On changing academic majors in college

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ON CHANGING ACADEMIC MAJORS IN COLLEGE

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ....................................... 1

Chapter
  I. SOURCES OF STABLE CHOICES OF ACADEMIC MAJOR . 17
  II. SOURCES OF UNSTABLE CHOICES OF ACADEMIC MAJOR 33
  III. STUDENTS WHO CHANGE ACADEMIC MAJORS ........ 61
  IV. CLASSIFICATION OF CHANGES OF ACADEMIC MAJOR . 77
  V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS ..................... 111

APPENDIX ............................................. 127

BIBLIOGRAPHY ......................................... 133
INTRODUCTION

One of the most crucial and far-reaching decisions that a college student can make is to change academic majors. Not only does it stand to affect his occupational career, but it is one of the more dramatic moments in the predominantly gradual process of his self-discovery. It is a point at which he is called upon to state rather definitely "I am not that, but this kind of person."

Hence at the outset the province of sociological inquiry is entered. For both "that" and "this kind of person" are obviously being defined by the student's membership in his former and new academic groups. His identity is being formed by his academic major because in our society a man is judged by others, and he judges himself, by the work he does; and an academic major is the college student's work - the college counterpart of his occupation. It does as much to shape his college life as an occupation will his later life. It determines where and how he will spend much of his time, what skills he will learn, and what kinds of contacts he will have with what kinds of people.

If changing majors involves a change in roles as dominant as this, it also necessitates some significant transformations of the student's self-concept. And it
is here, on such turning-points, that it is important to focus social psychological attention if the processes are to be understood whereby the individual acquires and sheds loyalties to the groups from which he gains his social identity.

These decisive turning-points in academic identity also have obvious relevance to an area of sociology still in its early stages of development -- career lines. There is still much to be learned about how careers are perceived by students and how their social experiences point them toward their enduring vocational roles which characterize adult life in our society.

Thus far we have seen three of the more salient and general justifications for a sociological investigation of changing academic majors in college:

1. It is part of an important, decision-making class of social behavior.

2. The process clearly illustrates a problematic transformation of students' self-concepts through an exchange of identifiable academic roles.

3. Changing majors is significantly relevant to the motivation and progress of student careers in particular, and occupational careers in general.
Previous Work Done

In order to become sensitized to some of the essential sociological matters that would merit attention in this inquiry I studied the previous research done in the area. I was unable to find any published studies dealing expressly with college students who had changed academic majors. Therefore, for the theoretical and substantive foundation of this study it was necessary to draw upon literature in closely related areas such as: vocational choice and stability; career lines; and vocations as they relate to the sociological phenomena of role and self.

There are several sociologists who have contributed to the necessary conceptual framework. Among the more significant are: Everett C. Hughes, a pioneer in the field of occupational sociology, and Donald E. Super, widely respected for his work in the psychology of careers.

Other researchers who provided useful concepts and insights for this study are Howard S. Becker and James W. Carper.¹ These investigators have collaborated in extensive interviews of graduate students in physiology, philosophy, and mechanical engineering to study mechanisms and obstacles in the development of identification with an occupation.

An interdisciplinary study by Eli Ginzberg and associates was one of the first attempts to actually obtain data in the important area of occupational choice. Although their theoretical proposals have been frequently criticized as overly ambitious for their limited data (91 single interviews with students ranging from 6th graders through college graduates), their study was suggestive of research procedures and hypotheses which were used to advantage in this study.

The one study most closely paralleling this research is the unpublished Ph. D. thesis of Archibald Macintosh who studied the student body of Haverford College (495 males) in regard to the stability of their vocational goals.


2There was one postulate by Ginzberg that unexpectedly stirred up my personal interest in the study. I had just recently shifted my own vocational aim from music education to sociology, when I read his conclusion: a realistic occupational choice "inevitably involves a compromise," i.e., a giving up of unattainable aspirations in favor of more limited ones. (ibid., p. 141.)

But I felt, somewhat defensively, that I for one had done no such thing! Rather, it seemed as if I had chosen a new a more realistic vocational aim that was actually higher than my previous one. To prove I was not just deluding myself in this, I wanted to obtain more supporting data from others who had also changed their vocational goals. Now admittedly, this is not one of the more widely recommended motivations for a scientific study, but it nonetheless was one source of my sustained interest in the research project.

directed attention to the importance of the particular vocation and the relationship of the individual student to that vocation as factors determining the constancy of vocational goals.

