Regular Articles

Calling and Vocation at Work

Definitions and Prospects for Research and Practice

Bryan J. Dik
Colorado State University
Ryan D. Duffy
University of Maryland

The purpose of this article is to initiate an effort to establish the constructs calling and vocation within counseling psychology. First, updated definitions of calling and vocation, developed with an eye toward stimulating research and providing useful practice applications, are proposed. Next, the authors explain how the constructs apply to the domain of human work, review empirical and theoretical work related to calling and vocation and their role in human functioning, and differentiate the terms from each other and related constructs. Finally, directions for basic and applied research on calling and vocation are suggested, and implications for career counseling practice are outlined.

> Three workers [were] breaking up rocks. When the first was asked what he was doing, he replied, "Making little ones out of big ones"; the second said, "Making a living"; and the third, "Building a cathedral."
>
> Ryan (1977, p. 11)

The role of work in human life has been conceptualized in a variety of ways throughout history, ranging from a curse (ancient Greece) to the means by which humanity likens itself to the divine (the Renaissance), from an act of self-realization (Marx) to an act of self-denial (Freud; Hardy, 1990). Time- and

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culture-bound work-related norms regulate social interaction by helping set social expectations and by influencing the subjective meanings work has for individuals (Ruiz Quintanilla & Wilpert, 1988). In turn, the meanings that individuals attribute to their work, such as their beliefs about its purpose or what it achieves (Brief & Nord, 1990), are typically assumed to influence important work-related outcomes such as job performance, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, and well-being (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). One aspect of the subjective meanings of work is the extent to which it contributes to a sense of purpose or meaningfulness, where *purpose* is defined as "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self" (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003, p. 121) and where *meaningfulness* is conceptualized as "the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one's being and existence" (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006, p. 81). Although relatively little empirical research has directly targeted purpose or meaningfulness in the work domain, more than 40 years of research suggests that the overall presence of meaning in life promotes (and may be a hallmark of) psychological health and well-being (Steger et al., 2006).

Beyond recent forays into the role of spirituality and religiousness in career development (e.g., Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006; Duffy & Blustein, 2005; Robert, Young, & Kelly, 2006) and a more substantial body of research on the meaning of work in women's lives (e.g., Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2001; Sellers, Thomas, Batts, & Ostman, 2005), surprisingly little research within counseling and vocational psychology has investigated individuals' experiences of purpose and meaningfulness in the work role. This leaves a conspicuous void in one of the central domains of counseling psychology, particularly given the field's emphasis on positive aspects of human functioning (Lopez et al., 2006; Robitschek & Woodson, 2006; Super, 1955). In response, we voice a call to counseling psychologists in general, and career development researchers and practitioners in particular, for increased attention to the roles and functions of developing, experiencing, and promoting meaningfulness and purpose at work. More specifically, we propose that calling and vocation are valuable, inclusive, and cross-culturally relevant constructs that provide a promising template for guiding research and practice that targets individuals' experience of work as meaningful. The purpose of the present article is to advance detailed, multidimensional definitions of calling and vocation; apply the constructs to the domain of work while briefly (i.e., nonexhaustively) discussing their relevance across cultures, social classes, and types of work; provide a context by reviewing contextually

relevant research within psychology; suggest new directions for research on these constructs; and describe their implications for career development practice.

Calling and Vocation: Background and Working Definitions

Historically, the idea that the full range of occupations can be viewed as a calling or vocation dates at least to the 16th century. At that time, Protestant reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin reacted against the prevailing zeitgeist, described by Hardy (1990) as "the medieval monastic ideal and its religious devaluation of all earthly occupations" (p. 45), by developing the idea that "earthly" occupations, too, can hold spiritual significance.[1] This perspective, decidedly egalitarian in nature, was affirmed by Puritans in 17th-century England, who wrote extensively on the topic after emigrating to what became the United States. The influence of Puritan views on work attitudes in the United States and northern Europe was famously (if controversially) pointed to by Max Weber (1904-05/1958), who argued that Protestants anxious about their prospects for salvation adopted a lifestyle of asceticism and dedication to hard work, which led to the rise of capitalism. Although this "Weber Thesis" has been roundly criticized as overly simplistic, some elements of Puritan thought and its antecedents are widely agreed to have contemporary influence on work attitudes in industrialized nations.

In recent years, a number of scholars (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1986; Colozzi & Colozzi, 2000; Hall & Chandler, 2005; Hardy, 1990; Schuurman, 2004; Treadgold, 1999; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997) and popular authors (e.g., Brennfleck & Brennfleck, 2005; Guinness, 1998; Levoy, 1997; Novak, 1996; Palmer, 2000) have argued for the importance of reestablishing the constructs of calling and vocation as pathways for infusing meaningfulness into work and other life roles. Underlying many of these arguments is the recognition that whereas calling and vocation were at one time culturally promoted considerations in career decision making (Baumeister, 1991), often described as contributors to the deepest forms of satisfaction or psychological success (Hall & Chandler, 2005), economic and societal shifts have engendered values antithetical to meaningfulness and purpose (e.g., viewing work as "a segmental, self-interested activity"; Bellah et al., 1986, p. 66). The increased attention in the literature and the challenge of renewing focus on these constructs has been matched with funding support: Between 1999 and 2002, 88 colleges and

universities were awarded $171.3 million through Lilly Endowment grants for the purpose of promoting "the theological exploration of vocation."[2] However, despite the favor these constructs have generated, there is little agreement regarding their definitions (Duffy, 2006). As is the case in other areas of investigation (e.g., see Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005), a certain degree of agreement on the meaning of calling and vocation is required for research to advance in a focused and coherent manner.

