CAREER CALLING IN EMERGING ADULT CHRISTIAN FEMALES:

A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

As emerging adults transition to adulthood, a significant struggle is how to find meaningful work. Emerging adults’ career decisions influence both their personal well-being and the greater occupational landscape, and those who can articulate a purpose for their career are better positioned to navigate the changing world of work. A concept that addresses this stage of identity exploration is that of a career calling, defined as putting one’s purpose into action to benefit others. Calling is a dynamic construct that is experiential, and this study utilized narrative research to understand emerging adult Christian females’ experiences of developing a career calling. From the participants’ career calling stories, a meta-narrative emerged. First, opportunities to enact innate identities and explore career options from a young age guided the participants toward initial career decisions. Then during their journeys into adulthood, each participant experienced a turning point event, categorized as either a trauma, tragedy, or transition. The participants responded to these events by: (1) Rethinking their situations, (2) Reaffirming their career paths, (3) Engaging in relationships, and (4) Realigning their lives around their values. This process resulted in a clarification of their callings, which they defined as (1) intentional, (2) an investment in others, (3) rooted in identity, and (4) a response to their faith beliefs. Lastly, the participants demonstrated agency and adaptability as they envisioned the future of their callings. Overall, these findings provide a framework for schools, universities, and organizations to design interventions to guide their students or employees toward developing a calling.

Keywords: career, calling, vocation, emerging adulthood, narrative research
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In lieu of goals, each new year our family determines a theme to focus the year ahead. It’s no surprise that the year I started the doctorate program, our theme was “Dare Greatly.” However, daring greatly is not possible without a community who is willingly and joyfully in the arena with you. It is also not possible without a God who “is with you wherever you go.” I am grateful that I have a community who is not only in the arena with me but reminds me that God is too. Only in Him, are “all things are possible.”

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Emerging adults, those ages 18 through 29, face endless possibilities as they transition to adulthood, but in the process, some feel paralyzed by the unknowns, experiencing mental health problems, such as depression, loneliness, high stress, and engagement in high-risk behaviors (Arnett, 2007; Arnett & Schwab, 2012; Kenny & Sirin, 2006). In particular, one of emerging adults’ most significant struggles is how to make career decisions and find meaningful work (Arnett, 2007; Arnett, Žukauskienė, & Sugimura, 2014). A concept that addresses this stage of identity exploration is that of a career calling, defined as a meaningful approach to work with a desire to serve a greater good (Hall & Chandler, 2005). The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study is to understand emerging adult Christian females’ experiences of developing a career calling. This chapter provides an overview of the problem and significance of emerging adults’ development of a calling, the author’s positionality in relation to the problem of practice, as well as the research questions and theoretical framework used in this study.

**Problem Statement**

Arnett (2007) coined the phrase emerging adulthood “as a new term for a new phenomenon,” describing the demographic shifts that have transformed the period of the late teens through mid- to late-20s as its own developmental stage (p. 70). Identity exploration, uncertainty, and change characterize this stage, and a primary focus is on career (Praskova, Creed, & Hood, 2015). Whereas past generations identified themselves by their work, now change and transformation characterize people’s careers (Bland & Roberts-Pittman, 2014). This shift causes emerging adults to search for meaningful work and prolong decision-making, evidenced not only by an increased time in college but also by decreased job tenure (Arnett et al., 2014; Mortimer, Zimmer-Gembeck, Holmes, & Shanahan, 2002; Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, &
Platt, 2010). The statistics support emerging adults’ disillusionment with work as they seek out meaningful jobs that fit their identity and must confront unfulfilled expectations as they search for meaningful work (Arnett, 2007; Clark University, 2015; Mortimer et al., 2002; Murphy et al., 2010). On average, only 52.9% of today’s college students graduate in six years with their Bachelor’s degree, and after this time, one-third of students have stopped higher education without receiving a degree or certificate (Shapiro et al., 2015). National data also reveals that these statistics represent an acceleration of the decline in completion rates (Shapiro et al., 2015). Many students attend college simply to delay making decisions about their careers and futures (Greenbank, 2011; Mortimer et al., 2002). Then upon entering the workforce, employees ages 20 to 24 switch careers every 1.3 years (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). For 25- to 34-year olds, the numbers are still low with an average employee tenure of 3 years.

Though emerging adulthood is known as the age of possibilities, it is also defined as the age of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between, making it the most heterogeneous period of life (Arnett, 2007; Arnett et al., 2014). As a result, many emerging adults experience mental health issues: More than half report anxiety and a third often feel depressed (Arnett & Schwab, 2012). Duffy and Sedlacek (2007) found that college students’ search for life meaning negatively correlated with psychological factors, including purpose in life, self-esteem, and life satisfaction, as well as career outcomes, such as career decidedness and self-clarity. The demographic delay in marriage and parenthood also increases the pressure to find the right career after graduating (Arnett et al., 2014; Kenny & Sirin, 2006).

With the career landscape becoming increasingly more complex, emerging adults who are able to identify and develop a career calling will be better positioned to make decisions for their futures (Bland & Roberts-Pittman, 2014). Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz’s
(1997) seminal study distinguishes between a job, a career, and a calling. The authors define the terms accordingly, and this study will adhere to these definitions as well:

- A job refers to work that one does to earn money and obtain material benefits to enjoy outside of work. Work is more of a means to an end.

- A career is a lifetime of similar types of jobs, which are relatively fulfilling but concerned more with promotions and advancements in the type of work. Those in careers can have personal investment toward their work but the focus is on achievements.

- A calling refers to work that people feel they are meant to do and that serve a greater good. Callings are typically viewed as “socially valuable – an end in itself – involving activities that may, but need not be, pleasurable” (p. 22).

Multiple studies confirm that the concept of a career calling is applicable for emerging adults, as evidenced by 68% of college students finding calling to be relevant to their career decision-making (Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2010). In a study at a large public university, 44% of college students believed that having a career calling was true or mostly true of themselves, and 28% were trying to figure out their career calling (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010). Additionally, several studies show the life benefits of a career calling, such as increased likelihood of finding a job that fulfills the calling, being committed to the job, and in turn being more satisfied with work (Duffy, Dik, & Steger, 2011). It is also associated with increased workplace satisfaction and commitment, as well as increased well-being, health, and life satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2011).

Although the term “calling” harkens back to the Protestant Reformation (Davidson & Caddell, 1994), it has recently become a popular topic in literature on career decisions (Duffy et al., 2011). Since the modern conceptualization of a calling is new in the literature, there is not a
fully agreed upon definition. In addition, how emerging adults develop and enact their career calling is not as prevalent in the literature. Although career calling measures exist (Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey, & Dik, 2012; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010), they do not assess the development toward a future career path, which is emerging adults’ primary developmental focus and is essential for understanding how emerging adults identify and live out their calling (Duffy, Douglass, Autin, & Allan, 2014; Praskova et al., 2015). Therefore, there is a need for more research in this area, and this study focuses on emerging adults’ development of a career calling in order to understand their decision-making process in the search for a meaningful career.

By exploring the development of a career calling, emerging adult individuals may benefit from an increased understanding of how to find their own calling. Those who work with this population, such as career and guidance counselors, teachers and professors, career coaches, and human resource professionals, may also apply this research to design interventions to help others discern a calling (Duffy & Dik, 2013). The author’s experience as a college and career coach provides personal interest in investigating how to focus tomorrow’s workers to find their career calling. This research may provide a new framework from which to counsel emerging adults, as well as a model to implement in school systems, universities, and organizations serving this population.

**Significance Statement**

As emerging adults transition from college to career, how they make career decisions and enter the workforce affects their own job satisfaction, the educational landscape, and larger workplace trends, as this section will explore (Hutchinson & Kettlewell, 2015; Mortimer, Zimmer-Gembeck, Holmes, & Shanahan, 2002; Steger et al., 2010). The concept of a calling
provides a construct for transitioning through emerging adulthood and finding a career path that mitigates feelings of being lost and alone (Praskova et al., 2015), as those with a career calling report greater psychological adjustment and positive work attitudes (Steger et al., 2010). On an individual level, the presence of a calling also positively affects career decisions and workplace behavior, correlating with greater career engagement, confidence, and vocational identity achievement (Hirschi, 2011) along with increased career planning, decidedness, and self-efficacy (Hirschi & Hermann, 2013).

Research, as well as personal experience as a college and career coach, shows that a primary struggle for emerging adults is finding a meaningful career path (Hutchinson & Kettlewell, 2015). The United States lacks a structured path for the school to work transition, which makes emerging adults’ own decision-making especially important (Mortimer et al., 2002). However, schools are not adequately preparing their students for future decisions, in large part because many school counselors are responsible for discipline issues, scheduling conflicts, standardized testing, and more, while also overseeing an average of 460 students (American School Counselor Association, 2014; Public Agenda, 2010). This “nerve-racking juggling act” makes it difficult to focus on college and career guidance (Public Agenda, 2010, p. 14). The difficult transition from education to employment has resulted in a new category of “NEET” young adults – not in education, employment, or training (Hutchinson & Kettlewell, 2015). Fifteen percent of 15- to 29-year-olds in countries a part of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are deemed NEET (OECD, 2014, as cited in Hutchinson & Kettlewell, 2015). Thus, a lack of guidance on the transition to the workforce not only affects individuals, but high young adult unemployment rates also have wide-reaching societal and economic effects (Hutchinson & Kettlewell, 2015).
The problem of emerging adults finding a meaningful career path has further implications for the larger workplace (Arnett et al., 2014). As was previously noted, job tenure for emerging adults is low, and employee turnover not only causes stress for the individual as they job search but is also a significant cost to the company (Boswell, Boudreau & Tichy, 2005; Holtom, Mitchell, Lee, & Eberly, 2008). The cost of turnover is estimated at one-fifth of a new hire’s annual salary, and soft-dollar costs of lost productivity can be even more significant (Center for American Progress, 2012; Towers Watson, 2005). Hiring for organizational fit is vitally important for the company’s health and the individual’s productivity, motivation, and life satisfaction (Huang, Guo, & Qiu, 2015; O’Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991; Uysal-Irak, 2014). However, when emerging adults enter the workforce, they often lack necessary support and guidance for their careers (Yarnall, 2011). By helping employees find meaningful jobs, workplaces enable themselves and their employees to compete on a global level (Schuler, Jackson, & Tarique, 2011). Thus, research on the development of a career calling could not only benefit emerging adults individually but may also have implications for human resource managers and other guidance practitioners who must understand young employees’ expectations and needs in order to provide specific development strategies (Polach, 2004).

**Positionality Statement**

Prior to research, it is important to examine one’s positionality to the topic. Doing so allows the researcher to develop strategies to approach the research objectively. My professional context as the founder of two college and career coaching companies allows me to personally identify with my problem of practice, and my experience confirms that many high school and college students, as well as recent graduates and young professionals, do not know how to articulate a sense of purpose for their career future. This experience provides passion for the
subject but also risks personal beliefs and biases creeping into the research process (Machi & McEnvoy, 2012). Through these companies, I help my clients make decisions for their future with a focus on their career path. As a coach I cannot transpose my own experiences onto my clients’ stories, which is a necessary approach for the research process as well. Following, I will examine my positionality in light of my personal experiences and biases and how it relates to emerging adults’ development of a career calling.

Briscoe (2005) explains that one’s identity and positioning in society influence their view of the world. I grew up in a white, middle- to upper-class family as an only child. Since my family placed a high value on education, as well as personal development, I attended a college preparatory high school and an out-of-state, private, liberal arts college. My upbringing and external contexts focused my attention on preparing for the future, but I need to be aware of how my race and socioeconomic status allowed me access to certain understandings about colleges, majors, and careers and not assume a similar knowledge base with all emerging adults. I cannot allow the knowledge that I was afforded to become a prerequisite for making meaningful career decisions. Otherwise, a deficit viewpoint will result, which assumes that the “cultural, social, educational, political, and economic spheres of life in the United States and access within the aforementioned are the same for all Americans regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and so forth” (Carlton Parsons, 2008, p. 1128). In my research, I take caution not to view my problem of practice from an environmental deficiency perspective that certain emerging adults lack information and resources for making good career decisions.

Additionally, I must be careful to not view career decision-making solely from my Westernized, middle-class, individualized lens. Researching only from this point-of-view neglects how a person’s immediate settings and broader institutional influences impact their
decision-making (Carlton Parsons, 2008). A person’s immediate contexts such as home and school (the microsystem), their relationships with others in the community (the mesosystem), and the larger culture (the macrosystem) influence one’s roles, perceptions, and experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Many individuals raised in cultures outside of one that is white and Westernized locate their identity in communities and the relational sphere, rather than in the individual (Fennell & Arnot, 2008). Therefore, in studying how emerging adults make career decisions, I take into account collective and communal perspectives, as well as individual.

Personally, one of my greatest beliefs that influences my passion for this problem of practice is my religious faith and background. I believe that everyone is called to a purpose and is designed with inherent worth and value. Therefore, I believe we are all meant to live a meaningful life. I recognize that I approach my research topic with this underlying assumption, namely that finding a meaningful career is important, necessary, and possible. I cannot allow my perception of having found my career calling to influence my definition or understanding of others’ career choices. Instead, keeping an open mind allows me to search for multiple perspectives of meaning and decision-making. For instance, identities are apt to change throughout one’s lifetime, which will influence how one determines what a “meaningful” career looks like for them as an individual (Briscoe, 2005).

In addition to background, ideology, and race, Briscoe (2005) posits that people form social identities also based on gender. As a woman, I experience the tension of choosing a meaningful career versus a family. I feel pressure to fit into a certain mold of success while also finding my identity as a wife and mother. This tension can produce a bias toward viewing women in “one of two roles – those of productive workers and reproductive mothers” (Fennell & Arnot, 2008, p. 527). Running my own companies offers flexibility as a mother and
businesswoman, but I recognize that even having this choice is something my privilege allows. Adhering to the Western feminism view of what Fennell and Arnot (2008) describe as the “othering of motherhood” can lead to “underprivileging… women’s role and identities” (p. 530). Instead, an awareness of this bias allows me to make room for various interpretations of a meaningful career.

In conclusion, my background and professional experience drive my interest in my problem of practice. By identifying my biases and opinions that result from this positionality, I am able to isolate my personal biases and opinions by remaining open-minded to differing perspectives (Machi & McEvoy, 2012). As a result, I gain a more balanced, accurate, and insightful understanding of my problem of practice.

**Research Question**

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study is to understand emerging adult Christian females’ experiences of developing a career calling. The following question guides this research: How do emerging adult females, who identity as Christians, describe the experiences that led them to their career calling?

**Theoretical Framework**

Savickas’s (2012a) career construction theory (CCT) is the theoretical framework that informs this study. CCT “explains the interpretive and interpersonal processes through which individuals construct themselves, impose direction on their vocational behavior, and make meaning of their careers” (Savickas, 2012a, p. 147). Rather than career development occurring in fixed stages with a “meta-narrative” toward definable career progress, CCT relies on “individual scripts” that dynamically present career development as an “exploration of possible selves” (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 240). Social constructionism informs the theory in that careers “do not
unfold” (Savickas, 2005, p. 43) in a linear, predictable path but rather are constructed by how individuals culturally, socially, and linguistically “impose meaning and direction on their vocational behavior” (Savickas, 2012a, p. 150). Whereas an objective career reflects a resume of past work experience, this subjective definition of careers is “the patterning of these experiences into a cohesive whole that produces a meaningful story” (Savickas, 2005, p. 43).

This theory refines Super’s (1957) seminal work that conceptualizes five career stages of growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement (Savickas, 2005). Super’s theory is known as life-span, life-space theory, in which individuals progress through specific developmental stages in order to integrate their self-concept into their work roles (Hartung, 2012). Adolescence and emerging adulthood occur in the stage of exploration, characterized by crystallizing, specifying, and implementing vocational choices and identity. Individuals’ “story their own work” based on this social narrative (Savickas, 2005, p. 49). However, the new, complex landscape of work requires shorter learning cycles rather than one life-long career cycle as Super proposed (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Boundaryless and protean careers are flexible and require the individual to continually “repackage” his or her knowledge, skills, and abilities to fit into the workplace market (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, p. 1544). This type of career “transforms the story from one about maturation in a stable medium to one about adaptation to a changing landscape” (Savickas, 2012a, p. 150). Thus, Super’s five career stages become minicycles “around each of the many transitions from school to work, from job to job, and from occupation to occupation” (Savickas, 2005, p. 50). As opposed to a career “path,” the career becomes “a carrier of meaning” – or for the purposes of this study, a calling (Savickas, 2012a, p. 150).

The foundation of CCT is McAdams and Olson’s (2010) three perspectives of an actor, agent, and author in a personal narrative, which evolves during the first two decades of life
(Savickas, 2011). Individuals begin life as actors who behave in their social roles; they then adapt this role to strive as agents toward their goals and ultimately become authors of their personal story. From this framework, CCT emphasizes three domains of vocational personality, adaptability, and life themes, which correspond to the actor, agent, and author respectively (Savickas, 2005). Vocational personality represents the what of vocational behavior, career adaptability the how, and life themes the why (Savickas, 2005). Though CCT divides the three domains, “in practice the three are inextricably related through narrative. What individuals do is based in part on their (why) life themes as well as their (how) adapt-‘abilities’” (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011, p. 335). Narratives then offer a holistic way to “draw out and clarify” the career story (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011, p. 334). In sum, “career construction theory, through the power of narrative, addresses what, how, and why people construct their careers as they translate their storied identity into work roles” (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011, p. 335). Appendix A displays a graphical representation of this model, and the remainder of this section will explore these three areas of career construction.

**Actor and Vocational personality**

From infancy, individuals “act in a social arena” (McAdams & Olson, 2010, p. 519), internalizing their family and social world (Savickas, 2012a). This first stage of development refers to individuals as actors because actors develop through the context of their environment, “modeling” themselves after others – in particular, one’s parents (Savickas, 2012a, p. 151). Within this social sphere and the cultural discourses around gender, race, class, birth order etc., individuals “craft characters or reputations” and then further develop these traits in their neighborhood and school (Savickas, 2012a, p. 151). This internalization process occurs through the influence of guides and role models. Individuals are born to or adopted by guides, who are
typically family members, but role models are the “first choice we make in constructing our careers” by choosing whom to identify with and imitate (Savickas, 2012a, p. 152). As these traits play out in activities, such as games, studying, and hobbies, they serve as a rehearsal for how they will be expressed in an occupation (Savickas, 2005). These behaviors come to form one’s vocational personality, which is “an individual’s career-related abilities, needs, values, and interests” – or “the what” of a career (Savickas, 2005, p. 47).

In CCT, Holland’s (1997) career taxonomy serves as the basis for vocational personality (Savickas, 2005). Holland empirically organizes vocations into six personality types that each share interests, traits, and values (Savickas, 2012a). His model is represented by the acronym RIASEC, which stands for the first letter of each vocational category: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. The RIASEC model describes those who “populate an occupational group,” and thus “can be used to summarize an actor’s reputation as it relates to work roles” (Savickas, 2012a, p. 153-154). With CCT’s emphasis on social construction, the theory considers interests to be dynamic, so vocational type represents “possibilities, not predictions,” which deviates from how many counselors use the RIASEC model (Savickas, 2005, p. 47). CCT’s emphasis is on how actors build a bridge between their vocational personality and their work, which occurs when actors’ “develop an internal sense of agency,” as is explained next (Savickas, 2012a, p. 155).

**Agent and Adaptability**

As actors evaluate their vocational interests, they engage in activities and seek out environments that will assist them in meeting their goals (Savickas, 2012a). At this point, actors become agents with the goal “to harmonize inner needs with outer opportunities,” and goals develop “from what an individual needs to feel secure” (Savickas, 2012a, p. 162). In particular,
agency is vital during educational and vocational transitions, which requires adaptability, or “the attitudes, competencies, and behaviors that individuals use in fitting themselves to work that suits them” (Savickas, 2005, p. 45). However, the focus is not on the changing person (P) or the changing environment (E), in the P-E fit: It is on the dash or rather the “series of dashes that build a career,” and adaptability addresses how this construction occurs (Savickas, 2005, p. 45; Savickas, 2012a).

CCT distinguishes three turning points that spark change and adaptability: vocational development, occupational transitions, and work traumas (Savickas, 2012a). Vocational development tasks are particularly salient during emerging adulthood in which society presents expectations as to how individuals should be preparing for and engaging in work (Savickas, 2012a). Occupational transitions occur when individuals move from one job to another whether for positive or negative reasons, including promotions or demotions. Traumas refer to unwanted and unpredictable work events that are painful, such as injuries or contract violations (Savickas, 2012a). Successfully navigating vocational tasks, transitions, and traumas stems from individuals who are willing and able to adapt to changing situations (Savickas, 2012a). Specifically, CCT focuses on four dimensions of adaptability resources, outlined in Appendix B. The four “Cs” of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence enable individuals to develop new career capabilities and are presented in order of importance as explained by Savickas (2005, p. 52) below:

1. “Becoming concerned about their future as a worker.
2. Increasing personal control over their vocational future.
3. Displaying curiosity by exploring possible selves and future scenarios.
4. Strengthening the confidence to pursue their aspirations.”
These four dimensions develop at varying rates, and as individuals grow as actors and agents, they are then positioned to integrate their goals into a cohesive narrative, which is the focus of the next stage as an author.

**Author and Life Themes**

As individuals become late adolescents, society expects them to present an identity narrative that explains who they are as a unique person (Savickas, 2012a). A significant storyline in this narrative is one’s career (Erikson, 1968). Thus, agents begin to become authors as they arrange episodes from their life and occupational choices into a meaningful whole (Savickas, 2012a). These career stories express why individuals make certain decisions and “the private meaning that guides these choices. They tell how the self of yesterday became the self of today and will become the self of tomorrow” (Savickas, 2005, p. 58). Savickas (2005) calls “life themes” the glue that holds the story’s plot together. A theme is a pattern that repeats itself and explains the various incidents and turns in one’s life, and thus it provides unity and continuity to a narrative without compromising diversity: “An author’s identity narrative supports both a stable actor with a continuous story and a flexible agent capable of change” (Savickas, 2012a, p. 165). In this way, life themes provide meaning and purpose to one’s work and “are also about mattering” (Savickas, 2005, p. 59). This definition provides a clear connection to the concept of career calling as individuals seek out what matters to themselves, as well as how what they do contributes to others (Savickas, 2005).

**Critiques of CCT**

In CCT, individuals create narratives to develop a sense of self and identity, while also interpreting their experiences within larger cultural, social, and family stories (Clark & Rossiter, 2008; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Savickas, 2012b). As individuals experience
life, they have control over how to interpret these experiences and write their personal narratives, providing an avenue for them to make sense of or change their narratives to create more empowering ones (Clark & Rossiter, 2008; Foote, 2015; Merriam et al., 2007). CCT posits that adaptability is what equips individuals with the necessary flexibility to anticipate changing contexts, develop new career capabilities, and ultimately write a new story for their lives (Savickas et al., 2009). However, scholars find three criticisms with these assumptions, which this section will explore. The first criticism revolves around the cultural scripts that inform people’s stories. Secondly, critics challenge the assumption that individuals are motivated to learn, adapt, and change their stories. Lastly, scholars critique the positive language around adaptability and challenge its effects.

Savickas (2012b) explains that individuals enact their identities in social contexts, such as neighborhoods, schools, and occupations, and from these environments they “adopt a meaningful cultural script” that guides them in how to create meaning for themselves and others (p. 15). However, the potential danger is that individuals’ stories can “reflect dominant narratives in the wider culture” rather than their personal voice (Reid & West, 2011, p. 176). As Freire (2013) explains, many people author plans based on their own view of reality, rather than considering other viewpoints. A missing component of CCT is discovering how one’s “history and culture are conditioned” by dominant ideas and beliefs (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 159). Additionally, CCT assumes that individuals choose the scripts that they adopt as their own. Organizational identity theory, however, reveals that organizations employ various strategies to interweave its employees’ identities with the organization’s identity in order to increase employee commitment and loyalty (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Organizations influence these stories through discursive methods, such as the vocabulary and language that they employ to
shape meaning, the narratives they tell about the historical and present-day context, how they define groups of employees, and the vision that leadership casts (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Driskill & Brenton, 2011). Organizations can also shape employees’ self narratives through regulative and constitutive influences, such as rewarding appropriate behaviors and penalizing wrong ones, as well as providing “templates” of how to act or think (Patriotta & Lanzara, 2006, p. 989). Although the intent can be to create purpose for members’ lives, the processes used to bring about this meaning can negatively control members’ identities (Pratt, 2000). These practices highlight the “hegemony of discursive practices” when organizations use their power to shape their employees’ identities (Humphreys & Brown, 2002, p. 423). As a result, the dominant voices of the organization create “an invisible prison” for employees who have alternative narratives from which to define their identities (Humphreys & Brown, 2002, p. 423).

In CCT, a developmental task, transition, or trauma sets learning in motion as the protagonist adapts to life changes (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011; Savickas, 2012a). Individuals’ responses to these experiences and how they construct their careers are based on what motivates them, creating a life theme that fuels a desire for significance (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011). However, embedded in this premise is the assumption that individuals are motivated to learn and adapt. Narrative career development adopts the humanist ideal of individuals’ personal autonomy to accept responsibility for their learning (Merriam et al., 2007), Lengelle and Meijers (2012) challenge the assumption that individuals are automatically open to learning from experiences about their careers. They assert that research is needed to address this assumption and understand which narrative learning processes develop a career identity. Further research in this area could examine if there are any differences among individuals who embrace the narrative process versus those who do not. Savickas et al. (2009), for instance, state that future research could analyze
how the interaction between individual characteristics, such as reflexivity and adaptation, and contextual characteristics, such as cultural background, influence narrative career construction.

Lastly, CCT posits that continuous change in the workplace requires that employees adapt, and the degree to which individuals apply the four components of adaptability will affect their career development and decision-making (Savickas, 2005). CCT only discusses the positive aspects of adaptability, and Sullivan and Baruch (2009) note that few scholars have explored the potential negative affects of boundaryless and protean careers. Instead, research focuses on the “winners” in these environments, such as those in their area of calling and those who have successfully formed new identities (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, p. 1550). However, continual adaptability can also have “a corroding effect” on employees’ identities and sense of self (Mumby, 2013, p. 342). For instance, some individuals feel lost in the new world of work, do not know how to adapt their career behaviors, are not equipped with transferrable skills and knowledge that are required for changing careers, or cannot meet the demands of continual learning in increasingly mobile work environments (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). These three critiques of CCT reveal that though adaptability may bring individuals the necessary flexibility to anticipate changing contexts and develop new career capabilities in the boundaryless workplace, there are many obstacles to developing this competency while retaining a unified identity and informed personal narrative.

