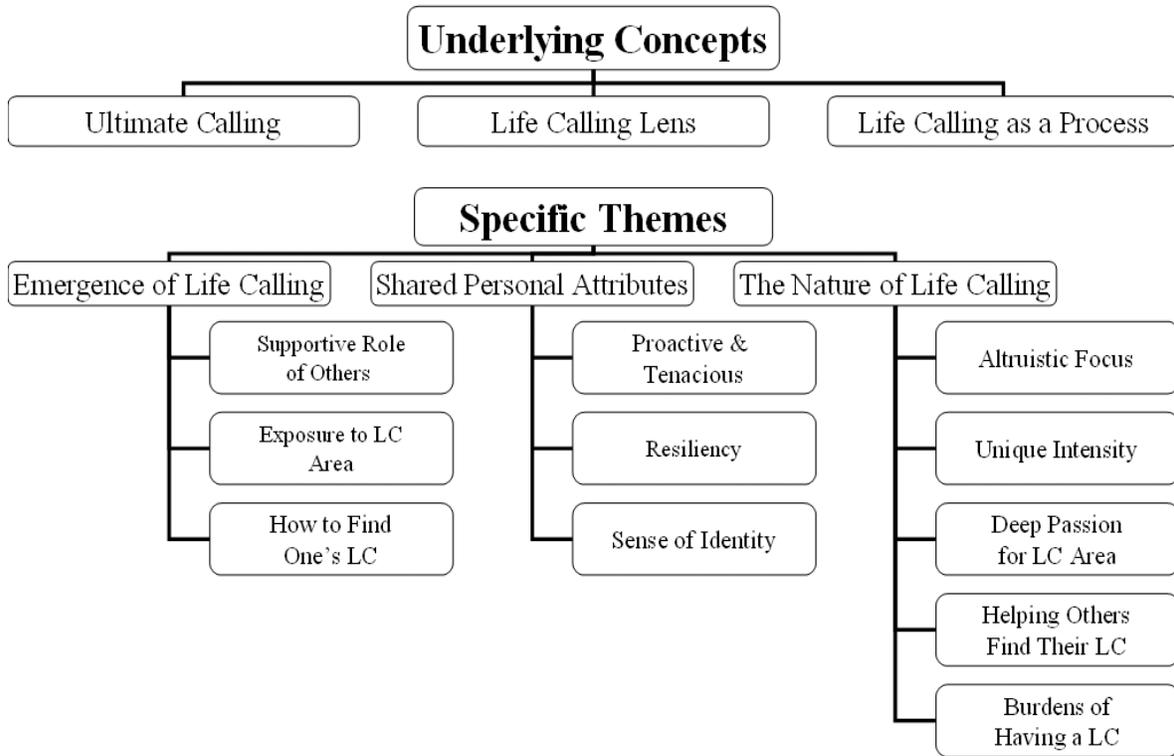
It appeared as if the interview process provided a unique experience for several of the participants to answer structured questions around their life callings, something that they had not previously had the opportunity to do. Several participants reported that the interview process allowed them to work through new ways of viewing their life calling, and that had arrived at an increased sense of self-awareness by the end of their research involvement.

For example, Lynn expressed an increased sense of self-awareness that came out of the interview process by saying:

So I started looking for ways to encourage others to notice that they have a strength here or a strength there, because that was how, now that I think about it, how it started with me. And so, actually today was the first time I thought about, "well that's how it started with me."

A pictorial summary of the themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews are found in figure 1.

Figure 1: Flowchart of Findings



CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The themes that emerged from the seven participants' narratives reflected the fact that life calling was experienced somewhat differently by each participant, given their unique histories, interests, and future goals. However, within the range of their individual experiences, many commonalities were evident. The conclusions that can be drawn about life calling from the common experiences of these seven women are presented in this chapter, along with implications for practice and future research, and the limitations of this study.

Conclusions

The findings of this study supported several different life calling perspectives that were presented in the literature review, suggesting that, although these participants were of the Christian faith, their experience of life calling is shared across other theoretical, historical, psychological, and modern secular views of life calling. The findings will be discussed in the categories in which they were presented in Chapter 4: Findings (above): (a) underlying concepts, (b) themes related to the emergence of life calling, (c) themes related to shared personal attributes, and (d) themes related to the nature of life calling.

