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## Examining how aspects of vocational privilege relate to living a calling

Ryan D. Duffy\*, Kelsey L. Autin and Richard P. Douglass

Department of Psychology, University of Florida, PO Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, USA

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The current study examined how aspects of vocational privilege directly – and indirectly via work meaning and career commitment – related to living a calling. With an economically diverse sample of 361 employed adults, both social class and work volition were found to moderately to strongly correlate with work meaning, career commitment, and living a calling. We used a structural equation model and found career commitment and work meaning to significantly predict living a calling and fully mediate the link between work volition and living a calling. Additionally, social class related to work meaning and career commitment via work volition. Findings suggest that the links between social class, work volition, and living a calling may be explained by individuals working in jobs they are committed to and that are meaningful, and that work volition may represent the gateway from social class to the experience of fulfilling work. Implications for practice are discussed.

**Keywords:** calling; work volition; social class; work meaning

Work represents a central life role for most adults and has significant effects on well-being. One work-related construct that has gained increased attention within positive psychology is the notion of a *career calling*. Conceptualized as a personally fulfilling and prosocial career, living out a calling has been consistently linked to positive experiences in the workplace and high levels of work and general well-being (see Duffy & Dik, 2013 for a review). However, living out this type of career is – by its very nature – a privileged opportunity, likely the result of access to opportunity, higher social class, freedom of career choice, and positive workplace experiences. Despite most studies examining calling as a predictor variable (e.g. Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Hirschi & Herrmann, 2012, 2013), recent longitudinal research has demonstrated that living a calling is best positioned as an *outcome* of positive workplace experiences such as meaning, commitment, and satisfaction (Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Douglass, 2014). The authors suggest that living a calling may be best conceptualized as a feeling that grows as a result of experiencing fulfilling work. In other words, it may represent the pot of gold at the end of the work rainbow.

But how do other aspects of vocational privilege interact with work experiences to predict living a calling? In the present study, we examine this question by studying a diverse group of working adults according to income, social class, and educational attainment. Building from calling research and theoretical propositions from the Psychology of Working Framework (PWF; Blustein, 2006, 2008; Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & Devoy,

2008), the goal of the present manuscript is to explore how work experiences (work meaning and career commitment) and aspects of vocational privilege (social class and work volition) simultaneously relate to living out a calling. Specifically, guided by Duffy et al.'s (2014) findings, work meaning and career commitment are positioned as predictors of living a calling. Additionally, in line with core propositions of the PWF (Blustein, 2008) – specifically that work has the capacity to fulfill higher order needs and that aspects of vocational privilege precede fulfilling work – social class and work volition are hypothesized to predict fulfilling work experiences, meaning and commitment, in turn relating to living a calling. Results from this study are novel, as no research to date has examined how aspects of vocational privilege relate and how career commitment and work meaning conjointly predict the experience of living a calling. Considering that individuals who live out their calling tend to be the happiest employees (Duffy & Dik, 2013), understanding these predictors is an important next step within the work domain of positive psychology.

### Predictors of living a calling

Although there is no single accepted definition of calling in the literature, in the current study, calling is conceptualized as a career that provides personal fulfillment and is prosocial in nature (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Duffy & Dik, 2013). These two components are essential to the definition and in combination are what distinguish a calling from only fulfilling work (e.g. a highly skilled stockbroker

\*Corresponding author. Email: [rduf@ufl.edu](mailto:rduf@ufl.edu)

that gets meaning out of making money) or only prosocial work (e.g. a social worker that hates his job). Across dozens of studies, *perceiving a calling* has been consistently linked with higher levels of work-related and general well-being (Duffy & Dik, 2013). However, several studies have demonstrated that these effects are salient only inasmuch as an individual is *living out that calling*. Whereas perceiving a calling is akin to owning a car, living a calling is akin to actually driving that car. For example, among a diverse sample of 201 employed adults, living a calling was found to moderate the link of perceiving a calling to work meaning and career commitment, such that these relations were only significant for those living out their calling (Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey, & Dik, 2012). Additionally, in a study of 553 working adults in the USA, living a calling was found to fully mediate the link of perceiving a calling to life satisfaction (Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Bott, 2013).

Considering that living a calling appears to be the key reason why perceiving a calling is linked with increased well-being, understanding what predicts this construct is important, especially given its strong ties to satisfaction with work and life (Duffy & Dik, 2013). To date, work meaning and career commitment are the two workplace variables that have been most consistently linked with living a calling. Work meaning is defined by work that is significant, positively valenced, and oriented toward personal growth (Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012). Career commitment reflects how strong one's motivation is to work in a chosen career (Blau, 1985). Several studies with working adults have evidenced moderate to strong correlations between these variables and living a calling, most often positioning living a calling as a predictor vs. an outcome of meaning and commitment (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009; e.g., Duffy, Allan et al., 2013; Duffy, Bott et al., 2012). However, in the first study to actually test the relation among these variables over time, Duffy et al. (2014) found that meaning and commitment were best positioned as predictors of living a calling.