**CCT’s Connection to the Research Question and Methodology**

Despite the critiques of CCT, this theory is a good fit for this research. The process for how individuals construct career narratives that converge with their life themes overlaps with the research question on understanding emerging adult Christian females’ experiences of developing a career calling. CCT aligns with the literature on career callings in that developing a calling is a
process of “clarifying a career path in which [individuals] may contribute to the well-being of their communities by authentically and adaptively engaging in work that provides a sense of personal fulfillment” (Bland & Roberts-Pittman, 2014, p. 386). Similar to life themes, those with a calling experience meaning for their personal work and a purpose that is significant for others. Additionally, individuals with a calling exhibit the two career metacompetencies of identity awareness (or vocational personality in CCT terms) and adaptability that CCT emphasizes and “that will, in the long term, aid them in navigating a complex career terrain” (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 157).

Recent research also demonstrates that calling is a dynamic process that can – and does – change over time (Hirschi & Herrmann, 2013; Praskova et al., 2015). Rather than “finding” or “having” a calling, people “develop” and “experience” a calling over the course of their lives (Dobrow, 2013, p. 432). Calling occurs through a series of short learning cycles in “an ongoing, cyclical process, involving deep exploration of personal goals, trial efforts, and reflection” (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 165). These learning cycles mirror Savickas’s (2012a) conceptualization of the growth, exploration, establishment, management, and disengagement stages that occur as minicycles during turning points in one’s life. A key turning point occurs during emerging adulthood, and CCT fits well for this developmental period because society expects individuals in this age range to develop “a unified life story and unique identity” (Savickas, 2011, p. 180). CCT posits that society aims to integrate emerging adults into their culture by relaying how to prepare for work, and this vocational developmental task then prompts emerging adults to learn and adapt (Savickas, 2012a). Emerging adults who adaptively navigate career decisions are then better able to position themselves in their areas of calling and find life and work meaning as a result (Bland & Roberts-Pittman, 2014).
Since the basis of CCT is social constructivism with the ontology that reality is constructed through lived experiences, this framework is a good fit for narrative research (Clandinin, 2013). CCT’s emphasis is on understanding calling through one’s career story, which aligns with the research question to hear the discovery stories of a calling. Individuals become protagonists in their life stories, and their career decisions depend on how they narrate their sociocultural contexts, identities, and meaning in life (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011). As Savickas (2012a) explains, “language contains the self, and stories carry the career” (p. 148). This constructivist approach to career development aligns best with narrative research to capture how individuals construct career narratives that converge with their calling.

**Conclusion**

As emerging adults transition from school to work, how they make career decisions will influence their personal well-being and the greater occupational landscape (Duffy et al., 2011). Those who can articulate a purpose for their career, defined as a “calling,” are better positioned to navigate turning points in life and adapt to the changing world of work (Bland & Roberts-Pittman, 2014; Savickas, 2012a). This study aims to understand the process that emerging adult Christian females undergo as they develop a career calling. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature on career calling and how it relates to emerging adulthood.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to understand emerging adult Christian females’ experiences of developing a career calling. This chapter investigates two questions in the literature: (1) What is a calling? and (2) How do emerging adults develop a calling? The literature review begins by examining the definition of calling as emerging adults understand the term. It then reviews the origin or source of a calling, conceptualizes it as a dynamic construct, and explores how individuals enact their calling. By exploring these two primary questions, this review presents how the concept of calling is relevant for emerging adults as they make career decisions.

What is a Calling?

The term “calling” originated in the 16th century and is very connected with the word “vocation,” which comes from the Latin word “vocare,” meaning “to call” (Dik & Duffy, 2009; “Vocation” n.d.). Though the concept is not new, it has recently gained interest in empirical research (Duffy, Dik, & Steger, 2011; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Hirschi, 2011; Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2010). Thus, the concept does not have a fully agreed upon definition, conceptualization, or theory (Duffy & Dik, 2013; Praskova, Creed, & Hood, 2015), and this section explores the various dimensions of the definition of a calling as it relates to emerging adults.

In general, a calling is understood as “work that a person perceives as his [or her] purpose in life” (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 160). As the purpose of this chapter is to explore the role of calling for emerging adults’ career decision-making, it is critical to fully understand how this demographic perceives calling. As Chapter One presented, several studies support that the concept of a career calling is relevant for emerging adults (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Hunter et al., 2010). For instance, Burges, Manuel, and Duffy (2013) found that over 40% of first-year
medical students have an understanding of their career calling. Similar rates are found in working adults, showing that the concept’s salience continues into the working world. In one study, 43% of 553 working adults indicated that having a calling was true or mostly true of themselves (Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Bott, 2013), and in another 48% viewed their work as a calling (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997).

Although career calling measures exist (Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey, & Dik, 2012; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010), they do not address the development towards a future career, which is emerging adults’ primary developmental focus (Praskova et al., 2015). Through a review of the literature, focus groups, expert reviews, and two factor analyses, Praskova et al. (2015) developed a scale to assess career calling in emerging adults. They found that career calling is a “largely self-set, salient, future-oriented career goal that is personally meaningful, other oriented, and involves active engagement” (p. 102). Since the study relates specifically to emerging adults and is confirmed across the literature, the three themes of (1) personal meaning or purpose, (2) orientation toward others or prosocial values, and (3) active engagement of one’s purpose inform the following discussion on the definition of a career calling. As such, this paper conceptualizes calling as a multidimensional construct, which differentiates it from other related concepts, such as passion, work engagement, or prosocial motivation (Praskova et al., 2015).

**Personal Meaning and Sense of Purpose**

As previously stated, an oft-cited shorthand definition of calling is Hall and Chandler’s (2005) assertion that it is “work that a person perceives as his [or her] purpose in life” (p. 160; Hirschi, 2011; Praskova et al., 2015). Duffy and Sedlacek (2010) reveal through surveying college students that although calling and life meaning are strongly related, the two concepts are
empirically distinct, confirming the multidimensional understanding of a calling. They found that students who identified with a career calling were also more likely to view their lives as meaningful, which suggests that “one pathway to feel that one’s life is purposeful is through a career” (p. 36). In reviewing the literature, Praskova et al. (2015) found that the meaning or purpose component of calling refers to a personal fit with one’s identity and values that is also personally important, rewarding, and satisfying. Similarly, in Hall and Chandler’s theoretical model of psychological success, they state that a calling requires a sense of identity and self-awareness of one’s values, purpose, and talents. Several empirical studies of college students’ understanding of calling also confirm the integral role that purpose plays in perceiving one’s calling, as this section will discuss further.

Recognizing the various definitions of calling in the literature, Hunter et al. (2010) used a purposive sampling strategy to understand undergraduate students’ perceptions of calling in work and life. One of the primary themes that emerged was that “Personal Fit/Eudemonic Well-Being” is integral to the definition of calling (p. 181). This theme relates to one’s job aligning with one’s abilities and the positive outcomes that result from this match. Students understood calling as an internal meaning and unique purpose that should express one’s talents and gifts (p. 183). Similarly, Hirschi (2011) tested ten hypotheses to research what characterizes a calling among German undergraduate students and found that achievement of vocational identity is a defining component of a calling. Hirschi defines vocational identity as one’s understanding of occupational interests, abilities, goals, and values and how this meaning is matched to career roles (p. 62). The college students in the study who had achieved vocational identity did so through intensive self-exploration.
Malin, Reilly, Quinn, and Moran (2013) also verify the importance of the sense of purpose component of a calling. To understand adolescents’ purpose development, they conducted two interviews in two years with adolescents ranging from sixth grade to junior year of college. They found that the adolescents who had discovered or sustained their purpose in the transition from high school to college had opportunities to reexamine their values and put their perceived purpose into action. For instance, college provided one participant with the opportunity to discover his value of environmentalism through taking a course on the environment and then working at a summer camp (p. 193).

Although not studying the emerging adult demographic specifically, other studies empirically confirm that a sense of purpose is a dimension of calling for working adults (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Steger, Pickering, Shin, & Dik, 2010). For instance, Bunderson and Thompson (2009) found that zookeepers identify their calling based on their “hardwiring” that they were born with the talents and passion needed for their occupation (p. 36). This call then cultivates “transcendent meaning” for their work (p. 39). As is true for the zookeepers in the study, part of self-exploration and personal meaning is an understanding of one’s values and the reasons behind one’s purpose. For emerging adults who have found their calling, a main factor is using one’s talents to serve others, which is discussed next as the second component of calling (Hernandez, Foley, and Beitin, 2011).

**Orientation Toward Others and Prosocial Values**

In addition to clarifying one’s purpose, several studies identify prosocial values, altruism, and an orientation toward others as a defining piece of calling (Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean, 2010; Hunter et al., 2010; Malin et al., 2013; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). In Dik and Duffy’s (2009) definition of calling, it includes “demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or
meaningfulness… that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation” (p. 429). Similarly, Elangovan et al. (2010) begin their definition of calling as “a course of action in pursuit of pro-social intentions” (p. 430), which Praskova et al. (2015) explain as “helping and altruistic behaviors” (p. 95). These behaviors include goals that are socially significant, contribute to the community, and produce satisfaction from helping others (Praskova et al., 2015), and they overlap with zookeepers’ sense of calling in Bunderson and Thompson’s (2009) study. Specifically, zookeepers view their calling as a moral duty to use their talents and passions to care for animals. As a result, they are willing to make personal sacrifices, including low wages and demanding, uncomfortable work, such as cleaning animal stalls and working unusual hours. Though a specific example, Bunderson and Thompson’s study exemplifies a second conceptualization of a calling. This section discusses several other studies of emerging adults that connect an orientation toward others with the presence of a calling or purpose, making prosocial values a key component of the definition of calling.

In their longitudinal study on adolescent purpose development, one dimension that Malin et al. (2013) explored was a “desire to connect with and contribute to something beyond the self” (BTS; p. 187). They perceive that the BTS dimension is one of the most important for differentiating between a life purpose and mere personal satisfaction because purpose indicates an outward-directed aim. Similarly, Hunter et al. (2010) also make the connection to prosocial intent occurring as a function of living out one’s purpose. Altruism emerged as a key theme in college students’ definitions of calling, and they viewed it as a necessary response to acting on one’s calling (p. 182). The students in the study perceived a calling as making a positive impact on someone other than just themselves.
Though Hunter et al. (2010) did not make this explicit connection, several quotations that they included in the study to demonstrate self-awareness also applied to the altruistic theme. For instance, one student said, “A ‘calling’ is when you find a career that really fits you as a person with your personality, and you feel like you can give something special to the field” (p. 182). In their definitions, several students made the connection of how living out their innate talents or acting on what brought them happiness in turn bettered themselves and others. Therefore, the cyclical nature of understanding one’s innate purpose and putting it into action for others leads to the development of a calling, as will be discussed further in the next section.

Though the research suggests that prosocial values are a part of a calling in emerging adults’ lives, one study did not find this correlation (Hunter et al., 2010; Malin et al., 2013). Hirschi (2011) found that only students whose understanding of calling came from religious standpoints placed above average importance on prosocial values. Other students held a variety of values, with some students having self-enhancement values as a part of their calling. He concludes, therefore, that prosocial values are not a requirement of a calling. However, Hirschi included students in the study who indicated that they are pursuing a career only for self-enhancement purposes, which does not align with the definition of a calling. For instance, Gandal, Roccas, Sagiv, and Wrzesniewski (2005) confirm the correlation between values and callings in Israeli and American undergraduate and graduate emerging adult students. Self-enhancement values, specifically the motivation for power, negatively correlated with a calling orientation but positively correlated with a career orientation. Transcendent values, specifically benevolence or “care and concern for the welfare of those close to oneself,” positively correlated with a calling orientation and negatively correlated with a career orientation (p. 1242). Thus, prosocial values are an important component of calling. Furthermore, the students with self-
enhancement values in Hirschi’s study also had low levels of self-exploration and self-evaluation, which are necessary components for discerning one’s purpose, which is the first part of calling’s definition. Since Hirschi’s study was also the exception, prosocial values can be considered as a component of calling. Knowing one’s purpose and prosocial values are the first parts of a calling, but these then must be matched to and utilized with opportunities, which is the final component of a career calling (Praskova et al., 2015).

Active Engagement

In many studies on calling, active engagement is not a specific, defined component of a career calling but rather is embedded within the discussion of enacting one’s purpose and prosocial behaviors (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Hirschi, 2011; Hunter et al., 2010). For instance, Hunter et al. (2010) include pursuing one’s interests, talents, and meaning as a behavioral implication of calling rather than as a part of the definition. However, in reviewing the literature on calling and through focus groups, Praskova et al. (2015) include active engagement as the third domain of a career calling for emerging adults. They define this component as “the action orientation in pursuit of a calling (i.e. pursuing interests and competencies, having a quest for fulfillment and enjoyment, being driven by an inner urge, purpose, or passion)” (p. 95). This definition is based on several recent studies, which confirm that enactment of a calling, rather than simply perceiving a calling, is foundational to the construct (Duffy & Autin, 2013; Duffy et al., 2013; Elangovan et al., 2010). The difference between having and living a calling will be further discussed in the next section.

In studies on the definition of calling, engagement in meaningful activities that connect to one’s purpose correlates with the presence of a calling in college students’ lives (Duffy, Dik, et al., 2011; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Hirschi, 2011; Hunter et al., 2010). Steger et al.’s (2010)
mediation model confirms that the crux of calling provides “people both with meaningful work experiences and also with a route to discovering and experiencing greater purpose and meaning in their lives as a whole” (p. 91). This conceptualization of calling ties together the experiential with the innate discovery of self. The process of understanding oneself and expressing this meaning through action is a common component in the definition of calling. Studies show that meaningful engagement in one’s purpose is a dual process (Duffy, Dik, et al., 2011; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Hirschi, 2011; Hunter et al., 2010). An internal understanding of purpose often precedes acting on that purpose, but acting out of one’s talents also brings more clarity to one’s purpose (Duffy, Dik, et al., 2011; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Hirschi, 2011; Hunter et al., 2010). This section examines several empirical studies that show the connection of enactment and discovery of purpose, which each influence the other in the understanding of one’s calling.

In Malin et al.’s (2013) qualitative study on purpose development, the early adults with a sense of purpose found a pathway to live out the role they imagined for themselves (p. 195). The study shows that late adolescents who had the opportunity to act on their intentions, which are what they hope to accomplish in life, in turn had a more developed sense of purpose. Other studies, such as Hunter et al.’s (2010), have also found the importance of meaningful engagement on developing a calling. In their study of college students’ perceptions of calling, the students understood that having a job that aligns with their abilities requires that they pursue and act on their interests and internal sense of meaning. As one participant said about finding meaning, “A career should not just merely be something a person does, but it should help define that person and add importance to their life” (p. 182). Thus, the connection between self-awareness and action is a key component of calling.
Hunter et al. (2010) made the connection between matching students’ abilities with their actions, and this same alignment presented itself in Hirschi’s (2011) study. In his cluster analysis, the undergraduate students with a calling had above-average career engagement as compared to the other participants. These results indicate that a sense of calling prompts students to be proactive and engaged in their career development, which supports “that calling entails an action orientation towards one’s career” (p. 70). Therefore, a calling is not just about self-awareness and what brings happiness, but it also requires action and engagement towards one’s career path.

Perhaps a quotation from one of Hernandez et al.’s (2011) participants explains this interactive process best in describing a calling as “more than why you’re here on earth. It’s what you’re going to do with that talent” (p. 73). Yet another of Hernandez et al.’s participants noted that a calling may not be the source of one’s greatest talent. Instead, through working in one’s area of calling, the talent develops. In this instance, a calling is where an individual makes the greatest impact, not where he or she has the greatest talent initially. Therefore, sometimes self-awareness precedes using one’s talents, and other times purpose and talents become clear after taking action. Either way, both components are necessary for a calling.

Though most studies connect a sense of purpose with active engagement, an orientation toward others can also be viewed through this lens. For instance, Malin et al. (2013) found that college students whose academic studies provided structured pathways for beyond the self (BTS) opportunities sustained their purpose when entering the working world. For instance, students pursuing helping professions, such as nursing, medicine, and teaching, had significantly smoother transitions into work (p. 194). Even when faced with obstacles in their careers, they sustained their commitment to BTS purposes. In contrast, students on less structured academic
pathways, particularly those in creative fields, lost their BTS dimension upon graduating, which many blamed on trying to earn money (p. 194). Therefore, the presence of a BTS goal or desire is not enough. Students need to actually contribute to others in order to sustain their purpose. In this way, the prosocial dimension of calling also connects to the active enactment of purpose. As seen through these studies, there is a cyclical aspect to understanding one’s innate purpose and putting it into action for others, which leads to the development of a calling.

**Section Summary**

Though the definition of calling is still up for debate among researchers (Duffy & Dik, 2013; Praskova et al., 2015) three themes emerged across most of the studies. First, emerging adults perceive a calling on their lives when they identify a personal meaning or purpose. This sense of purpose includes prosocial values and an orientation to positively impact others (Dik & Duffy, 2009). Lastly, a calling includes active engagement of one’s purpose, which ties all three components of a calling together. Calling is cyclical in that understanding one’s innate purpose and putting it into action for others in turn brings more clarity to that purpose (Hernandez et al., 2011). The next section will explore how emerging adults develop their calling based on this definition.

**The Development of a Calling**

Although the definition of calling is one of, if not the most, controversial debates in the literature (Duffy & Dik, 2013), few studies assess the predictors and “developmental trajectory of career calling” (Duffy, Douglass, Autin, & Allan, 2014; Praskova et al., 2015, p. 91). A primary focus for emerging adults is on career, and identity exploration, uncertainty, and change characterize this stage (Arnett, 2000; Praskova et al., 2015). Thus, how emerging adults develop a career calling is particularly relevant for this population. The search for a career calling, as
opposed to the presence of one, negatively correlates with career decidedness, comfort with career choices, and self-clarity (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). On the other hand, the concept of a calling provides a way to transition through emerging adulthood and engage in a career with confidence (Arnett, 2007; Hirschi, 2011). This section will examine three aspects of the development of a career calling, including the origin, construct, and engagement of a calling.

**Origin of Calling**

To develop a calling in one’s life first requires an understanding of where that call originates. As previously mentioned, since the concept of calling is recent in academic literature, it is more likely to have discrepancies in its definition. Researchers all note that the origin of the word comes from religious roots, and they recognize the religious undertones to the concept of calling (Duffy, Dik, et al., 2011; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Hirschi, 2011; Hunter et al., 2010; Steger et al., 2010). Studies on calling draw connections to the concept of a vocation, which emerged during the Protestant Reformation, as being “called” by God to do work that is larger than oneself (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Hunter et al., 2010; Steger et al., 2010). However, large disagreements exist in regards to where a call or purpose originates, and whether the term should be applied spiritually or secularly (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Hirschi, 2011; Steger et al., 2010). Some definitions maintain that a calling must originate from beyond the self, for instance from God or a guided force in one’s life. Others secularize the term, showing that callings can originate from internal sources of motivation. This section discusses each perspective and suggests an integrated definition of the two views.

**Neoclassical view.** The neoclassical perspective of calling views the construct from its historical roots, which emphasizes “a sense of destiny and prosocial duty” (Duffy & Dik, 2013, p. 429). The primary definition of calling from a spiritual perspective comes from Dik and
Duffy’s (2009) interdisciplinary research. Their definition begins by claiming, “A calling is a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self…” (p. 427). Studies approaching calling from the neoclassical view include an external summons as a defining part of calling. The argument is that to feel “called” requires a “caller,” which may include a higher power, family legacy, needs of society, etc. (Duffy & Dik, 2013, p. 429).

For instance, in Bunderson and Thompson’s (2009) study of zookeepers, they found that the participants’ expression of calling was in line with the neoclassical definition. Zookeepers frequently referred to their profession as something they were born to do, which the authors categorized as their sense of destiny or fate. Furthermore, they viewed their work as a moral duty to society, again emphasizing the neoclassical perspective. Bunderson and Thompson assert that the zookeepers’ experience describes calling as “that place in the occupational division of labor in society that one feels destined to fill by virtue of particular gifts, talents, and/or idiosyncratic life opportunities” (p. 38).

To test the validity of the neoclassical definition, Hunter et al. (2010) analyzed college students’ definitions of calling. A “Guiding Force” was a primary theme that emerged, which participants cited as “God’s will and gifts, a sense of destiny, and more general feelings of being driven and pushed by some unknown force” (p. 181). Hunter et al. asserted that this theme confirmed Dik and Duffy’s concept of a beyond the self summons. Yet, the ambiguity of the source of the calling led Hunter et al. to conclude that calling should be more inclusive to encompass both sacred and secular views.

**Modern view.** As opposed to the neoclassical view, in the modern perspective a calling originates within the individual (Duffy & Dik, 2013; Hall & Chandler, 2005). Rather than emphasizing a sense of destiny, the modern view refers to “an inner drive toward… personal
happiness” (Duffy & Dik, 2013, p. 429). This view is also referred to as a secular calling, recognizing that the construct has expanded beyond its original religious roots (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Thus, instead of enacting a larger purpose from an external summons, the focus is on self-fulfillment of one’s personal meaning in life (Hall & Chandler, 2005).

Several studies have researched the concept of faith in college students’ understanding of calling. Duffy and Sedlacek’s (2010) study of first year college students at a public university found only a small relationship between the presence of a career calling and religiosity. They suggested that for these students, a calling referred more to what one is “meant to do,” rather than having a religious connotation (p. 37). Similarly, Steger et al. (2010) tested the broader, secularized term “meaning in life” versus a sacred, intrinsic religiosity in individuals’ relationships with calling. Their findings suggest that people identified significantly more with calling as “an orientation to work that prioritized meaning as a core experience” (p. 91). These studies highlight people’s connection with an internal “meaning” rather than an outward religion in their understanding of a calling. Hirschi (2011) also draws on an internal meaning for the definition of calling. He found that intensive self-exploration is a primary component of calling. Since this practice is internal and stems from the individual, Hirschi concludes that a calling does not need to originate beyond oneself (p. 70). These three views promote a broader, more secularized understanding of calling.

**Integrated view.** The limitation with the neoclassical and modern perspectives is that they position calling only as either an internal drive or external summons. Individuals who understand calling from a spiritual view could also look internally and desire an internal meaning in life. Similarly, internal meaning could derive from an external source. The definition of
calling, instead, could allow for the coexistence of an internal focus and external summons, which the following studies demonstrate.

Some of the struggles to define the origin of a calling could be related to the development process of emerging adults’ identities. Emerging adulthood is a period of increased self-exploration, including religious and spiritual beliefs (Barry, Nelson, Davarya, & Urry, 2010). Therefore, emerging adults are likely still developing core components of their identity, such as an understanding of their faith and purpose, or as Duffy and Sedlacek (2010) say, what one is “meant to do” (p. 37). Arnett and Jensen (2002) found that emerging adults’ religious beliefs remain the same or increase during this period, with 82% indicating that their religious beliefs were at least somewhat important to them. Hernandez et al. (2011) found that struggles of faith were associated with searching for a calling, which they conclude reveals the complex link between religiosity and a career identity (p. 82). Though Steger et al. (2010) promote a more secularized definition of calling, they state, “Meaning in many people’s lives may be inseparable from their religious beliefs, traditions, and experiences” (p. 91). Therefore, if the religious component is very important to some individuals’ understanding of calling, it appears that the definition of calling should allow for this origination, especially since the concept of calling is in religious roots.

At the same time, however, the neoclassical view limits the relevance of calling for emerging adults who do not associate with religious or spiritual beliefs. For this reason, several authors (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Duffy, Allan, Bott, & Dik, 2014; Praskova, 2015) are promoting an “expanded notion of calling” that the origin of a calling can be from a religious or a secular, “inner-directed nature” (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 162). This perspective allows individuals to derive meaning from a variety of sources, which can benefit themselves, their
family, community, and/or society (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Hall & Chandler, 2005). To integrate the two views of origin, Duffy, Allan, Bott, et al. (2014) define calling as a “belief that one’s career is a central part of a broader sense of purpose and meaning in life and is used to help others or advance the greater good in some fashion, often arising from an internal or external summons” (p. 310).

Summary. The historic background of the concept of calling suggests that it derives from an external influence. Some studies found that a “Guiding Force,” which includes various interpretations of faith, destiny, or God, is a necessary component to the origin of calling (Hunter et al., 2010). However, a primary dimension of calling is to understand one’s talents and purpose, which requires self-reflection and suggests an internal origination. Thus, an integrated understanding of calling allows for both of these originations to coexist, according to what fits the individual. Interestingly, regardless of where one identifies the source of their calling, job satisfaction and life satisfaction do not significantly differ, and for those who are living their calling, the experience of life and work satisfaction are high (Duffy, Allan, Bott, et al., 2014). This held true regardless of whether the source of the calling was external, internal, or from an inside-out approach of “finding a perfect fit” between one’s skills, values, interests, and occupation (Duffy, Allan, Bott, et al., 2014, p. 565). The outcomes and predictors of calling are discussed in more detail next, and just as the origin of a calling is multifaceted, so too is the development of a calling a dynamic process.

Dynamic Construct

Many scholars of calling conceptualize it as a stable construct that does not change (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). However, recent research asserts that calling is a dynamic process that changes over time (Dobrow, 2013;
Hirschi & Herrmann, 2013; Praskova et al., 2015). “Developing” and “experiencing” a calling over the course of one’s life replaces previous terminology of “finding” or “having” a calling (Dobrow, 2013, p. 432). Praskova et al. (2015) highlight the “ongoing process” of setting and pursuing goals, as well as adapting, in the development of a calling (p. 92). Similarly, other scholars indicate the importance of adaptive processes in relation to the development of a calling (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Elangovan et al., 2010). Positioning career calling as a dynamic construct, rather than a stable trait, further aligns with emerging adults’ developing career decisions, which requires goal-oriented and adaptive actions (Dobrow, 2013; Praskova et al., 2015).

In the dynamic view of calling, the existence of a calling is not automatically the starting point to an individual finding his or her calling, claiming it, then receiving the positive life benefits (Dobrow, 2013). As the discussion on the origin of a calling revealed, its source is often multifaceted, further confirming the dynamic nature of developing a calling. Furthermore, recent research has found a significant difference between perceiving a calling and living a calling (Duffy et al., 2012; Duffy & Autin, 2013; Duffy et al., 2013). Simply because a calling exists or its origin can be identified does not indicate that a calling is put into action and lived out. Instead, Duffy, Allan, Bott, et al. (2014) found that as long as individuals experience that they are living out their calling, the source of their calling is irrelevant to their job and life satisfaction.