Further Exploration and Objectives

Because of this dearth of previous literature I had acquired a plethora of hunches hut very few applicable hypotheses from reviewing it. However, while I had been exploring the written material I had also been interviewing students to get phenomenological clues to essential elements, patterns and processes involved in changing majors. In an exploratory way, constantly shifting my sights and reconstructing my interview questions, I interviewed twelve students, both male and female, who had changed majors among a wide variety of academic fields.

It was immediately apparent from the interviews that changing majors is a form of "mass" behavior. For there had been only negligible interaction between students as they had made their separate selections of new majors to meet their own individual needs. Changing majors was apparently not unlike that of other consumers of non-academic values, making their separate selections in non-academic settings. Hence, the changers of major are more accurately described not as an interacting group, but as a social category of individuals having in common the experience of
changing majors.

From the exploratory interviews and the review of literature I knew that there were four main questions the study should aim to provide at least partial answers for:

1. What are the social influences predisposing students to stable and unstable choices of academic major?
2. Who are the students who change majors? How are they distinguishable, if at all, from the students who do not change majors?
3. How can the various changes of major be classified?
4. What functions do changing academic majors serve in the evolving self-conceptions of the students who change?

The Sample

The exploratory interviews were valuable in still another way. The reported responses were so irregular because of the individual differences in age, sex, academic major, ambitions, etc., that I decided my inquiry would be more fruitful if it were more clearly focused in certain respects.

I decided not to interview female and foreign students, to avoid the complications introduced by the variant
career patterns and ambitions of these groups.

Since some freshman and sophomore students view their changes of major as almost inconsequential, or as a matter of course, I limited the final interviewees to juniors and seniors. The exploratory interviews indicated that their decisions were more crucial, more consciously thought through, and more revealing of insights into the decision-making process than those of underclassmen.

For purposes of comparative analysis I decided to select my sample from three different academic fields. Also for comparative purposes I wanted to select three categories of students: (1) students who had recently changed into the major (Changers-in), (2) students who had recently changed out of the major (Changers-out), and (3) students who had been in the major at least a year and a half (Non-changers).

The faculty adviser for the thesis, Dr. Raymond L. Gold, suggested that the sample include 45 students. If there were to be three categories of informants from each of the three academic fields, this called for selecting 15 students from each academic field: five Changers-in, five Changers-out, and five Non-changers. Combining the categories from all three academic fields there was a total of 15 Changers-in, 15 Changers-out, and 15 Non-changers. Thus the three Change categories could be studied comparatively, as could the effects of the three different academic majors on the decisions to change majors.
I originally intended to select academic fields which were as similar as possible to the three diversified departments investigated by Becker and Carper: physiology, mechanical engineering and philosophy. However, in the small university of our study (approximately 3400 students) I encountered the problem of finding departments with enough junior and senior men who had changed into and out, within the last year.

I finally settled on the fields of business administration, geology and liberal arts, expecting their differences to have observable influences on the nature of students' attractions, dissociations and commitments relative to them.

The Interviews

In all, I formally interviewed 57 students, in 12 exploratory and 45 final interviews. The interviews took place in an office on campus and lasted from an hour to an hour and a half. On the basis of the exploratory interviews I constructed a final interview guide with some 30 basic questions to be used with the last 45 interviewees.

1 Becker, American Journal of Sociology, 61, 289-98.

2 The subjects of this study were attending a state university in sparsely populated and rural Montana, which may recruit from lower levels in the socio-economic class structure. For this reason, it is possible and even likely that there are important differences between them and students in the same fields at other kinds of universities.

3 See Interview Questionnaire on page 127 below.
Although all the interviews were tape recorded, only the first twelve were transcribed verbatim. For the final forty-five I constructed a guide to facilitate the codification, supplementing this guide with transcriptions of those portions of the interviews which showed promise of being suggestive or illustrative of significant matters. In this manner I was able to boil down the material to manageable size and still preserve the informants' unique contributions in verbatim interview excerpts.

All tapes were retained and reviewed following the final interviews. Thus tape recording aided my communication with the informants in two ways: (1) it eliminated the distraction of note-taking during the interviews, and (2) it gave me an opportunity to effectually "re-interview" the informants to follow up leads picked up from the face-to-face interviews.