Specifically, Duffy et al. (2014) examined how these variables related at three time points over a six-month period among a sample of employed adults. Although living a calling at Time 2 did significantly predict Time 3's work meaning and career commitment, Time 1 and Time 2's work meaning and career commitment each predicted Time 2 and Time 3's living a calling, respectively. Additionally, in the reciprocal Time 2 to Time 3 links, work meaning and career commitment at Time 2 evidenced much stronger relations to living a calling at Time 3 (.31 and .27, respectively) than Time 2's living a calling did to these variables at Time 3 (.07 and .10, respectively). Drawing from these findings that work meaning and career commitment are better positioned as predictors of living a calling over time (Duffy et al.,

2014), we hypothesize that work meaning (*Hypothesis 1*) and career commitment (*Hypothesis 2*) will significantly predict living a calling. The more individuals are committed to their careers and feel their work is meaningful, the more strongly they will feel they are living a calling.

### Aspects of vocational privilege and living a calling

In addition to experiences in the workplace, living out a calling is likely predicated upon an individual's vocational privilege. The importance of understanding how privilege impacts one's experiences with work has been documented within Blustein and colleagues' PWF (Blustein, 2001, 2006; Blustein et al., 2008). PWF scholars assert that, although the last century of the study of work has brought forth a wealth of solid theory and empirical findings, it has failed to fully include diverse populations and integrate knowledge from related disciplines. Specifically, most career research has focused on traditional career trajectories of college student samples, limiting the extent to which these findings can be generalized to broader populations. Although recent strides have been made examining how vocational privilege influences career-related outcomes (e.g. Ali, 2013; Allan, Autin, & Duffy, 2014; Duffy & Autin, 2013; Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015; Duffy, Bott, Torrey, & Webster, 2013; Fouad, Liu, Cotter, & Gray-Schmiedlin, 2014), the present study seeks to draw from these studies by examining these relations in a more comprehensive manner to address what Blustein and colleagues called attention to: the fact that, for most individuals, there are substantial barriers to work choice which limit the ability to achieve and sustain a fulfilling career.

An important aspect of the PWF (Blustein, 2008) is a focus on the different needs that working might fulfill (Blustein et al., 2008). Specifically, working has the capacity to satiate needs of survival and power, relatedness, and self-determination. Living out a calling is particularly salient to the higher order needs of relatedness and self-determination, which focus on one's feelings of connectedness toward others and intrinsic reward from working. Consistent with Maslow's (1962) hierarchy of needs, the PWF asserts that if one is struggling to meet survival and power needs, they will have difficulty obtaining higher order relatedness and self-determination resources (Blustein et al., 2008). This leads to the question of whether or not meaningfulness, purpose, transcendence, and connection with others through work is reserved only for the privileged.

Conceptually, the PWF (Blustein, 2008) proposes that aspects of vocational privilege precede fulfilling work experiences over time – the more privilege individuals have, the more likely they will be to enter desired occupations and gain fulfillment from this work. Previous empirical research has demonstrated that there

is a link between aspects of vocational privilege and experiencing fulfilling work. For example, Allan et al. (2014) found that people with higher social-class backgrounds were more likely to experience meaningfulness from work. Additionally, in two studies specifically examining calling, Duffy and colleagues (Duffy et al., 2013; Duffy & Autin, 2013) found that, although adults across income brackets were equally likely to perceive a calling, individuals with higher annual incomes were more likely to be living their callings. These results suggest that higher social class and income allow for the opportunity to experience more fulfilling work. As such, in the current study, we hypothesize that higher social class will significantly predict living a calling (*Hypothesis 3*).

Intriguingly, although aspects of social class have been related to meaningful work and living a calling, the correlations between these variables have been weak (Allan et al., 2014; Duffy et al., 2013; Duffy & Autin, 2013). Additionally, Duffy et al. (2013) found another social-class variable – educational attainment – to be significantly correlated to living a calling, but Duffy and Autin (2013) failed to corroborate that finding. In light of weak correlations and mixed findings, it may be that the *perception of vocational privilege* is equally important in predicting experiences in the workplace vs. the privilege afforded by higher social class. In the PWF (Blustein, 2008), this perception is referred to as work volition. Specifically, work volition is defined as the perceived capacity to make occupational choices, despite constraints (Duffy, Diemer, Perry, Laurenzi, & Torrey, 2012), and numerous studies have linked this construct to aspects of fulfilling work.

For example, work volition has been consistently, strongly correlated with job satisfaction among working adults, even after accounting for other well-established predictor variables (Duffy et al., 2015; Duffy, Bott, et al., 2013; Duffy, Diemer, et al., 2012). Additionally, work volition has been found to moderately correlate with living a calling (Duffy & Autin, 2013) and strongly correlate with work meaning (Allan et al., 2014; Duffy et al., 2015). Allan et al. also found work volition to fully mediate the link of social class to work meaning, suggesting that one reason why social class relates to more meaningful work is due to the perception of choice in one's career decision-making. These findings suggest that the perception of privilege in one's work life, or work volition, may be an equal, if not more robust, predictor of the experience of fulfilling work. As such, in the current study, we hypothesize that work volition will predict living a calling (*Hypothesis 4*).