Common underlying concepts. The underlying concepts included (a) ultimate calling, (b) life calling lens, and (c) life calling as a process. For this group of young women, life calling appears to encompass much more than one's academic major or area of occupational interest; it appears to be deeply intertwined with their worldviews and life values. Because the participants' worldviews and senses of life calling were closely connected, the act of seeing the world through the lens of one's calling seems to be a logical amalgamation. Given that the participants often felt consumed by their life callings, and much of their university

and recreational lives were directly related to their callings, it is understandable why other, non-related experiences were viewed through their life calling lenses. One of the questions that remains unanswered is whether people with a strong sense of calling at an early age view their whole life through this lens because they have a strong sense of that calling; or whether their adoption of a lens of calling to interpret all aspects of their life is what has allowed them to develop such a strong sense of calling; or whether they are dispositionally prone to becoming absorbed in whatever they do, and they have come to describe such an approach a calling when it comes to their occupational domains. In any case, it is evident that their life calling pervades every area of these people's lives.

Each participant's faith played a large role in her sense of life calling, as many references were made to "God's will" and their perception of what God would have them do. Alongside the participants' faiths were their own interests, motives, and preferences which, when combined, seemed to result in a dance between discerning one's own direction and the direction in which they felt God has called them. For all seven participants, both directions ended up being the same, suggesting that their life callings were the culmination of both their own desires and the direction they felt God was leading them in. This may have been in part due to their pursuit of what they perceived to be their ultimate calling of following God's will, which would likely have made them shift their priorities to become in line with what they discerned to be God's will.

The idea that there is an underlying ultimate calling seems to suggest that some people perceived life calling to be much greater than themselves. Although each calling was experienced personally, its origins and purposes went beyond the specific person who was experiencing the calling. This sense of greater purpose was also evident in the finding that

each participant felt called to offer some form of service or help to others. As D. Hansen and Rehm (1995, 1990) would frame it, these life callings reflected the intersection of the deeply personal with that which is socially purposeful, meaningful, or necessary. Although the design of this study opposes the refutation of Elliott's (1992) claim that calling does not always have to be directed at serving the community, the experience of life calling of all seven participants certainly seem to support D. Hansen and Rehm's position that life calling includes a strong social element.

The finding that life calling was process-oriented provides some support for Hall and Chandler's (2005) proposal that calling is experienced as cyclical in nature. Exposure, interest, and success in the areas of their calling served to reinforce and increase participants' confidence, interest, and frequency of exposure to their life calling areas. Most participants described a process of life calling that was slowly built upon step by step, as interest and success in their life calling areas were increasingly reinforced. Their process of experiencing life calling included exposure to and completion of tasks within a calling area, which when completed, resulted in further interest and assuredness of oneself within the calling. Hall and Chandler's concept of metacompetencies was also evident in these findings, as the metacompetency of identity awareness emerged as participants spoke of their increased sense of identity and in turn increased self-confidence.

Together, these findings regarding the process of life calling all support the idea that it is a timely process, one that cannot be rushed, and one that requires reflection of times past, consciousness of the present, and a vision for the future.

Emergence of life calling. The themes that arose in this area were (a) the supportive (or non-supportive) role of others, (b) experiences in and exposure to the life calling area, and (c) how to find one's life calling.

Six participants spoke with deep appreciation about individuals who have helped them along their life calling journey. Whether it was a parent, educator, or friend, the supportive role of others appears to be crucial in the development of life calling, for people who develop a strong sense of calling at an early age. In contrast, Heather's experience demonstrated that the support of others is not always required for someone to discover and pursue their calling. However, her perception was that the absence of such support resulted in a much more difficult discovery and exploration process. Overall, it would appear that support from others is not necessary, but is certainly helpful in the development of a sense of calling early in life.

A related finding is the theme of other people influencing participants' sense of calling by exposing them to their present life calling area. The presence of supportive figures who encourage individuals to pursue a calling and expose them to a particular area of interest (particularly during their formative years) seems to be an important factor in facilitating the discovery of life calling. The findings also suggest that a strong sense of life calling is not necessarily fostered through epiphany-like moments passed from one person to another, but may emerge gradually, through actions as simple as noticing a student scoring higher in a certain subject area and commenting on that strength.