Typically, the terms calling and vocation are used to refer to a sense of purpose or direction that leads an individual toward some kind of personally fulfilling and/or socially significant engagement within the work role, sometimes with reference to God or the divine, sometimes with reference to a sense of passion or giftedness. However, existing definitions often are vague and confounded, frequently represent "a somewhat degraded form of the concept[s]" (e.g., as a "duty to the self" or "one's passion in life"; Baumeister, 1991, p. 142), and tend to lack the detail and clarity necessary to guide reliable and valid measurement. In response, we propose conceptual definitions of the constructs with the goal of facilitating comprehensive, multidimensional, and culturally relevant operational definitions with clear and specific applications to counseling practice. Our working definition of calling is as follows:

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

The first dimension of the definition represents the extent to which the individual perceives her or his motivation within a particular life role to come from an external source. This intentionally leaves open the content of the perceived source or sources of callings, which may range from God to the needs of society to serendipitous fate. Some individuals may point to multiple sources (e.g., a calling from God and from the needs of society). The second dimension involves being mindful of the purpose and meaningfulness of one's activity within a particular life role and how one's efforts may fit into a broader framework of purpose and meaning in life. This process is believed to help people find stability and coherence in life (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Savickas, 2005; Wrzesniewski, 2003). The remaining dimension draws from historic meanings of calling and vocation that assumed that the purpose and meaningfulness of activity within a particular life role was to contribute (directly or indirectly) in some positive way to "the common good" or wellbeing of society. Also encapsulated in this dimension of the definition is the

motivation on the part of some individuals to honor God through their work (e.g., Tisdale, 2004). Finally, this definition implies that a calling potentially can be pursued within any life role (Super, 1980), not solely that of worker or employee (Schuurman, 2004). An individual may claim to have a calling in the context of a particular network of relationships, for example, or may describe having multiple callings (Oates, Hall, & Anderson, 2005). As already noted, the purpose of this article is to describe the application of calling and vocation to the work role.

The construct vocation is closely tied to calling historically, although over time an increasingly clear distinction between the two constructs appears to have evolved (Schuurman, 2004; Serow, 1994). Our working definition of vocation attempts to acknowledge the considerable overlap with calling while conceptualizing the construct as inclusive of internal sources of motivation to approach a life role in this manner. Specifically, we define the construct as follows:

> A vocation is an approach to a particular life role that is oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation.

The overlap of calling and vocation obviously is considerable, but their distinction is important. That is, individuals with callings and vocations connect their work to an overall sense of purpose and meaningfulness toward other-oriented ends, but only individuals with callings perceive the impetus to approach work in this manner as originating from a source external to the self.

A Priori Assumptions

To help elucidate the discussion that follows, we begin by making explicit the following assumptions. First, we view persons as active agents capable of genuine intentionality, forethought, self-regulation, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2006), but we also assume this agency to be influenced by complex interactions among biological, environmental, and spiritual factors (Bandura, 1982; Chen, 2006; Jones, 1994). Second, we assume that humans are meaning-making organisms (e.g., Baumeister, 1991; Frankl, 1969; Wong & Fry, 1998) who consciously and subconsciously construct both global and particular meanings for life experiences. Third, we assume with Super (1980) that individuals enact a constellation of life roles that interact in varied and complex ways. We consider work to occupy one of these life roles and define

working broadly to include any activity or effort, paid or unpaid, that is directed toward accomplishing or producing something that fills a societal or organizational need. (We acknowledge with Blustein [2006] that distinctions between work and nonwork are not "neat and tidy" [p. 24] and that activities often are approached through the lenses of multiple life roles.) Fourth, we assume that humans, by necessity, live in societies bound by common needs and mutual service (e.g., Blustein, 2006; Hardy, 1990; Robitschek & Woodson, 2006) and that work role activities therefore have direct or indirect social implications that vary in magnitude. Finally, we assume that obstacles to meaningfulness and purpose at work are present on multiple levels (e.g., individual, organizational, societal) but also that these obstacles are amenable to change.

Calling and Vocation in the Work Role

As calling and vocation apply to the work role, it is important to note several points of clarification. First, our view is that these constructs do not reflect something a person discovers once and for all but rather involves an ongoing process of evaluating the purpose and meaningfulness of activities within a job and their contribution to the common good or welfare of others. This view recasts calling and vocation as encompassing a process that can include making a career choice but extends beyond choice behavior to include the question of how a career, once chosen, might be pursued in a manner that connects work activities to one's overall sense of purpose and meaningfulness toward "other-oriented" or pro-social ends. One implication of this perspective is that it also gives the constructs relevance for individuals who may not have pursued their ideal career but who may nevertheless craft or reframe their existing work responsibilities in a way that transforms their work into a calling or vocation (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Second, these definitions imply that every person potentially has a vocation. This assumption is fundamental to the applications of the construct to career development practice. We acknowledge the possibility that considerations of calling and vocation may be perceived as irrelevant for individuals for whom basic survival needs are not met. However, it also is plausible that a calling or vocation is most needed in such circumstances, and in fact, some may perceive as prejudicial the assertion that only the privileged are able to experience a sense of meaningfulness and purpose in life or in the work role. Hardship may even facilitate pursuit of a calling or

vocation for some. For example, Hall and Chandler (2005) reported that among unemployed research participants from diverse backgrounds "there was consensus that having resources can in some cases be a barrier to discovering a calling, as that removes a source of motivation to self-explore and try out different kinds of work" (p. 167). Of course, the life of an unemployed professional in the United States is still obviously privileged relative to that of, for example, a laborer toiling in the sugar cane fields of the Dominican Republic for the equivalent of $15 a month (Bernier, 2003). Accordingly, the extreme conditions (such as forced labor) faced by far too many individuals and groups in the global community are patently antithetical to experiencing meaningfulness in work. Even so, anecdotal evidence of resilience demonstrated by individuals working under severe oppression who nevertheless infuse their work with purpose is available (see McWhirter, Blustein, & Perry, 2005, for a poignant example). Ultimately, we view the relation between social status and calling or vocation to be a matter for research to address.