The key factor is that individuals not only perceive a calling in their lives but also live it out, as the third component in the definition of calling suggests. In their study of working adults, Duffy et al. (2013) found that living a calling correlated more strongly with life satisfaction than only perceiving a calling. In their study, perceiving a calling was unrelated to age, and since their participants included those in emerging adulthood, the results are relevant for this demographic.
Other studies also note the distinction between perceiving and living a calling (Duffy & Autin, 2013; Duffy et al., 2012). Whereas Duffy et al. (2013) found calling to mediate the link of perceiving a calling to life satisfaction, Duffy et al. (2012) found that living a calling moderates the link between perceiving a calling and career commitment and work meaning. Despite these differing perspectives, these studies confirm that “assessing an individual’s ability to live out his or her calling may be equally as important as, or more important than, assessing the presence of a calling” (Duffy et al., 2013, p. 43).

The studies on living versus perceiving a calling view the construct as a predictor variable for positive life benefits. For instance, Duffy et al. (2013) found that living a calling predicts life satisfaction, which is partially mediated by job satisfaction and life meaning. Praskova, Hood, and Creed (2014) tested calling as a predictor variable in young adults over time and found that it predicts work effort, career strategies, life meaning, and career adaptability. However, research differs on the “developmental trajectory” of a calling, positioning it as both a predictor and an outcome variable (Praskova et al., 2015, p. 91). As Duffy et al. (2013) and Praskova et al. (2014) found, several other studies also confirm that calling is a predictor of life and work meaning (Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Douglass, 2014; Duffy, Douglass, Autin, & Allan, 2014). Interestingly, these same studies also found calling to be an outcome of life and work meaning, which demonstrates “a reciprocal relation of calling and life meaning” (Duffy, Allan, Autin, et al., 2014; Duffy, Douglass, et al., 2014, p. 316). Duffy, Douglass, et al.’s (2014) study of undergraduate students suggest that over time, feeling a calling may bolster life meaning, “but perhaps more importantly, having a foundation of life meaning may allow for the development of a calling” (p. 316). This effect is also exhibited in medical students: the level of vocational development and life meaning prior to medical school
significantly predicted the level of calling two years later (Duffy, Manuel, Borges, & Bott, 2011).

Other reciprocal relationships also occur in calling being both a predictor and outcome variable. Duffy, Allan, Autin, et al. (2014) found that living a calling was a predictor of and predicted by career commitment, meaning that the degree one feels committed to their career correlates with a calling but that a calling also leads one to feel committed to their career. However, career commitment and work meaning much more strongly predicted living a calling than perceiving one. Thus, the authors suggest that living a calling is better positioned as an outcome variable.

Hirschi & Herrmann (2013) also found reciprocal effects between calling and career preparation. Having a calling predicted increases in career planning and self-efficacy in undergraduate students, and in turn career planning and decidedness predicted calling. This reciprocal relationship with career preparation shows that “the presence of a calling motivates students to envision their vocational future and make plans for their careers,” while also increasing their confidence (p. 58). Simultaneously, having clarity about one’s career goals also strengthens students’ sense of calling.

The cyclical, reciprocal nature of calling further supports it as a dynamic construct (Hirschi & Herrmann, 2013). In particular, the research on calling as an outcome variable offers direction on how individuals develop a calling, such as through searching for and finding life meaning, vocational self-clarity, work meaning, career commitment, and career planning (Duffy, Allan, Autin, et al., 2014; Duffy, Allan, Bott, et al., 2011; Duffy, Douglass, et al., 2014; Hirschi & Herrmann, 2013). These predictors can be categorized as what Hall and Chandler (2005) call
two “career metacompetencies” of identity and adaptability, which are explored in detail next (p. 157).

**Engaging a Calling**

The definition of a calling as an active engagement of one’s purpose and its conceptualization as a dynamic construct underscore the importance of emerging adults enacting their calling, rather than merely perceiving one for their career. This process begins with the origin of a calling but to then enact that calling in the new, complex landscape of work requires “identity growth” through a learning orientation (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 162; Praskova et al., 2015; Shulman et al., 2014). Thus, the development of a calling is an interplay between identity work and personal adaptability, two aspects of engaging in one’s calling.

**Identity.** With each view on the origin of calling comes a method for identifying the calling. The neoclassical view traditionally explains finding one’s calling through discernment, such as prayer and listening (Hall & Chandler, 2005). The modern view relies on intensive self-exploration (Hirschi, 2011), which is personal and introspective, reflective, and relational (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Thus, the first part of developing a calling requires “a clear sense of identity, or self-awareness,” which can be referred to as an authentic understanding of self (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 163).

As emerging adults transition into adulthood, they refocus their life goals and rely on conscious and unconscious reflective processes (Praskova et al., 2015). To determine one’s future career path requires deep, internal awareness because “the ultimate judge of one’s vocation is one’s self” (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 162). A calling cannot be developed without the self-direction to deeply understand one’s identity, whether that entails hearing an external call, identifying a calling for oneself, or a combination of the two (Hall & Chandler, 2005).
Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) study on authentic identity provides a guide for developing an authentic understanding of one’s calling. They define authenticity as “being conscious of self, others, relationships, and context through critical reflection. As such, it is a journey of transformation and individuation” (p. 288). For the authentic teachers in their study, teaching was a passion, spoken of “as a calling or a vocation, as something that gave meaning to their life” (p. 278). Identifying this calling required intensive self-exploration and questioning as the teachers evaluated their meaning in life with a deep level of awareness.

This process of authenticity mirrors key components of Savickas’ (2012a) Career Construction Theory (CCT), the theoretical framework for this study. As outlined in Chapter One, CCT “explains the interpretive and interpersonal processes through which individuals construct themselves, impose direction on their vocational behavior, and make meaning of their careers” (Savickas, 2012a, p. 147). Individuals begin life as actors, engaging and growing within social contexts. Similar to the authenticity research, how individuals navigate this social world develops their vocational personality, which represent “career-related abilities, needs, values, and interests” (Savickas, 2005, p. 47). This self-awareness prompts individuals to understand who they are and what matters to themselves, and this narrative brings meaning and purpose to their work (Savickas, 2005, p. 59). Of course, individuals must be motivated to learn and adapt in order for their career to carry meaning (Savickas, 2012a, p. 150).

Similarly, Elangovan et al. (2010) assert that “the motivation to find meaning in one’s life (including work) is a critical factor in initiating and maintaining the search for and identifying one’s calling” (p. 433). Shulman et al. (2014) also found internal motivation to be integral to emerging adults finding meaningful career paths. Emerging adults who had lower levels of motivation were more likely to be dissatisfied with their careers seven years later. In particular,
the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation mattered. Those with higher levels of extrinsic motivation, combined with decreased parental support, were more likely to have unclear ideas about their career futures and lack commitment toward their jobs. For these emerging adults, their rates of depression also significantly increased over the seven years, a common symptom in emerging adults overall (Kenny & Sirin, 2006), which further confirms the importance of personal self efficacy in exploring meaning in one’s life.

Individuals who are “driven internally by one’s own values,” a key component of calling, also recognize that self-exploration is both “deeply personal” and “relational” (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 162). In Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) study, the more authentic teachers questioned and challenged the influence of their context in an effort to more fully express their own values and beliefs. This finding aligns with Praskova’s (2015) definition that a career calling is context-specific, which Hall and Chandler (2005) explain as a person’s ability to take in, read, and understand “the changing ‘data’ of their consciousness… and the reality in which they are accurately immersed” (p. 163, as cited in Weiss et al., 2003, p. 17). To do so requires relationships and dialogue to help clarify one’s values and career goals (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Hall & Chandler, 2005). Authentic dialogue also encourages “participants to be reflective and self-aware,” and critical reflection is a key aspect of an authentic career identity (Mazutis & Slawinski, 2008, p. 442). Cranton and Carusetta’s (2004) study found that teachers who had developed mature authenticity engaged in critical reflection by questioning their view of themselves, their students, and their work context.

The first step toward developing a calling is through identity awareness, which emerges from exploring one’s meaning and values in his or her personal and relational contexts. Yet, just as one’s contexts change over time, so too is authenticity not fixed but rather continually shifting
and re-constructed (Kreber, Klampfleitner, McCune, Bayne, & Knottenbelt, 2007). Thus, self-exploration and identity awareness should “foster an individual’s adaptability, which enhances her ability to take action consistent with her identity” (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 164). This developmental process of adaptability is discussed subsequently.

**Adaptability.** As was discussed, recent studies on calling distinguish between simply perceiving one’s calling, such as through self-awareness, and actually living one’s calling (Duffy et al., 2012; Duffy & Autin, 2013; Duffy et al., 2013). A second component of developing a calling requires engagement in the calling, as the definition of calling suggests. Several authors refer to this competency as adaptability (Bland & Roberts-Pittman, 2014; Gu et al., 2014; Hall & Chandler, 2005). As Hall and Chandler’s (2005) case study of emerging adults revealed, “A career calling is initially shaped by ‘knowing why’ investments – self-knowledge, clear identity, an understanding of one’s needs – and then subsequently shaped by the enactment of ‘knowing how’ and ‘knowing whom’” (p. 169). Adaptability provides the framework for emerging adults to “know how and whom” in today’s complex career environment. Praskova et al. (2005) integrate this competency into their definition of emerging adults’ career calling, stating that an individuals’ meaning and purpose have “the potential to be strengthened (or weakened) by engaging in goal-directed, career-preparatory actions and adaptive processes” (p. 93). Ongoing adaptive processes include career exploration, (Hall & Chandler, 2005), personal agency and flexibility (Shulman et al., 2014, as cited in Blustein, Juntunen, & Worthington, 2000), as well as attentiveness toward opportunities and willingness to experiment and test out new paths (Elangovan et al., 2010).

The meta-competency of adaptability is another main component of Savickas’ (2012a) CCT framework. As individuals understand their abilities, interests, and values, they explore
“possible selves” (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 240). Adaptability underpins this process of matching one’s identity with work roles. Specifically, CCT focuses on four dimensions of adaptability, including concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, which equip individuals to develop career capabilities in the changing landscape of work (Savickas, 2005, p. 52).

Several other scholars have begun to emphasize adaptability over decision-making in career theory and practice (Bland & Roberts-Pittman, 2014; van Vianen, De Pater, & Preenen, 2009). Van Vianen et al. (2009) conclude that pressuring young adults to make decisions about their careers is an ineffective strategy. Today’s career environment includes many more choices for careers, which is not only overwhelming but also leads young adults to set unrealistically high standards. As a result, they tend to feel stuck in an irreversible decision that they made the wrong choice among so many options (van Vienen et al., 2009). Instead van Vienen et al. argue for a focus on a flexible view of the self and career options through continuous experimentation and learning. By adopting an adaptable mindset, young adults can respond and change to new situations by focusing on shorter-term goals that include “the mastery of different roles rather than fixed roles that lead to a final destination” (p. 306). The best time to nurture this competency, van Vienen et al. assert, “is when individuals are just starting their career” (p. 306).

Bland and Roberts-Pittman (2014) also present a new model for career decision-making that relies on existential and the chaos theory of careers (CTC). These theories promote adaptability, calling, and moral responsibility in response to the changing demands of a global society. In particular, existential theory and CTC emphasize “embracing, not avoiding, uncertainty” (p. 385). Thus, individuals have the responsibility and ability to respond to situations, rather than making the one right career choice. The model’s premise is to replace self-
identity with “a multitude of potentials (beyond a specific identified calling)” and so construct “a cohesive story… of career identities” to navigate the changing work landscape (p. 393; p. 396).

Bland and Roberts-Pittman (2014) and van Vienen et al.’s (2009) models are seen in practice in Shulman et al.’s (2014) study of Israeli emerging adults. The emerging adults who exemplified “wide exploration” of careers and the “ability to cope with failures or disappointments” were also more likely to be in meaningful careers (p. 1513). Furthermore, members of this group were also able to reformulate their plans and design new goals, instead of being stuck to a static goal. Similarly, Guo et al. (2014) also examined career adaptability and calling for social work students in China. Their results showed that career adaptability enhanced the students’ professional competence by promoting their calling. In particular, this relationship occurred through the adaptive abilities of career concern and career curiosity, which are a part of Savickas’s (2012a) career construction theory. Career concern refers to “considering future career possibilities and preparing for these possibilities,” and career curiosity is “exploring various situations and potential roles” (Guo et al., 2014, p. 395). In sum, the adaptability to think ahead and prepare for the future, while remaining open to new ideas and plans is a key part of developing a career calling.

The abilities that are associated with adaptability are particularly salient for individuals who are unable to live out their calling at work. Berg, Grant, and Johnson (2010) studied employees across occupations to understand how they experienced and pursued their unanswered callings. They found that individuals pursue unanswered callings through job and leisure crafting. Job crafting techniques included ways that participants created opportunities for their calling at their current occupation, such as task emphasizing (changing tasks to incorporate aspects of the unanswered calling), job expanding (taking on new tasks to pursue the unanswered
calling), and role reframing (changing one’s perception of their role to align with the unanswered calling). Participants also engaged in leisure crafting through vicarious experience – finding fulfillment in others’ participation in their unanswered calling, and participating in activities related to their unanswered calling. By engaging in these crafting techniques, participants utilized adaptability to change their goals, situations, or view of themselves to live more into their calling. As a result of these crafting techniques, participants felt enjoyment and meaning, which they associated with pursuing a calling. However, some also experienced regret over being unable to fulfill their calling and stress in trying to pursue their unanswered call. Thus, this finding reinforces the importance of incorporating active engagement as a part of living out one’s calling.

Summary. To fully develop a calling requires engagement through identity awareness and adaptability. Bland and Roberts-Pittman (2014) describe this process as identifying a career path that allows individuals to “contribute to the well-being of their communities by authentically and adaptively engaging in work that provides a sense of personal fulfillment” (p. 386). Since identities are multi-faceted and can change over time (Kreber et al., 2007; van Vianen et al., 2009), enacting authenticity requires adaptability. Ibarra (2015) coined the phrase “adaptively authentic” to explain what she considers the authenticity paradox (p. 58): A “rigid self-concept” promotes “outdated views of ourselves” (p. 57). Instead, viewing development as “trying on possible selves” allows us to be more open to possibilities and “experiment to figure out what’s right for the new challenges and circumstances we face” (p. 58) – essential skills for identifying and living out a calling.
Section Summary

This section explored the development of a career calling by looking at a calling’s origin, its dynamic construct, and how it is enacted. Most scholars are moving away from the original view of calling as a primarily religious concept to incorporate a more integrated perspective (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2011; Duffy, Allan, Bott, et al., 2014; Praskova, 2015). In this integrated view, one’s calling can derive from an external source, including a spiritual summons, and/or internally through introspection (Hall & Chandler, 2005). To discern one’s call from either source requires self-awareness of who one is and what one values. However, since calling is a dynamic construct (Dobrow, 2013), engaging in a calling requires adaptability along with identity awareness (Bland & Roberts-Pittman, 2014; Hall & Chandler, 2005). Perceiving a calling relies on understanding one’s identity, while living out that calling depends upon adaptively navigating career decisions.

Chapter Conclusion

This review demonstrates how a calling is relevant for emerging adults as they make career decisions. The literature supports the definition of a calling as putting one’s purpose into action to benefit others. To understand how emerging adults enact their purpose, this review also examined the development process of a calling, positioning it as a dynamic construct. Specifically, two competencies are needed to engage in one’s calling: identity awareness and adaptability. This review expands the current research on the development of a calling by linking together perceiving a calling with identity awareness and living a calling with adaptability. As emerging adults take action on their initial understanding of their purpose, they are more likely to find meaningful careers, which then further solidify their identity (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Therefore, the concept of a calling could provide emerging adults with a way to bridge the gap
between self-awareness and action in the pursuit of their calling. This conclusion informs the study’s research question of investigating how emerging adult Christian females describe the experiences that led them to their career calling. As explained through this review, developing a calling is a dynamic process that is thereby experiential. Capturing these experiences requires storytelling as individuals make sense of their own experiences and meaning in life, and thus, narrative research is the best fit. Chapter Three will outline the narrative methodology used in this study.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative, narrative research to explore how emerging adult Christian females describe the experiences that led them to their career calling. This chapter discusses why this methodology is appropriate for the research question, providing an overview of the research design and tradition. It then explains participant recruitment, data collection, analysis, and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Paradigm

Qualitative research aims to interpret phenomena based on the meanings that people ascribe to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). As such, qualitative research best fits this study’s research question by aiming to understand the meaning that emerging adults attach to their career calling experience. This research problem inquires into the views of individuals, seeks to describe the process of developing a career calling, and requires detailed information from a small number of participants – all characteristics of qualitative research (Kim, 2016; Mertens, 2010). Since the study’s emphasis is on meaning-making and lived experience, the constructivist paradigm is also a best fit within a qualitative research design (Mertens, 2010).

The constructivist paradigm developed from the German philosophy of hermeneutics, “the study of interpretive understanding of meaning” (Mertens, 2010, p. 16). Essentially, constructivism posits that all knowledge is socially created, which allows for multiple understandings, definitions, and interpretations of a career calling as the literature on calling also supports (Mertens, 2010). The goal is to understand the multiple ways meaning is constructed by honoring individuals’ experiences within their specific contexts (Mertens, 2010). Similarly, this study’s research question assumes that each participant offers a unique view on the career calling discovery process. The aim is not to produce a static, singular set of results; instead the goals of
constructivism are “idiographic and emic,” seeking to illuminate the multi-faceted experiences of a career calling (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129).

In constructivism, the researcher acts as a “passionate participant” and co-creator of knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 171). This role elevates the importance of a researcher’s positionality, as detailed in Chapter One, and requires the researcher and participant to co-construct research findings and interpretations through dialogue together (Ponterotto, 2005). The researcher aims to understand lived experiences from the vantage point of those who lived it while also attending to his or her own experiences of the phenomenon (Mertens, 2010). This foundational principal influenced the selection of the study’s research tradition, sampling, data collection, and analysis, as this chapter details. The assumption is that the meaning of data is rooted in context, which encompasses individual experience and perceptions of that experience, social environments, and interactions between the participant and researcher (Mertens, 2010; Ponterotto, 2005). The data is then interpreted – as will be outlined in the data analysis section – and organized so that it “can be made explicit through narrative” (Mertens, 2010, p. 19). This connection between constructivism and narratives supports the use of a narrative research tradition to frame the study, as discussed next.

**Research Tradition**

A constructivist approach aligns best with narrative research to capture how individuals construct career narratives that fit their calling. As Chase (2011) explains, narrative research organizes experiences “into a meaningful whole” that draws connections between life events (p. 421). Narratives of emerging adults’ development of a career calling will most effectively capture the process and meaningful events leading up to their callings. This section provides an overview of narrative research to explain why this tradition is the best one for the study.
Narrative Research Overview

Since the 1970s, narrative research has spread from the humanities field across all social disciplines (Spector-Mersel, 2010). This “narrative turn” began with liberation movements, rooting narrative research in interpretive hermeneutics, phenomenology, and postmodernism (Josselson, 2006; Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 204). Viewing reality as subjective and relativist – reflected in and constructed by stories – has produced a multitude of ways in which narrative research is employed (Spector-Mersel, 2010). The narrative field has constructivist, realist, and postmodern influences with no agreed upon definition and origin (Reissman & Speedy, 2007). Some scholars consider narrative research primarily as a method, others as a phenomenon being studied, and others as its own paradigm (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2016; Spector-Mersel, 2010). Chase (2011) calls narrative inquiry “a subtype” of qualitative inquiry, distinguished in that it begins with a biographical approach of one’s biography, history, and society (p. 421). Using the metaphor of a quilt, Kim (2016) explains narrative inquiry as an interdisciplinary qualitative approach that explores participants’ stories through various narrative methods, such as autobiographical, life story, oral history, ethnohistory, or autoethnography, to name a few. Spector-Mersel (2010) takes the most extreme stance by positioning narrative research as its own paradigm with a “philosophical stance towards the nature of social reality” (p. 206). Most of the seminal authors in this field, however, view narrative research as both a method and phenomenon, defining it as the study of human experience through story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Josselson, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1995). This study will use the latter perspective with the researcher’s aim being to understand the meanings behind people’s experiences (Chase, 2011).
The focus on experience underpins narrative research and derives from Dewey’s philosophy that experiences are “continuously interactive,” changing “both people and the contexts in which they interact” (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 576). It is then through stories that people make meaning of their experiences, which sums up the narrative ontology (Caine et al., 2013). Spector-Mersel (2010) categories this ontology as constructivist with phenomenological and hermeneutic foundations, which influences its epistemology: People understand themselves and the world through “subjective and culturally rooted” interpretation (p. 212), which is accomplished through stories in immediate, collective, and cultural contexts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Simply put, narratives are based in the individual as well as the sociological.

The aim of narrative research is to describe human action in a “thematically unified goal-directed process” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5), while preserving “the complexity of what it means to be human” (Josselson, 2006, p. 3). This complexity derives from experiences that are grounded in a specific time, place, and society (Josselson, 2006). This context of time and space is crucial to narrative research, and again Dewey is cited as the influencer of the three-dimensional space narrative structure (Caine et al., 2013). According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the three dimensions that underpin a narrative study are continuity, situation, and interaction, which are also referred to as temporality, place, and sociality. A narrative involves scenes where characters live out their stories in relationship with others (sociality); these scenes occur within a time, place, and context (place); and the plot involves the significance of the past, the value of the present, and one’s future intentions (temporality) (Clandinin, 2013). The three-dimensional space narrative frames every aspect of the study from its research design to the analysis and presentation of findings because to understand a participant’s experience, the
researcher must also understand the “social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives that shape, and are shaped, by the individual” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 33).

**Narrative Methodology**

How the researcher integrates and analyzes these components of the narrative is where scholars diverge. For instance, Josselson, Lieblich, and McAdams (2003) reject methodology altogether, preferring to follow whatever path will best convey participants’ lived experiences. However, most narrative studies include key elements, such as collaboration between the researcher and participant(s), collecting stories often through interviews but also other forms, and designing a study that assesses multiple levels and contexts (Caine et al., 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 1989; Spector-Mersel, 2010). First, the researcher must determine who is telling the story and then select a small number of individuals with life experiences of the topic under study. Regardless of the type of study, an overall principle in narrative inquiry is that the researcher must reflect on, understand, and question his or her own story in relation to the topic of study (Trahar, 2009). For this reason, collaboration is essential as researchers negotiate entry and gain permission to hear and capture others’ stories, give all participants a voice, and co-construct “the story that emerges through the interaction or dialogue of the researcher and the participant(s)” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2013, p. 71). This data collection process is nonlinear and aims to represent the various contexts in which a narrative is written – immediate relationships, the collective social field, and broad cultural meta-narratives (Spector-Mersel, 2010; Zilber, Tuval-Mashiach, & Lieblich, 2008). As the researcher collects these data points, the emphasis is on the whole “built from a rich data source” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 5). This whole, however, recognizes that stories are always partial and dependent on how they are retold, making data analysis an essential component of narrative research.
In his seminal article, Polkinghorne (1995) explains two analytic approaches based on Bruner’s (1985) cognition types: paradigmatic and narrative. Paradigmatic-type of narrative inquiry brings order to experience through categorizing elements of a story, much like what is done in typical qualitative analysis. Thus, it can be both inductive and deductive. Narrative analysis, on the other hand, uses data that “consists of actions, events, and happenings, but whose analysis produces stories” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 6). Reissman (2008) integrates both approaches into three strategies of thematic, structural, or dialogic/performance analysis. The process most aligned with typical qualitative analysis is thematic – or paradigmatic in Polkinghorne’s (1995) terms. First, the researcher examines the data for common themes, using a coding scheme (Polkinghorne, 1995). The coding scheme can develop themes inductively and/or based on predetermined categories, such as a theoretical framework or story structure (Kim, 2016; Polkinghorne, 1995). The coding process is continued until “best fit” categories emerge (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12). The narrative, or structural, analysis process diverges from the theme-based coding process (Chase, 2011). Rather than attending to what is “told,” the analysis focuses on the “telling,” or how the narrator communicates his or her experience (Reissman, 2008, p. 77). The progression is from “elements to stories” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12) to answer the “how” in addition to the “what” of a story’s outcome (Reissman, 2008, p. 105). In this analytic strategy, the form, plotline, and literary approaches are important, and the researcher examines the story as a whole unit through these narrative lenses (Spector-Mersel, 2010). Lastly, the dialogic/performance approach to analysis focuses on the production and performance of the story to understand its message (Reissman, 2008). Reissman (2008) explains that in this approach a researcher examines the narrator’s words for not only the “what” and “how” but also for whom, when, why, and “for what purposes” (p. 105). This approach is particularly suited for
researchers whose aim is hegemonic discourse, deconstructing stories from cultural constraints (Chase, 2011; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994).

**Narrative Approach of the Study**

This study will use Kim’s (2016) narrative analysis approach to narrative research, which blends together Polkinghorne’s (1995) analytic approaches, Mishler’s (1995) narrative typology, and Labov and Waletzky’s (1997) narrative model. Kim uses a blended approach because it draws out stories from the data rather than decontextualizing the story into pieces, as is typically done in qualitative research. Since narratives are viewed holistically, the participants’ interpretations of their own life experiences are left intact, which is essential to retaining the authenticity of narratives (Kim, 2016).

A graphical representation of Kim’s model is shown in Appendix C. It approaches narrative research through the lens of Polkinghorne’s (1995) paradigmatic and narrative modes of analysis, recognizing the usefulness of both. It then examines the “telling” of the story versus the “told,” using Mishler’s (1995) typology. This distinction is similar to Reissman’s (2008) thematic versus structural analysis, as explained previously. Specifically, the “told” refers to how participants sequence events and action in their narratives, and the “telling” is the order that the research text will present the narratives to make them cohesive and accessible to readers. Kim outlines four of Mishler’s methods for analyzing this “temporal order”: (1) Recapitulating the told in the telling, (2) Reconstructing the told from the telling, (3) Imposing a told on the telling, and (4) Making a telling from the told (p. 200). Labov and Waletzky’s (1997) model provides the framework for the first method, which “emphasizes recapturing the action and meaning of personal experience” and is related to Polkinghorne’s narrative analysis (p. 201). Specifically, a fully developed narrative should contain six components: (1) Abstract or summary of the story,
(2) Orientation or context of the story, (3) Complicating action, (4) Evaluation or meaning associated with the events, (5) Result or resolution, and (6) Coda, returning narrative to the present.

Mishler’s second method of analysis is reordering the storyline into a chronologically or thematically structured narrative that allows the researcher to make sense of the data (Kim, 2016). This method also integrates Polkinghorne’s narrative analysis. The third method switches to incorporate Polkinghorne’s paradigmatic analysis to identify a story pattern (Kim, 2016). To compare multiple participants’ stories, researchers can seek commonalities and differences from predetermined or emergent categories. Lastly, method four infers stories from nonverbal data to integrate visual, archival, and artifact data (Kim, 2016).