By choosing the interview approach I of course committed myself to a reliance on the informants' retrospective verbal report for data about their experiences in changing majors, which I could not observe first hand. As recollections, these reports were subject to the same distortions, intentional and unintentional, as are all remembrances of things past. Especially for certain types of events, considered below, is the memory prone to fallibility: events of little interest, events difficult to comprehend, and events in the distant past.

\[1\] See Codification Guide on page 130 below.
Fortunately, this research minimizes the fallibility of the informants' memories in regard to these three types of events: (1) Rather than an event of little interest, changing majors represents for most junior and senior male college students a crucial event. (2) Rather than being difficult to comprehend, changing majors is usually experienced quite palpably by the Changers through the alterations in both their academic identity and curriculum. (3) Rather than occurring in the distant past, changing majors necessarily occurred within the current academic year, in order for students to be included in the sample.

Considering now the disadvantages in this regard, there is one type of memory fallibility which unfortunately inheres in the data of this study. It is that corruptibility of memory in relation to events of significance to the self. It inheres in the data because, for students who are forced to change majors due to grade deficiencies, a defensive rationalizing of their failure begins early and in earnest. After a choice has been forced upon a student, he will often rationalize his choice by endowing his former major with less desirability, and his new major with more desirability than he originally thought they had. The preventative research measures which I took here were: (1) to limit the time interval between changing majors and the interview as much as possible and still obtain enough interviewees, and (2) to not suggest in the interviews that the informants had shown either incompetence or imprudence in their actions.
surrounding their change of majors.

The data of this study is particularly vulnerable to still another distortion, this one due not so much to the informants' unwillingness to remember accurately, as it is to their inability to. A change in academic majors has the potential to work significant changes in both the environment and self-conceptions of the Changers. Almost inevitably such changes produce transformations of perspective, making it difficult, if not impossible, for the students to remember precisely their former attitudes and motivations. In the interviews I tried to aid the informants' recall, this last device facilitated an important test of the validity of the data. The rephrased questions helped in testing for the internal consistency or, as Allport terms it, "self-confrontation" within the interview.¹ Allport maintains "A document (he included interviews here) that hangs together, that....harbors no impossible contradictions has at least prima facie validity."² Tape-recording all interviews for subsequent review was also an indispensable aid in this test for validity.

Further, Allport describes two additional tests for validity which, when combined with "self-confrontation," are sufficient to establish high validity: "(1) As in everyday life, the general honesty and credibility of the report

²Ibid.
can be relied upon; this is the *ad hominem* test. (2) The plausibility of the document in terms of our past experiences, as they are relevant, can be considered; even if our past experience is meager we know something of the range of human potentialities by which we can judge the probable truth of an account."¹ Both of these tests were also employed throughout the study to establish the high validity of the findings.

It was not hard to get most of the informants to talk. Many of them, I am sure, consented to the interview largely out of pity for the "struggling graduate student." But when they saw in the flexibly-structured interview a chance to reminisce about themselves to an interested fellow student, most of them opened up volubly. Several even expressed a sort of gratitude for the opportunity to think over for the first time what had been happening to them in their academic transactions.

My role might have been an even greater asset, however, had I been an undergraduate like the interviewees. A graduate student is sometimes suspected of being too close to the faculty to be trusted. I tried to minimize this barrier by talking and dressing informally, by not advising the interviewees, and by occasionally pointing out parallels between their change of majors and mine.

¹Ibid.
Before entering upon the discussion of the study's central findings, which are based entirely on responses of students, changing academic majors must be considered in a larger context than our student informants will be able to provide. It is important to see changing majors as but one of many paths of action the student may take when confronted with problems of grade deficiencies or personal discontent within his major field.

To illustrate, consider an imaginary student who finds his grades are too low for him to remain in his present major field. He has at least three alternative ways of reacting to the problem. Firstly, he might adapt himself to the requirements of the situation by studying more productively, if he is capable. Secondly, he might adapt the situational requirements to his needs by taking fewer or easier courses within his major field. Thirdly, he might, by necessity, merely leave the scene by either dropping out of school or changing majors. It is only this last adaptive alternative which is of concern in the present study.

Although this inquiry is focused largely on the students who change majors, it is advisable here to look at some of the alternative paths of action mentioned above. They give a clue as to how changing majors contributes to,
and/or lessens the adaptation of the university social system, i.e., how it is functional or dysfunctional to the system.

First of all, under threat of having to change majors, some students will keep up their grades and others will eliminate their grade deficiencies, to the benefit of the university's academic standards. Further, by requiring students with grade deficiencies to leave their academic field, the university culls much dead wood from many of the departments. Finally, instead of forcing the students out of school entirely, but allowing them to change into another major, the university furthers another important goal—keeping its enrollment up.

The institutional dysfunction of changing majors is that it does not make for the very smoothest processing of students through the university's portals.