Third, a calling or vocation can occur in the context of any legitimate[3] area of work, not just (for example) religious, teaching, or social service careers. This implies that callings and vocations can be pursued within all occupations, including those that may not appear to enhance the well-being of society in any obvious way. For example, individuals with jobs low on the prestige hierarchy—positions they may have entered out of economic necessity rather than as the result of an unconstrained decision-making process—may still approach work as a calling or vocation. This possibility is consistent with our perspective that these constructs apply more to the way individuals approach their work rather than to the actual content of the job choice, but empirical evidence also supports this hypothesis. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) and Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) reviewed evidence suggesting that groups of administrative assistants, hospital cleaning staff, hairdressers, and restaurant kitchen employees indicated that they approached their work as a calling or crafted their jobs in ways that allow them to experience their work as meaningful, often in a manner that contributed to others' well-being. Similarly, Isaksen (2000) found that employees in highly repetitive jobs often derive meaning from work, with the effect of reduced stress symptoms. Finally, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) provided evidence that even individuals in "dirty" (i.e., extremely undesirable) jobs often derive meaning by reframing, recalibrating, or refocusing the social function of their work tasks.

Fourth, some individuals may describe themselves as currently having a sense of calling or vocation, whereas others may indicate that they are

searching for (but do not currently have) a sense of calling or vocation. We regard the distinction between "presence of" and "search for" in the study of calling and vocation as critical, particularly in light of developmental differences across the trajectory of career development. Finally, as noted earlier, we expect some individuals to regard calling and vocation as completely irrelevant to their approach to work. For example, individuals who endorse values related to power, prestige, and wealth accumulation as most salient are probably disproportionately less likely to appraise their work as a calling or vocation. To reiterate, we expect that individuals who endure ongoing workplace discrimination are less likely to approach work as a calling or vocation. As Blustein (2006) noted, the hardships that many people face at work can be so overwhelming that it may extremely difficult (though perhaps not impossible) to derive any meaningfulness or sense of purpose out of the work context.

Research on Purpose and Meaningfulness at Work

Ryff and Singer (1998) identified having a sense of purpose as a critical factor in lives that are well lived and noted that the work domain is an obvious context in which purposeful living can be expressed. They observed that research on the effects of work on human health and well-being has been extensive but that the dominant emphasis has been deficit based, focusing on illness and how adverse work conditions or loss of work affects human dysfunction. They concluded that the field lacks "a counterpoint literature on how work facilitates human purpose, meaning, self-realization, and enactment of one's unique abilities, and thereby enhances one's health. The linkage between these aspects of work and the enhancement of one's health has rarely been addressed" (p. 8). We obviously agree that researchers need to more vigorously address the health- and meaning-promoting functions of work and careers, and in fact we are hopeful that this article stimulates investigation of such topics within counseling psychology.

However, Ryff and Singer's (1998) conclusion also is an overstatement. It overlooks research undertaken by areas such as industrial–organizational psychology, management, and occupational health psychology that addresses some of what they describe as largely missing. For example, researchers have investigated multidimensional patterns of subjective meanings people attribute to working (e.g., Brief & Nord, 1990), the relative importance of work in the context of life (Dubin, 1956; Greenhaus, 1971; Kanungo, 1982; Loscocco, 1989), intrinsic and extrinsic motivation toward

work (Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, & Tighe, 1994; Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959; Lawler & Hall, 1970), and how people shape jobs to fit their unique work role orientations (Wrzesniewski, 2003; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Moreover, the desire to find a job that has meaning and purpose can be an important component in the career decision-making process (Lips-Wiersma, 2002; Wrzesniewski, 2003; Young & Valach, 2004), and individuals who find their work meaningful beyond financial rewards report higher job satisfaction, higher job performance, less job stress, and longer tenure (Claes & Ruiz Quintanilla, 1994; Knoop, 1994a, 1994b; Mottaz, 1985). Unfortunately, this research has been conducted primarily on samples that are disproportionately affluent and White, and far too many studies fail to report demographic information about participants. These constraints clearly limit the extent to which such research can be generalized across groups in a rapidly diversifying society.