Although a number of different social supports were mentioned by the participants, mothers were the people who were most frequently perceived as playing the crucial role in the formation of these women's life callings. As the majority of participants spoke about

their positive relationships with their mothers, they also commented on how their mothers had supported them throughout their lives and life callings. In combination with previous research demonstrating the important role that parents, especially mothers, have on career development during the formative years (e.g., Birk, & Blimline, 1984; Dick & Rallis, 1991; Domene, Shapka & Keating, 2006; Otto, 2000; Paa & McWhirter, 2000; Young et al., 2006), this finding suggests that mothers who have healthy and supportive relationships with their daughters, and who approach career exploration from a calling perspective, may have provided many of the factors that can lead to young women's successful discovery and pursuit of their life callings. Although Heather's and Becky's experiences demonstrate that having a supportive mother is not a necessary pre-condition to the development of a strong sense of life calling, it certainly seems to facilitate the process.

The experience of two participants also indicated that significant negative experiences, such as being diagnosed with life threatening conditions or having to undergo multiple surgeries, can also lead to the development of a clearer sense of calling. This possibility is also supported by Eliade (1987), who explains that calls are commonly heard in times of social or personal crisis and provide remedies for the distress or disorder. Both Penny and Becky reported pursuing careers in which they would one day fill the shoes of those that brought healing to them and, in the future, provide remedies for others who are in distress. It should also be noted that, during the exposure to negative experiences within the life calling area, these two participants encountered caregivers who played a supportive role in their physical care, and who also encouraged them to pursue their callings. It remains to be determined whether the crucial element for the formation of calling is the crisis situation itself, or the presence of supportive individuals whom one encounters during a crisis, or the

combination of the crisis experience and being exposed to others who are supportive.

The theme of finding one's calling also raises the unique perspective proposed by Becky, who proposed a "looking back" approach as opposed to the "looking forward" mentality of discerning what one should pursue. Her perspective indicates that, for some people, life calling encompasses the entire course of one's life, including one's past. For individuals like Becky, part of pursuing one's life calling may involve reflecting upon the times one was involved in experiences of deep interest, energized focus, and feelings of fulfillment and satisfaction.

Overall, the results of this study suggest that there are many different aspects and experiences that can contribute to a person's strong sense of life calling in young adulthood, including the supportive role of others, exposure to life calling areas, and pursuing one's calling by looking in the past and towards the future, are all key elements to the process of life calling's emergence in one's life.

Shared personal attributes. The shared personal attributes that emerged in this study included (a) being proactive and tenacious, (b) having resiliency and (c) developing a strong sense of identity.

Many of the participants took the initiative to research their life calling area, and also involved themselves in many different experiences within their callings through volunteering, summer jobs, and even recreation. They were also able to continue their pursuit despite experiencing challenges and obstacles, thus revealing the presence of resiliency in their calling. Consistent with Hall and Chandler's (2005) model of calling development, the participants seemed to experience an increase in their degree of self-identity, after successfully attaining goals and overcoming obstacles in their life calling

areas.

This category of themes raises questions about how a strong sense of life calling emerges in young people. Specifically, the tenacious, investigative and determined nature of all the participants leads to the possibility that life calling may emerge most strongly in individuals with personality types similar to the participants in this study. At minimum, this study indicates that being tenacious, proactive, and resilient is strongly linked with the ability to identify and maintain pursuit of one's calling. This finding relates back to the dance between the participants' own interests and efforts and their discerning of God's will for their lives, which included an assuredness in their life calling journey. This possibility is supported by Lewis' (1989) theory of calling, which includes two elements, the promise and assurance of protection and assistance in carrying out the call, and the total commitment of the person to the calling.

Concerning the participants' personal efforts, life calling appeared to emerge in an active rather than passive way; that is, life calling may not be something that is stumbled upon like partially buried treasure sticking out of the ground. Instead the process may be closer to running a marathon, taken step by step, requiring tenacity, determination, and resiliency. The participants in the study revealed that their sense of calling was developed over time, as they took the necessary steps to continue the emerging process. Some participants enrolling themselves in relevant classes, others volunteered in their life calling areas, and others researched their areas in order to identify what tasks were required to continue their pursuit. Although it is possible that some people's life callings may emerge very quickly and with minimal effort, all the participants in this study described experiences that involved active engagement in the emergence of their callings, over a considerable

amount of time.