Kim’s (2016) analysis framework then filters down to the specific genres that inform the methodology. The type of narrative for this study is biographical to explore how emerging adult Christian females make sense of their past, present, and future as they relate to their career callings (Kim, 2016). This biographical, thematic analysis blends an inductive and deductive approach as the researcher attends to individual stories and yet also recognizes that “great stories transcend the particularity of their plots… which makes them subject to thematic analysis and criticism” (Kim, 2006, p. 12). The specifics of this research process are described next.

Participants

Kim (2016) does not discuss specific sampling methods nor do most narrative research scholars (Guetterman, 2015). In reviewing narrative studies, Guetterman (2015) found that in general, they did not discuss sampling strategies or cite literature to support sampling decisions. Noy (2008) confirms this finding, stating that in constructivist-qualitative studies, sampling procedures have been “overlooked” (p. 328). For this study, five female emerging adults, who
indicate that they are currently living out their career calling, were selected as participants. The strategy used to select these individuals was criterion sampling. To keep the definition of a career calling consistent, the participants identified with the following criteria, which are based on the literature as outlined in Chapter Two:

- You are within the 18- and 29-year old age range.
- Recognizing that your calling can change throughout your life, you are currently engaged in work that you perceive as your purpose in life.
- Your work provides you with personal meaning and purpose.
- A primary source of motivation for your work is the opportunity to contribute to something or someone beyond yourself.

Although many narrative studies only choose one or two participants to study in depth, Kim (2012) reports that a sample size of around six participants is sufficient if saturation and “thematic redundancy” occur (p. 161).

**Recruitment and Access**

To recruit participants to the study, the researcher used a criterion sampling strategy through a partnership with the ABC Group (a pseudonym), a research company studying the role of faith in America. The ABC Group surveyed thousands of Christian adults across the United States to understand their worldview. Of the 1,456 respondents, 333 were emerging adults. At the end of the worldview survey, participants had the opportunity to answer an additional question about career calling with the acknowledgement that they may be contacted for further information. The question stated: “Can you describe why you believe you are called to your work?” Of the survey respondents, 93 answered the question; 19 of which were in the emerging adult age range. These 19 emerging adults were contacted via an IRB-approved script and
invited to participate in this study (Appendix D). Six emerging adult Christian females initially agreed to participate, and five ultimately joined the study.

**Data Collection**

Data collection included in-depth, semi-structured interviews along with journal entries and a chronological timeline of career history. First, each participant answered two journal questions and drew a chronological timeline of her career history prior to the interview (Appendices F and G). This document oriented the researcher to the participant’s career story, an important component of narrative research (Kim, 2016). The researcher then interviewed each participant for up to one-hour. The interviews occurred via phone and followed an IRB-approved interview protocol, as shown in Appendix H. Prior to the interview, the participants received an informed consent form and an overview of the study’s purpose, risks, and benefits (Appendix E). The most common type of interview for narrative inquiry is the life story interview because it presents a holistic story of a participant’s “social reality and a personal, experiential world” (Kim, 2016, p. 166). Atkinson’s (2012) life story interview informed most of the interview questions with demographic questions, such as age, education, occupation, and years in their current job asked up-front. Kim (2016) describes the interview process as having a narration phase and a conversation phase. In the narration phase, interviewees give full narrations of their experiences with minimal interjection from the researcher. During the conversation phase, the researcher uses semi-structured questions to invite elaboration, clarification, and future narrations. Each interview was recorded, and the researcher took detailed notes throughout the interviews to capture observations, descriptions, and reflections (Kim, 2016). During the entire research process, a field journal was also maintained to record thoughts on the process and the participants.
Data Storage

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality, and the pseudonym was used in all transcripts and other documents. The name key was stored separately and securely from any recordings, transcripts, and documents. Informed consent forms, interview notes, and other physical documents were stored in a secure place, accessible only to the researcher. Following each interview, the recordings were downloaded and saved to a password-protected computer. The recordings were then transcribed, and the transcriber had no connection to the research study or participants.

Data Analysis

As previously explained, this study used Kim’s (2016) approach for data analysis. After the transcription process, each interview was analyzed separately to order the participants’ experiences into a narrative and chronological story (Kim, 2016). This chronological account contained key events, complicating action, evaluations, and results based on the participants’ chronological career history timeline and interview responses (Kim, 2016). After developing a chronological narrative for each interview, the inductive coding process began. First, the researcher read through the transcripts, highlighting quotations and concepts that captured main themes about the development of a career calling (Kim, 2016). The highlights were then read a second time with accompanying notes on a separate page, capturing the main points of the quotation with designated line numbers. Thirdly, the researcher reviewed the notes to begin sorting them into categories and then looked for points of consolidation first within coding category and then across categories (Kim, 2016). The second cycle of coding combined codes that included similar themes and patterns (Kim, 2016).
Kim (2016) relies on Connelly and Clandinin’s (1990) tools of broadening, burrowing, and restorying during the coding and analysis process. First, the researcher approached the data through a lens of understanding the broader context (Kim, 2016). This lens generalizes the participant’s character and values and locates the field text within a cultural, social, and/or historical context (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2016). Secondly, the researcher burrowed into the data, such as focusing on the participant’s specific emotions, key events, and her interpretations (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2016). Burrowing also prompted the researcher to seek out why and how these specifics influenced the participant’s lived experiences (Kim, 2016). Lastly, restorying positioned the story in the present to consider its meaning, how it may change, and what its significance is for the future (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2016). Although this data analysis process can be mapped on paper, in reality narrative research is nonlinear, which requires ethical considerations and trustworthiness, as discussed next.

**Ethical Considerations and Research Bias**

Kim (2016) proposes that relational ethics are “at the heart of narrative inquiry” because it is a “collaborative storytelling methodology” (p. 99, 103). This study maintained ethical standards by being transparent in its research purpose and developing trustworthy relationships with participants (Kim, 2016). Each participant received an informed consent form, and anonymity was preserved through the methods outlined in the data collection section. Additionally, narrative research strives to “respect the dignity and welfare” of participants by clearly explaining how participants’ voices are honored and represented, disclosing any researcher bias, and supporting any claims with evidence from the narratives (Kim, 2016, p. 103). Chapter One of this study outlines the researcher’s positionality and discloses any potential researcher bias.
Trustworthiness

Four criteria to evaluate the trustworthiness of a study include credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007). Credibility is how accurately the phenomenon under study is represented. Since narrative research relies on participant collaboration, credibility is established through member checking and prolonged engagement. In this study, the participants answered journal questions and developed a career timeline prior to the interview. The researcher then reviewed these documents with the participants during the interview. Dependability was established in this study by clearly outlining how the research was conducted and analyzed, and confirmability demonstrates how the data developed into the final research text (Ryan et al., 2007). For instance, narrative research should reflect the multiplicity of interpretations rather than “create smooth texts” that portray narratives as coherent and always ending well (Clandinin, 2013, p. 48; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kim, 2016). To guard against this potential threat, this study details how the findings are “generated and collected,” as well as the data’s context prior to its isolation into coding schemas (Chenail, 1995, para. 2.6). Additionally, this study presented the researcher bias upfront so as not to make the researcher’s voice the voice of the participants (Edel, 1984, as cited in Creswell, 2013).

Lastly, transferability refers to how applicable the study’s results are to those outside the study (Ryan et al., 2007). In the constructivist paradigm, however, Ponterotto (2005) warns that the researcher should not seek a singular reality from the data, and so it is “irrelevant” if two researchers review the data and arrive at different conclusions (p. 130). Instead, “the reader should judge the rigor of the study on the basis of its thick description” (p. 130). Transferability, therefore, occurs when the reader retains a sense of the whole while being invited to participate in the concrete details (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). To embed transferability into this study,
the following analysis toggles between a holistic presentation of findings and simultaneously attends to thick descriptions and direct quotations from the interview transcripts. Lastly, a potential threat to internal validity could include member dropout. To mitigate this threat, this study recruited six participants to ensure saturation even though one participant declined to participate in the study (Kim, 2016).

**Limitations**

The main limitation to this study is transferability because each narrative of career calling is embedded in the context of the participant’s experience (Mertens, 2010). Though criterion sampling resulted in a somewhat diverse demographic base, there is a limitation to external validity. For instance, a 22-year-old and a 28-year-old were selected as participants, but their narratives do not represent the perspectives of all 22- or 28-year-olds. The various occupations represented by the participants also fall under the same limitation of generalizing findings. However, as Kim (2016) reminds, the purpose of qualitative research is not certainty that can be generalized but fidelity of the participants’ experiences.

**Conclusion**

This study explores how emerging adult Christian females describe the experiences that led them to their career calling using narrative research. The constructivist paradigm informs this methodology by seeking out multiple ways that meaning is constructed through individuals’ experiences within their specific contexts (Mertens, 2010). In particular, Kim’s (2016) framework for narrative inquiry informs the sampling, data collection, and analysis processes. The study takes a biographical approach to generate narratives primarily through in-depth interviews. Chapter Four presents the findings and analysis from this data collection process.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this study, a narrative research approach explores how emerging adult Christian females describe the experiences that led them to their career calling. This chapter discusses the themes that emerged from the data, which consists of interview transcripts, journal entries, and career timelines (see Appendix I for sample career timelines). This chapter first presents the participants’ backgrounds and brief biographies, followed by an in-depth analysis of each superordinate theme and sub-theme. The data analysis yielded five superordinate themes and 17 sub-themes. The chart below summarizes these themes.
Participant Profiles

In this study, five emerging adult women, who identified both with having a calling and with the Christian faith, described their journeys toward a career calling. Each participant submitted two journal responses and a career timeline before completing an hour-long interview with the researcher. These documents along with the interview transcripts provided a narrative of how these women experienced a career calling. The chart below summarizes the participants’ demographic and background information. Following is a brief biography of each woman’s career history.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>College Location (United States)</th>
<th>Current Location (United States)</th>
<th>Family Status</th>
<th>Previous Work Role</th>
<th>Current Work Role</th>
<th>Length of Time at Current Role (as of interview)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>Administrative Assistant at private elementary school</td>
<td>About 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torrie</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic region</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Payroll Processor</td>
<td>Self-employed: Retailer of personal care and beauty products</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethany</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Appalachian region</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Admissions Recruiter at university</td>
<td>Copywriter and Account Assistant for a public relations company</td>
<td>10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Mid-Atlantic region</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Food service</td>
<td>Assistant high school cross country coach (part-time)</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelsie</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Married, 1 child</td>
<td>Nanny</td>
<td>Stay-at-home mom and part-time nanny</td>
<td>2 years as a stay-at-home mom; 9 months as a nanny</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lynn

Lynn is a 28-year-old, Caucasian female working as an Administrative Assistant at a non-profit private Christian school. Her degree is in Human Resource Management, and from the ages of 21 to 27 she worked in the human resource field at several different companies. After college, she moved to a big city for a human resources position at an investment bank. Two years later she broke up with her boyfriend and moved back to her hometown. She next worked for a drilling company but a downturn in the natural gas industry compelled her to transition to a human resources role at a nursing home. A downsizing at this company led to her being laid off, so she found part-time work at a homeless shelter. This experience prompted her to recognize how much a “social aspect” to work and “helping others” mattered to her in a career (personal communication, May 10, 2017). When a friend mentioned an opening at a school where she was working as a consultant, Lynn applied and became the Administrative Assistant. Although she may not work in a school setting forever, she desires work to be just as fulfilling, rewarding, and worthwhile as it is currently.

Torrie

Torrie is a 25-year-old, African American female, who has been self-employed for the past two years. She sells personal care and beauty products as an independent seller through Amazon and at local flea markets in the Mid-Atlantic area of the United States. She graduated with a Bachelor in Business Administration but had difficulty finding a job in the financial accounting field after graduating. From ages 21 to 22, Torrie found part-time work as a tutor and office assistant, and then upon moving to a larger city in a Mid-Atlantic state, she worked as a Payroll Processor at an accounting firm. Then after her father unexpectedly passed away, she
“took a leap of faith” and became self-employed (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Although not “necessarily an easy road,” she believes she is living out her true calling.

**Bethany**

Bethany is a 25-year-old, Caucasian female working as a Copywriter and Account Assistant at a public relations company. She attended a Division I university in the Appalachian region on a cheerleading scholarship, majoring in Broadcast Journalism. After graduating, however, she turned down a job offer as a news reporter in favor of working as an Admissions Recruiter at her university. Although she loved her role, after two years she recognized that her job lacked growth potential. Additionally, she desired to move back to her hometown in the Midwest. At age 24, she joined her current company as a copywriter because it allows her to use writing “to help other people or enhance a business,” which she views as an aspect of her calling (personal communication, May 16, 2017).

**Francis**

Francis is a 22-year-old, Caucasian female, who is an Assistant Cross Country Coach at a high school in the Mid-Atlantic area. This job is part-time, so she is currently looking for full-time work in addition to coaching. In college, Francis studied psychology and Spanish. She was a competitive runner for two years in college until injuries forced her to quit, and in her current job she desires to help her team discover a passion that will keep them healthy throughout life. This same desire translates into why she feels called to go to graduate school for psychology – to “lead people to live their own best life,” specifically those in the juvenile justice system (personal communication, May 19, 2017). After graduating, Francis intended to stay in the city where she went to college, but a personal emergency necessitated that she move back to her hometown. Her plan is now to save up money for graduate school, and in the meantime, find
entry level work in the psychology or wellness fields, such as at a psychiatric hospital or health services company.

**Kelsie**

Kelsie is a 25-year-old, Caucasian female, who is a part-time nanny and stay-at-home mom. In high school, the deaths of her grandfather, aunt, and other people that she was close to led her to question – and then strengthen – her faith beliefs. This experience, while not altering the specific path toward her calling, “completely changed” the motivation behind her calling (personal communication, June 3, 2017). She attended college in the Midwest, majoring in Early Childhood Education because she views her calling as “glorifying God… by loving the children that I’m around well” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Kelsie married during college and was pregnant during her last semester of student teaching. Since she was due two months after graduating and “always desired to be a mother,” she did not think it made “logical sense” to pursue a job (personal communication, June 3, 2017). When her son was about a year old, she began nannying for a family three days a week, and she is able to bring her son with her to work, allowing her to continue investing in him, which is her “biggest joy” (personal communication, June 3, 2017).

For each of the participants, the path toward understanding a career calling followed a similar outline: A few key, early influences became identity markers that initially shaped each woman’s career path. Then a turning point experience occurred, which in many cases was painful. In the chaos, confusion, and questioning, the turning point prompted a response and a shift toward identifying a calling. From this process, each woman came to have a deeper understanding of her calling. These experiences required agency and adaptability, resulting in the
participants viewing the future as unknown yet secure. The next section explores each phase of this process in detail.

**Theme One: Early Influences and Identity Markers**

Each of the participants’ stories contained early influences that impacted initial steps towards a specific career path. In many cases, these influences created identity markers about who the person was and what “came naturally” to them (Lynn, personal communication, May 10, 2017). Specifically, these early influencers included family and upbringing; teachers and coaches; innate interests and abilities; and confirming experiences, such as classes, first jobs, and internships. The theme’s title reflects that these early influencers influenced what the participants were drawn to while growing up, which then influenced the initial decisions towards their career path. This section first presents a narrative of each participants’ influences while growing up. It then outlines the four sub-themes embedded in these narratives: (1) Innate interest and abilities, (2) Opportunities to enact identity, (3) Key early relationships, and (4) Exploration.

**Participants’ Stories of Early Influences:**

**Torrie.** Since she was a girl, Torrie remembers selling candy to her neighbors and mailman. Then in high school, she would set audacious fundraising goals, ultimately raising $10,000 for a debutante ball and falling just short of her goal of selling 1,000 boxes of Girl Scout cookies. Surrounded by an aunt, grandfather, and a father who all started their own businesses, Torrie also “always believed that’s what God wanted me to do with my life” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). She “always liked to sell things,” has “always been entrepreneurial,” and “always” had the goal to start her own business one day (personal communication, May 11, 2017). This word choice reflects that though she expected to enter a finance job after graduating from college, it was not a surprise that her innate talents, interests,
and early experiences led her down the entrepreneurial path when the corporate world drained her. It also came as no surprise to Torrie’s family members when she announced that she was quitting her job to start her own business. Torrie’s mother was one of the early influencers toward Torrie becoming an entrepreneur, taking her to flea markets since she was a teenager to sell used items (personal communication, May 11, 2017).

Kelsie. Similarly, Kelsie was not surprised or disappointed when she graduated college and became a stay-at-home mom instead of starting a career, explaining that she “always, always wanted to be a mom” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). She remembers “there was always a new baby at Christmas with my cousins” and being the one who helped care for the children in her large extended family – often by changing diapers and making sure they were fed. She then had the opportunity to “practice out motherhood” by nannying in college (personal communication, June 3, 2017). She would watch mothers with their children and learn, “How do I love this child when they’re making me angry or when they’re disobeying?” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). From these experiences, motherhood “wasn’t as shocking” to Kelsie, nor was it a difficult decision to not become a teacher as she had planned (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Kelsie “always dreamt about being a teacher” ever since her second grade teacher made such an impression on her (personal communication, June 3, 2017). She was specifically interested in early childhood education because “children still needed a nurturing role” during this time (personal communication, June 3, 2017). A career test, along with student teaching experience in high school, confirmed that she “thrived working with children” and solidified her decision to major in Early Childhood Education (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Now in her current role as a stay-at-home mom and part-time
nanny, these same passions and strengths “bled into” why Kelsie enjoys and views her work as a calling (personal communication, June 3, 2017).

Francis. Like Kelsie, Francis also intended to go into education because of her experience being the oldest of six children. She comments that she is “not going to say” she helped raise her younger siblings, and yet she was the one to stay home and babysit, “watching them grow up and working with them. That’s kind of where teaching came into play in my mind” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). When Francis started college, however, she realized that she might not “want to spend my whole life working at a school,” so she switched her major to Psychology (personal communication, May 19, 2017). She “always thought psychology was really interesting,” specifically understanding how different disorders manifest and are treated (personal communication, May 19, 2017). This interest comes from her experience of mental health both personally and in her family. What “first propelled” her into psychology was her own struggle with an eating disorder for eight years and a desire to show others that recovery is possible (personal communication, May 19, 2017). In addition to her eating disorder and a more recent diagnosis with generalized anxiety disorder, Francis believes that her upbringing shaped her calling the most: “I can now see looking back, especially on my dad's side of the family, there's a lot of what I consider to be undiagnosed depression” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). Yet, there is also “a lot of stigma” against therapy (personal communication, May 19, 2017). “Basically on my dad's side of the family, if you have a problem like anxiety or an eating disorder or whatever, you just kind of have to get over it and deal with it on your own because there's people with real problems” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). Though she currently works as a cross country coach as she saves money to attend graduate school for counseling, she sees an overlap between psychology and coaching as her calling: “I've always
loved working with people, especially when it's regarding something I know a lot about and am passionate about… I've always kind of had jobs where I'm working with others and helping others,” whether that is coaching students or helping her brother through a difficult season of depression (personal communication, May 19, 2017).

**Bethany.** Just as Francis always saw herself as a “helper” (personal communication, May 19, 2017), writing was always Bethany’s “strongest suit” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Since she was ten years old, Bethany anticipated using her communication skills in news and sports, dreaming about being on ESPN’s SportsCenter one day. She took media classes in high school, which confirmed her decision to pursue a broadcast/journalism major in college. Sports broadcasting was Bethany’s primary interest because she has “always been extremely interested in sports” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). She lettered in three sports in high school and was on a cheerleading scholarship for all four years at a Division I college. Additionally, she explained that her dad has always been a coach – only later adding that he is also a principal. When she was little, Bethany’s mom signed her up for dance and gymnastics, and then from age 19 on Bethany began giving private lessons for gymnastics and cheerleading. However, after two internship experiences in sports and news broadcasting, she realized, “I just didn’t think that I loved general news enough to be able to work in that field for a prolonged period of time” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Instead, after working as a recruiter at her university, she landed a copywriting job at a public relations firm, which allows her to use her journalism degree and writing skills. Her college coach was a big influence regarding work because she “taught that cheerleading was secondary to the way that you interacted with people, and fans and children, and alumni. [She] really wanted you to be a good person before you were a good cheerleader” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Although Bethany still desires “to
work in sports one day if somehow my writing, or clients or something could take me in that
direction,” she knows that her “writing has the ability to help people” through the small
businesses that she works with at her PR firm (personal communication, May 16, 2017).

Lynn. Lastly, Lynn also ended up in a different field than where she began her career,
and like Bethany, ended up in a work environment better suited for her unique wiring. She traded
in a “high pressure” and “high stress” career in human resources for a position at a school, where
students surprised her during her first week with a packet of letters they wrote to her (personal
communication, May 10, 2017). Lynn initially pursued Human Resource Management as a
major and career because she enjoyed business classes in high school, building resumes “came
pretty naturally and easy for me,” and her mom gave her the idea to go into the field (personal
communication, May 10, 2017). Career fairs and internships then “solidified” her decision, and
she spent the first six years of her career in human resources roles (personal communication,
May 10, 2017). Although she now works at a private Christian school as an Administrative
Assistant, she does not discount her time in the human resources field. Instead, she sees that
“without that business experience, I may not have ended up where I was today” (personal
communication, May 10, 2017). Additionally, she still enjoys using the same strengths of
“dealing with people” and “the business end of things” that are needed in HR, but she applies
them in a different setting as a school administrator (personal communication, May 10, 2017).

Through these vignettes of the participants’ childhood and adolescent years, several sub-
themes emerge. First, although the participants view themselves as having “always” been a
certain way, they had specific opportunities to enact these interests and abilities. Secondly,
influential relationships reinforced who the participants had “always” been. Thirdly, the
participants looked for confirmation in the areas that they enjoyed, such as through classes, majors, and internships.

**Innate Interests and Abilities: Who I’ve “Always” Been**

In describing who they are as individuals, all of the participants used the word “always.” They could each trace the decisions that they have made along their career path to who they have “always” been or what has “always” been an interest for them. Torrie was always entrepreneurial; Kelsie always wanted to be a mother; Francis was always the helper in her family; Bethany always enjoyed sports and writing; and Lynn always enjoyed working with others. These self-constructs arose at a young age, with every participant except Lynn remarking that they have been “always” been that way since they were young: “When I was really little, maybe four, I always just liked to sell things (Torrie); “I wanted to be a teacher since I was in the second grade” (Kelsie); “[I’ve been] a helper… and caretaker for so long” (Francis); “Since I was young, probably like ten or eleven, I was really interested in the news and sports” (Bethany).

Lynn’s innate sense of self emerged later once she began working in an environment “where they encourage you to pray every day and they really encourage you to love one another” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). She recognizes now that “faith was always important to me. Now that I'm working and doing something that's faith-based, I can see how that plays a role” (personal communication, May 10, 2017).

Additionally, though other people may have reinforced the participants’ identities, each woman took on the identity marker as her own. For instance, Torrie notes that her distant family members and acquaintances “overall have been very supportive [of starting my own business] because they’ve known all through my life I’ve always, like I said, been entrepreneurial minded” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). This phrasing demonstrates that others affirmed
Torrie’s identity but that she had already claimed being “entrepreneurial minded” for herself. Similarly, Kelsie said the “wisdom, and guidance, and encouragement from fellow Christians has directed me and encouraged me to stay at home and nanny… because I enjoy it and I feel like it's a good place for me to glorify God” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Though others affirm Kelsie’s choices, she identifies with her roles apart from their input. These examples demonstrate that the participants identify their innate interests and abilities as a unique part of who they are and what they have “always” known. This word choice seems to indicate that innate interests and abilities shape one’s career path, influencing the choice of extracurricular activities, classes, and engagement in one’s family, as explored in the following themes.

**Enact Identity: Opportunities to Enact Identity through Family Upbringing**

Although the participants indicated that they had “always” exhibited certain traits or strengths, one’s upbringing also presented specific opportunities to enact or reinforce these characteristics, which eventually surfaced in their career callings. For instance, Torrie’s family predisposed her to entrepreneurial ventures. Her father owned a company, her aunt owns a daycare, and her grandfather used to run a store and have a janitorial business. Then as a teenager, Torrie accompanied her mother to sell old or used items at a flea market, which transformed into Torrie’s own business of selling retail. Kelsie and Francis also had the opportunity to enact their “nurturing” (Kelsie) and “helper” (Francis) personalities in their large families – roles which they willingly stepped into and embraced as a part of their identities. Kelsie states, “I've been around children my whole life and helped take care of them... I think I've always had a nurturing personality” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Similarly, Francis comments that what has impacted her life the most is “being the oldest of so many siblings, being around family, being around a lot of people and kind of being a helper” (personal
communication, May 19, 2017). Kelsie’s and Francis’s comments reveal the inherent nature-nurture debate. Although they have always viewed themselves as being a nurturer or helper, their family environments also allowed them to express these traits. Similarly, Bethany’s upbringing reinforced her love of athletics. Bethany describes herself as “competitive,” needing to “get some sort of physical energy out each day” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). The “fun” atmosphere that sports provide carries over into her seeking out work environments that have this same level of energy (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Though this orientation is how Bethany is wired, her family also provided a home environment that encouraged her affinity for sports. Since her father was a coach, her parents were “very, very supportive of sports… As long as I was doing well in school, they let me play as many sports and stuff as I wanted” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Just as the participants’ upbringings helped shape their innate traits, their key relationships also reinforced their identities, as discussed next.

**Early Relationships**

Each of the participants had key relationships that called forth aspects of their career callings. Influential relationships is a theme that resurfaced throughout the participants’ narratives and one that will be discussed further in Theme Three. This theme focuses on early relationships that played a role in shaping one’s career decisions. As alluded to in the previous section, many of the formative relationships were family members, such as Torrie’s family influencing her entrepreneurism, Bethany’s family orientation toward sports, or Lynn’s mother, who gave her the idea to pursue Human Resources. For Francis, a negative family experience shaped her calling. Francis’s extended family stigmatized her for seeking help for her eating and anxiety disorders. However, her dad “has always been very open to me when I was in my own therapy” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). This experience and her dad’s understanding,
prompted Francis to “want to be able to make a difference in my generation to erase that stigma within my family of talking about problems” (personal communication, May 19, 2017).