Finally, we hypothesize that career commitment and work meaning will serve as mediators, explaining the relation between social class, work volition, and living a calling. These hypotheses are based on findings that

work meaning and career commitment were found to be building blocks of living a calling over time (Duffy et al., 2014). To specify, people who found their work to be meaningful and were committed to their career were more likely to feel that they were living their calling. Meaningful work has also been found to serve a mediating role in the relation of work volition and job satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2015). Additionally, studies have demonstrated direct links from work volition and social class to work meaning (Allan et al., 2014; Duffy et al., 2015) and a theoretical implication within the PWF (Blustein, 2008) is that individuals who have higher social class and greater freedom of choice will enter careers to which they are more committed (Blustein, 2006). As such, individuals with higher social class and work volition are proposed to be more likely to live out their calling due to increased career commitment and work meaning (*Hypotheses 5 and 6*).

### The present study

The primary goal of the present study is to examine how two aspects of vocational privilege – social class and work volition – relate to the experience of living out a calling among employed adults. As previously noted, drawing from Duffy et al.'s (2014) longitudinal findings and studies linking aspects of vocational privilege to living a calling (Allan et al., 2014; Duffy et al., 2013; Duffy & Autin, 2013), work meaning, career commitment, social class, and work volition are each hypothesized to directly predict living a calling (*Hypotheses 1–4*) and work meaning and career commitment are hypothesized to mediate the relation of social class and work volition to living a calling (*Hypotheses 5 and 6*). Along with testing these bivariate relations, we also explore how social class, work volition, and workplace experiences of work meaning and career commitment conjointly predict living a calling (see Figure 1). These hypotheses will be tested using structural equation modeling, examining the fit of

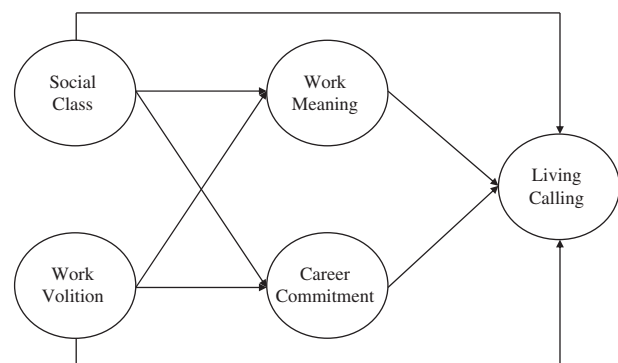


Figure 1. Hypothesized structural model.

measurement and structural model. Additionally, we will examine the strength and significance of path estimates and use bootstrapping techniques to examine indirect effects.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 361 employed adults living in the USA, of whom 213 (59%) were female, 147 (40.7%) were male, 1 (<1%) was transgender, and they had an average age of 34.57 (SD = 11.30). Participants (who were allowed to select as many as applied) mainly were self-identified as white ( $n = 291$ , 80.6%), as well as Hispanic or Latina/o American ( $n = 24$ , 6.6%), African or African-American ( $n = 22$ , 6.1%), Asian or Asian American ( $n = 20$ , 5.5%), Arab American or Middle Eastern ( $n = 1$ , <1%), Asian Indian ( $n = 4$ , 1.1%), American Indian/Native American ( $n = 9$ , 2.5%), and Other ( $n = 2$ , <1%). In terms of employment class, of those who reported, 268 (74.4%) were employed full-time and 92 were employed part-time (25.5%). For income, respondents reported incomes of less than \$25,000 (72, 19.9%), \$25,000–\$50,000 (116, 32.1%), \$51,000–\$75,000 (86, 23.8%), \$76,000–\$100,000 (44, 12.2%), \$101,000–\$125,000 (21, 5.8%), \$126,000–\$150,000 (12, 3.3%), \$151,000–\$175,000 (5, 1.4%), \$176,000–\$200,000 (3, .8%), and above \$200,000 (2, .6%). For educational attainment, of those who responded, our participants reported some high school (1, .3%), high school degree (36, 10%), trade/vocational school (17, 4.7%), some college (110, 30.5%), college degree (129, 35.7%), and professional/graduate degree (65, 18.2%). Finally, of those who responded, participants reported the following childhood social classes: lower (38, 10.5%), working (114, 31.6%), middle (144, 39.9%), upper middle (61, 16.9%), and upper (1, .3%), and current social classes: lower (25, 6.9%), working (126, 34.9%), middle (172, 47.6%), and upper middle (38, 10.5%).

### Instruments

#### Social class

Participant's social class was assessed by three distinct, but related, indicators. Following guidelines proposed by Diemer, Mistry, Wadsworth, López, and Reimers (2013) and Liu, Soleck, Hopps, Dunston, and Pickett (2004), two of our indicators assessed participants' view of their social class. One indicator asked 'How would you identify your current social class' with the following options: lower class, working class, middle class, upper middle class, and upper class. The second indicator was the ladder instrument developed by Adler, Epel, Castellazzo,

and Ickovics (2000). With this instrument, participants were shown a ladder with 10 rungs and given the following statement:

Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in our society. At the top of the ladder are the people who are the best off, those who have the most money, most education, and best jobs. At the bottom are the people who are the worst off, those who have the least money, least education, and worst jobs or no jobs.