The finding that these individuals had a strong sense of identity appears to be intertwined with Lopez' (1989) proposal that discovering one's life calling requires a certain degree of self-knowledge. He posits that the clearer one's sense of interests, goals, and values as they pertain to career planning, the further one is in the process of individuation and in the formation of one's vocational identity. The present study also provides some support for Kush and Kim's (2004) applied integrative model of life calling. In particular, their model states that having a strong sense of identity, when matched with a strong sense of purpose, results in individuals identifying a particular direction which together formulates a sense of life calling. A sense of identity is crucial in this model as it requires that one have a certain degree of self-awareness in order to know which skills, abilities and talents to implement along with their sense of purpose and direction. The participants in this study demonstrated a high sense of identity which allowed them to combine that sense along with their identified purpose and life calling direction.

Furthermore, many participants framed their calling as a natural expression of who they were, an understanding of calling that echoes Maslow's description of vocation being a tangible expression of one's growth needs:

Generally the devotion and dedication is so marked that one can fairly use the old words vocation, calling, or mission to describe their passionate, selfless, and profound feeling for their work...Something for which the person is as natural, something that he is suited for, something that is right for him, even something that he was born for. (1971, p. 291)

The findings related to the participants' personal attributes do not support a single

model of life calling to the exclusion of all others. Instead, it appears as if many of the existing psychological models of life calling provide part of the answer in explaining the development of a strong sense of calling early on in a person's life.

The nature of life calling. The themes that emerged about the nature of life calling in these young adults' lives were (a) an altruistic focus, (b) a unique intensity, (c) a deep passion for the life calling area, (d) helping others find their life calling and (e) the burdens of life calling. Life calling was experienced as both an inward and outward experience. As each participant spoke about feeling fulfilled, experiencing a sense of flow, and having a deep passion for the area in which she was helping people, it became apparent that to have a strong sense of life calling meant to express oneself through one's skills, personhood, and passions. Moreover, this expression of self was commonly achieved through the outward-focused goal of helping others. The altruistic nature of the life callings that were reported also seemed to be connected to participants' ultimate life callings. All participants identified with the Christian faith, and many of their interpretations of God's will for their lives involved the service of others. This may mean that, for Christian young adult women who have already developed a strong sense of life calling, many may interpret their calling as including some element of social commitment.

The way that the participants all expressed an incredible zeal for their area of interest suggests that life calling is something that evokes passion and excitement in the hearts of those who feel it. Consistent with many models of life calling (e.g., Elliott, 1992; Gareau, 1984; Jung, 1953/1983), most participants described being pulled towards their calling in an indefinable way. For many, they were captured by their life calling area but could not fully explain why. Note that the findings do not indicate that individuals must be perceived by

others as passionate people in all areas of life in order to experience a life calling. However, it is proposed that for someone to develop a strong sense of calling, he or she must have the propensity to be romanced by an area of interest; that is, have an openness towards becoming immersed and passionate about a particular topic.

Those young adults who do develop a strong sense of life calling may also be recognized by others as having something which is desirable. As the participants spoke of assisting others in their pursuit of calling, it became evident that they were viewed as teachers or guides by others who were seeking similar direction in life. Simultaneously, those who have experienced their own calling seem to want to share this possibility with others. Much like the experience of falling in love, one wants to share with the world his/her discovery, so too does life calling appear to urge the individual to share of its attributes, and just as importantly, its attainability.

Despite the passion that these participants felt for their life callings, virtually all of them also revealed that pursuing a calling comes with a heavy cost. They described how having a calling means that other areas of interest, relationships, and recreation are put aside. Pursuing a calling seems to require a lot of hard work, pursuit, and dedication, and like anything else in life that is greatly sought after, it comes at the expense of other experiences. The findings also suggest an element of delayed gratification in the experience of life calling: many of the participants were ignoring pursuits outside of their life calling area and working hard in the present, to attain greater happiness and fulfillment for the future. They also revealed that, although the work involved in their strong sense of calling is far preferable to not knowing one's calling or failing to actively follow it, pursuing their calling still leads to unexpected trials, obstacles that must be faced, and sacrifices that must be

made.

Thus, the interviews with these seven individuals suggest that the nature of life calling can involve an outward focus, an inexplicable passion, a desire to help others discover their own callings, and a burden which is heavy, but also well worth the cost.