Well-being researchers, following centuries of teachings from "philoso-phers, religious masters, and visionaries, from both the East and the West" (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 145), have proposed that eudaimonic well-being, which entails personal growth, psychological strengths, and meaning-fulness, irrespective of levels of hedonic (pleasure-driven) well-being, represents a cornerstone of human flourishing (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Mean-ingfulness, in particular, buffers against depression and anxiety and corre-lates positively with a variety of indices of healthy psychological functioning (e.g., Steger et al., 2006). Meaningfulness also has been conceptualized as one of several factors from which happiness arises (Lent, 2004) and is itself a desirable end state, possibly instinctual in nature (Frankl, 1969) and of central existential importance (Emmons, 1999). Because women and people of color continue to face barriers in access to the hedonic benefits (e.g., stemming from power, pay, and prestige) of many careers due to racism, sexism, and glass ceiling effects (Constantine, Erickson, & Banks, 1998; Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2002; Worthington, Flores, & Navarro, 2006), a sense of meaningfulness and purpose in one's career may be especially important for these groups. This possibility is consistent with results from a large-scale survey by Ryff, Keyes, and Hughes (2003) in which minority status was a consistent *positive* predictor of eudaimonic well-being, even after controlling for other factors (e.g., perceived discrimination). This result does not contradict the well-established finding that mental and physical health can be harmed by distress associated with racism; rather, it suggests that advantages in some aspects of well-being may be independent of, and can exist alongside, negative outcomes. This same phenomenon may occur

for those experiencing disadvantages in their working lives. For example, despite barriers and constraints faced by women in the workplace, the role of work in women's lives can provide a venue for social support, additional opportunities to experience success, and an avenue for meaningfulness and purpose outside of traditional gender roles (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Halpern, 2005).

Research within counseling psychology has begun to assess the role of religiousness and spirituality, constructs closely tied to meaning (Park, 2005), in career development (Duffy, 2006). For example, intrinsic religiousness and spiritual awareness were positively associated with career decision self-efficacy for one sample of predominantly White (80%) students attending a Catholic university (Duffy & Blustein, 2005). Duffy and Lent (in press) found that among religious college students, support received through one's religious community and relationship with God weakly to moderately correlated with career decision self efficacy (CDSE), and God support served as a stronger predictor for (CDSE) than general social support. Qualitatively, with samples of African American (Constantine et al., 2006) and predominantly White college students (Royce-Davis & Stewart, 2000), participants have described drawing from their spirituality and religiousness for help in coping with career-related struggles and have reported that their spiritual and religious beliefs influence their work-related values, prompting thought into what "God's plan" is for them. In a sample of predominantly White working adults, spiritual and religious well-being was positively associated with job satisfaction (Robert et al., 2006). Also, a recent qualitative study of 16 participants from New Zealand, representing diverse nationalities and religious/ spiritual affiliations, found that those who viewed spirituality as important in life also expressed a greater desire to serve others through work and to have a meaningful career (Lips-Wiersma, 2002). The connection of individuals' religiousness and spirituality in their career development has been supported by a number of theoretical models, including those by Bloch (2005), Brewer (2001), Hansen (1997), and Miller-Tiedeman (1994). While there are variations among the models, each emphasizes that individuals who are spiritual or religious should use this in their decision making, as these may be critical components of their self-definitions that often go overlooked when thinking about careers (Duffy, 2006). It is interesting that these theoretical and empirical efforts appear to have developed independently from organizational research on workplace spirituality (e.g., Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003), which recently was described as one of the fastest growing areas of new scholarly inquiry (Giacalone, Jurkiewicz, & Fry, 2005).

In part reflecting limitations in many of the existing definitions of calling and vocation, research on these constructs has relied on measurement approaches consisting of grouping methods, single items, or brief scales for which adequate psychometric evidence is not reported. Another major limitation of these studies is their frequent failure to report basic demographic characteristics of participants, thus making it impossible to assess their generalizability. Most notably absent in multiple studies is any reference to race and ethnicity or social class. Nonetheless, these studies have yielded generally consistent results. For example, participants who approach work as a calling have reported greater work and life satisfaction (Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Wrzesniewsi et al., 1997); greater commitment to their profession (Serow, Eaker & Ciechalski, 1992); greater self-concept clarity and use of problem-focused coping; and less stress, depression, and avoidance coping (Treadgold, 1999) compared to those with other approaches to work. One recent study with a large, diverse sample of college students found that those who expressed higher levels of the presence of a calling were more decided and comfortable in their career choices, reported greater vocational self clarity, and attributed greater importance to their careers (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). Also, students who expressed higher levels of searching for a calling were more undecided and uncomfortable in their career choices, reported lower vocational self clarity, and attributed less importance to their careers. Finally, one study of predominantly White (90%) education students indicated that those who felt called to teach, compared to those who did not feel called, were more likely to endorse personal values related to social justice and spiritual fulfillment, displayed greater enthusiasm and commitment toward their careers, were more mindful of the social impact of teaching, were less concerned about sacrifices that accompany teaching, and were more likely to voice acceptance of duties that go beyond the job description (Serow, 1994).

A small number of qualitative studies also have investigated aspects of calling and vocation. A majority of African American undergraduates in one study reported that they were living out God's plan through their career, with some identifying their work as a calling or vocation (Constantine et al., 2006). In another, several African American women described their careers in education as callings, despite entering teaching only because societal barriers prevented pursuit of their preferred career choices (Loder, 2005). Finally, in two studies of predominantly White, Christian mothers working in academic settings, participants reported feeling called to both motherhood and their careers. They described the nature of their callings as subtly different across roles and noted that approaching work as a calling facilitated an adaptive approach to coping with interrole conflict (Oates et al., 2005; Sellers et al., 2005).