Additionally, several of the participants had teachers or coaches that also spoke into their lives, influencing their career choices. Kelsie commented that her second grade teacher “re-did school for me and made me love school forever,” which is when she began dreaming about going into education (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Torrie’s fourth grade teacher sparked a “pivotal moment” in her life because he “encouraged and believed in me” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Through the third grade, Torrie attended a private Christian school until her parents could no longer afford it. Her fourth grade teacher helped her to believe that she was “a talented and gifted girl” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Torrie explains, “I think ever since then that’s when I really saw that in myself, and it made me push myself… and just challenged myself to be my best. Before then… I just did enough to get a decent grade. I didn’t really care” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). For Bethany, her high school cheerleading coach taught her the value in pushing herself. Her coach helped her realize that she could attain a cheerleading scholarship for college: “She always pushed me and thought I was better than I thought I was, so that was very influential” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Additionally, Bethany saw her coach thrive as a teacher for remedial students, explaining,

I saw her interact with those kids all the time, and that was actually really awesome to me because that would be a job that people may not really like and she thrived at it. She was really good, so I saw somebody who really cared about their job and like what other people may not like (personal communication, May 16, 2017).
Though Bethany and Torrie did not draw a direct connection to these influences on their career path, in looking at their narrative as a whole, it is evident why they mentioned these relationships as influencing their lives in significant ways. For Torrie to make the risky decision to start her own business required drive that her fourth grade teacher helped to instill. For Bethany to risk turning down her first job in pursuit of a career that she cared about, she needed to draw on her coach’s drive and inspiration. These key relationships contributed to the formation of the participants’ identities that they would draw on as they made decisions towards their career calling, as will be explained further in subsequent themes.

**Explore: Seek Confirmation**

Once identifying their areas of interest, each participant sought confirmation for a career that they would enjoy, such as through classes, majors, internships, and – for one participant – a career test. For some participants, these experiences confirmed their career path, but for others, the experiences redirected their career decisions. The participants used this exploration strategy throughout their career journeys, both as they made initial career decisions, discussed in this theme, and as they progressed on their career path and had turning point experiences, as detailed in Theme Three.

Lynn began her career in the human resources field, and she gained confidence in this decision through her business classes in high school, a career fair, and internships in college. Bethany’s two years of broadcast/media classes in high school led to her broadcast/journalism major in college. Torrie started college knowing that she wanted to study business from her entrepreneurial experiences in high school. She began as a marketing major because a relative told her it was more exciting than finance. However, once she discovered “what marketing really entails, I realized that wasn’t really me and I realized that finance was more suited to me” based
on her interests and confirmation through an internship (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Like Torrie, Francis also started college with a different major. She initially majored in early childhood education because when she was 13, “I decided I wanted to be a teacher. By the time I was 18 and had to pick a major, that was still the main career that I had in my head” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). After recognizing that her education major “wasn’t igniting a spark in me,” Francis switched her major to psychology, which she had found interesting in high school. Volunteer experiences in this field then confirmed her decision, as will be discussed later in her narrative. Lastly, Kelsie had the opportunity to do a mentorship program in high school where she worked in a preschool and had student teaching experiences with second, third, and fourth grade students. Her experience in the preschool confirmed that she wanted to pursue early childhood education in college. Then toward the end of high school, her parents paid for her to take a career test with a professional coach. The results indicated that either a child-centered environment or politics fit her personality the best. Kelsie said that the test helped “give me the confidence that I knew [early childhood education] was an area where I would thrive” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Although a professor tried to convince Kelsie to study Elementary Education, after taking “some early childhood courses, I just really made the decision that that was a place for me” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). In sum, classes, internships, and other real-world experiences prompted the participants’ early career decisions – even if some of these decisions did not end up being their areas of calling.

**Theme Conclusion**

Looking back, the participants can see the thread of who they have “always” been, and three of the five participants made a direct correlation between their first jobs while growing up and their career calling. Torrie first remembers selling candy to her neighbors as a four-year-old
– a precursor to her calling as an entrepreneur. Kelsie grew up babysitting and working as a server at local restaurants, but the three summers she spent as a counselor at a Christian camp was “the most significant experience or job or anything that I had encountered in college” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). She describes the camp leadership as changing “my view of what it means to walk with God,” which shaped her on a “foundational basis” as she learned how to minister to children (personal communication, June 3, 2017). This experience influences her role as a stay-at-home mom and nanny today. Francis explains that through her first jobs as a coach, swim instructor, lifeguard, and babysitter, she “met a lot of different kinds of children, a lot of different family dynamics” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). These experiences helped her realize that she desires to meet people “where they are and be able to help them with whatever the problem is at hand, whether it’s they want to be a better runner” – i.e. her current role as a cross country coach – “or whether it’s they want to rehabilitate and get their life back on track” – i.e. her future goal to be a counselor (personal communication, May 19, 2017). Though Lynn did not make this connection herself, her first job as a waitress at age 16 required the very qualities that she uses to define herself in her area of calling now, namely serving and helping others. Lastly, Bethany’s first jobs were babysitting and coaching gymnastics, which overlap with her desire to “work in sports one day,” while helping others achieve “an objective in some way” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Though the participants can look back and recognize their identities in their calling based on their early influences, they still required clarifying experiences to make the jump from enacting to owning their identities. These experiences became turning points towards their career callings, which is the next theme in the participants’ career narratives.
Theme Two: Turning Point Experiences

Based on their identity markers and early influences, the participants made decisions about college, their major, and career path. However, as the participants progressed on this path, each one experienced a personal and/or professional turning point that prompted a response to reconsider their calling. Theme Two discusses the turning point experiences, and Theme Three explores the participants’ responses to these turning points. Then, Themes Four and Five explore the redefinition of the participants’ callings and how they envision the future of their callings. These experiences occur concurrently, so the process is more cyclical than linear. The following vignettes describe the key turning points in each of the participants’ stories.

Participants’ Turning Point Stories

Francis. During winter break of her freshman year of college, Francis spent time with family at her uncle’s house. Her uncle is a counselor, and as Francis describes it,

I actually found myself at my uncle’s house reading a copy of the DSM [Diagnostic Statistical Manual], and I spent an hour going through it. That was kind of the moment I knew maybe this is what I’m supposed to do. Maybe this is what I’m supposed to be working with, and these are the kind of people I’m supposed to be helping (personal communication, May 19, 2017).

In particular, the section about borderline personality disorder stood out, and Francis recognized some of the features of the disorder in herself. She read about what a “devastating impact” psychological disorders can have on people, such as generalized anxiety, which she personally experiences (personal communication, May 19, 2017). However, rather than feeling hopeless, Francis realized that she “wanted to be able to help people process” their disorders and break misconceptions since “more people than you would think” struggle with a disorder (personal
communication, May 19, 2017). Stumbling upon her uncle’s book prompted Francis to change her major from Education to Psychology, starting her down the path toward her calling in the counseling field.

More recently, a “personal emergency” necessitated that she move back home instead of staying in her college town “for the foreseeable future” as she had planned (personal communication, May 19, 2017). This sparked another turning point on the path toward her calling. Francis explains,

I don’t want to go into all the details because it’s still kind of fresh, but …the main reason I moved was I was leaving an abusive relationship… It was only two months ago. It was very unplanned; it was very last minute. It was kind of like I started to feel not safe, and my parents were starting to really worry, so we kind of decided within the span of two hours that I needed to pack my stuff and I needed to move (personal communication, May 19, 2017).

This experience led her to find the cross country assistant coaching job that she has currently while she works to save money to attend graduate school for counseling.

**Kelsie.** During her senior year of high school, Kelsie lost her grandfather, aunt, and several other close relations. She explains, “Before that, I had never really questioned God or His existence. I could kind of care less so to speak” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Death became the “biggest thing” that led her to investigate her faith (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Kelsie comments that this journey of examining her faith and becoming a Christian, “completely changed my calling” even though “I always obviously loved working with children and I probably would've gone down that route regardless” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Rather than change what her calling was, the experience changed the motive behind her
calling: “My calling, in general as a person, is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. So that completely changed because my heart had been changed” (personal communication, June 3, 2017).

Then when Kelsie became pregnant during her senior year of college, it marked another turning point experience as she put her calling into practice as a stay-at-home mom. She and her husband decided that since she was going to deliver her son two months after graduating, it “didn’t make logical sense for me to get a job for that short period of time” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). She also “always desired to be a mother and invest in my children at home… so that kind of was a driving decision” to stay at home and be a part-time nanny (personal communication, June 3, 2017).

Torrie. Death was also a key factor in Torrie’s journey to understanding her calling. When Torrie was 23 years old, her father unexpectedly passed away from what the doctors think was a heart attack. Four months later, Torrie decided to become fully self-employed. Only after prompting during the interview did Torrie see a connection between her father’s death and her decision to be a full-time entrepreneur:

Now that you mention it, I think [my dad’s death] did probably influence my decision to do it, to go for it, because I know that was also his dream. I think it probably did give me the reality of how life can be short and how you should chase your dreams (personal communication, May 11, 2017).

As previously mentioned, Torrie’s father owned a business and dreamed of Torrie one day doing the same, which gave her the “extra fuel and push” to take “a leap of faith” and become self-employed (personal communication, May 11, 2017). She describes her turning point moment as “when I actually made the decision that this is what I’m going to do. I’m going to turn in my two
weeks notice at my current employment” as a payroll processor (personal communication, May 11, 2017). She realized that working nine to five at an office in the corporate world was not something she wanted long-term: “My heart really is with being self-employed” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). She felt God directing her and she drew inspiration from Christian podcasts and sermons about following your dreams. However, after she made the decision she kept it to herself for a week because she did not want friends or family “to talk me out of it,” give her conflicting advice, or make her doubt (personal communication, May 11, 2017). She did not tell anyone until after she gave in her two weeks notice. Her mom was the only one who was very “upset” and “didn’t handle it well” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Torrie explained her decision “that I was chasing my dream and that I felt that this is what God wanted me to do with my life” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Despite the uncertainties of entrepreneurism, Torrie still knows “that this was the right thing to do” (personal communication, May 11, 2017).

Bethany. Like Torrie, Bethany’s key turning point in her calling involved risking job security. She applied for a news reporter position, was offered the job, but then turned it down. She calls it “every parent’s not dream” to turn down your first job offer out of college (personal communication, May 16, 2017). She decided that “the subject matter of a small-town reporter did not outweigh the crazy hours and low pay” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Although she had an offer in the field that she had prepared for since high school, she decided to “switch gears” and “step out of the expected path of a broadcast graduate” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Her parents were surprised – wanting to make sure that she had other interviews lined up and that she knew how difficult on-air positions are to land – but ultimately supportive. She decided to take a job with her university’s Admissions Office, where
she had worked as an undergraduate student as a campus tour guide. She “really, really enjoyed” her role as an Admissions Recruiter and stayed in the position for two years (personal communication, May 16, 2017).

During this time, she broke up with her boyfriend of five and a half years, which gave her space to “broaden my horizons and see what other kinds of opportunities there were” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). She realized, “If I wanted to continue to evolve in a profession, I was probably going to need to make a change… I do need an opportunity to gain more responsibility, which there wasn’t really that” at her Admissions Recruiter position (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Though leaving a job and co-workers that she enjoyed was difficult, she desired a company with “growth opportunity” and “was ready to be back with my family” in her hometown (personal communication, May 16, 2017). This decision prompted another turning point on the path toward her calling as Bethany intentionally sought out an “avenue where I could use my writing,” which she considers to be her “strongest suit” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). She accepted a position as an Account Assistant at a public relations company that is in her hometown, offers growth opportunities, and allows her to use her writing to meet clients’ needs.

Lynn. Lastly, Lynn’s turning point occurred after she was let go from her human resources role at a nursing home when the company went through a downsizing. She explains,

I had always liked my jobs, but I didn't find something that I loved and that I enjoyed going to work every day. I was dealing with some personal issues too, so I wasn’t ready to jump back full-time into the workforce (personal communication, May 10, 2017).

For these reasons, she did not look for another human resources job. Instead, she found part-time work at a homeless shelter. It was at this job that she discovered the “service” and “social”
aspects of work: “Helping others was something that really spoke to me. I knew I wanted my next full-time job to be kind of along that line” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). In this role, Lynn used her previous experience of creating and assessing resumes to help the residents at the homeless shelter apply for jobs and present themselves to potential employers. She says, “I was helping them start their future, I guess. Finding a job is so critical to someone that doesn't have anything. They need a job first before they can get anything else. It was just really rewarding” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). It was through this experience that she “ended up knowing that I wanted to do something a little bit different” with her career (personal communication, May 10, 2017). When she was ready for full-time work again, she wanted a job that was just as meaningful. A friend of hers worked as a consultant at a private Christian school and told Lynn about an opening for an Administrative Assistant role. She applied, was hired, and has been working at the school for about a year. To Lynn, the “opportunity kind of just fell into my lap… If it weren't for [my friend], I would have never even heard about it… I felt like it was meant to be” (personal communication, May 10, 2017).

Transitions, Traumas, and Tragedies

Each of the participants’ turning point experiences are a result of a transition, trauma, or tragedy. The transitions are both occupational, such as changing career direction for either positive or negative reasons, as well as personal changes in one’s life, such as Kelsie’s pregnancy. Bethany experienced two occupational transitions that altered her calling – the first occurring when she turned down the news anchor position and the second when she recognized the lack of advancement opportunities at her university job. Traumas are also work-related and personal. An occupational trauma refers to a change at work that is an unpredictable and painful experience (Savickas, 2012). Lynn’s occupational transition to working at a homeless shelter
ignited a positive change, but it only occurred after the trauma of being laid off from her previous job. An example of a personal trauma is Francis’s abusive relationship. Francis first experienced a positive transition of finding the psychology book at her uncle’s house, but she then experienced the trauma of leaving an abusive relationship, which changed her career path. Lastly, the participants’ experienced tragedies as a turning point. For this study, a trauma involves an event happening directly to the participant, and a tragedy refers to an event happening around the participant. Both examples of tragedies in the study involve the deaths of loved ones. Facing the tragedy of multiples deaths in her family caused Kelsie to reexamine her calling. Torrie experienced all three turning point categories on the path toward her calling. She first experienced an occupational trauma when she could not find a job in the financial field after graduating college. The tragedy of her dad’s death then prompted her to transition to working as a full-time entrepreneur. These turning point experiences are summarized in chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Turning point, as identified by participant</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Additional turning points, as identified through narrative</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Francis</td>
<td>Read psychology book at her uncle’s house</td>
<td>Transition (Occupational)</td>
<td>Ended abusive relationship</td>
<td>Trauma (personal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelsie</td>
<td>Death of grandfather, aunt, and other relatives</td>
<td>Tragedy</td>
<td>Pregnancy/Becoming a mother</td>
<td>Transition (personal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torrie</td>
<td>Turned in two-weeks notice to become a full-time entrepreneur</td>
<td>Transition (Occupational)</td>
<td>a. Dad passed away unexpectedly</td>
<td>a. Tragedy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. Could not find job in finance field after graduating</td>
<td>b. Trauma (occupational)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethany</td>
<td>Turned down on-air news anchor position</td>
<td>Transition (Occupational)</td>
<td>No advancement opportunities at university job</td>
<td>Transition (Occupational)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>Began work at homeless shelter</td>
<td>Transition (Occupational)</td>
<td>Laid off from human resources job</td>
<td>Trauma (Occupational)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme Conclusion

These turning point experiences became decisive moments for the participants to examine their current situation and determine next steps for their career paths. Their responses to the tragedies, traumas, and transitions are what made them turning point experiences; otherwise, the participants would have continued in the same course of action. The next theme explores the participants’ responses and how their actions moved them closer to their areas of calling.

Theme Three: Responses to Turning Points

For each of the participants, the turning point events triggered a response rather than a shutting down. The participants shared four primary responses to their turning point experiences: rethinking their situation, reaffirming their path, seeking out supportive relationships, and realigning their values. This section explores each of these responses by first recording a narrative from one participant that demonstrates the sub-theme and then providing additional examples and descriptions that support the sub-theme.

“Rethink- Maybe I Need to be Doing Something Totally Different”

Lynn’s story. Before Lynn was laid off from her human resources role at a nursing home she thought,

I always wanted to be a big, successful businesswoman with the corner office with a nice view. I wanted to make a lot of money and be in charge of a lot of people... I grew up learning to define success as having money (personal communication, May 10, 2017).

She believed that this path required her to progress in the human resources field until she was the boss over many people. However, being laid off caused Lynn to “sit down and rethink, ‘Maybe I need to be doing something totally different’” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). Once she found part-time work at a homeless shelter, she recognized that her definition of success
based on money was “not really the case” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). She reconsidered her situation by contrasting the “pressure” of her human resources jobs with how “rewarding” her experience was at the homeless shelter (personal communication, May 10, 2017). This contrast freed Lynn to look for a full-time career where she could focus on “making a difference” rather than making money (personal communication, May 10, 2017).

**Theme description.** After experiencing their turning point events, the participants took time to pause, consider the situation, and rethink their career paths. Instead of plowing forward, they paused first. Lynn was prompted to “sit down and rethink,” as was Bethany, who remembers “sitting really thinking about the job” offer as a reporter (personal communication, May 16, 2017). The deaths of loved ones led Kelsie to “investigate” her faith, “ask bigger questions,” and “question what faith… looks like” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). She joined a Bible study and engaged in conversations with her brother to create safe spaces to think through difficult questions that she had never considered before.

For some of the participants, this reflection process included picturing the future. Through her homeless shelter work, Lynn “knew I wanted my next full-time job to be kind of along that line” of helping others (personal communication, May 10, 2017). In discussing starting her business, Torrie said,

I think it's always been something I wanted to do and I was thinking more of down the line, and then I kind of, I think, just realized once I was in the corporate world working in a regular office that this is not something I want to do for the long-term… Then after just talking about it [with a friend], I realized, wait, this is something I could probably do now, and I realized that this was kind of a good time in my life to do it while I'm single
and don't have major responsibilities or kids or anything like that (personal communication, May 11, 2017).

This reflection reveals that Torrie considered her career path by pausing (“wait”) and thinking about her current situation (“this was kind of a good time in my life”). She also contrasted her current work role (“working in a regular office… is not something I want to do for the long-term”) with her future goals (“it’s always been something I wanted to do… down the line”).” Bethany also followed a similar thought process when she turned down the on-air broadcasting position. She commented, “I was sitting really thinking about the job – it would have required me moving not far but to kind of a rural place… I just don't think that I could be happy doing this in this place, at this time” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Taking time to pause, assess the situation, and picture her future gave Bethany clarity to turn down the job offer. By finding opportunities to pause and “rethink” their situations, the participants gained a deeper understanding of their callings and what career step to pursue next, which is the next sub-theme described.

“Reaffirm What I Want to Do”: Testing Career Options

Francis’s story. After Francis read her uncle’s psychology book and changed her major to Psychology, she began exploring career options and gaining experience in the counseling field:

Since I've changed my major to psychology, I've kind of had to cycle through all the options of what I could do in that field. I could work with children or I could work with teenagers or I could work with families or I could specialize in certain mental disorders. I've had to go through a lot of the options, and I feel like over time what my ultimate goal is in that field has evolved (personal communication, May 19, 2017).
At first, Francis wanted to work with teenagers who were dealing with eating disorders and anxiety, since she has personal experience in these areas. However, she now desires to work with teenagers and young adults in the juvenile justice system. This shift occurred when Francis was dating a boyfriend whose “family had had a lot of problems in the justice system, and a lot of his friends had issues with that” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). In particular, Francis met one teenage girl who had been arrested for assault, drugs, and a DUI: “It really saddened me that she was only 18 years old and was already making so many mistakes” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). She now wants to help youth like her to recognize, “You've done all this already, but you're still so young. You still have so much more potential” (personal communication, May 19, 2017).

During college, Francis also had the opportunity to test out this career path by serving as a mentor at the Department of Juvenile Justice. The girl that Francis mentored was 15 years old and had a 12-month sentence. As Francis explains, “We actually had a pretty instant connection. It was awkward a little at first... Then after that, we had very natural conversations for the rest of the time we were there honestly” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). Though the mentors were only required to stay for one hour, Francis and her mentee “always stayed for the full two hours just talking” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). Francis used this experience to confirm her decision to work in the juvenile justice system:

I figured if I didn't like this, that would show that this isn't what I'm supposed to do, I need to find something else, but it completely reaffirmed my thought that this is what I want to do and these are the kind of people I want to work with (personal communication, May 19, 2017).
Theme description. Francis’s story presents several strategies that the other participants also used to test out their career options. These “tests” were typically low-risk and either confirmed or refuted the participants’ career callings, similar to their initial exploration described in Theme One. When Francis changed her major, she enrolled in a psychology class that required community involvement outreach. She used this opportunity to volunteer in her field of interest at the Department of Juvenile Justice. Several other participants also sought out opportunities that were available to them, such as Kelsie. Kelsie did student teaching through her college classes and had “different field experiences with different schools” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Nannying for two of her college professors then gave her the opportunity “to live out” parenting (personal communication, June 3, 2017).

Additionally, Francis’s narrative demonstrates how she maintained an open mind about her options in the counseling field, including continuing to minor in Education and add a double-major of Spanish. This decision now gives her the flexibility to take a teaching certificate test and find a job in a school while she saves up money to return to graduate school. However, she is also considering various health and wellness jobs in the psychology field, further exhibiting a learning orientation toward work. Torrie also fostered an open mind after discovering that most of the financial accounting jobs she was interested in required at least two years of experience. From her college classes and an internship, she knew that the finance field was a good fit, so she found odd jobs after graduating until gaining enough experience to land a position at an accounting firm. During this time, she also started her business on the side, which allowed her to test out entrepreneurism while gaining finance experience. Like most of the other participants, Lynn completed a college internship in human resources, which confirmed her interest in the field. Although she “was trying different things” at a variety of human resources positions after
college, at each job she felt “there’s something better out there for me” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). Lynn’s sentiment about “trying different things” sums up this theme. On their journeys to understanding their callings, the participants maintained an open mind to test various career options. Ultimately, this openness led Lynn away from human resources to her current role as an Administrative Assistant at a school. For Bethany, her two broadcasting internships gave her “real world experience” in the field and exposed that though she enjoyed sports reporting, she “was not interested in the news aspect” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Though Lynn and Bethany sought to reaffirm their career decisions as the other participants did, their experiences confirmed that there was instead “something better” for them (Lynn, personal communication, May 10, 2017). Hands-on experience was an essential way the participants learned more about themselves and the working world, especially after their turning point events. They sought re-affirmation, a follow-up to the confirming experiences during their growing up years, as described in Theme One.


**Kelsie’s story.** After experiencing the deaths of her relatives, Kelsie joined a Bible study led by a mother and her daughter who attended Kelsie’s high school. Kelsie explains that this family was “monumental for me at the time with my insecurities… especially seeing another high schooler walk with God faithfully… She was never ashamed of her faith, and everyone knew it, and people didn't hate her for it, surprisingly in high school” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Kelsie’s brother was also a “game changer” during this time because he knew her life “more intimately than anyone else… So he knew the questions to ask and… became the biggest role model and leader for me, and source of reliability and truth” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). This support system enabled Kelsie to rediscover her faith in a
new and authentic way. In college, she joined the same ministry that her brother had been a part of, and the leadership she received through that experience “was influential in my calling… I was discipled on and off pretty much the entire time I was in college by different women” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Additionally, the mother that Kelsie nannied for in college “was probably the other significant source of Godly leadership in my life” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Then when Kelsie worked for three summers at a Christian camp, “the leadership of that camp was significant and really kind of changed my view of what it means to walk with God” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). It was as a counselor at this summer camp that she met her husband. Kelsie describes her husband as “my biggest supporter” and “biggest joy” saying,

He really leads our family well, and loves me well, loves our son well. He's continually wanting to pursue me and to pursue God... My husband's never forced me to want to do something different than what I would like to do. He's always been kind of my biggest supporter as far as encouraging me to pursue any career path that I'm interested in as long as it's not affecting our family in a negative light, and it's not causing me to stray from truth… Obviously marrying him was probably the greatest decision of my life other than becoming a Christian, and obviously becoming a mother, they are continually affecting my calling… My two biggest joys are my husband and my son (personal communication, June 3, 2017).

The investment that these key relationships made in Kelsie’s life helped her navigate both the most distressing and the most joyful times in her life.

**Theme description.** Though Kelsie emphasized relationships the most, all of the participants mentioned key relationships that helped them navigate their turning point events. As
Kelsie’s narrative details, her relationships became a vital support system during the difficult period after her family members’ deaths. Other participants experienced a similar support system, such as Francis whose family helped her leave an abusive relationship and move back home. Lynn’s family also offered their home and support when she was laid off, which allowed her to pursue a career path in the education field:

When I got laid off and I didn't have to worry about where to go... I knew I could go home, and I knew they would be supportive of whatever I decided to do, especially since I kind of changed career paths and went into something that wasn't paying very well. Their support has made all the difference, because I don't know if I could have done that if I was having to pay rent and utilities and things somewhere else (personal communication, May 10, 2017).

Lynn found out about the Administrative Assistant position at the school because of a personal connection who told her about the opening. Although the “opportunity kind of just fell into my lap,” the support of her family made it possible (personal communication, May 10, 2017).

Bethany is also close to her family, and when she recognized the lack of advancement opportunities as the Admissions Recruiter at her university, she “was really ready to move home” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Additionally, her family “secretly wanted me to come home too, but they try not to interfere too much” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Bethany explains,

I really hadn't decided that I wanted to come home yet until about two years [into my Recruiter role]… My whole family's here and everything, and they thought I would want to come home eventually, but was just kind of waiting and see when it fits for me. They
were excited about that. I think they were excited for the opportunity that I found [at the public relations firm] (personal communication, May 16, 2017).

Lastly, Torrie’s best friend was starting a business at the same time as her, so he helped her “make the big leap” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). They “fed off of each other” with ideas and would “discuss our dreams” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). He was “very encouraging” and “very supportive” during the risky time of Torrie becoming solely self-employed (personal communication, May 11, 2017).

These supportive relationships fully “invested” in the participants’ lives, and as a part of this investment they also asked the participants hard questions (Kelsie, personal communication, June 3, 2017). Kelsie’s friends pointed out “the lifestyle I was living, and it wasn’t one that was pleasing to God” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Her brother also “knew the questions to ask” to think deeper about her beliefs, and the Bible study that she joined was “about how to reset your assumptions” about faith (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Instead of pushing Kelsie away, she embraced asking these “bigger questions,” which is something her husband also challenges her to do in regards to her calling (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Allowing others to speak into her life and ask challenging questions ultimately gave her “this confidence” that she did not have “originally” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Several other participants also allowed their support systems to ask hard questions, which then produced more confidence in their chosen career direction. When Bethany turned down the news anchor position, her parents were “surprised” and “wanted to make sure that I had thought through the decision” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Bethany explains,

I really did have to explain to them that I thought sports was pretty cool, but I was not interested in the news aspect, especially because I had some real world experience. In that
internship, I was in the news office all the time. I said, "Mom and Dad, I don't think I fit there. I don't think I would be a happy person working in that field" (personal communication, May 16, 2017).

By answering their concerns, Bethany affirmed her decision to pursue a different career path. Similarly, Torrie’s mom was surprised when Torrie called to say that she quit her job to attempt self-employment. However, her mom’s reaction was much more negative:

She was actually pretty upset. She didn't handle it well… I just kept trying to talk to her because I think at first she didn't really even want to talk to me because she thought it was just too painful to talk about… What I did is just try to explain the decision to her that I made and why, that I was chasing my dream, and that I felt that this is what God wanted me to do with my life and everything (personal communication, May 11, 2017).