Summary. The themes that emerged within the six categories of findings have revealed how life calling is experienced, and what its meanings are, among a sample of seven female Christian university students. In a similar study (conducted with 25 adults ranging in age from the late twenties to early seventies), Elliott (1992) defined a secular calling as involving (a) a sense of doing what you were meant to do, (b) a compelling sense that you must do this work, (c) a level of intensity not found in other work, (d) a desire to share the results of the calling with others, and (e) a determination to do it even if work were not financially necessary. Each of the participants in this life calling study met all of the criteria for Elliott's definition of a secular calling (apart from the last point which was never inquired upon by the researcher). The comparability of results between studies, and the relationships between the findings of this study and the theoretical, historical, and psychological views of life calling, suggest that life calling is a distinct phenomenon, with common attributes that are shared across various peoples in various points of history.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations were present in this study, primarily due to the size and homogeneity of the sample.

In many forms of qualitative research, the concept of saturation refers to capturing all aspects of a particular research area (Creswell, 2004). With only seven individuals contributing to the final data set, saturation was not achieved. There may be many other

aspects of the experience of life calling in young adulthood that have yet to be identified.

The findings of this study remain transferable to other young women with similar life circumstances as the participants, but should not be interpreted as an exhaustive description of all the meanings and characteristics that are possible for one's sense of calling early in life. Future research conducted with larger groups of young female adults, of varying backgrounds, would expand the understanding of the phenomenon of life calling among this population.

Despite the original intention to recruit both men and women, all seven participants in the final sample were women. This limits the knowledge and conclusions that can be made about life calling in young adult males. For example, each of the women reported a critical role their mothers played in the development of their life calling, future research that includes male participants may indicate that fathers also play an integral role in the development of one's life calling. It should also be noted that two of the four excluded interviews derived from male participants who lacked clarity when talking about their sense of life calling. There are many possible explanations for this lack of clarity in the males. For example, males could be less skilled at articulating their calling, males may not have as strong a sense of calling as females, or males could simply be less interested in participating in research, especially research that involves lengthy qualitative interviews. Alternatively it may have been the result of sampling issues (e.g., proportion of males to females in total sample, potential age effects in terms of males or females in the sample being of different ages). Whatever the reason, there is a clear need to explore the issue of life calling in male young adults, whether through this strategy or some other research design.

Although all participants were female, each interview was conducted by a male

researcher. It is possible that participants would have responded differently to a female interviewer, given the different dynamics that exist in female-female relationships than in male-female relationships. A similar future study on life calling that involves female researchers conducting the semi-structured interviews may yield somewhat different responses. At the same time, it should be recognized that Elliot, in her qualitative study on life calling, found many themes that were similar to the ones that emerged in this study.

All participants described themselves as having a Christian religious faith. Although the experience and meaning of life calling of these participants fitted a wide range of religious, historical, theoretical, and psychological views of calling, it is unknown if people with worldviews that are grounded in secular or other faith traditions would have similar experiences and meanings of their life callings. Future life calling research that includes young adults of different worldviews and faith traditions would bring further light to this area of inquiry. One specific direction to explore further is that the participants in this study linked the altruistic focus within their life callings to their Christian faith. It would be of interest to determine whether individuals of other faiths or of no faith traditions who have a strong sense of life calling have a similar altruistic focus to their callings. Alternatively, given societal expectations for women to be nurturing and care-giving (Eagly & Crowley, 1986), it will also be important to extend this line of research to young adult males, before any comprehensive understanding can be attained about the links between calling and altruism.

Although limiting participants to individuals who were between 18 and 25 years old was an intentional choice, this decision still has some consequences that need to be acknowledged. Of necessity, the findings were only able to focus on the beginning stages of

life calling. It is expected that in the participants' futures, hindsight will become more of a factor, resulting in an increased ability to see how one's life calling has weaved through other aspects of their lives. A more complete picture of life calling could be obtained through a longitudinal study, which would be capable of addressing the differences and similarities in people's views of their life calling at different stages of their lives.

The findings of this study suggest that discovering one's life calling is facilitated by having a certain degree of self-awareness; that is, awareness of one's values, interests, goals, thoughts, emotions, behaviour, and worldview. A question that naturally arises is how do parents, educators, and leaders in the community aid in helping young people discover themselves? Research aimed at developing strategies and techniques to increase young people's self-knowledge is expected to produce valuable information that could assist in individuals discovering and pursuing their life calling.