Participants were then asked to choose which rung on the ladder best represents where they think they are. A number of studies have used this instrument to assess social class and have found scores to relate to a variety of work and well-being outcomes (e.g. Adler & Snibbe, 2003; Operario, Adler, & Williams, 2004; Singh-Manoux, Marmot, & Adler, 2005).

To assess additional indicators of social class, participants were asked about their educational attainment and average yearly income, which are displayed above in the Participants section. Scores from the social class, ladder social class, and annual income indicators all strongly correlated with each other ( $r$ 's .52–.67). However, educational attainment was only a weak moderate predictor with each of these variables ( $r$ 's .26–.33). Given this finding, only the three highly correlated variables were used as indicators of social class in the overall model tests.

#### Work volition

The degree to which individuals felt choice in their work lives, despite constraints, was measured with the Work Volition Scale (Duffy, Diemer et al., 2012). The scale consists of 13 items with three subscales assessing volition, financial constraints, and structural constraints. Participants answered items on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Sample items include 'I feel total control over my job choices,' (volition) 'Due to my financial situation, I need to take any job I can find,' (financial constraints) and 'Negative factors outside my personal control had a large impact on my current career choice' (structural constraints). Duffy, Diemer, and colleagues found the three subscales to evidence adequate internal consistency reliability, ranging from .70 to .81, and found the total scale to have good internal consistency reliability (.84). Additionally, scores on the instrument have been found to correlate in the expected directions with job satisfaction, work self-efficacy, social class, and living a calling (Allan et al., 2014; Duffy et al., 2013; Duffy & Autin, 2013; Duffy, Diemer et al., 2012). In the current study, the estimated internal consistency reliability of scores for the entire scale was .91 and for the three subscales was as follows: .83 (volition), .87 (financial constraints), and .79 (structural constraints).

### Work meaning

The degree to which participants perceived their work as meaningful was measured with the Work as Meaning Inventory (WAMI; Steger et al., 2012). The WAMI contains 10 items which were answered on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The WAMI consists of three subscales: positive meaning, meaning-making through work, and greater good motivations. Example items from each subscale are as follows, respectively: 'I have found a meaningful career,' 'My work helps me understand myself,' and 'The work I do serves a greater purpose.' Steger et al. found scores from the total scale to have an estimated internal consistency of  $\alpha = .93$  and internal consistency reliabilities on the subscales ranged from .82 to .89. Scores from the WAMI have correlated in the expected directions with living a calling, career commitment, and job satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2013, 2014; Steger et al., 2012). In the current study, the estimated internal consistency reliability of scores for the entire scale was .96 and for the three subscales was as follows: .94 (positive meaning), .91 (meaning-making through work), and .93 (greater good motivations).

### Career commitment

The degree to which participants felt committed to their careers was measured by the Career Commitment Scale (Blau, 1985, 1988). This scale contains seven items which participants answered on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Example items include, 'I like my job too well to give it up' and 'My current job is an ideal line of work.' Blau found scale scores to have good internal consistency reliability (.83–.87) and to negatively correlate with career withdrawal intentions ( $r = -.41$ ). Many recent studies have used this scale, finding it to correlate in the expected directions with living a calling, work meaning, and job satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2013, 2014; Duffy, Bott et al., 2012). In the present study, the estimated internal consistency reliability of scale scores was .88.

### Living a calling

The degree to which participants felt that they were currently living out their calling was measured with the Living Calling Scale (LCS; Duffy, Allan, & Bott, 2012). This scale contains six items which participants answered on a seven-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. An additional choice was 'Not applicable – I don't have a calling.' Example items include, 'I have regular opportunities to live out my calling' and 'I am currently engaging in activities that align with my calling.' Of the entire group, 38 participants answered that

they did not have a calling on at least one item and were thus removed from analyses (see Procedure for further elaboration). Duffy, Allan et al. found scales' scores demonstrated strong internal consistency reliability (.95). Additionally, many recent studies have found scores on this scale to correlate in the expected directions with work meaning, career commitment, and job satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2013, 2014; Duffy, Allan, et al., 2012). In the current study, the estimated internal consistency reliability of scale scores was .96.

### Procedure

We recruited participants through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online service where individuals from all over the world can participate in research for payment. MTurk has become a very popular way to collect data – particularly data from adults and diverse populations – within social science research (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013) as well as within counseling psychology research (Dahling, Melloy, & Thompson, 2013; Duffy et al., 2014; Hardin & Donaldson, 2014). Duffy et al. (2014) provide a detailed review of the strengths and weaknesses of MTurk and found that most scholars agree that gathering data through this method is equally as reliable as other online methods. Additionally, scores on a variety of vocational instruments (including those used in the current study) are comparable to in person collected data or data collected through other online methods (Duffy et al., 2014).

