



# Development of Character Prospection in Emerging Adult Search and Presence of Calling

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## Introduction

- Emerging adulthood is a developmental time period characterized by identity formation, focus on the self, and wide-ranging opportunities for exploration (Arnett, 2007). It is considered a particularly important period for seeking life roles that provide a sense of purpose or meaningfulness. It is also considered a critical formative period for moral maturity in adulthood, and for personality changes that relate closely to character development (Noftle, 2015).
- Emerging adulthood is characterized by broader and longer formal education, delayed marriage and parenthood, increased opportunities for women, changing dynamics in romantic relationships, instability, and identity exploration (Arnett, 2000; 2012).
- Sense of calling is reported as a mechanism that acts as a catalyst for multifaceted personal growth in emerging adulthood (Bott & Duffy, 2015).
- Calling is described as a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, regarding life roles that are meaningful and other-oriented (Dik & Duffy, 2009). This model posits two overarching and overlapping aspects: presence and search. Research supports calling's association with a variety of positive career-related and general well-being variables (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Dik & Duffy, 2009), especially in college students and working adults (Dik, Sargent, & Steger, 2008; Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Bott, 2012).
- Character prospection is a higher-order thinking skill that encompasses how people foresee their character changing over a given period (Noftle, 2015).

## Method

### Participants

Data were collected on a total of 308 undergraduate students enrolled in PSY 1200 Psychology as Vocation and PSY 4899 Senior Seminar in Psychology at Seattle Pacific University over the two academic years of 2016-17 and 2017-18.

**Longitudinal data.** Longitudinal data were collected from that subset of students for which complete sets of data were available and matches could be made between the data collected in PSY 1200 Psychology as Vocation (Time 1) and PSY 4899 Senior Seminar in Psychology (Time 2). This sample included 43 students: 8 men, 34 women, and 1 gender nonconforming; ages at time point 1 ranged from 18 to 25 ( $M = 19.41$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ ), and ages at time point 2 ranged from 19 to 26 ( $M = 21.62$ ,  $SD = 2.16$ ).

**Cross sectional data.** Cross sectional data were collected from the total sample ( $n = 308$ , 236 women, 66 men, 3 gender non-conforming, ages 18 – 35 ( $M = 20.66$ ,  $SD = 2.46$ ) in PSY 1200 Psychology as vocation ( $n = 176$ ), PSY 4899 Senior Seminar in Psychology ( $n = 132$ ).

### Materials.

Demographic questionnaire

*VIA Survey of Character Strengths* (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

- Six Virtues: Wisdom, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence
- 24 Strengths (e.g., Spirituality, Humor, Love of Learning)

*Calling and Vocation Questionnaire* (CVQ; Dik, Eldridge, Steger, & Duffy, 2012)

- Scales: Presence, Search
- Subscales: Transcendent Summons, Purposeful Work, Prosocial Orientation

### Procedures.

Informed consent materials were explained and signatures collected. Participants then provided demographic data and completed the Calling and Vocation Questionnaire in Qualtrics. Participants were then directed to the VIA Institute on Character website, where they completed the VIA Survey instrument. A debriefing was distributed at the close of the data collection session. The present study reports findings from the CVQ data only.

## Major Findings

### Longitudinal Analyses

Two of our three hypotheses were supported (see Table 1). Students in Senior Seminar had significantly higher CVQ Presence scores than they did in Psychology as Vocation, and students in Psychology as Vocation had significantly higher CVQ Search scores than they did CVQ Presence. Our third hypothesis was that Senior Seminar students would have significantly higher CVQ Presence scores than CVQ Search. While this finding did not reach statistical significance, and had a small effect size, it was in the direction of our prediction.

**Table 1**

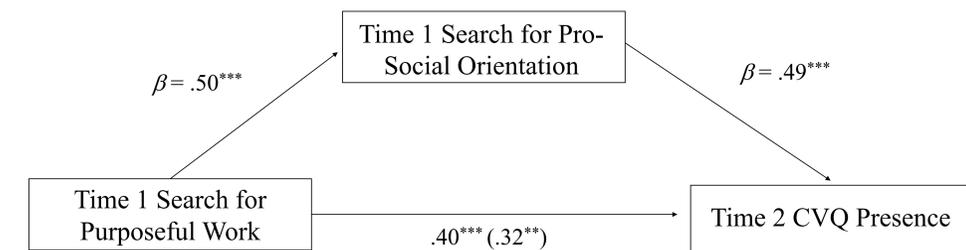
*Correlated t Tests Between Time 1 and Time 2*

Variable	t value	df	p value	Cohen's d
Time 2 presence and Time 1 presence	3.89	42	.000	.56
Time 1 search and Time 1 presence	2.61	42	.013	.48
Time 2 search and Time 2 presence	0.96	42	.350	.17

Search for Pro-Social Orientation at Time 1 mediated the relationship between Search for Purposeful Work at Time 1 and CVQ Presence at Time 2.

Mediated effect = .15\*

Prop. Mediated = .48\* ( 48% of variance accounted for)



**Figure 1.** *Prosocial Orientation Mediation Model*

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

## Cross - Sectional Analyses

No interpretable differences were found between Psychology as Vocation and Senior Seminar students on Search and Presence in cross-sectional analyses. See Table 2 below.

**Table 2**

*Search and Presence Differences in PSY 1200 & PSY 4899*

Variable	t value	df	Cohen's d
Search	.396	294	.047
Presence	.241	294	.03

## Discussion

The finding of a significant increase in CVQ Presence between Psychology as Vocation and Senior Seminar confirms Noftle's (2015) conception of "character prospection" in that there is sustained growth in the future oriented perception of purpose, calling, and vocation. Noftle presented emerging adults as planning and executing changes to aspects of their character in terms of future aspirations and motivations. These were operationalized in our study using calling and vocation.

Search for Prosocial Orientation at Time 1 as a mediator between Search for Purposeful Work at Time 1 and CVQ Presence at Time 2 may reflect the judgment of many graduating Psychology seniors that a calling to which one commits should be directed to better the human condition.

The lack of difference between Search and Presence among Senior Seminar students (Time 2) was not predicted. This finding may reflect the unsettledness of emerging adulthood in general. This is particularly so for seniors in college, who may feel a presence of calling but also a simultaneous search for how to live out that calling.

Finally, our cross-sectional analyses did not support our expectation of greater Search in Psychology as Vocation students and greater Presence in Senior Seminar students. This finding likely reflects the lack of clear time separation between the two courses in our earlier samples.