Given the finding that participants experienced a unique intensity when involved in their life calling area, links between this theme and the psychological constructs of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) or hardiness (Kobasa, 1979) may be made. It is expected that research in all these areas may result in commonalities. In particular, it would be of interest to discover if participants who report experiencing a sense of flow, or who demonstrate hardiness in their lives, would also consider themselves to have a life calling.

As mentioned previously, the personal attributes of the participants in this study requires follow-up on the possible connections between personality types and the experience of life calling. One possible direction would be to use standardized measures of personality and life calling to explore the intercorrelations between the various components of these constructs. Assuming that such a study would reveal identifiable, replicable links between

aspects of personality and life calling, this future research direction may eventually assist career counsellors when directing clients who fit a particular personality description.

Implications for Counselling

The findings in this study provide many potential implications for career counsellors, vocational educators and others, in terms of integrating a life calling perspective into their practice. These implications must be understood in terms of the preliminary and exploratory nature of this study, but are nonetheless worthwhile to consider.

Educating parents, teachers, religious leaders, youth leaders, and caregivers around the historical and contemporary concepts of life calling and vocation is expected to bring clarity to the concepts at hand. Doing so in a counselling setting would hopefully result in a broader awareness of the applications of life calling that transcends traditional religious occupations, and in turn, a greater number of individuals may begin living from a calling perspective.

The crucial role of mothers in facilitating their daughters' life callings emerged in this study. Thus, it may be beneficial for parents who are open to a life calling perspective to be (a) encouraged and reminded of how much of a positive and supportive effect they can have on their children at a young age, and (b) informed about the possible benefits that may arise from their children's development of a strong sense of life calling (e.g., confidence, self-efficacy, identity, purpose, and direction). Doing so may allow parents to be recruited as effective partners in the career counselling process, a strategy that has been encouraged elsewhere in the vocational psychology literature (e.g., Domene et al., 2006; Hall, 2003; Middleton & Loughead, 1993; S. Palmer & Cochran, 1988).

Some recent career counselling research has already examined the potential benefits

of implementing calling-based career development workshops with university undergraduate students. Dik and Steger (2006) examined the effects of including a life calling perspective within career development workshops offered on campus. Among their findings was an indication that the beneficial effects of self-disclosure by the workshop facilitators on attendees' meaning in life, was greater for people in the calling-infused workshop condition than for those in a standard career-development workshop. Other findings within the study suggested that the calling-based workshop may provide unique wellbeing benefits (i.e., presence of meaning in one's life) for participants who were already in a place of searching for meaning. Together, Dik and Steger's research and the findings of the present study, suggest that including a life calling perspective in different modes of career counselling (group or individual) may benefit university students, at least for those students whose career development includes a component of searching for meaning.

Given all the participants' expressed desire to share their journey of life calling with others, career education workshops could be designed to allow young adults with a high sense of life calling to assist their peers, through providing examples, modelling, and feedback, within a group or individual setting. This form of intervention may benefit both the young adult facilitators, and their peers who are seeking guidance. Support groups could also be formed for those individuals with a high sense of life calling in order to share and reflect with one another on the burdens that come with having a life calling, working towards recognition that hard work and sacrifice appears to be part of the calling process.

Given that a majority of the participants reported being introduced to their life calling areas at a young age, counsellors may also find it useful to encourage children and adolescents to try out many different vocational areas, using language that promotes a life

calling perspective of self-expression, purpose, and direction.

In terms of individual counselling strategies, career counsellors may also find it useful to highlight the fact that life calling is process oriented, and that pursuing one's calling may include identifying one's interests, volunteering, exposing oneself to unknown topic areas, enrolling in post-secondary education, and job shadowing. Also, because every participant spoke about the altruistic focus of her life calling, it may be beneficial for career counsellors to suggest to clients that combining what is deeply personal and socially purposeful may allow them to develop a stronger sense of their life calling. Career counselling could then also focus on the related issues of one's worldview, identity, purpose, and life goals, hopefully leading to a heightened sense of awareness of what life and occupational directions one most desires.

Overall, this study expanded the knowledge base of life calling through a thematic qualitative analysis of seven interviews with Christian female university students. Given the intriguing and exciting findings that emerged, it is greatly anticipated that further, larger-scale research in life calling will yield results that will more systematically inform clinical practice. There is already sufficient evidence to consider including a life calling perspective within a career development context, and it is apparent that there is a large degree of potential growth in regards to the various ways of including life calling in the world of career counselling. As future research is conducted, the knowledge base of life calling is expected to grow and along with it, the varying potential benefits of having a strong sense of life calling.