In the current study, after receiving IRB approval, we recruited participants who lived in the USA, were employed at least part-time, and were over the age of 18. On the MTurk website, individuals interested in participating were asked if they would like to take a survey about their work lives and were directed to click on a survey link if they met the desired qualifications. Participants were then directly taken to a survey hosted on Qualtrics where they gave their informed consent prior to participating. Participants were compensated US\$.50 through the MTurk system for taking the survey.

An initial group of 542 participants began the survey. Of this group, 114 participants were removed who failed to answer and/or answered incorrectly to one of four validity checks inserted in the survey. Next, 24 participants were removed who were not employed at least part-time and 5 were removed who failed to answer one of the social-class questions. Finally, 38 participants were removed who answered 'Not applicable – I don't have a calling' on any of the LCS items, which is a procedure completed by numerous previous studies using this same instrument (Duffy et al., 2013, 2014; Duffy, Allan et al., 2012; Duffy & Autin, 2013). In the current study, we were interested in predictors of living a calling for those

who perceive a calling. Thus, given that living out a calling is predicated upon perceiving a calling, removing these participants from the analyses was required. We examined whether excluding this group from our analyses affected the predictor variables, such that the sample of individuals who have a calling to some degree might experience more vocational privilege than the sample who doesn't. *T*-tests were computed and no significant differences were found between those who had a calling ( $n = 361$ ) and those who did not ( $n = 38$ ) in terms of income, current social class, ladder social class, or work volition. And akin to previous studies (Duffy et al., 2013; Duffy & Autin, 2013), perceiving a calling in the current sample was unrelated to aspects of vocational privilege, and thus we felt confident removing these 38 participants did not result in a more privileged sample. In total, these removals resulted in a final participant total of 361, all of which had complete data on all of the instruments.

## Results

### Preliminary analyses

We conducted a number of preliminary analyses prior to testing the formal hypotheses. Of the four total scales and three indicators of social class, only income was skewed at a level over 1 (1.26), indicating that participants were more likely to answer at the low end of the income scale. In order to construct a more normal curve, we grouped all participants making more than \$100,000 into one group. This normalized the skewness of income (.46) and all other variables were left in their original form. We examined whether there were any significant gender differences on all study variables: all indicators of social class, work volition, career commitment, work meaning, and job satisfaction. *T*-tests confirmed no significant group differences on any of these variables, suggesting it was appropriate to analyze these data using

the entire sample. Table 1 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all seven variables used in the structural models, as well as childhood social class and educational attainment. Living a calling was found to weakly to moderately correlate with most indicators of social class, moderately correlate with work volition, and strongly correlate with career commitment and work meaning.

### Measurement model

A measurement model was constructed and tested with the five latent constructs (social class, work volition, work meaning, career commitment, and living a calling). As recommended by experts (Weston & Gore, 2006), each of these latent constructs was represented by three observed indicators. For social class, these indicators were subjective current social class, ladder social class, and annual income. For work volition and work meaning, these indicators were the three subscales for each instrument. As the living a calling and career commitment scales do not have subscales, three item parcels were created for each variable (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). To assign items to parcels for both scales, we conducted exploratory factor analyses using principal axis factoring for the items in the scales, then we rank-ordered items in terms of the strength of loading (Velez & Moradi, 2012). Then, we grouped items together in three parcels, respectively, to maximize the equality of factor loadings per parcel. The correlation of the two items for each LCS parcel was as follows: Parcel 1 ( $r = .73$ ), Parcel 2 ( $r = .79$ ), and Parcel 3 ( $r = .83$ ). The correlation/internal consistency reliability of the two, two-item parcels and one three-item parcel for career commitment was as follows: Parcel 1 ( $r = .55$ ), Parcel 2 ( $r = .45$ ), and Parcel 3 ( $\alpha = .71$ ).

Using these observed indicators, we constructed and tested the measurement model with EQS 6.2, positioning

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations ( $N = 361$ ).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Childhood social class	–								
2. Current social class	.30	–							
3. Ladder social class	.27	.67	–						
4. Annual Income	.11	.63	.52	–					
5. Educational attainment	.10	.28	.33	.26	–				
6. Work volition	.07	.31	.37	.32	.19	–			
7. Work meaning	.03	.25	.33	.18	.23	.54	–		
8. Career commitment	.06	.23	.27	.24	.15	.61	.67	–	
9. Living calling	.06	.28	.32	.17	.20	.48	.78	.65	–
<i>M</i>	2.65	2.62	5.10	2.64	5.47	56.51	45.48	21.74	23.90
SD	.90	.77	1.69	1.23	1.16	15.45	14.93	6.65	11.26

Notes: Correlations  $>.11$  significant at the  $p < .05$  level. Only current social class, ladder social class, and annual income were used as social-class indicators in the measurement and structural model.