Other friends and family were supportive and encouraging but also expressed their doubts. They commented that “it’s a big risk, but we’re happy you’re taking it. They just wanted me to use wisdom” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Two years later, Torrie’s mom has “made peace with it,” though Torrie still does not think “she fully agrees” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Despite the tension, by Torrie receiving and responding to the doubts, she gained confidence that God was calling her take this “leap of faith” (personal communication, May 11, 2017).

Many of these hard questions ushered in seasons of doubt during the participants’ journeys to their callings. However, by embracing the uncertainties and engaging in self-reflection, the participants realigned their lives to be congruent with their values. This next theme is the final response to the turning point experiences and is described subsequently.
Realign Values: “Refocus… and Fulfill My Potential”

Kelsie’s story. Before Kelsie’s turning point experiences and discovery of her faith, she had a short period in high school where she wanted to be a “fashion designer or something crazy and move across the country and have this crazy just rich life, where rich is in the monetary sense” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). However, then Kelsie realized, "Yeah, that's probably not gonna happen, that's not how I thrive, that's not who I'm designed to be” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Instead, Kelsie began studying early childhood education in college and intentionally deepening her faith. During this time, she had a "relationship with a guy that… turned into something unhealthy” and made her doubt her calling. She explains that the relationship changed her life because she had “given my everything to this guy and when I was rejected by him and I felt ashamed of things that occurred, it really, really, made me think, ‘Can I really know God if these are the decisions I'm making?’” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Afterward, she met with the husband and wife who led her college campus ministry. She says that she will never forget the moment when the leader looked her in the eye and asked if she knew “you are loved beyond measure” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). For the ministry directors to see “me at my weakest point” and show love and compassion confirmed what Kelsie had experienced during the major turning point in her life a few years earlier, namely understanding who God is and “who I am in his story, and not who he is in mine” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). This understanding reoriented Kelsie’s values away from a lifestyle focused on herself toward “a big passion for the people who are in our lives” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Primarily, Kelsie’s son plays the biggest role in her calling. Even through her work as a nanny, Kelsie can bring her son with her, which allows her
to live out her value “to invest in my children at home specifically in ages zero to five” (personal communication, June 3, 2017).

**Theme description.** Kelsie’s story illuminates an experience shared by all the participants: Turning point events spark a season of doubt, which serves as a catalyst for the participants to evaluate and realign their values. After Kelsie strengthened her faith in response to the deaths of loved ones, she experienced a relationship that made her question the authenticity of that faith. If she says she believes and desires to live in congruence with her faith, then her life should reflect this belief – “Can I really know God if these are the decisions I'm making?” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Similarly, although Torrie knew becoming self-employed “was the right thing to do” and “meant to be,” she doubted the timing (personal communication, May 11, 2017). A few months after her decision, she was in a car accident that was her fault. This financial setback triggered her doubt whether the timing was right for entrepreneurship. In a journal entry she writes,

> I faced both financial and emotional challenges. On the financial side, I faced numerous financial obligations such as rent and other bills with no guaranteed way to meet the obligations… On the emotional side, I faced the anxiety of stepping out and doing something risky with no guarantees of success. I also faced skepticism and criticism from so [many] of the people close to me such as my mom (personal communication, May 11, 2017).

These situations and struggles made Torrie doubt her decision. Did she believe what she told her mom that “this is what God wanted me to do with my life”? (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Ultimately, she did. Like Kelsie who realigned her life with her faith values, Torrie also relied “on my faith in God” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). She writes, “I responded
by saving up for several months of expenses, trying to live [as] frugally as possible and relying on my faith in God to provide for me” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). She also looked to her faith in her emotional doubts: “I responded by once again by relying on my faith in God and listening to encouraging and inspirational podcasts and sermon[s] and by also surrounding myself with people that believed in my dreams and supported my ambitions” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). These examples demonstrate how turning point experiences exposed the incongruence between the participants’ values and their actions. This exposure then served as a catalyst for reorienting one’s life around values of faith.

Kelsie’s and Torrie’s stories also both include an understanding of success that is beyond financial. As they responded to their turning point events, they confronted their definition of and evaluation of success: Before her faith experience, Kelsie desired a “crazy rich life,” which now is not her career aim (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Similarly, when Torrie made the decision for self-employment, she noted, “I was excited and scared at the same time… being self-employed, there's no guarantee even though I have a little bit of money saved up there was always that risk… especially living in the city on my own” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). She valued taking a “big step” of sole entrepreneurism over the security of a paycheck (personal communication, May 11, 2017). She continued on to say, “A lot of people I feel like aren't living out their true calling. I think people are more motivated by money or other things out there” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). The other participants also came to share this sentiment after their turning point experiences.

For instance, Francis discovered her uncle’s psychology book during her winter break from college. When she returned to her schoolwork, she began to doubt if it would “be worth it” to finish college and continue onto graduate school for psychology (personal communication,
May 19, 2017). She was “really stressed with school” and was “making easy money” working in restaurants (personal communication, May 19, 2017). She states,

Talking about it now, I kind of realize that was a very shallow kind of questioning of it, but it did make me question whether I should continue to spend time being paid less or whether I should just take a job where I know I can make a decent living (personal communication, May 19, 2017).

Then over the summer when Francis worked full-time at various restaurants, she realized that she did not desire to become a manager or work in the restaurant business long-term. She decided to “refocus on school” and “do something that's going to make more of an impact and make me feel more fulfilled and fulfill my potential” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). As she writes in her journal entry, she is currently fulfilling that aim:

I am in a job where I am helping others and where I am doing something about which I am passionate (running). I know I still have a long way to go to achieve a high-paying full-time job, but for now I am very satisfied in the job I have (personal communication, May 19, 2017).

Likewise, Lynn “grew up defining success as having money” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). As described previously, when she reflected on her human resources jobs, she realized that this definition of success did not make her work enjoyable. In response to her turning point experience of working at the homeless shelter, she realigned her values and took the administrative assistant role at a school: “Clearly it’s not about the money for me anymore… I'm making less now than I ever did before. I think I even made more interning in college” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). Her values in work and success have changed:
I've never been happier before. This job pays the least out of all the jobs that I've had, but I found that it's not the paycheck that's as important. It's just I'm truly happy, and to me, that's worth a lot more than the paycheck that I used to have. That's my mood, and enjoying going to work every day is how I know that it's what I need to be doing (personal communication, May 10, 2017).

Through this narrative, Lynn expresses that “doing good work” confirms what she is meant “to be doing” for her career (personal communication, May 10, 2017). Kelsie, Francis, and Torrie also articulated similar beliefs as they reoriented their careers around their values. Kelsie views her son as “my primary ministry target” but also desires to invest in “different children in my life” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Nannying allows her to bring her son with her to work and align both of these values. Francis values saving money for graduate school while also helping others through her work, and her job as a cross country coach meets both of these aims. Similarly, Torrie values her work as an entrepreneur but also needs to make enough money to support herself. She states, “It's been ups and downs, and it's not really necessarily an easy road, especially when you choose to do sales and be self-employed. You're going to have bad times, but I think overall it's worth it” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Torrie’s perspective on her work being “worth it” despite the “ups and downs” reflects the participants’ overall willingness to embrace the challenges brought about by their turning point experiences (personal communication, May 11, 2017).

**Theme Conclusion**

As the participants navigated their turning point experiences, they responded in four primary ways. By pausing to reflect, they gained perspective on how to reaffirm – or redirect – their career decisions. They surrounded themselves with a support system that would both
encourage and challenge them in their thinking. Lastly, though many of the participants’ turning points raised doubts about their careers, they examined their values and took actions to realign their lives around their values. This response resulted in them replacing their doubts with a sense of purpose, which ultimately clarified their callings, as discussed in the next theme.

**Theme Four: Clarification of Calling**

As the participants addressed the tensions in their career path and struggles in their personal story, they gained more clarity on their calling. Specifically, they defined their career calling as being (1) intentional and meaningful, (2) an investment in others, (3) rooted in identity, and (4) a response to faith. These components differ from passions, which were present in the participants’ hobbies. Instead, their callings give purpose to their work, answering the “why” to their career narratives. In the following analysis, each of the four sub-themes begins with a primary quotation that represents that component of calling. A description then follows which provides deeper insight and explanation into each sub-theme. Though divided into four sub-themes, the components overlap with each other, which is evident in the participants’ responses and the descriptions.

**Intentional, Meaningful, and Fulfilling**

After Lynn’s experience of working at the homeless shelter, she now understands what she desires for a career calling. Her current role as an Administrative Assistant at an elementary school meets these criteria:

I want it to be fulfilling and rewarding and to feel like what I'm doing is worthwhile and that I am making a difference... It's just about being happy and enjoying going to work and enjoying the work that I do. That's really what motivates me to work, too. I just enjoy
it, and I feel like I'm doing good, wholesome, fulfilling work (personal communication, May 10, 2017).

This quotation from Lynn showcases that participants define their callings as both personally fulfilling and outwardly meaningful. Lynn desires work to be enjoyable for her and to make a difference for others. Similarly Francis says, “Feeling called to a career means finding something that would make me feel the most fulfilled… to know that I'm fulfilling my full potential and making the biggest impact that I can” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). This other-orientation is fleshed out in a separate sub-theme; instead this sub-theme explores the participants’ descriptions of their callings as “meaningful” and “fulfilling” (Lynn, personal communication, May 10, 2017).

Lynn explains that “enjoying going to work every day is how I know that it’s what I need to be doing” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). Calling is tied to her enjoyment of the work and contrasts with her previous work experiences: “I wasn’t totally happy in any of the jobs previously” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). This viewpoint is similar to Bethany’s decision that “I just didn’t think that I loved general news enough to be able to work in that field for a prolonged period of time” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). As the participants envisioned their day-to-day work, personal fulfillment and enjoyment were key pieces of defining their calling. For instance, Torrie’s enjoyment of work provides confirmation of her calling even when entrepreneurism is risky and difficult: “You have to put in work and effort, of course, but it's something that you just enjoy and that's just you. I feel like everyone has that thing that you truly enjoy. That's how I would say a calling is” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). She feels “in the zone” when she is “simply enjoying what I am doing. This experience is so meaningful to me because it gives me confirmation that I have chosen the right
career path and have been making the right life decisions” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Like Lynn, Torrie describes personal fulfillment in work as a meaningful experience.

When asked what brings her this joy in work, Torrie discussed the parts that also brought her life meaning. Torrie “is passionate about animals,” so she donates cat and dog items since she has access to lower prices through her work (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Though the donations are not directly related to her work, it has “really given me joy… to make a difference with what I do… even though I’m not where I want to be financially to really support animals and ministries, I have been able to do a lot more than I would have been able to” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Torrie leverages her work to pursue a passion on the side, which is similar to Bethany. Her public relations role incorporates her calling to write, yet Bethany is also passionate about sports. In her spare time, she writes for a sports blog, which she finds “personally fulfilling” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). These examples demonstrate that passions can be separate from callings and expressed through hobbies. They also show that Torrie and Bethany crafted their work and life to be more fulfilling and meaningful. Though none of the participants used this word specifically, their callings as fulfilling and meaningful can also be seen as intentional.

Like Bethany and Torrie, the other participants intentionally integrated a purpose into their work to make it meaningful and fulfilling. For instance, though Francis is not yet pursuing her ultimate calling in the psychology field, she views her work as a cross country coach as a calling too because it is meaningful and fulfilling: “I’ve always loved working with people, especially when it’s regarding something I know a lot about and am passionate about” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). Kelsie also designs her work as a nanny to integrate the most meaningful and fulfilling aspect of her life – mothering her son: “This experience [of mothering]
is the most meaningful to me because it is the area of life I have the greatest impact in molding a child” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). In this journal entry, Kelsie ties together her inherent enjoyment of mothering with how meaningful her role is as a stay-at-home mom and nanny. Similarly, Lynn could have simply performed her responsibilities as an administrative assistant, but instead she views even “the little things that you do for [the children], like whenever I have to give them a Band-Aid or just help them to feel better” as purposeful (personal communication, May 10, 2017). “It just means so much to them and they remember that. Those kids are so appreciative and so grateful and so loving for just everything. It's just so refreshing. That's probably my favorite part” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). The previous examples demonstrate that the participants intentionally integrated purpose into their callings, which maximized a personally fulfilling and meaningful career experience. This meaningfulness provides the framework for the next three components of calling as other-oriented, identity-rooted, and faith-based.

**Investment in Others**

As Kelsie envisions the future development of her calling, it boils down to “locally investing in the people who are in our lives” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). This phrase sums up all of the participants’ purpose behind their callings. Whether it is Lynn caring for students’ cuts and scrapes with a Band-Aid, or Kelsie inventing “a little song or a way to memorize a verse of the Bible with the children” that she nannies, the participants tangibly invest in those around them (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Though the participants told stories of impressive accomplishments (i.e. Lynn developing “new, creative recruiting methods” for a company) it was the tangible, daily actions of serving others that brought the most joy and meaning to their work (personal communication, May 10, 2017). For instance, at the markets
where Torrie sells her products, the other vendors are “mostly older people and probably still men” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Torrie finds joy in “opening people’s minds” that being a successful young, female entrepreneur “can be done” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Inspiring others can “be as simple as just talking to people that I meet” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Though Bethany desires “to assume a larger role eventually” at her company, she sees how “I can positively impact small businesses” by growing their media presence through her writing (personal communication, May 16, 2017). These regular interactions of investing in others through their work were vital to the participants’ understanding of their callings. As Francis reflected on her calling, she said:

> In general, I think what my calling is to work directly with people and help people. That's one of the reasons I got into psychology is because I want to help people get through hard times in their life. Even with coaching, I'm excited to be able to help the kids find a love for running or even just athletics in general, to find something that they can also be passionate about and that can keep them healthy (personal communication, May 19, 2017).

This quotation demonstrates that calling necessitates a tangible aspect of helping others while also keeping a larger purpose in mind. Francis practically helps her team develop their passion and skills for running. Yet she also points to a larger “why” of a holistic view of health – whether counseling clients through difficult times or effectively training a cross country team. This broader purpose is meaningful and fulfilling because of the day-to-day ways that Francis invests in others.

For Francis and most of the other participants, their purpose relates to their turning point experiences as they seek to help others in the same areas of struggle that they experienced.
Though the participants did not draw this connection themselves, it is evident throughout their narratives. In reflecting on what contributed to her calling in the psychology field, Francis stated, I want to be able to show people that I've gone through it too, I struggle with this too, but there is hope on the other side. What really I think first propelled me into wanting to [go into the psychology field] was I have had an eating disorder in the past. I'm recovered now for about a year, fully recovered, don't use the behaviors, any of that. I struggled with it for I'm going to say seven or eight years where it would merit a full-blown diagnosis. That's the main thing I kind of want to use in whenever I do practice, say, "Look, recovering from whatever you're dealing with is possible." …A lot of people will say, "Well, if you have this disorder, you have X, Y and Z, you're going to be dealing with it your whole life." That's just not true. I want to be able to let people know that there is hope (personal communication, May 19, 2017).

Since Francis struggled and then recovered from a serious diagnosis, she has personally experienced hope and now wants to offer that hope to others. Her turning point event of finding the psychology book at her uncle’s house resonated so dramatically because it offered a practical way to provide this hope. Torrie’s, Kelsie’s, and Lynn’s career callings also connect to their turning point experiences, giving purpose to their work as they seek to help others. While navigating her father’s unexpected death, Torrie received inspiration from sermons, friends, and her dad’s legacy, which ultimately encouraged her to pursue entrepreneurship full-time. Now one of Torrie’s greatest purposes in her work is to inspire others to take a “leap of faith” (personal communication, May 11, 2017).

When Kelsie experienced the deaths of close relatives, she wrestled with her faith. As her brother and other mentors walked alongside her during this time, her faith became the defining
aspect of her identity. As a stay-at-home mom and nanny, her primary desire is “practicing glorifying God on a daily basis in any way that I can by loving the children that I’m around well” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Lastly, Lynn experienced a lot of stress in her previous human resources roles, trying to hire a large number of people based on “pieces of paper” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). After being laid off, her interim work at the homeless shelter was to help the residents create those same pieces of paper: “The main thing I was doing with the residents there was helping them create a resume from scratch and just making it look pleasing to a perspective employer, and then helping them look for jobs to apply to” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). However, this time, Lynn viewed her role as “helping them start their future” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). Again, though Lynn did not draw this conclusion herself, her narrative draws a line from judging resumes at her HR position, to creating futures at the homeless shelter, to now desiring “to just love others and live life without judging others” (personal communication, May 10, 2017).

Lynn continues on to explain that recognizing she has “an innate sense of unconditional love for other people” was a shift: “Discovering myself and what made me happy… that's really what caused that shift, was just finding that internal happiness that I hadn't really found before” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). This explanation reveals that calling is a connection between understanding how one’s purpose contributes to others while also developing a deeper awareness of self. This third aspect of calling as being rooted in identity is explored next.

**Rooted in Identity**

In reflecting on her definition of calling, Torrie states,

I believe everyone is given certain gifts and things that you're able to do easier than others. I think everyone has a purpose in their life of what comes natural to them… You
have to put in work and effort, of course, but it's something that you just enjoy and that's just you. I feel like everyone has that thing that you truly enjoy. That's how I would say a calling is (personal communication, May 11, 2017).

This quotation sums up calling as a purpose that “comes natural” to each individual (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Rather than “natural” referring to being unchallenging, Torrie defines it as something “that’s just you” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). The other participants also expressed the importance of this “you-ness.” None believed their calling should come easily but rather that it was rooted in their identities – a discovery process of how to apply their innate talents and strengths. As mentioned, Lynn’s turning points led to her “kind of discovering myself and what made me happy” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). The “kind of” phrasing suggests that an understanding of oneself is an ongoing process but that it involves the first component of calling: recognizing what brings fulfillment to one’s life (“what made me happy”). Or to use Torrie’s words, “everyone has that thing that you truly enjoy” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Similarly, Kelsie discusses how her “personality naturally thrives with children,” and her work allows her to flourish “by doing what I'm already good at, by doing something that I already enjoy” (personal communication, June 3, 2017).

Part of understanding one’s identity and what is enjoyable is to “learn what situations and what office environments that you thrive in,” as Bethany explains (personal communication, May 16, 2017). She continues, “Things like your office environment and the people you work with are sometimes half the battle of enjoying your job daily” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). When Bethany was looking for her second job, she “was paying attention… seeing if the environment was going to be similar” to her first job, which she really enjoyed (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Torrie, Kelsie, and Lynn also mentioned the importance of their
work environment aligning with their wiring. Torrie “realized once I was in the corporate world, working in a regular office, that this is not something I want to do for the long-term” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Now with her business she “can set my own schedule” and enjoy a more flexible lifestyle (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Since a faith-based approach to parenting and nannying is fundamental to Kelsie’s identity, she writes in a journal entry, “I have chosen to not work in a secular job where I have to deal with the pushback of fellow coworkers in this area of life” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Lastly, Lynn never fully enjoyed her work environments until her current role at the school. She explains,

> I had never worked in a school before with kids, but I love the fact that they encourage sharing about God and just encouraging the children to grow and to love one another. To me, that is extremely meaningful, and that I kind of discovered that once I did start working there (personal communication, May 10, 2017).

The participants learned through experiences what work environments were fulfilling, drawing out the best in their identities. However, as Bethany explains, a career calling not only aligns with what environment is enjoyable but also recognizes “how you can contribute to a culture” (personal communication, May 16, 2017).

When Bethany decided not to pursue broadcast journalism, she sought an avenue to use her writing, which is something “I really like” and is “my strongest suit” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). This journey also brought her to where she was best wired to contribute to others:

> We were all kind of blessed and developed with certain talents, a range of different things – as you can imagine, obviously doctors, teachers, those are obvious ones but you know math skills or whatever you might have to offer. Writing was always what I was really
good at, even growing up that was kind of my strongest suit. So career calling – I ended up, when I decided I really didn't want to be on TV, how could I use my writing to help other people or enhance a business or an objective in some way (personal communication, May 16, 2017).

In coming to understand her calling, Bethany looked to how she could utilize her distinct talents. She also expresses her belief that everyone is uniquely equipped to “offer” value to others (personal communication, May 16, 2017). In this way, one’s identity informs how one invests in others through their calling. Bethany’s narrative links identity awareness to the personal fulfillment aspect of calling as well as an investment in others. The outer circles in the graph in Appendix J represent this mutual relationship graphically. The center circle of Appendix J shows the final component of calling as a response to one’s faith beliefs, as explained next.

**Response to Faith**

Francis’s definition of a career calling ties together all four components of a calling:

Feeling called to a career means finding something that would make me feel the most fulfilled and would give me peace knowing that I'm doing what God put me here to do… Especially because I'm still kind of in limbo trying to figure out a full-time job, I've put a lot more faith in God to lead me where he wants me to be and where he wants me to make the most impact… being able to lead the most people to living their best life or the life that God in turn has put them on Earth to do (personal communication, May 19, 2017).

In this quotation, Francis explains calling as that which is (1) fulfilling (“feel the most fulfilled”), (2) based in her identity (“what God put me here to do”), (3) an investment in others (“make the most impact”), and (4) a response to her faith beliefs (“faith in God to lead me”) (personal...
communication, May 19, 2017). As with the other components, this sub-theme cannot be separated from the three sub-themes already discussed. Instead, the response to faith seems to inform the other three components, as depicted in Appendix J. First, Francis recognizes that calling is not only rooted in her identity but also rooted in an identity that is in relation to God. This relationship provides fulfillment and purpose to her calling. Embedded in the others participants’ views of their identities is also the belief that people are created in a specific, intentional way. Bethany called it being “blessed… with certain talents” (personal communication, May 16, 2017); Torrie said, “I believe everyone is given certain gifts” (personal communication, May 11, 2017); and Kelsie attributed her nurturing personality as something “that he’s [God] given me” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). These viewpoints position their identities in relation to a Creator, and their callings are a response to this relationship. As Kelsie says, “My calling in general as a person is to glorify God and enjoy him forever” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Her personhood is directly related to her enjoyment of God. This relationship then deepens and provides increasing fulfillment as the participants live out their callings. Lynn explains,

I had always gone to church but never really deepened my relationship with God. Now that I'm in an environment where they encourage you to pray every day and they really encourage you to love one another, those are things that I was always taught growing up, but I had never really put them to use. Just being in the environment has really helped me grow my faith personally (personal communication, May 10, 2017).

This connection between a deepened relationship with God in conjunction with a depth of understanding one’s identity brings about a purpose to one’s work. For Lynn this relationship led to loving others, and for the other participants the response was similar. For instance, Kelsie
discusses “glorifying God…by loving” others (personal communication, June 3, 2017), and Francis desires to make an “impact” and “help others” by “doing what God put me here to do” (personal communication, May 19, 2017).

Lastly, the participants viewed their callings as a response to their faith, rather than something they found or discovered on their own. Francis’s career situation prompted her to “put a lot more faith in God to lead me where he wants me to be” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). Similarly, Torrie explains that “my faith led me” into self-employment: “I've always believed that's what God has wanted me to do with my life. I feel like he gave me the opening (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Torrie views her faith as giving her direction and leading her to an opportunity for self-employment, but then she had to respond and step into her calling: “My faith was saying that this was the time to go ahead and do this and step out and take chances” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). All of the participants except Bethany referred to the importance of their faith throughout the interview. Only when asked about faith beliefs did Bethany discuss her relationship with God, and she was also the only participant who was unsure “if I necessarily believe I have a spiritual calling… yet” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Despite this uncertainty, Bethany still views her calling as a response to her faith: “I know that God lands me in the right positions when it is time for me. Like when it was time for me to move back... I believe the opportunity arose when it was supposed to” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Rather than striving for career opportunities on her own, Bethany responds to opportunities that God places in front of her.

**Theme Conclusion**

The participants developed a deeper understanding of their career callings after their turning point events. This clarity derived from experiencing their work as that which is (1)
intentional, meaningful, and fulfilling (2) an investment in others, (3) rooted in their identities, and (4) a response to their faith and relationship to God. Thus, their callings were personal yet also other-focused. In rating the satisfaction found in their callings on a scale of zero (no satisfaction) to ten (highest satisfaction), the participants’ average rating was 9.1. This score is so high because the participants’ callings aligned with their identity and had a greater, other-oriented purpose. As Bethany sums up, “I think you have to have a job that is going to aid people or dreams because otherwise I think it feels pointless to do that job” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). The participants felt drawn to their work because of their faith and could articulate why their work mattered, which gave purpose to their callings, making them anything but “pointless.” This purpose remains a constant in the participants’ future visions of their callings, which the next theme describes.

Theme Five: Future – “A Question Mark but Secure”

As the participants envisioned the development of their callings, they expressed confidence in their futures yet also held their goals loosely. Kelsie best sums up this tension by saying that the future “looks like a big question mark, and it looks secure at the same time” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). The participants’ security came from a clearer sense of identity as they navigated their turning point experiences and found work opportunities that integrated their callings. These experiences also taught them that life is unexpected, requiring adaptability. This theme explores the two dimensions of agency and adaptability as the participants progress in their career callings.

Agency: “I Don't See My Overall Calling Changing”

As the participants approached the end of the interview and looked toward the future, they spoke in confident tones about their views of themselves. Lynn made the direct connection
between her searching, insecure self prior to her turning point events and a “new sense of happiness and peace” she has now found (personal communication, May 10, 2017). She attributes this “shift” to “discovering myself and what made me happy” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). Rather than seeking out another job because she is discontent, Lynn says, “I know whenever I'm looking at the future, I will want a job that gives me the same kind of fulfillment and feeling like I'm doing good work” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). Other participants also referred to this sense of peace, such as Torrie. She states, “I just feel at peace. I don't really have to answer to anybody. It's not like really strict. It's more of a laid back lifestyle now” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). At the start of her entrepreneurial journey, Torrie questioned the timing of solely supporting herself from her business venture. She lamented not feeling cut out for the corporate world’s pace and working style. Now she is confident in her identity as an entrepreneur and the “laid back lifestyle” that coincides with her personality. Like Lynn, as Torrie looks to her future, she desires to build on who she already is in relation to her work:

I would like to… continue doing what I’m doing probably just on a larger scale and just growing my business… I would also like to have more of an inspirational tone to what I do to show other people about my faith and about not giving up and also showing other people that they can achieve their dreams... I would just like to… continue doing even more for the animals and charity type things (personal communication, May 11, 2017).