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APPENDIX A

Life Calling Survey Information

Due to the in-development nature of the Life Calling Survey, the authors of the survey have requested that it be removed from this thesis. If you would like further information regarding the survey please contact one of the authors:

Dr. Ken Kush – kush@twu.ca

or

Dr. Mira Kim – mira.kim@twu.ca

APPENDIX B

Life Calling Survey Recruitment E-Mail

Dear student,

Hi there, my name is Jared French and I am a graduate student in Counselling Psychology at TWU School of Graduate Studies. I am currently looking for participants for my thesis project that is focused on life calling among university students.

I am using a survey entitled the “Life Calling Survey” to help identify potential participants for my thesis project. The survey itself only takes about 10-15 minutes to complete and as an incentive, if you complete the survey and provide your email address (which will be kept confidential and used to contact you if your name is drawn), you will be entered to win a \$50 gift certificate at TWU’s bookstore.

If you decide to participate in the survey, you will find on the survey’s second page a question asking if you would be open to being contacted for further research on life calling. This question is provided so that if your scores indicate that you would be a good candidate for further research, I will be able to send you more information about my study and you can decide if you’d like to be further involved.

Below is a link to the Life Calling Survey, by clicking on the link you will be able to participate in the survey.

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=391151658691>

If you have any questions or would like further details concerning this study, please reply by email to jared.french@shaw.ca

Thank you,

Jared French

APPENDIX C

Demographic Questionnaire Attached to the Life Calling Survey

Life Calling Survey Demographics (Just for Analysis)

1. Gender:

- Male
- Female

2. Year:

- First Year
- Second Year
- Third Year
- Fourth Year
- Fifth Year +
- TWU Alumni
- Graduate Student (School of Graduate Studies)

3. Nationality:

- Canadian
- American
- Other (please specify)

4. Religion:

- Christian
- Buddhist
- Muslim
- No Religion
- Other (please specify)

5. Race/Ethnicity:

- Caucasian
- Other (please specify)

6. Program you are/were in:

7. Email Address (Confidential – Just for the incentive and for further research):

8. Are you willing to be contacted by email for further research regarding life calling? (Your name and email will be kept confidential):

APPENDIX D

Participant Recruitment E-Mail

Dear Student,

You filled out an internet survey on Life Calling that was administered approximately 2 months ago. You had mentioned that you may be willing to participate in further research on this topic. I invite you to participate in my research study that is independent of student life and is for my Master of Arts thesis project. My study involves interviewing participants about: (a) what life calling means to university students; and (b) how life calling is experienced in peoples lives.

There will be two interviews with the first being about 1 hour long and the second follow up interview being about 30 minutes. Interviews will be video and audio-recorded. All information collected will remain confidential. However, if the participant is a danger to self or others, confidentiality may be breached for the protection of the client and/or potential victim.

The risks and benefits of taking part in this study are minimal, but all interviewees will receive a token of thanks (\$10 gift certificate to TWU's bookstore). Please note that all participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence, should they feel uncomfortable for any reason.

Please let me know if you are interested in participating in this study via email (jared.french@shaw.ca). If you decide to participate I will contact you to book a time for an interview.

If you have any further questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact myself or one of my supervisors.

Jared French: jared.french@shaw.ca

Dr. José Domene (Thesis Supervisor): jose.domene@twu.a

Dr. Ken Kush (Second Reader): kush@twu.ca

Thank you,

Jared French

APPENDIX E

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Do you consider yourself to have a life calling? (If so, what does that mean to you?)

2. When did you first know that you have a life calling?

How did the life calling come?

Has someone told you something that triggered it?

Do you have any models, even people you don't know personally?

Do you have any mentors?

3. How do you feel about having a life calling?

What do you like about it?

What do you not like about it?

How much of your life does it consume?

Have you ever felt isolated because of it? If so, how do you deal with it?

What's been the impact of your calling on your relationships?

What is your parents' and other's attitudes towards your calling?

What's been the attitude of your friends towards your calling?

4. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX F

Sample of Four Stage Thematic Analysis of Participant Interview (see attached)