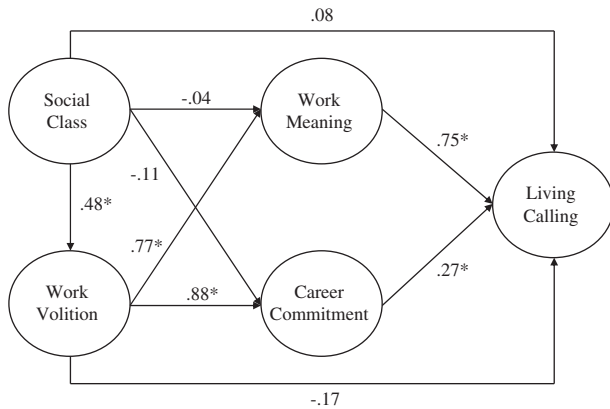


Figure 2. Structural model including path from social class to work volition. \* $p < .05$ .

each variable as being correlated. We used the comparative fit index (CFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) to assess fit (Duffy et al., 2014; Hu & Bentler, 1999). The CFI compares the proposed model to an independent model that considers all study variables to be uncorrelated; values greater than .95 represent good fitting models (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The RMSEA tests how well the proposed model would fit population covariance matrices if the optimal parameter estimates were available; the RMSEA takes into account degrees of freedom and, as such, is sensitive to model complexity. Values equal to or less than .06 suggest good fit and values less than .10 suggest adequate fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The measurement model was an adequate fit to the data:  $\chi^2(80, N = 361) = 228.81$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .97, RMSEA = .07.

Given that living a calling, career commitment, and work meaning were so highly correlated ( $r$ 's .65–.78), we also tested several alternative measurement models. First, we examined a three-factor model where these variables were hypothesized to load onto one factor and the other two factors were work volition and social class. This model was not an adequate fit with the data:  $\chi^2(87, N = 361) = 911.15$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .82, RMSEA = .16. Second, we tested a four-factor model where only living a calling and work meaning were set on the same factor. This model was also not an adequate fit with the data:  $\chi^2(84, N = 361) = 510.76$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .91, RMSEA = .12. Finally, a potential confound existed with one of the social-class indicators – the ladder instrument. Specifically, in the instructions, on the high and low side of the ladder, participants were asked to use people's jobs – best or worst – as indicators of social standing. It is possible this could have been used as a proxy for personal job satisfaction vs. social class. As such, we tested a measurement model which removed this as one of the social-class indicators, resulting in the following model fit which was nearly identical fit statistics or the original

measurement model:  $\chi^2(67, N = 361) = 205.21$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .97, RMSEA = .08. Given all of these findings, we proceeded to test the structural models with the five-factor model and all three indicators of social class.

### Structural models

We tested the hypothesized structural model seen in Figure 1. The model was not an adequate fit to the data:  $\chi^2(82, N = 361) = 334.77$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .94, RMSEA = .09. We examined the model for any potential modifications and noted that the moderate relations found between the indicators of social class and work volition were not included in the model. Although previous studies have linked indicators of social class and work volition (e.g. Allan et al., 2014) and this is a theoretically implied connection within the PWF, we failed to include this path in our original model. Accordingly, a path from social class to work volition was included and upon doing so, the model was an adequate fit to the data:  $\chi^2(81, N = 361) = 277.23$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .96, RMSEA = .08,  $\chi^2 \Delta = 57.54$ ,  $p < .05$ . As seen in Figure 2, career commitment and work meaning were each significant predictors of living a calling; work volition significantly predicted career commitment and work meaning and social class significantly predicted work volition. All indicators loaded significantly onto their factors at .7 or higher. In total, the model accounted for 68% of the variance in living a calling.

When conducting SEM analysis, methodological experts (Mueller & Hancock, 2008) recommend comparing the hypothesized model to an alternative model. Guided by our findings from the primary model, we concluded that an equally plausible alternative model would involve removing the direct paths from social class to work meaning, career commitment, and living a calling and only retaining the direct path from social class to work volition. This makes the model much more parsimonious by removing three non-significant paths and suggests that work volition is a full mediator linking social class to work meaning, career commitment, and in turn living a calling. In other words, the reason why higher social class would relate to increased work meaning and career commitment is due to the perception of choice in one's career. The model was also an adequate fit to the data with almost identical fit:  $\chi^2(84, N = 361) = 283.49$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .96, RMSEA = .08,  $\chi^2 \Delta = 6.26$ ,  $ns$ . Given that this model (Figure 3) was more parsimonious while having nearly identical fit, we used it to test for indirect effects.

### Indirect effects

Indirect effects were assessed for the following hypothesized relations: (1) work volition to living a calling as



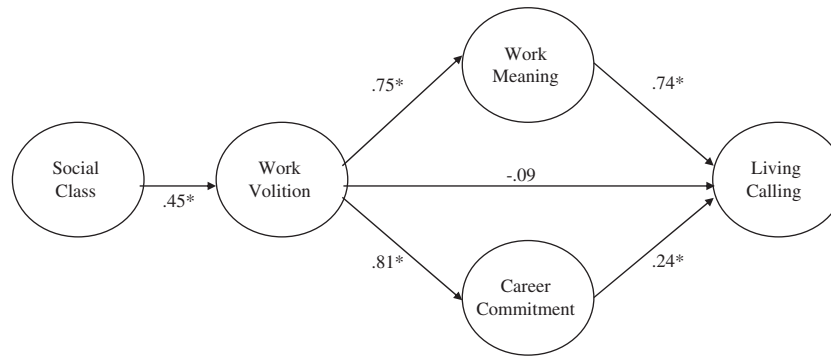


Figure 3. Alternative and final structural model.  $*p < .05$ .