Francis’s story may provide the best example that captures this sense of self even amidst turmoil. She explains that moving back to her parents’ house after leaving an abusive relationship was a shock. “I’ve been living… on my own basically since I was 19, and then all of a sudden I was back in my parents’ house and didn’t even know where to begin looking for jobs.
It was just a lot” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). Within two months she moved into an apartment with friends and found the cross country coaching job. As she envisions her future, she plans to coach for at least two years and find a second job in the health and wellness field to gain “access to how the field works” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). She says, “By the time I go to graduate school, I want to have a decent sized savings account to be able to be fully independent once I’m there” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). As she looks toward graduate school for psychology and counseling, she desires to integrate her calling into her life: “Where I go to graduate school, I want that to be where I can start work and where I can settle down and live for a little while. I want to be able to find an area where I’m going to feel safe but an area where there also is a lot of need… where I can make a big impact basically” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). Despite the trauma she experienced, Francis knows her identity and goals for the future. She aims to be “fully independent” and is making decisions about jobs, financial planning, and future areas of residence based on this agency (personal communication, May 19, 2017).

The agency that the participants exhibited toward the development of their callings also provide a source of security, stability, and peace. Before Torrie pursued self-employment full-time, she prayed about the decision and “did have peace about it” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). As Lynn discovered a newfound peace in her career, she said, “I feel secure just because of how happy I am” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). Lastly, Kelsie is confident in the stability of her overall purpose: “I don't see my overall calling – to know Christ and to walk with him – I don't foresee that changing at all in my life, so that element will probably always be a stability that I have” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). It is from
this place of security that the participants can then hold their future goals and plans loosely, as the next sub-theme addresses.

Adaptability: “Ever Evolving”

Though Kelsie expressed confidence in the purpose of her calling, she does not know the specifics of how her calling will manifest itself in the future. She describes her work as a nanny and stay-at-home mom as “temporarily where God's placed me” in a career calling (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Similarly, Lynn comments that although she enjoys her work at the school, “I probably won’t stay there forever” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). Despite the uncertainty in what the future will look like, the participants remained confident that they would continue to find avenues that allow them to express their callings. Their ability to adapt, in conjunction with their faith beliefs, contribute to this confidence.

Kelsie explained that she tries “to be as adaptable as possible” since her husband is “the most significant factor in my calling” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). She says, “We've talked about it, and if he feels called to do something different in his career, we have that flexibility and I kind of try to let him make those decisions and give him the freedom for that” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Though Kelsie wants to “go with the flow,” she also has her own goals for the future, including starting a blog, going on a mission trip, and having college students live in their home (personal communication, June 3, 2017). In regards to the future, she has “an idea in my head, and it kind of gets re-evaluated and shifted a little bit every six months” (personal communication, June 3, 2017).

Similarly, Bethany and Francis describe their goals for the future as evolving. Bethany stated that the future is “still not necessarily as clear as I'd like it to be” and that understanding her calling is “ever evolving” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). However, she says,
I think between using my writing skills, using a lot of knowledge I've gained in this job...
I could definitely see myself advancing in this company, or… if there was an opportunity to get into sports using these skills, I think that would be perfect too (personal communication, May 16, 2017).

Though her future is still fuzzy and she is “someone who likes to plan,” she views it as “exciting” to remain “open to other things” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). This openness will allow her to adapt her skills to various roles, similar to when she was in the university recruitment role and she knew, “If I wanted to continue to evolve in a profession, I was probably going to need to make a change” (personal communication, May 16, 2017).

Francis also has an overall vision for how she would like to use her strengths in a career, but the details are not yet developed: “I want to be working in the justice system… I want to be able to figure out whether I want to work mainly with young juveniles or whether I want to work with adults, maybe do both if that's possible” (personal communication, May 19, 2017). Her “ultimate goal is in that field has evolved” over time, but her commitment to her calling as a “helper” is a constant (personal communication, May 19, 2017).

Even the participants’ personal goals reflect adaptability as they wait to see what life presents. All of the participants, aside from Kelsie who is already married, mentioned desiring marriage one day. They emphasized that this desire was something down the road. Bethany and Francis put it in almost the same words: “I would like to eventually be married and have a family” (Bethany, personal communication, May 16, 2017). Torrie commented, “I would like to be a home owner, and I would like to probably be married maybe somewhere down the line” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Torrie’s reference to “probably,” “maybe,” and “down the line” demonstrate that she holds this intention with an open hand. Lynn, who was the oldest
participant at 28, reflected that marriage was not something she desired previously but after her internal “shift” toward happiness and peace, she is ready for it and is “starting to think about family things” (personal communication, May 10, 2017). The phrasing of these personal desires reflects that like their career goals, the participants demonstrate adaptability in how they envision their futures. Rather than striving toward a destination, they are drawn into what life presents.

This openness to the future could derive from the participants’ faith and their confidence in their beliefs. Kelsie, Bethany, and Torrie discuss how life unfolds according to the various seasons and opportunities that God brings to them. Torrie believes “God’s timing is everything… life has cycles and seasons where you're meant to do different things” (personal communication, May 11, 2017). Similarly, Bethany is “a firm believer in that God has a plan. I no longer pray for certain things, but that God leads me in the direction and in the place that I'm going to be successful and that I will do well” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). By surrendering her plans to God – even though Bethany is a natural planner – she is confident “that God lands me in the right positions when it is time for me” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). Kelsie also recognizes that life presents different situations and she explains how her and her husband make decisions:

I think just as life progresses, we just take each circumstance that comes our way and we evaluate what's best for our family. What's financially, physically, emotionally, all those things, but primarily, spiritually, "Are we making this decision in light of how we can best glorify God to best magnify him through our work?" (personal communication, June 3, 2017).

Kelsie views God as bringing various circumstances to her, so she must remain open and adaptable to what comes. However, she also has the ability to evaluate these circumstances and
determine which she believes is most aligned with God’s plan. Thus, this description of her decision-making ties together the two components of experiencing agency and adaptability toward the future of one’s calling.

**Theme Conclusion**

Now that the participants understand how their career callings connect to a specific job, they are more open-handed to how their callings will evolve in the future. Their previous experiences reinforce the need to stay open to changing circumstances but also offer them a confidence in navigating the future. The agency to make decisions, combined with the adaptability to see new opportunities, enables the participants to continue refining their career callings.

**Conclusion**

Five primary themes emerged as the participants shared their career calling narratives. First, early identity markers guided the participants toward initial career decisions. These identity markers included an innate understanding of their identities, opportunities to enact these identities and explore career options, and support from key relationships. During their journeys into adulthood, each participant experienced a turning point event, categorized as either a trauma, tragedy, or transition. These experiences prompted a shift toward their career callings as the participants responded in four similar ways. First, they paused to rethink and reconsider their situations. They then sought further opportunities to reaffirm — or redirect — their career paths. With the support and challenge from significant relationships, the participants engaged in seasons of doubts as they recognized misaligned values in their lives. As they realigned their lives around their values, they gained clarification on their callings. The participants defined their callings in four primary ways as intentional, meaningful, and fulfilling; an investment in
others; rooted in their identities; and as a response to their faith beliefs. Lastly, as the participants
looked to the future development of their career callings, they saw the future as secure but with
unknowns. They demonstrated both agency and adaptability as they navigated the paradoxes of
experiencing peace amidst an evolving future. The final chapter will address how these findings
relate to the current literature and make recommendations for practice and further research.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study is to understand how emerging adult Christian females describe the experiences that led them to their career callings. This chapter situates the study’s findings to the literature, connecting each theme first to the theoretical framework and then to broader research. Following, the chapter presents recommendations for practice and future research.

Below is a summary table, representing the five main themes and their sub-themes.

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**Theme One: Early Influences and Identity Markers**

The first finding from the study explored the early influences and identity markers that shaped the participants’ initial career decisions. The theme includes four primary areas of influence: (1) Innate interest and abilities, (2) Opportunities to enact identity, (3) Key early relationships, and (4) Exploration of career options. This stage in the participants’ career
narratives aligns well with the study’s theoretical framework, Career Construction Theory (CCT). In CCT, individuals begin life as actors, developing within the context of their environments and behaving in their given social roles (Savickas, 2012a). During this stage, the emphasis is on understanding vocational personality – the interests, values, and needs for a career (Savickas, 2005).

Theme One’s findings follow a similar process to CCT as the participants navigated their upbringing and transitioned from adolescence to emerging adulthood. The context of their family environments presented opportunities for the participants to enact certain personality traits and interests. In this way, the participants were actors, trying out inherent characteristics within specific social roles. Through these interactions, the participants came to understand their vocational personalities better. CCT “attends to an individual’s behaviors as an actor,” and as the participants reflected on their growing up years, they emphasized the behaviors that characterize them even today as emerging adults (Savickas, 2005, p. 151). Every participant also referred to parents and family members as influential in guiding them toward initial career decisions, with teachers and coaches selected as role models. These key early relationships called forth aspects of the participants’ career callings and, to use CCT language, provided “modeling” opportunities from these guides and role models (Savickas, 2012a, p. 151). Lastly, the participants explored potential careers through classes, internships, and volunteering. As explained in CCT, participants rehearsed for various occupations by engaging in these activities (Savickas, 2005). The participants’ narratives of early influences in Theme One reflect the progression of an actor career identity as they enacted their identity through family contexts, developed key guides and role model relationships, and explored career options (McAdams and Olson 2010; Savickas,
Several other studies confirm Theme One’s findings and the development of the actor identity as explained through CCT.

Bunderson and Thompson’s (2009) seminal article on zookeepers’ career callings supports the theme’s premise that the participants had innate interests and abilities, directing them toward their callings from a young age: “At the heart of the calling notion for these zookeepers, then, is a sense that they were born with gifts and talents that predisposed them to work in an animal-related occupation” (p. 37). The zookeepers believed that their “hardwiring” propelled them toward their chosen profession (p. 36). Similarly, the participants in this study viewed themselves as having “always” exhibited certain characteristics and interests that relate to their chosen career field. The participants described these characteristics as being innate, integrated into their understanding of their vocational personality. Volodina and Nagy (2016) also found vocational interests to be the most prominent predictor of students’ vocational choices among 900 tenth graders in Germany. The authors relied on Holland’s (1997) career taxonomy to categorize occupational interests, which is the foundation for CCT’s vocational personality. Gender, achievement test scores, grades, and self-concepts were also related to vocational choices, but once vocational interests were controlled for, the effects were small. Thus, Volodina and Nagy’s study, combined with this study’s finding, support CCT’s emphasis on vocational personality in influencing career choice and calling.

The participants’ contexts also influenced the emergence of their vocational personality during their formative growing up years. Although the participants could pinpoint innate traits, their upbringing presented opportunities to enact these characteristics. Several studies confirm the relationship between individuals’ environmental contexts and their vocational aspirations. Bronk (2012) found that adolescents’ culture and environment influenced their interests.
Rodrigues, Guest, and Budjanovcanin’s (2013) findings demonstrate that social and family contexts influence career preferences and that gender, ethnicity, and family context shape one’s approach to work. Rodrigues et al.’s findings also suggest that individuals’ orientations to work develop prior to beginning work, which is true for all five participants in this study as well. Pizzorno, Benozzo, and Carey’s (2015) narrative study explores an adolescent female’s career identity narrative through a gender discourse. Their analysis reveals how the participant’s narrative both shapes and reflects her gender identity, influencing her vocational discourse in the process. Though the females in this study did not specifically refer to their gender, it is most likely a contextual factor influencing their career decisions and an alternative approach to framing their narratives. For instance, Kelsie referred to motherhood as a major factor to her career calling.

Other influential contextual factors in the participants’ stories were their family and key mentors. The participants’ reference to role models is consistent with Liang, Spencer, Brogan, and Corral’s (2008) research about youth mentors. For instance, Kelsie “practiced” motherhood by observing the mothers’ whose children she nannied for, which aligns with Liang et al.’s finding that as mentees mature they desire more autonomy to practice personal growth (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Empowerment was also a key feature of adolescents’ mentoring relationships, which both Torrie and Bethany referred to in how their mentors pushed them to achieve (Liang et al., 2008). Ashby and Schoon (2010) also found that parental educational aspirations and family income influenced teenagers’ career ambitions and educational performance. After controlling for family socioeconomic status, teenagers from families that expected them to pursue higher education held higher career and educational aspirations. Interestingly, parents held higher expectations for their daughters more than their sons. The
participants in this study were all female and discussed career and educational goals beginning at a young age. They also all came from stable family backgrounds and referenced their upbringing as influential to their career views. For instance, Torrie’s family exposed her to entrepreneurism as a child. Several other studies connect parental behavior with childhood career exploration (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009; Schmitt-Rodermund & Vondracek, 1999). Schmitt-Rodermund and Vondracek (1999) found that how parents model exploratory behavior; spend time in creative, technical, and cultural activities with their children; and engage with them on their likes and dislikes predict adolescents’ career exploration, which is a primary process of identity formation into emerging adulthood. The participants in this study emphasized the opportunities they had to engage in their interests as children and the importance of exploring career options. Dietrich and Kracke’s (2009) study of 359 German adolescents confirms that the more parental career-related support that an adolescent receives, the more the adolescent engages in career exploration.

Specifically, the opportunities that the participants in the study had to enact career exploration was formative during their growing up years. These experiences allowed them to own their self-concept and not just reflect their parents’ influences. This distinction is important as it relates to the participants’ understanding their callings, as supported by Usinger and Smith’s (2010) study of adolescents’ career development through the lens of self-construction. Usinger and Smith interviewed 60 students twice a year for six years, from seventh through twelfth grades. They found that 60% of the students had an externally derived sense of self, defined as allowing “perceived external ‘truths’ [to] dominate self-definition” (p. 585) – essentially the opposite of owning their identities. They were categorized as self-absorbed, angry, detached, and overwhelmed. Forty percent of the students had an internally derived autonomous self, and of this group, only half mirrored career construction theory. These students were categorized as
“self-in-the-larger-world group” and navigated their world by asking where they fit and how to
develop themselves (p. 590). No gender, race/ethnicity, geographic, or specific life experiences
differences were found between the groups. What mattered was how the students responded to
their contexts. The self-in-the-larger-world group followed Savickas’s (2005) CCT in
recognizing how their present vocational choices derive from past experiences and then using
these connections to picture a desired future (Usinger & Smith, 2010). Similarly, the participants
in this study could look back and recognize the thread of who they have “always” been and how
their early formative experiences and relationships directed them toward their vocational
pursuits.

**Theme Two: Turning Point Experiences**

As the participants made initial career decisions, they encountered turning points that
began the process toward understanding their careers as a calling. The second theme in the study
categorizes these turning points as transitions, tragedies, and traumas that occur both personally
and occupationally. This theme coincides with CCT, which posits that turning points can be the
trigger for transitioning from an actor to an agent of one’s career. Specifically, vocational tasks,
occupational transitions, and work traumas are the three types of turning points that Savickas
(2012a) discusses. Since CCT focuses on career, these turning points are all work-related, unlike
this study which found vocational and personal turning points. Even so, CCT’s turning point
categories overlap with those found in this study. Several participants in this study experienced
occupational transitions, primarily related to work opportunities but also due to changes in
academic studies and for personal reasons. The participants also experienced occupational
traumas as undesired and unpredictable work events. Personal traumas occurred as well, along
with personal tragedies.
The turning point category not explicitly mentioned in this study is CCT’s vocational tasks, which refers to societal expectations for how individuals should engage in work roles (Busacca, 2007). Savickas (2005) calls it the “grand story of career,” which communicates how individuals should be advancing in their work based on cultural norms (p. 49). As discussed in the previous theme, context “frames people’s stories of work,” and for the participants in this study, these scripts framed the contexts around their experiences, rather than becoming turning points in and of themselves (Savickas, 2005, p. 49). For instance, Bethany knew the expected course of action would be to take the on-air news anchor position. This cultural script framed her thinking, but ultimately, she turned down the offer as an intentional transition out of the broadcasting field.

Based on Clausen’s (1998) life review framework, this study asked participants to draw a career satisfaction chart and answer interview questions about specific turning points in their lives. Clausen defines a turning point “as a time or event when one took a different direction from that in which one had been traveling” (p. 202). He posits that role transitions are often “little” turning points along the way (p. 203). Similarly, Rönkä, Oravala, and Pulkkinen (2003) differentiate between transitions or life events and turning points, explaining that turning points bring about change in an individual’s “developmental trajectory” (p. 204). Essentially, an experience is a turning point only when an individual realizes new meanings because of the experience (Clausen, 1995). For Clausen (1998), these new meanings “open up new vistas,” and the participants in this study all experienced new understandings of themselves, their career, and their opportunities as a result of their turning point experiences (p. 203).

When Rönkä et al. (2003) interviewed men and women in their 30s, they found that the majority of turning points were “normative role transitions of early adulthood,” such as
completing school, starting a new job, beginning or ending relationships, and becoming a parent (p. 211). “Nonnormative events,” such as the death of a relative, were uncommon, and even rarer were turning points pertaining to questions of identity and religious beliefs (p. 211). Though some of the turning points for the participants in this study were normative, such as finishing school, starting new jobs, and becoming a mother, there were also several nonnormative events, including deaths and abuse. Furthermore, Kelsie’s turning point centered on her religious identity. Even for the normative turning points, however, the participants tied the experiences to their identity and developmental trajectory, which differed from Rönkä et al.’s study. The findings more aligned with Clausen’s (1998) discovery that for many women, their turning points produced greater confidence in themselves as they discovered new parts of their identities.

Though many of the turning points in this study were painful for the participants, they all experienced a deeper sense of self. De Silveira and Habermas (2011) also found that for young adults, turning points coincide with “identity-finding processes,” requiring that new awareness be integrated into one’s personal narrative (p. 15). In short, the participants saw turning point experiences as purposeful, and several studies connect a “transformative life event” with purpose development (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009, p. 309).

Kashdan and McKnight (2009) outline a model of purpose development through three pathways: proactive processes (intentional exploration of interests and meaningful experiences), reactive processes (transformative life event brings clarity and meaning to life), and social learning (observation, imitation, and modeling of others). Reactive processes align with turning points in that either a direct event (i.e. a trauma) or an indirect event (i.e. death of a loved one) triggers the individual to re-examine her life. Hill, Sumner, and Burrow (2014) tested this model and found that emerging adults use the three pathways, or a combination of the three, to develop
their purpose in life. Specifically, for individuals engaging in the reactive method, this process was triggered by reactions to either changing situations in life or to “less objective events, such as when one feels a ‘calling’” (p. 228). For the participants in this study, their commitment to a career calling came from reacting to a significant event in their lives and in the process, they clarified their calling. Bronk (2012) also supports this finding that commitment to one’s purpose evolves through triggering experiences. Though turning points and participants’ responses align with the reactive pathway, they engaged in all three processes on the path to clarify their calling, as described in the next theme.

**Theme Three: Responses to Turning Points**

As the participants navigated their turning points, they responded to the experiences in four similar ways: (1) Rethinking their situation, (2) Reaffirming their career path by testing career options, (3) Seeking out supportive relationships, and (4) Realigning their values. These responses are also present in CCT. Savickas’s (2012a) foundational definition of CCT is as an “interpretive and interpersonal” process that makes meaning of one’s career (p. 147). The participants exhibited interpretive behaviors as they reexamined their lives and aimed to live out the values they espoused. They also engaged interpersonally as they sought out support systems, allowing close relationships to speak into and question their career decisions. Through these responses, the participants entered CCT’s second stage of becoming agents of their career (Savickas, 2005). Whereas the beginning of the participants’ career journeys focused on the “what” of vocational behavior, moving from an actor to agent requires addressing the “how” (Savickas, 2005). Savickas (2012a) explains the “how” as desiring to “harmonize inner needs with outer opportunities” (Savickas, 2012a, p. 162). The participants’ turning points exposed their inner needs, and as they tested career options, outer opportunities emerged. For instance,
there is a correlation between envisioning a possible self in a desired occupation and having experience and/or exposure to that work (Hardgrove, Rootham, & McDowell, 2015). The participants’ final response of reorienting their life around their values then brought harmony between their inner needs and outer opportunities.

Through these responses, the participants engaged in the three pathways to purpose, as introduced in the previous theme. Each participant was already “laying the foundation” for a life purpose – or calling – through proactive development processes (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009, p. 309). For instance, they had a sense of direction for their careers that they refined over time based on exploration techniques outlined in the first theme (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009). The participants then experienced their turning points, or transformative life events, which expedited their purpose development through reactive processes (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009). Three of their responses to the turning points align with the reactive processes that Kashdan and McNight (2009) detail, namely being introspective (rethinking their situations), an accelerated trial-and-error process (reaffirming career options), and re-examining priorities to create meaning (realigning values). The participants’ fourth response was to engage in supportive relationships, and this strategy matches Kashdan and McNight’s third developmental pathway of social learning, defined as observing and modeling others. Hill et al. (2014) found that among the three pathways, social learning had the weakest relation to purpose commitment, so it is interesting that the participants in this study applied this strategy as part of a more comprehensive approach. Hall and Chandler’s (2005) calling study also asserts that self-exploration requires both personal insight and relational dialogue. In sum, the participants experienced their turning points while deploying proactive development processes. As Kashdan and McNight present, these
transformative experiences then trigger reactive processes that led to the development of a purpose because of prior direction from social learning and self-discovery.

In CCT, agency is essential when one’s vocational narrative is stopped or redirected (Savickas, 2012a). An individual employs agency to regain momentum, and this process requires adaptation as one reorients to a new career story (Savickas, 2012a). This adaptation process relies on goals to direct one’s choices and strategies for action, which are particularly salient during transitional periods (Savickas, 2012a). De Silveira and Habermas (2011) also explain that narrative turning points catalyze agency, and they found that turning points coincided with an awareness of change and incorporating new perspectives into one’s story. Similarly, for the participants in this study, their turning points required that they confront their expectations for their careers and redirect their goals to a new career narrative. For instance, after leaving her abusive relationship, Francis abandoned her expectation—and desire—to remain in her college town. In light of this change, she had to reimagine a different future that still integrated her overall purpose.

King and Hicks’s (2006) framework of “lost possible selves” addresses the adaptability required by the participants in this study as they responded to their turning points and charted new career directions (p. 121). King and Hicks found that investment in current life goals and divestiture of lost goals predicts positive well-being. However, understanding and elaborating on lost goals correlates with ego development and predicts increased development over time. Thus, one must simultaneously let go of goals when one’s circumstances prevent the “hoped-for future,” while also committing to new goals to “restore positive functioning” (King & Hicks, 2007, p. 28). This study’s participants demonstrated this tension by first recognizing and
narrating the lost goals stemming from unexpected turning points, and then replacing lost goals with new ones related to their callings.

Both CCT’s agency stage and the lost possible selves research focus on goals because they play a “central role in the experience of meaning” (King & Hicks, 2006, p. 135). As such, goals are a primary arena for self-change (King & Hicks, 2006). Similarly, as the participants responded to their turning points, they reflected on previous goals for a successful career. In examining their current situations, they recognized the need to redefine their view of success. King and Hicks (2007) found that examining unmet expectations – even when painful or in response to failure – produces growth. However, to do so requires understanding one’s meaning structures. For instance, being laid off prompted Lynn to recognize that defining success as financial wealth was not meaningful to her. In rethinking their situations, the participants in this study gained clarity on their meaning schemas, and other studies confirm that those who sustain their purpose amidst transition have reexamined their values and engaged in reflective practices (Malin, Reilly, Quinn, & Moran, 2013; Praskova, Creed, & Hood, 2015). Cranton and Carusetta (2004) found that teachers who exhibited authenticity challenged their contexts in order to understand and express their values. Hall and Chandler (2005) also posit that individuals with a calling are internally values-driven. Similarly, the participants in this study engaged in reflection both introspectively and relationally, allowing key relationships to challenge their espoused values. This awareness then illuminated the discrepancy between lost goals and the new sense of values and meaning they desired to live out in their careers. These responses then brought clarity to their calling, as the next theme addresses.
Theme Four: Clarification of Calling

The participants’ explanations of their callings could be categorized in four ways: A calling is (1) intentional, meaningful, and fulfilling, (2) an investment in others, (3) rooted in identity, and (4) a response to faith. The participants’ conceptualization of calling aligns with CCT in that as individuals enter the final stage of authoring their careers, they recognize themes in life that give meaning to their personal work and provide a purpose that contributes to others (Savickas, 2005). Furthermore, the participants’ perspectives on calling also corresponds to the overall literature on career calling.

First, the foundation of a calling is that it provides personal meaning and a sense of purpose to one’s life (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Praskova et al., 2015). In Praskova et al.’s (2015) career calling scale, a primary component of calling is an “active engagement,” such as pursuing interests, seeking fulfillment and enjoyment, and a drive toward purpose and passion (p. 95). When the participants in this study described a calling as meaningful and fulfilling, they also tied this component to intentionally integrating purpose into their careers. To actively engage their calling, the participants relied on several job and leisure crafting strategies as outlined by Berg, Grant, and Johnson (2010). For instance, Francis used role reframing to view her cross country coaching job as aligning with her overall calling. Torrie relied on job expanding to not just sell products but to also be an inspiration to others, and Kelsie engaged in task emphasizing to be a stay-at-home mom and nanny simultaneously. Torrie and Bethany also used leisure crafting to participate in hobbies outside of their callings. These experiences of a meaningful career then gave them “confirmation” that they were in their area of calling (Torrie, personal communication, May 11, 2017). These strategies also support Creed, Kjoelass, and Hood’s (2016) finding that assimilation is directly and positively related to career calling. Emerging
adults with high levels of assimilation modify their environments to actively pursue their goals, as opposed to accommodation, which adjusts one’s self to fit the environment. By intentionally engaging in and crafting their careers, the participants demonstrated high assimilation.

Furthermore, the participants’ callings were meaningful because they contributed to others’ needs. As Kelsie said, her calling is “investing in the people who are in our lives” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). Calling literature refers to this investment as a “beyond the self” dimension that many studies confirm as an integral part to calling (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Elangovan, Pinder, & McLean, 2010; Malin et al., 2013, p. 187; Praskova et al., 2015). In a longitudinal study with adolescents and emerging adults, Quinn (2017) found that among all ages, individuals were unlikely to tie a beyond-the-self dimension to their most important goals and values. The most common occurrence was no presence of a beyond-the-self dimension throughout the entire study (56% of the sample), and the least common was developing a beyond-the-self focus during the study (12% of the sample). Almost 16% of the sample maintained a beyond-the-self orientation, and almost 16% lost it. Thus, it is interesting that in this study all the participants emphasized a purpose beyond themselves as an integral part of their callings. Quinn relates a beyond-the-self focus to developing an identity connected to the well-being of others, and this premise appears to hold true in this study as well. Chen, McAnally, Wang, and Reese (2012) also confirm this finding in their study of adolescents’ critical event narratives. They found that higher levels of coherence (measured by theme, developmental consequentiality, and meaning-making) of one’s high- and low-point events was significantly associated with prosocial behavior – but only in late adolescence. Similarly, this study’s participants showed narrative coherence in telling their career stories, which integrated identity achievement and prosocial behaviors.
Chen et al.’s (2012) linkage between coherence in one’s narrative and identity achievement also supports the third component of the participants’ callings being rooted in identity. Several studies include personal fit and vocational identity as a fundamental part of calling, referring to a self-awareness of one’s personality, interests, goals, and values and how this identity matches vocational roles (Galles & Lenz, 2012; Hirschi & Herrmann, 2012; Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2010). Galles and Lenz (2012) found that among undergraduate students, higher levels of vocational identity and lower levels of negative thinking are significantly related to the presence of a career calling. Duffy, Douglass, Autin, and Allan (2014) also found vocational clarity to be a predictor of calling among undergraduates, but Hirschi and Herrmann (2012) found that vocational identity achievement mediated the relationship between the presence of a calling and life satisfaction. These findings demonstrate the dynamic nature of vocational identity and calling, which CCT and this study support (Busacca, 2007). The participants in this study began to construct their vocational personality as children and adolescents, and as they gained clarity in their callings as emerging adults, they solidified their vocational identities.