Distinction of Calling and Vocation
from Related Constructs

In defining (or redefining) any construct, it is necessary to describe how that construct differs from others that are conceptually similar. In the work domain, well-established constructs such as work centrality (Dubin, 1956), work commitment (Loscocco, 1989), work and job involvement (Kanungo, 1982), and career salience (Greenhaus, 1971) refer to various aspects of the psychological importance an individual places on her or his career. Although we expect that individuals who view their careers as a calling or vocation likely attribute considerable importance to their work, the meaning-making and pro-social aspects of calling and vocation are not captured by these constructs. Personal engagement (Kahn, 1990) in a work context refers to "the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviors that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence (physical, cognitive and emotional), and active, full role performances" (p. 700). Although individuals with a calling or vocation may display high levels of personal engagement, the episodic basis of engagement differs from the more stable calling and vocation orientations. Similarly, we expect that "flow" experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) may often occur for individuals approaching work as a calling or vocation, but the experience of "flow" is not a defining characteristic of the constructs.

Additional variables that may overlap with the proposed constructs relate to other aspects of how individuals approach work. Psychological participation (Vroom, 1959) refers to the extent to which a person is able to influence decisions made within her or his work environment; high levels of participation likely help facilitate calling and vocation orientations, but participation is function of the work environment, whereas calling and vocation are individual characteristics. Hall (2002) described "the protean career" as a self-directed, values-driven orientation to work. This resembles the calling and vocation orientations but does not require that work is pursued with a purpose, other oriented or otherwise (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Intrinsic work motivation (e.g., Amabile et al., 1994; Lawler & Hall, 1970) refers to the phenomenon of individuals engaging in work as an end in itself (e.g., because of the challenge it provides or because it satisfies interests) rather than as a means to some extrinsic end (e.g., a paycheck or promotion). We expect that individuals who approach work as a calling or vocation generally score high on measures of intrinsic work satisfaction; however, work can be pursued intrinsically for reasons other than those captured by our definitions of the terms.

One's sense that helping others is an important component of a career can be considered a work value, where Dawis (2001) defined values as "uncomplicatedly what is important to us" (p. 461). Although these constructs incorporate particular work values (e.g., for meaningfulness and social contribution, components of altruism in Dawis and Lofquist's [1984] taxonomy of values), calling and vocation also include demonstrating or deriving meaning and, in the case of calling, require the perception of an external summons to approach one's career in this way.

Finally, construct overlap also may occur when comparing calling or vocation to workplace spirituality, recently described as "a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees' experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy" (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003, p. 13). Framed in this way, calling and vocation might be understood as collections of individual characteristics that can be fostered by organizations that promote workplace spirituality. In sum, although they may share variance with a number of other constructs, calling and vocation appear to be sufficiently distinct from other career-related variables to warrant attention as unique constructs.

Implications for Research

The establishment of concrete definitions of calling and vocation paves the way for a host of research implications. Perhaps first and foremost is the development of measurement instruments to reliably and validly assess the constructs. Of the few studies that have assessed calling or vocation empirically, none did so with instruments supported by strong evidence for reliability and validity. The establishment of psychometrically sound instruments that measure the degree to which individuals are currently characterized by the "presence of" and "search for" the dimensions of calling or vocation would allow for greater power in examining individual differences with respect to these variables than is available using current approaches. Improved measurement tools also would allow for a greater ability to assess the extent to which members of a given population currently approach their work as a calling or vocation or are currently seeking a calling or vocation (i.e., base rate information). Particularly because this area of research is in its infancy, we advocate using multiple methods to facilitate a rich assessment of these constructs. For example, data collected using rationally and statistically derived scales may be augmented with qualitative interviews or open-ended

response items. Another possible measurement strategy would be to adapt procedures used to assess personal goal constructs, such as personal strivings (Emmons, 1999) or current concerns (Klinger, 1987), so that goals within the work domain are targeted. Responses elicited by such measurement approaches can be self-coded by participants and coded by independent raters along a variety of relevant dimensions that may shed light on the roles of calling and vocation in the working lives of individuals. An initial study demonstrated the utility of a "career development strivings" approach for assessing calling and other constructs (Dik, Sargent, & Steger, in press).

The construction of psychometrically sound measurement approaches would set the stage for exploratory research on calling and vocation. On a very basic level, little is known about demographic predictors of these constructs. For example, despite initial evidence (e.g., Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997) suggesting that individuals across the full range of occupational prestige approach their work in ways that resemble a calling, it is plausible that calling and vocation orientations are overrepresented in high prestige careers or careers requiring a high level of education. Similarly, socioeconomic status may link to calling and vocation in that activation of a minimum level on Maslow's (1970) need hierarchy (e.g., esteem needs) may be required before considerations of purpose or meaningfulness in one's work become relevant, although it may also be the case that such considerations represent a mechanism for coping with hardship in the work role. High-status work may, in fact, discourage or obstruct the pursuit of calling and vocation to the extent that such work creates an internalized demand to maintain a high baseline of wealth or power (which we suspect it often does). Discovery-oriented, qualitative methodology would likely be especially useful in building a rich understanding the interaction of these constructs with social status.

Another critical demographic question pertains to how calling and vocation may differ across individuals with different cultural backgrounds. For example, individuals from collectivist cultures, where career satisfaction may be more closely linked with meeting the needs of a community or group rather than the individual, may be more oriented to the pro-social elements of the constructs than those from individualist cultures. Similarly, the strength of religious and spiritual commitments in certain cultures or societies may make these considerations highly salient, resulting in calling being viewed as the normative ideal. We hypothesize that calling and vocation are relevant across multiple cultural perspectives but that differences in the expression of these constructs may exist cross-culturally (e.g., greater emphasis on meaningfulness in individualist cultures and greater emphasis on social contributions in collectivist cultures). Finally, although initial research suggests that

aspects of approaching work as a calling may be differentially related to other variables (e.g., intrinsic work motivation) across gender (Eldridge, Dik, & Steger, 2006), more research is needed to investigate possible effects of gender socialization processes on calling, vocation, and work experiences.