mediated by work meaning; (2) work volition to living a calling as mediated by career commitment. Additionally, given our use of an alternative model, we examined two non-hypothesized paths: (3) social class to work meaning as mediated by work volition and (4) social class to career commitment as mediated by work volition. We used bootstrapping techniques with 5000 bootstrapped samples of the data at a 95% confidence interval to determine all indirect effects (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007). We calculated the mean parameter estimates of all 5,000 samples. According to Shrout and Bolger (2002), if the confidence intervals for the mediation models do not include zero, the mediations are statistically significant at  $p < .05$ . The indirect effect of work volition on living a calling mediated by work meaning was significant, (95% CI [.47, .83],  $\beta = .63$ ,  $SE = .09$ ), as was the indirect of work volition on living a calling mediated by career commitment, (95% CI [.08, .40],  $\beta = .23$ ,  $SE = .08$ ). The indirect effect of social class on work meaning mediated by work volition was significant, (95% CI [.30, .59],  $\beta = .44$ ,  $SE = .07$ ), as was the indirect effect of social class on career commitment mediated by work volition, (95% CI [.33, .60],  $\beta = .46$ ,  $SE = .07$ ).

## Discussion

The primary aim of the current study was to examine how aspects of vocational privilege – social class and work volition – related to living out a career calling. Specifically, we tested a model predicting living a calling from social class and work volition, with work meaning and career commitment as mediators. Preliminary analyses demonstrated that work volition had moderate to strong positive relations with work meaning, career commitment, and living a calling, whereas these relations were more modest with measures of social class. Additionally, as found in previous work (Allan et al., 2014), work volition moderately correlated with indicators of social class in the positive direction. Unlike more

objective indicators of vocational privilege (e.g. income and social class), this construct specifically refers to the *perceived* freedom of choice in work, and this moderate relation suggests there is more to feelings of volition than high social class. In addition to the role that social class may play in garnering positive workplace experiences, the *perception* of choice may be equally important. Thus, feelings of volition may extend beyond factors related to social class; one with high social class may still feel constrained in their work, which in turn might limit their ability to live out a perceived calling.

Both the proposed and the alternative structural models demonstrated adequate fit to the data. However, in the alternative model, the three non-significant direct paths from social class to work meaning, career commitment, and living a calling were removed, allowing for a more parsimonious model and demonstrating that social class linked to work meaning and career commitment via work volition.

## Direct effects

Hypotheses regarding direct effects were partially supported. Work volition was found to directly, positively predict both career commitment and work meaning. Although initial hypotheses regarding social class were not confirmed, *post hoc* modifications to the model indicated a moderate, positive relation between social class and work volition. This suggests that the positive, preliminary correlations between social class and positive work variables might be explained by increased work volition. This is consistent with theoretical propositions asserted in Blustein's (2006) PWF. Particularly, given the increased access to financial, social, and educational resources to those of higher class backgrounds, it makes conceptual sense that these individuals perceive greater work choice (Blustein, 2006). This finding provides empirical support for Blustein's assertion that access to social and economic resources might impact an individual's experience of satisfaction and fulfillment on the job.

The above results suggest that it may not be social class, per se, that predicts living a calling. Rather, it appears to be the heightened perception of job choice that accompanies a higher social-class background that in turn relates to experiencing more fulfilling work. This was confirmed with findings that work volition strongly predicted both work meaning and career commitment. This suggests that perceived freedom of work choice may play a key role in experiencing meaningfulness at work as well as being committed to one's career. These findings are supported by previous research linking work volition to positive work outcomes (Allan et al., 2014; Duffy & Autin, 2013; Duffy et al., 2011). Current and previous findings suggest that perceived job constraints and confinement to a particular job limit one's ability to find meaning in that work. Further, these perceived constraints limit the likelihood that one has intentions of staying in that career long term. Although future research is needed to understand the underlying mechanisms of these relations, current findings point to perceived choice as critical to the experience of meaning and commitment at work.

In addition, hypotheses regarding direct effects of work meaning and career commitment on living one's calling were confirmed. Work meaning strongly predicted living a calling and career commitment moderately predicted living a calling, with higher levels of meaning and commitment relating to a greater likelihood of living a calling. These findings are supported by previous work identifying work meaning and career commitment as key in the experience of living a calling (cf. Duffy & Dik, 2013). Specifically, meaningfulness is identified as core to the experience of living a calling across definitions and theoretical explanations (Duffy & Dik, 2013), and career commitment has consistently been linked to living a calling across empirical studies (e.g. Duffy et al., 2011, 2013; Duffy, Bott et al., 2012). Moreover, results are supported by recent longitudinal data, positioning living a calling as an outcome variable (Duffy et al., 2014). It is likely that experiencing meaning and feeling long-term commitment to a particular career path results in the conceptualization of purposeful, prosocial work that we define as a career calling.