Lastly, the participants understood their callings as a response to their faith beliefs. By positioning their callings as a response, this study aligns more with the neoclassical view that to feel called requires a caller (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Some participants were further along in their faith journeys while others only recently reconnected to a faith community, but all took ownership over their spiritual beliefs. Most grew their relationship with God and engaged in community during their turning point experiences, thereby confronting pain in their stories instead of avoiding it. Similarly, Bailey et al.’s (2016) grounded study on emerging adults found that spiritual exemplars take ownership of their faith, are shaped by a spiritual community, and
encounter spiritual pain. As this study’s participants understood God’s purpose for their work, they also gained clarity about their personal identities. Emerging adulthood is a time of exploring religious beliefs (Barry, Nelson, Davarya, & Urry, 2010), and Liang and Ketcham (2017) examined how emerging adults develop purposes related to their faith. They found that faith-related purpose was a process, not a sudden arrival or event, that evolved through active discovery. Several experiences supported the discovery process, including affirmation by others and trial and error of new experiences based on one’s interests. Several participants in this study also referred to supportive relationships and testing out new experiences in discerning their calling and God’s purpose for their lives. The students with the clearest sense of purpose in Liang and Ketcham’s study engaged in activities that shared a central theme, which coincides with CCT’s final stage of authorship. Authors recognize themes in their occupational story that provide a meaningful pattern throughout life’s twists and turns (Savickas, 2012a). This study’s participants began to transition from agents to authors as their clarified their callings, which the next theme elaborates further.

Theme Five: Future is “Question Mark but Secure”

Theme Three explored the process of the participants becoming agents of their careers, which sets the stage for Theme Five as the participants engage both agency and adaptability to envision their futures. As explained in Theme Three, the second stage of CCT is agency, and adaptability is the primary competency to develop as an agent. The study’s participants demonstrated their mastery of adaptability and agency through their narratives of the future. As Kelsie stated, the future “looks like a big question mark, and it looks secure at the same time” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). The future looks secure because of the agency the participants developed as they navigated their turning point experiences, integrated their callings
into work roles, and gained clarity on their values and identities. Schoon and Lyons-Amos (2016) posit that the transition to adulthood necessitates agency, namely active decision-making based on self-regulation and self-awareness. Their study of young adults’ transition from education to work found that an individual’s agency is integral to decisions about educational and work transitions. Specifically, educational aspirations significantly shaped transitions even after controlling for parental background and employment opportunities. Hardgrove, Rootham, and McDowell (2015) also found that envisioning possible selves “links imagined futures to agentive behavior in the present” (p. 166).

In describing the future as a question mark, this study’s participants also engaged CCT’s four “Cs” of adaptability: concern about the future, control over their future, curiosity about the future, and confidence to pursue future goals (Savickas, 2005). Each participant had thought about the future (concern), and four of the five participants expressed their personal control over their futures. Kelsie, the only married participant, was the exception. Part of her adaptability derived from needing to remain open to changes in her husband’s vocation, so she did not demonstrate increased personal control over her career. Kvitkovičová, Umemura, and Macek (2017) conducted a longitudinal study with over 1,000 emerging adults to understand how attachment relationships relate to career decision-making processes. They found that at Time 1 every attachment figure (mother, father, best friend, and romantic partner) related to career decision-making, but a romantic partner was the only attachment relationship significantly associated with career decision-making at Time 2, suggesting that romantic partners are more likely to influence career decisions throughout emerging adulthood. Kelsie’s integration of her husband’s vocation into her own career choices confirms this finding. Furthermore, self-concept clarity was the mediator between every attachment relationship and career decision-making.
processes (Kvitkovičová et al., 2007). This finding supports that attachment relationships promote healthy self-concept development, and healthy self-concepts then inform career decision-making. Hamman et al. (2013) also found that self-concepts develop out of relational interactions and personal reflection. Similarly, in this study the participants engaged in key relationships and deep reflection throughout their career journeys and developed secure, agentic self-concepts.

The participants also displayed confidence in pursuit of their future goals. Despite stating that the future will be “ever evolving,” they exhibited confidence in finding ways to continue to live out their callings (Bethany, personal communication, May 16, 2017). This confidence in part derived from their faith beliefs, which aligned with the three themes that Kimball, Boyatzis, Cook, and Leonard (2013) found in mature faith narratives among recent graduates. Specifically, Kimball et al. explored how emerging adults “represent meaning in their faith narratives,” and they defined mature narratives as those that integrated challenging, transitional experiences into a “coherent and reasoned conception of the self” (p. 221-222). Three themes emerged from the mature narratives: (1) Perspective changes that challenged beliefs, (2) Relationships challenged to incorporate safety and honesty, and (3) Experiences of God’s direction and guidance. The participants in this study also exhibited all three faith themes in their narratives by reexamining their beliefs, surrounding themselves with a support system that asked challenging questions, and being drawn into God’s plan. As Bethany said, “I no longer pray for certain things, but that God leads me in the direction” (personal communication, May 16, 2017).

By integrating their faith stories into their overall career narratives, the participants approached the future with a mature confidence. In exploring lost possible selves, King and Hicks (2007) posit that admitting to being surprised by life is a fundamental component of
personality development. Surprise requires recognizing one’s “vulnerability, the inadequacy of one’s preexisting meaning structures in the face of the challenges of reality, and one’s apparent smallness in the grand scheme of life” (p. 35). These facets require courage, which the participants demonstrated in submitting their goals to God’s timing and plan. However, courage also comes from expecting something out of life despite past disappointments and failed expectations, which “may be the best expression of maturity” (King & Hicks, 2007, p. 35). Even though life presented challenging surprises, the participants exhibited the confidence to envision new goals, such as growing their business, being promoted, and pursuing a dream career – all held loosely within the context of their faith.

Lastly, the participants also demonstrated curiosity about the future by exploring possible selves, which is a fundamental principle of CCT (Savickas, 2005). Rather than a fixed self, it is more useful to test out possible selves – what Ibarra (2015) calls being “adaptively authentic” (p. 58). The participants’ openness will allow them to adapt their skills to various roles over time. As Kelsie explained, “I have an idea in my head, and it kind of gets re-evaluated and shifted a little bit every six months” (personal communication, June 3, 2017). This study found that the participants’ turning points presented new contextual factors, which changed their views of themselves and their vocations. As a result, they simultaneously strengthened their self-concepts and agency while also approaching the future with an adaptable, learning-oriented mindset.

Hamman et al. (2013) also found that as education students at a large university engaged in new student teaching experiences, they formed new possible selves in response to the changing contexts. Possible selves became a useful framework for preparing new teachers for challenges in future work contexts. As individuals develop self-concepts that are future-oriented, they envision a potential future self that integrates one’s hopes, fears, and expectations for the future.
For the participants in this study, their possible selves involved marriage, motherhood, and evolving in their professional contexts. However, they approached these goals with curiosity and exploration rather than expectation.

These possible selves align with Rathbone, Salgado, Akan, Havelka, and Berntsen’s (2016) study on how young adults imagine the future. They found that across cultures, the most common possible self was of self-improvement, followed by being married, becoming parents, and being employed. Interestingly, this study’s participants did not focus on self-improvement but did envision possible selves in the other three categories. Rathbone et al. also found that specific possible selves (behavioral in nature) were envisioned further in the future and were more vivid than abstract (trait-based) possible selves. Similarly, participants in this study used words like “eventually” and “down the line” to describe specific possible selves around marriage and family, marking them more in the future. Though their marriage and family goals were not vivid, their specific possible selves around careers contained clear and vivid images (i.e. working in the justice system or being an inspirational entrepreneur). Their abstract selves around traits and emotions represented a continuation of their identities, such as Kelsie developing her “nurturing personality” or Lynn desiring fulfillment in future work (personal communication, June 3, 2017). By positioning their abstract selves more in the present, the participants build future vocational aspirations on their current career self-concepts.

Thus, the foundation of fully being agents of their careers then propelled the participants into CCT’s final stage of an author. As Savickas (2012a) explains, an author’s narrative incorporates an actor with a unified story and an agent with the adaptability to change. The participants began to enter this stage at the time of the study, as evidenced by their articulations of the “why” to their callings in Theme Four. For instance, Francis’s goals for her career have
“evolved,” but her identity as a “helper” is a life theme throughout her narrative (personal communication, May 19, 2017). The other participants also recognized threads throughout their stories that provide meaning and “mattering” to their overall narratives (Savickas, 2005, p. 59). As they envision their futures, they addressed three questions that King and Hicks (2006) propose a mature narrative reflects: “‘Who was I?’ ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Who do I want to be?’” (p. 135). A mature person can see multiple possible selves in their stories while still recognizing a meaningful whole, which requires a tenacity that the participants exhibited (King & Hicks, 2006; Savickas, 2012a). As Bethany said at the end of her interview, “I wonder what I will be in that I never thought I'd be... It's kind of exciting… it just leaves you open to other things” (personal communication, May 16, 2017). This perspective reinforces that rather than finding or discovering one’s calling, it is a dynamic process rooted in experiencing and developing a calling throughout one’s life (Dobrow, 2013; Hirschi & Herrmann, 2013). Each participant had begun to recognize that they could author their career stories in the context of what future opportunities and challenges life would present.

**Conclusion**

This study endeavored to understand how emerging adult Christian females describe the experiences that led them to their career callings. The findings illuminated that callings are dynamic, requiring engagement in self-awareness and experiential learning. Specifically, the participants understood their callings first through early experiences within their family and school contexts and then as a response to unexpected turning point events. To navigate their turning points, the participants actively reexamined their lives and sought out support systems. This process then clarified the participants’ career callings, which centered around investing in others. These findings also support the study’s theoretical framework of Career Construction...
Theory, in which individuals move through three stages of an actor, agent, and author during the construction of their career. In this study, the participants began their careers as actors, became agents after their turning point events, and began to author the meaning to their careers after aligning their values. Based on these findings are recommendations for practice and future research.

**Recommendations for Practice**

By outlining five primary themes in how emerging adults came to understand their career callings, this study provides a framework for individuals, guidance professionals, universities, and organizations to intentionally engage in developing one’s own or others’ career callings. The following list summarizes primary implications for practice, followed by a discussion of each area.

- The role of narrative in career construction
- Framework for designing interventions to help others discern a calling
- Data, action steps, and impetus for schools, universities, and organizations to guide their students or employees toward developing a calling
- Developmental processes for career metacompetencies of agency and adaptability

**Role of narrative.** First, the study supports the use of narrative in understanding one’s career path. By dividing one’s narrative into actor, agent, and author stages, an individual or helping professional can identify where one is in the journey toward a calling and what domains to emphasize based on Career Construction Theory (i.e. vocational personality, adaptability, or life themes). Instead of examining calling with an achievement-mindset of finding one’s calling, a narrative approach emphasizes a learning orientation, presenting calling as a dynamic developmental process and not a one-time discovery. By framing calling in this way, the
construct is better situated within the complexity of today’s career environment, and it frees individuals from determining one “right” career path, opening them up to the narrative that their entire career will present (Bland & Roberts-Pittman, 2014).

**Framework for designing interventions.** Using this framework as a base, career counselors, teachers and professors, career coaches, and human resource professionals can apply the study’s findings to design interventions to help others discern a calling. For instance, they can use the study’s five themes to guide individuals through their career narrative – beginning with their background and context (Theme One), understanding key turning points in their journey (Theme Two), assessing responses to their turning points (Theme Three), gauging their perspective on a calling (Theme Four), and listening for their development of agency and adaptability (Theme Five). For example, the four responses to turning point events is a new perspective for calling literature. This finding provides individuals or professionals with a marker to first recognize key transitions, traumas, or tragedies in one’s narrative and then a framework for addressing turning points with a developmentally-minded approach. This framework can equip human resource managers and other guidance practitioners with questions to ask young employees as they transition through new experiences and provide specific development strategies to meet their needs.

Practitioners can also use the finding on the four characteristics of a calling to gauge development areas by asking questions that align with each component, such as: (1) Are you engaged in meaningful activities at work? What brings meaning to your life and work? *(Intentional/meaningful)* (2) Can you articulate who you are and how you are uniquely equipped to contribute at work? *(Rooted in identity)* (3) In what ways do you enjoy investing in others? Are you investing in others through your career? *(Investment in others)* (4) How do you
incorporate larger beliefs and values around faith and spirituality into your career? *(Response to faith).* In particular, this spiritual component is an important dimension of calling for individuals who desire to live out their religious beliefs in relation to their work. By representing an integrated notion of calling that includes an internally driven self-awareness and an externally-derived discernment of God’s will, this study portrays how to incorporate spirituality into career decisions. In sum, the framework that this study provides enables guidance practitioners to encourage emerging adults to put their calling into action.

**Action steps for education and organizations.** The study also provides data, action steps, and impetus for schools, universities, and organizations to guide their students or employees toward developing a calling. One key finding was the importance of one’s context and relationships in shaping a calling. By highlighting the roles that these factors play in a calling, this study could help improve college recruitment and retention rates by incorporating these findings more directly into their curriculum and vision of the careers for which they are preparing students. For instance, individuals in collectivist cultures may benefit from a more communal approach to career development ([Fennell & Arnot, 2008](#)).

Active engagement and opportunities to test career paths were other important findings in the development of a calling. Schools, universities, and organizations could benefit from providing intentional opportunities for their students or employees to try out various career roles or job functions. Job crafting is another strategy for human resource professionals to increase employee engagement and embed one’s calling into their current career at an organization. Additionally, by integrating a beyond-the-self emphasis to all majors and curriculum, universities can attract and retain students, who are searching for a calling, to careers they may
have not considered. As Dik and Duffy (2009) assert, this application first requires that organizations and universities view work as meaningful and purposeful.

Additionally, the study stresses the importance of turning point experiences. This finding is relevant for universities and organizations as new students enroll and new employees begin work. These experiences could be major turning points for students and employees, especially those in the emerging adulthood age range. Universities and organizations have the opportunity to help these individuals navigate this change by providing intentional development and support systems, thereby increasing employee engagement and competitiveness in the marketplace (Polach, 2004; Schuler, Jackson, & Tarique, 2011).

**Career metacompetencies.** Lastly, this study confirms the importance of emerging adults developing the career metacompetencies of agency and adaptability. Hall and Chandler’s (2005) calling model includes identity awareness and adaptability as the two metacompetencies that support individuals in learning new career skills, but in keeping with CCT’s language this study focuses on agency rather than self-awareness. An individual engages agency through self-regulation and pursuing “goals of their own choosing” (Savickas, 2012a, p. 155). To understand one’s preferences and goals, an individual must have self-awareness as “they seek to implement a concept of themselves” (Savickas, 2012a, p. 155). Thus, agency can be thought to incorporate identity awareness. This study found that by examining their career situations and considering how their values were – or were not – reflected in their lives, the participants developed agency. This finding is relevant to individuals or practitioners aiming to develop agency because it provides tangible actions, namely reflexivity and values assessment. These are skills that can be honed and mastered over time. Secondly, adaptability is required when individuals encounter transitions and changing contexts. This study confirms that adaptability allowed the participants
to engage in learning and development during large changes, rather than remaining complacent (Savickas, 2012a). The participants demonstrated the four C’s of adaptability (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence), which provides specific mindsets or attitudes to address, as well as key skills to develop. Agency and adaptability ultimately positioned the participants to recognize opportunities to live out their callings; however, they grew in these competencies throughout their career narratives. This finding reinforces the importance of cultivating a learning mindset that is rooted in experience as one seeks to understand their career calling.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study contributes to the career calling literature by examining emerging adults’ development of a calling and future career path, which research has not widely addressed (Duffy, Douglass, Autin, & Allan, 2014; Praskova et al., 2015). By outlining five primary themes of how emerging adults identify and live out their callings, these findings provide a framework for subsequent studies. The first theme of early influences supports the role that context plays in one’s calling. Additional research could examine contextual factors in more depth to understand those that influence a calling. Hall and Chandler (2005) state that the enactment of a calling “is a product of the interaction between the individual and contextual factors,” including socio-economic, demographic, economic, and sociopolitical trends (p. 166). Contextual factors, such as race and first-generation college students, need specific study in relation to calling. A few studies have begun to identify these influences, such as Duffy et al.’s (2013) and Duffy and Autin’s (2013) findings that higher income and educational levels significantly correlated with living out a calling. Interestingly, Duffy and Autin found no significant differences for participants who perceived a calling, showing that context plays more of a role as people aim to live out their
calling. Thus, future studies could research strategies that enable emerging adults with various contextual factors to enact their calling.

Another contextual factor is the role that gender plays in one’s calling. Since this study has a small, all female sample, future research could incorporate participants from a wider demographic. For instance, females are often not attracted to science-related majors because they are not perceived as relating to helping-oriented professions (Miller, Blessing, & Schwartz, 2006). When females are interested in these fields, they gravitate toward professions that are more helping-oriented, such as medicine or bioengineering (Bucak & Kadirgan, 2011; Miller et al., 2006). Engineering branches, such as genetic, environmental, and industrial engineering, are also perceived by both male and female students to be more appropriate for females (Bucak & Kadirgan, 2011). As this study presents, a helping-orientation or “beyond the self” dimension is a main component of a career calling. Thus, understanding how females and males can relate their work to this dimension in any profession could enable them to engage in a calling they may not have explored otherwise.

The study’s second and third themes about turning points and the participants’ responses to these events are additional areas for research. Since this study overlapped with but did not mirror the turning point categories in Career Construction Theory, future studies could focus on turning point experiences in individuals’ paths to their calling (Savickas, 2012a). In particular, the study found that the participants shared four primary responses to turning point experiences, which is a unique finding to this study. Additional studies could focus on turning point events and quantitatively measure the types of responses that helped to develop a career calling, as well as gather more qualitative data for deeper understanding.
Throughout the study, the participants emphasized the role that testing out career options played in developing their callings. One research area pertaining to this topic is to assess how guidance practitioners encourage emerging adults to put their calling into action, such as through involvement in organizations, internships, and work. A study could measure the effectiveness of these strategies on helping emerging adults discern a calling and mitigating their rates of depression (Kenny & Sirin, 2006).

Overall, this study’s findings advance an understanding of how emerging adults develop a career calling over time. The findings also provide empirical support for Career Construction Theory, as well as contribute additional data around the definition of calling and career metacompetencies of agency and adaptability. By putting one’s purpose into action to benefit others, emerging adults can engage with their careers at a deeper level, bringing meaning to their work and lives. At such a developmentally critical time, the concept of a career calling could play a key role in emerging adults transitioning into adulthood and finding purpose in their careers.
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APPENDIX A

Career Construction Theory Model

**Actor**
- Addresses the "What"
- Domain: Vocational personality
- Focus: Behaviors and Reputation
  - Guides
  - Mentors

**Agent**
- Addresses the "How"
- Domain: Adaptability
  - Concern
  - Control
  - Curiosity
  - Confidence
- Focus: Striving toward Goals

**Author**
- Addresses the "Why"
- Domain: Life Themes
- Focus: Themes and Explanations

Based on Savickas (2005, 2012a)
## APPENDIX B

Career Adaptability Dimensions: Savickas (2012a)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptability Dimension</th>
<th>Attitudes and Beliefs</th>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Coping Behaviors</th>
<th>Career Problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concern</td>
<td>Planful</td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Aware Involved</td>
<td>Indifference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Preparing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Decisive</td>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>Assertive Disciplined Willful</td>
<td>Indecision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Inquisitive</td>
<td>Exploring</td>
<td>Experimenting Risk taking Inquiring</td>
<td>Unrealism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Efficacious</td>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>Persistent Striving Industrious</td>
<td>Inhibition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

Kim’s (2016) Framework for Narrative Inquiry

Polkinghorne:  
Paradigmatic Mode of Analysis  
Narrative Mode of Analysis

Mishler:  
1. Recapitulating the Told in the Telling  
(Labov & Waletzky’s Model)  
2. Reconstructing the Told from the Telling  
(Reordering a Storyline)  
3. Imposing a Told on the Telling  
(Identifying a Story Pattern)  
4. Making a Telling from the Told  
(Inferring a Story)

Labov & Waletzky:  
Abstract  
Orientation  
Complicating Action  
Evaluation  
Result or Resolution  
Coda

Narrative as Phenomenon and Method  
Biographical Narrative Inquiry
Dear [Potential Participant Name],

You are being contacted as a follow-up to a survey that you completed for the “ABC Group.” Specifically, you identified that you are living out your career calling, which could qualify you for participation in an additional research study should you be interested.

I am a graduate student in Northeastern University’s Doctor of Education program, and I am currently in the dissertation phase of my studies.

I am interested in studying the concept of how individuals identify their career calling. You have been identified as someone who may be living out your career calling. Should you agree with the following criteria below, I would be very interested to interview you to understand your experience of developing a career calling. Please verify that the following criteria are an accurate reflection of you:

- You are within the 18- to 29-year old age range.
- Recognizing that your calling can change throughout your life, you are currently engaged in work that you perceive as your purpose in life.
- Your work provides you with personal meaning and purpose.
- A primary source of motivation for your work is the opportunity to contribute to something or someone beyond yourself.

By participating in this study, you can expect to gain a better understanding of your own career calling through the interview process. The research generated from this study will also be used to benefit professionals, such as career and guidance counselors, teachers and professors, career coaches, and human resource professionals, in designing interventions to help others discern a calling.

If you are interested in participating in my study, please contact me at xxx, and I will outline the details the study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Shackelford
APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Form

Title of Project: Development of Career Calling for Emerging Adults

Request to Participate in Research
You are invited to participate in a research study as a part of the “ABC Group’s” study on Christian worldview. I, Stephanie Shackelford, am moderating the qualitative portion of this study with the purpose to understand emerging adults’ experiences of developing a career calling.

You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project.

The study will take place via a phone call and will take about 1 hour. If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to answer a series of interview questions about your career experience. You will also be asked to draw a chronological timeline of your career history prior to the interview along with answering a couple journal entry responses.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, your answers may help us to learn more about how others discern their career calling.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not personally identify you or any individual as being part of this project.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

You will receive $100 compensation for your participation from the “ABC Group.”

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Stephanie Shackelford, the person mainly responsible for the research at xxx. You may also contact the Principal Investigator at xxx.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact xxx. You may call anonymously if you wish.

You may keep this form for yourself.

Thank you.
Stephanie Shackelford
APPENDIX F

Career Chronological Timeline: Based on Clausen’s (1998) Life Satisfaction Chart

Chart out the chronology of your career on the 0 to 30 years old timeline provided below. Indicate where each job that you’ve had falls on the 0 to 10 satisfaction scale, with 0 being “rock bottom” and 10 being “highest satisfaction.”
APPENDIX G

Journal Entry Prompts

Please answer the following two questions:

1. Describe a time when you've been challenged during your career path. How did you respond? What actions did you take?

2. Describe a time when you felt “in the zone” during your career. What made that experience so meaningful to you?
APPENDIX H

Interview Protocol

Interviewee (Title and Name):
Interviewer: Stephanie Shackelford
Research Question: How do emerging adult Christian females describe the experiences that led them to their career calling?

Part I: Introductory Protocol / Verbal Consent

Part II: Interviewee Background

I would like to begin with some introductory questions. To start, please state your age, gender, ethnicity, and describe the current work that you do.

Part III: The Main Interview

Through this study, I hope to gain more insight into the experiences that led emerging adults to their career calling. I would like to hear about your experience of finding a career calling, in your own words. To do this, I am going to ask you some questions about the key experiences you encountered.

1. To provide me with some context, could you walk me through your career history?
   a. Going back to the beginning, could you tell me more about your initial decision to go into your field/job?
   b. Could you tell me a little bit about each of the jobs you’ve had?
   c. Could you tell me more about your job transitions, i.e. your reasons for transitioning?

2. Tell me more about how you ended up in the type of work that you do now.

3. In general, a career calling is defined as a meaningful approach to work with a desire to serve a greater good. Tell me about what this definition means to you.
   a. Would you describe your current work as a calling?

4. Can you describe a key turning point in your path toward your calling?
   a. Tell me about an experience that has given you the greatest joy in your calling.
   b. Tell me about a time when you doubted your calling.
c. What significant life events occurred on the path toward your calling? Could you walk through some key events in your life story?

5. Tell me about your dreams or goals regarding your career while growing up. Where did these come from?

   a. Tell me about your hopes and dreams as you entered adulthood. What experiences marked your arrival into adulthood?

   b. Describe how you see the future in regards to your calling.

**Conclusion:**

6. If the interviewee has not mentioned relationships in the interview, then ask: What would be some of the main things that have shaped and influenced your life the most in regards to your calling?

   a. Can you describe some of the main relationships that have shaped and influenced your life the most?

7. As we wrap up the interview, what else you would like to mention that we haven’t yet discussed about discovering your calling? Is there anything we left out of your life story?

8. Do you have any questions for me at this time?

Thank you so much for your participation. I truly appreciate you taking the time to allow me to interview you.
APPENDIX I

Example of Participants’ Career Timelines

Torrie’s Timeline

- Age 21: Private tutor (rating 6)
- Age 19: US Census taker (enumerator) (rating 6)
- Age 22-23: Payroll Processor at accounting firm (rating 7)
- Age 22-23: Self-employed in retail sales (rating 9)
- Age 23-25: Office/research assistant at moving company (rating 5)

Life Satisfaction

Top 10

Bottom 0

0 years

30 years
Lynn’s Timeline

Age 16 - 21
Waitress: 6 rating

Age 18 - 21
College student worker: 3 rating

Age 21 - 24
Investment bank: 6 rating

Age 24 - 26
Drilling company: 8 rating

Age 26 - 27
Nursing home: 5 rating

Age 28
School: 9 rating

Life Satisfaction

Top 10

Bottom 0

0 years

30 years
APPENDIX J

Participants’ Definition of Career Calling

Faith

Identity

Investment in Others

Fulfillment & Meaning

& Meaning

Investment

in Others

Fulfillment

& Meaning