Calling and vocation also could be assessed alongside a number of variables that may precede, follow, or relate concurrently to the proposed constructs. Of particular interest would be an individual's level of "presence of" or "search for" calling and vocation as they relate to classes of variables such as spirituality and religiousness; motivational characteristics; personality traits; and traditional variables of interest within vocational psychology such as vocational interests (most notably Holland's [1959, 1997] typology), needs/values, abilities, self-efficacy beliefs, self-concept clarity (i.e., vocational identity), career adaptability, decision comfort, and occupational choice, aspirations, and expectations. Levels of calling or vocation also may correlate with a number of criterion (i.e., "outcome") variables related to working including job satisfaction, job performance (especially "metacompetencies"; Hall & Chandler, 2005), work commitment, work engagement, organizational citizenship behavior, and tenure. Similarly, levels of calling and vocation may link to a number of higher order variables, such as life satisfaction, life purpose, meaning in life, and social connectedness, which may be related directly to calling and vocation or may be mediated or moderated by other variables. Although it is expected that calling and vocation correlate positively with desirable career development criterion variables such as job satisfaction (e.g., Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), some (e.g., Hardy, 1990) have suggested that individuals oriented toward calling and vocation often sacrifice some aspects of job satisfaction (e.g., pay, comfort) for the sake of others (e.g., making a difference in society). Higher order variables also may interact with calling and vocation dimensions to differentially predict well-being. Preliminary evidence from an initial investigation found only limited support for the hypothesis that individuals seeking a calling but who experience life as meaningful report greater well-being and positive career development; more support was found for the hypothesis that individuals seeking meaning in life while indicating they have a calling report greater well-being and positive career development progress (Steger & Dik, under review).

Research also is needed on factors that influence the development of a sense of calling or vocation. Research within vocational psychology indicates that family structure variables (e.g., parents' occupations) as well as family process variables (e.g., warmth, attachment) influence a number of career development constructs (Whiston & Keller, 2004). We expect that similar family-of-origin influences may be at work in the development of calling or

vocation. Critical life events, experienced directly or vicariously, may also contribute to a sense of calling or vocation for some. For example, anecdotal evidence suggests that large numbers of people respond to highly visible disasters (e.g., the 9/11 terrorist attack, Asian tsunami, and Hurricane Katrina) by leaving their current jobs, temporarily or permanently, to come to the aid of victims (e.g., Eidelson, D'Alessio, & Eidelson, 2003). Ultimately, longitudinal research is needed to assess the development of calling and vocation over time; however, investigations employing retrospective methods would be beneficial in providing an initial foray into this question.

On a similar note, research also is needed on the range of different sources of a calling and how these differences may relate to both predictor and criterion variables. For example, some people perceive themselves as called by God to a certain career while others may feel called to serve society in some capacity without necessarily being spiritual or religious. Although these groups may experience similar outcomes, such as job and life satisfaction, the variables predicting different calling sources are likely to vary considerably and may range from a strong relationship with a higher power to the presence of specific life events or experiences to which individuals ascribe special significance (Bellah et al., 1986; Dalton, 2001; Greenbalt & Greenbalt, 2001). As noted earlier, comparisons of individuals with a calling to those with a vocation but not a calling would provide useful insight into the influences of externally occurring versus self-generated sources of motivation in the context of work.

Finally, an important research consideration particularly relevant for career development professionals is the extent to which a calling or sense of vocation can be encouraged or instilled in individuals with career-related concerns, as well as what the salient outcomes of such efforts are. For example, studies employing randomized clinical trial methodology might be conducted in which well-being, career development progress, and client satisfaction outcomes are assessed for participants randomly assigned to treatment conditions, such as calling-oriented counseling, non-calling-oriented (i.e., "standard") counseling, and a control group. Results from an initial research effort employing this approach suggested that a calling-oriented workshop was at least as effective as a workshop for college students based on standard, person–environment fit (P-E fit) and that the calling-oriented workshop was particularly beneficial for participants who indicated that they were searching for meaning in life (Dik & Steger, under review; Steger & Dik, under review). On a broader level, given the recent prevalence of institution-wide programs such as those recently sponsored by the Lilly Foundation, research investigating the influence of such programs on target outcomes among participants is needed. Finally, research could be conducted within an

organization to assess the extent to which particular organizational practices designed to nurture callings or vocations (e.g., job redesign, employee involvement, path-goal leadership) effectively foster employees' experience of their work as meaningful or socially valuable. Such research also may identify organizational practices that impede development of callings or vocations.

Implications for Practice

We believe the concepts of calling and vocation provide a useful framework for career counseling and vocational guidance with clients who desire to find purpose and meaningfulness within the work role. In our experience and that of others (e.g., Colozzi & Colozzi, 2000), a high percentage of clients presenting for career counseling indicate that finding meaningful work is important to them, and many use the word calling or vocation to describe what they are hoping to experience. Some clients, particularly those with strong spiritual or religious beliefs, present with concerns about trying to find what they are "meant to do" or what "God's plan is" for them (Duffy & Dik, in press). One implication of our understanding of calling and vocation is that when such language is used, counselors might first assess clients' beliefs regarding the nature of career decision making and the extent to which they expect to play an active or passive role in the process; some clients may be oriented toward engaging in traditional career decision-making tasks (e.g., self-assessment, gathering world of work information), whereas others may express an expectation that answers will somehow be made known to them via inspiration or revelation. For clients characterized by the latter approach, it may be helpful to encourage them to view the process of discerning a calling as one that usually is mediated by one's own ability to self-examine (e.g., interests, abilities, etc.) and assess fit with various opportunities in the world of work.[4] This may provide an opportunity for such clients to integrate their spiritual and religious beliefs into the career decision-making process in a manner that gives them the freedom to engage the process actively, facilitating rather than circumventing their ability to make informed career decisions.