### *Indirect effects*

Hypotheses regarding indirect effects were also partially supported. Specifically, work meaning and career commitment fully mediated the relation from work volition to living a calling. This suggests that the variance in living a calling attributed to work volition was due to the fact that those with higher levels of work volition were more likely to find meaning in their work and be committed to their careers. These findings are particularly interesting because they point to potential possibilities of

constructing the experience of living a calling indirectly through increasing work volition, work meaning, and career commitment. Previous research has shown those with higher levels of work volition to be significantly more likely to report living a calling (Duffy & Autin, 2013). It may be that perceiving greater freedom of work choice lays the foundation for experiencing careers that provide optimal opportunity for meaning and factors leading to long-term commitment. Additionally, as work volition fully mediated the relation of social class to career commitment and work meaning, it may represent the gateway from more objective indicators of vocational privilege to subjective feelings of fulfilling work. What is clear is that the experience at work is what drives seeing one's job as a calling, and one way to have positive experiences with work may be to have greater work volition.

### *Practical implications*

Results of the current study have several implications for practitioners, particularly those working with individuals on work-related issues. Previous research shows that many individuals report having a calling, but few report actually living their calling (Duffy et al., 2013; Duffy & Autin, 2013). Given the intrinsic reward in living out a calling, it is a desirable outcome for individuals who report having a calling. Work meaning and career commitment emerged as direct predictors of living a calling. Thus, practitioners might work with individuals to cultivate these constructs in their daily work lives. Previous scholars have provided recommendations for enhancing a felt sense of meaning at work. Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) work on 'job crafting' described ways in which workers might structure their jobs to align more closely with needs and values. For example, workers might benefit from emphasizing tasks that provide prosocial benefit through both psychological reframing and shifting amount of time spent on these tasks.

Although workers may benefit from job crafting techniques, it is important that they feel volition in choosing their work. Results from the current study suggest that although social class is weakly correlated with positive work outcomes, this is largely due to work volition, given the fact that work volition fully mediated these relations. Furthermore, work volition appears to be the stronger and more robust predictor of these variables. Thus, interventions targeting work volition may be useful in working with individuals from a variety of demographic backgrounds, but particularly those from lower social-class backgrounds. Clearly, the most important part of increasing volition in this population is working at a systemic level to remove objective barriers (Blustein et al., 2008). However, at the individual level, practitioners might work with individuals to (a) raise critical

consciousness and (b) generate creative strategies for overcoming structural barriers.

Critical consciousness refers to a person's awareness of systemic inequalities that impact their experience of the world (Ali, 2013). Recent research shows that people who receive interventions that raise critical consciousness have better vocational outcomes, such as goal achievement progress (Chronister & McWhirter, 2006). Scholars suggest that raising one's critical consciousness results in an increased engagement and motivation to achieve due to a desire to deconstruct inequality in existing opportunity structures. Thus, we recommend that practitioners work with individuals to help them gain insight into how their environment might pose barriers on their work choice. Once barriers are identified and connected to the broader societal structure, individuals might benefit from discussing how they might work within their locus of control to generate strategies to overcome those barriers.

### Limitations and future directions

Results of the current study should be considered in light of a number of limitations. First, we utilized cross-sectional methodology, ruling out causal interpretation. Although previous longitudinal studies support the direction of proposed model paths, it will be important to confirm them in the future using longitudinal or experimental methods. Given the relatively recent findings of living a calling as an outcome variable, this should be confirmed with replication studies in the future. Second, although our sample included breadth of diversity with regard to income, education, and social-class background, it was predominately white. An important area for future research is studying work volition and calling among diverse populations, representing diverse work experiences. An area that might be important for future study is the impact of discrimination and occupational climate on individuals with minority identities including ethnic/racial minorities, sexual minorities, people from low social-class backgrounds, and women.

Third, results did not support social class as a significant predictor of work meaning, career commitment, and living a calling in our hypothesized model, but did support work volition as a significant predictor. Given that social class and work volition are moderately related, future researchers might further explore the role of work volition in positive work outcomes. Additionally, future research might benefit from understanding how a sense of work volition can be developed, especially in individuals with a large number of financial and structural barriers. An interesting area of study might be the extent to which psychological characteristics impact work volition and how these might be developed through interventions. Likewise, future research in this area might benefit from

investigations focused on increasing work meaning and career commitment as a strategy for indirectly increasing sense of lived calling.

### Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the relation of social class and work volition to the experience of living out a calling. Specifically, we tested a model predicting living a calling from social class and work volition with work meaning and career commitment as mediators. Results indicated that work volition, not social class, predicted living a calling as mediated by work meaning and career commitment. However, social class did link to work meaning and career commitment via work volition. These results contribute to the literature by suggesting that the positive relation between social class and positive work variables might be explained by the ability for those from higher social-class backgrounds to feel a freedom of work choice. Practical implications include utilizing these findings to enhance clients' sense of felt calling, particularly those who have low levels of volition.

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