Central to our understanding of calling and vocation within the work role is the emphasis on connecting an individual's activity within that role to a larger framework of meaning and purpose. Given the varying cultural traditions and values of clients, it is critical that counselors are open to a wide range of conceptions of purpose and meaning. Thus, for counselors to

assist clients in this process, a first step may involve helping clients to clarify their larger framework for meaning and purpose and exploring how this developed. A number of authors have provided helpful strategies that can be adapted for this process. Savickas (1989, 1995, 2005), for example, has advocated a life theme counseling model that employs a narrative approach. In this vein, Brott (2005) reviewed several techniques, based on a constructivist career counseling perspective, that are useful in identifying personal life meanings of clients. A simple and direct approach to specifying a larger framework of purpose and meaningfulness might utilize open-ended writing exercises, such as responses to a series of questions akin to, "When it comes down to it, what ultimately is most important in life?" "How would you describe your overall purpose in life?" and "Where do you try to find answers to questions of purpose and meaningfulness?"

Once clients have addressed the broad level of life purpose or meaning, a next step is for counselors to help clients connect what they view as their life purpose or role in the larger society with their activity within the work role. The goal in this process is helping clients align work-related pursuits in a manner that is consistent with, or that contributes to, their larger sense of life purpose or meaningfulness. Colozzi and Colozzi's (2000) depth-oriented values extraction approach provides one method for assisting clients in clarifying and prioritizing value themes and finding connections between work and life values. Counselors may frame this discussion by first making explicit the assumption that engaging in meaningful work potentially has a wide range of benefits related to job satisfaction, performance, general well-being, and life satisfaction. Counselors also may encourage clients to incorporate the assumption that humans live in societies governed by interdependence (e.g., Blustein, 2006; Hardy, 1990; Robitschek & Woodson, 2006); this lays the foundation for connecting all honest areas of work to the "common good" or well-being of society. It is hypothesized that for clients from certain cultural backgrounds, this notion may be accepted and viewed as commonplace while for others this may seem new and abstract; here again would mark a critical process point. If this component fits within a client's cultural framework, counselors then can assist clients in specifying career development goals that that complement their visions of life purpose.

The content of approaches like those just described obviously requires sensitivity to the specific concerns with which clients present. For those with concerns about initial career choice, goals may center around choosing a best-fitting occupation and approaching that area of work in a way that aligns with life purpose. In contrast, for those currently employed but dissatisfied—particularly those who may experience significant barriers to changing jobs—goals

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may involve approaching one's current job in a different way, such as by changing the task or relational boundaries of the job or changing one's cognitive approach to the job and its meaning in the context of society. This process is similar to what Wrzesneiwski and Dutton (2001) describe as "job crafting." As mentioned earlier, Wrzesniewski and Dutton reviewed evidence suggesting that individuals from a range of occupations, many of which were low in prestige, may approach their work in a manner that facilitates a sense of meaningfulness and purpose. For example, the authors described a group of hospital cleaners engaging in several tasks not required by their job, such as interacting with visitors and patients and timing their regular job duties to make the work of others in their units (e.g., nurses, clerks) more efficient. These employees enjoyed their work, felt their job tasks required a high degree of skill, and perceived their activity as critical in helping patients heal. The process by which these employees changed the boundaries of their jobs to enhance purpose and meaningfulness was presumably naturally occurring; we suggest that career development practitioners assist clients in developing their own job crafting strategies, given the unique demands of their jobs.

The constructs calling and vocation also suggest a unique, albeit not new, parameter for consideration in career counseling: the notion of "social fit." First advanced in Plato's *Republic*, the idea of "social fit" can be defined as the extent to which an individual's abilities (broadly defined) fit with the requirements established by a particular set of social needs (Muirhead, 2004).[5] In our view, "social fit" parallels "personal fit," defined as the extent to which an individual's abilities, interests, and work-related needs are effectively utilized, satisfied, and reinforced by the work role. This view of personal fit reflects the traditional understanding of P-E fit, first articulated by Parsons (1909). Arguably most career counseling approaches, implicitly or explicitly, incorporate the notion of personal fit, such as by interpreting assessment instruments in light of requirements and opportunities in the world of work. We advocate expanding this approach to include considerations of social fit by assessing client beliefs about, for example, what types of services or products are most needed in their local community or in the larger society and where within the identified range of social needs they perceive themselves to be best equipped (currently or potentially) to contribute. Frequently, career counseling and vocational guidance practitioners describe the goal of career interventions as helping clients attain optimal levels of both job satisfaction and job performance; implicitly, the goal is personal fulfillment—a goal that may often be at odds with work-related norms from diverse cultural traditions. The calling and vocation perspectives are not at odds with this goal but add as a desired outcome that of helping clients contribute (directly or indirectly) to others' well-being. In doing so, it is expected that clients would experience increased levels

of meaningfulness, purpose, significance, and sense of contribution within the work role, although this clearly is a question for research to address. Furthermore, an explicitly pro-social approach to vocational psychology research and practice is consistent with vocational psychology's recent push to promote a social justice agenda (e.g., Blustein, McWhirter, & Perry, 2005).

When considering the application of calling and vocation to the counseling process, we again remind practitioners to be cognizant of the cross-cultural significance and meaning of the constructs. Within the field of career counseling, theoretical and empirical work has highlighted the cultural differences that exist with regard to effective treatment and techniques (Arthur & McMahon, 2005; Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005). Clients working on career issues related to the presence of, or search for, a calling or vocation would undoubtedly do so through a cultural lens, and failure to acknowledge this lens would discount a critical element of a client's identity. Although we propose nomothetic definitions of calling and vocation to guide research, counselors are encouraged to work with clients to understand possible idiosyncrasies in how these constructs are understood and explore how cultural values may affect their salience.

Finally, as Blustein et al. (2005) aptly noted, "a fine, and important, distinction exists between assisting people to overcome adverse conditions and working toward dislodging those conditions" (p. 152). Much of the discussion in this section has focused on the individual level of change, including helping those experiencing work-related barriers to reframe or restructure their approach to work in an effort to increase their potential for experiencing meaningfulness. Thus, we end by reiterating our assumption that organizational and societal systems and practices often strip work of its dignity and potential meaningfulness. Yet we also assume that the brokenness in these structures is amenable to change. In full agreement with Blustein et al. that counseling psychologists "are a group with a shared responsibility to actively make the working lives of all people humane, safe and optimizing" (p. 155), we suggest that the constructs calling and vocation should serve to supplement and enhance the ongoing efforts of counseling psychologists and career development practitioners to promote a social justice agenda targeting the removal of barriers to meaningful work experienced by marginalized members of society (e.g., Blustein, 2006; Blustein et al., 2005; Hansen, 2003). In fact, the vision for a social justice approach to vocational psychology articulated by Blustein and colleagues is itself a framework through which counseling psychologists might pursue their work as a calling or vocation to the benefit of the oppressed and under-represented in our communities and world.

Summary and Conclusion

This article provides evidence for the importance of establishing the constructs calling and vocation and emphasizes the potential usefulness of these constructs in counseling psychology research and practice. Although research on these constructs has been sparse, our hope is that the definitions presented here will spark attention for these constructs that may play pivotal roles in career choice, job satisfaction, work commitment, and life meaning. Similarly, incorporating aspects of calling and vocation into counseling practice may add a dimension of counseling that is practical, constructive, and perhaps necessary for clients with strong spiritual and religious commitments or for meaning seekers. In sum, our view is that counseling psychologists are poised to play a formative role in contributing to a better understanding of the extent to which individuals approach their life roles as a calling or vocation and in turn how this affects their lives; constructing testable definitions, proposing hypotheses for research, and suggesting possible counseling extensions are first steps.

Notes

1. It is important to note that ecumenical convergence on this view of calling and vocation has occurred within the past century. For example, contemporary teachings of the Catholic Church support the general parameters of this view (see Pope John Paul II, *On Human Work: Laborem Exercens*). This view also shares assumptions made by teachings within some other world religions (e.g., Islam: El Azayem & Hedayat-Diba, 1994; and Buddhism: Dalai Lama & Cutler, 2004; Rinpoche, 2001; Sinetar, 1989) as well as some secular perspectives (Hall & Chandler, 2005).

2. More information about this initiative, including links to recipient institutions, is available online at http://www.ptev.org. Although some programs developed using with these funds are designed to encourage overtly religious career paths (e.g., ministry and mission work), most are designed to cultivate the view that all careers can be approached in a way that incorporates considerations of meaningfulness and purpose, consistent with the perspective presented in this article.

3. The word *legitimate* is used because *calling* and *vocation* include a posture of seeking the common good. The implication is that some areas of work cannot be considered callings or vocations inasmuch as they are not helpful to others or to society as a whole (e.g., manufacturing cigarettes; Carson, 1992). Of course, this introduces the inevitable subjectivity inherent in determining which areas of work are unhelpful to society. The definitions advanced here focus on the individual's subjective perception of her or his work as promoting the common good. However, the possibility of cognitive dissonance experienced by some individuals employed in morally questionable areas of work who nevertheless are highly invested in enhancing the well-being of their coworkers, for example, is one of a number of interesting empirical questions for which these definitions promote investigation.

4. This approach is consistent with mainstream Christian teaching on career choice (e.g., Hardy, 1990; Schuurman, 2004) as well as, for example, the Buddhist concept of "right livelihood" (Dalai Lama & Cutler, 2004; Sinetar, 1989).

5. The notion of social fit also is reflected in Buechner's (1973) oft-cited description of a calling as "the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet" (p. 95).

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Ryan D. Duffy, MA, is a doctoral candidate in counseling psychology at The University of Maryland, College Park and is currently a pre-doctoral intern at the University of Delaware's Center for Counseling and Student Development. He received his Bachelor's degree from Boston College and Master's degree from The University of Maryland, College Park. His research interests are broadly in the area of vocational psychology, and he has published on topics related to work values, job satisfaction, research productivity, and the interface of spirituality and career development.

Bryan J. Dik is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at Colorado State University and father of three boys. His degrees are from Calvin College (BA, 1998) and the University of Minnesota (PhD in counseling psychology, 2005). His primary scholarly interests include vocational interests and basic and applied research on calling, vocation, meaningfulness and purpose in the work role. He is co-editor with Peter C. Hill of the forthcoming book *The Psychology of Religion and Workplace Spirituality*.