In the individual academic fields, however, the picture is not entirely similar. It is true that removing the "dead wood" of students with grade deficiencies benefits many individual fields. As one professor said in an informal exploratory interview, "Sometimes we wish the students would leave sooner than they do!"

But the possibility of dysfunctional results can readily be seen when those same students enter their new majors. What was their former department's gain is possibly their new department's loss!

Thus far only those students who have been forced
to change majors have been considered. The students who are not forced, but who voluntarily choose to leave their majors can cause further discontent within individual departments. Evidence of this is the fact that proselytizing by professors is considered unethical. Wanting to maintain their enrollment and reason for existence, departmental faculties understandably prefer not to lose their established students.

A case of faculty feelings of this sort running quite high was reported by a female informant in an exploratory interview. As a freshman in her third week of school, she consulted the dean about her strong desire to change majors. He informed her that since she was already registered in that school it would be impossible for her to change. After heated discussion, she went in tears to the registrar's office where she learned it was entirely possible to make such a change. If this had not been possible, she had made up her mind to take the other alternative—quit school.

The discussion here has been aimed toward providing a perspective of the process of changing majors as it functions within the structure of the university as a whole and within the individual academic departments. Such a perspective is a necessary preliminary to the following main body of the study, based on the responses of student informants.

By way of preview, chapters I and II will deal with
the first of the thematic questions—what are the social factors predisposing students to stable and unstable choices of academic major? Chapter III will attempt to distinguish who changes majors. And in chapter IV, answers will be sought to the last two thematic questions: how changes of major can be classified, and how the experience of changing majors is related to the developing self-conceptions of students.
CHAPTER I

SOURCES OF STABLE CHOICES
OF ACADEMIC MAJOR

Changing academic majors is relatively unstructured behavior which takes place on the predominantly stable grid of permanent and unchanging choices of academic major. This stable foundation is essential to the smooth functioning of the university as an educational institution.

It is this "ground" of stability which will be of concern first, before turning in the next chapter to the "figure" of changing academic majors. Hence, this chapter will consider the various factors observable in the data, which tended to channel the informants into permanent and unchanging academic choices.

These many factors will not merely be enumerated serially, however. They will be presented more meaningfully, it is hoped, by employing a scheme of analysis which is frequently used in many sciences: breaking down the phenomena being studied into the organized system and the environment in which the system exists.¹ Utilized in the present study, this results in breaking down the phenomena, i.e., factors.

¹George C. Homan demonstrates the research value of this type of abstraction in The Human Group (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1950), pp. 81-130.

-17-
contributing to stable academic choices, into those generated within the university system itself, and those originating in the social environment in which the university exists.

Of course, this dividing line between the university and its external social environment is purely imaginary. It is arbitrarily drawn as a useful abstraction in classifying the factors, evidenced in the data, which contribute to stable choices of academic major.

Working in this manner, this chapter will consider, first of all, stabilizing factors which are external to the university. Among them are (1) attractive goals of vocational success, (2) the success timetable, and (3) family influences.

Following this, attention shall be given to stabilizing factors generated within the university, such as (1) limited academic alternatives, (2) academic over-specialization, (3) the educational investment mechanism, (4) the graduation timetable, and (5) student identification with the major fields.

**Stabilizing Factors External to the University**

Students come to college virtually soaked in the values and norms of the American culture; the college portals shut out few if any of the non-academic social expectations which the students are supposed to satisfy.
As will be seen, many of these expectations conduce to academic permanence by either prescribing stability or prohibiting instability in choices of academic major.

Attractive Goals of Success

For instance, prior to entering the university most of the informants, being males, have grown aware of how essential the college degree will be in fulfilling their long-range aspirations toward success. Most of them probably sensed that higher education was possibly their safest channel for moving up in our society.

But the price for this sort of social elevation is not just four years in college; the education must be considerably specialized. Consequently, in order to graduate, the students must sooner or later hold to a major. If they do hold, they receive approval for demonstrating their maturity by "sticking with it" and acting "sensible" in their vocational climb. Coupled with such prescriptions are also social prohibitions which make for permanent academic choices. As Robert Merton succinctly states, "The cultural manifesto is clear: one must not quit, must not cease striving, must not lessen his goals, for 'not failure, but low aim is crime.'"¹

As a reward for abiding in their major fields, society presumably has in store for them many occupational

positions reputed to have as many satisfactions.

Whether or not this is a concrete offer, college students hope it is, and are thus motivated toward occupational goals. Not infrequently a student is even willing to sacrifice satisfactions in college for such future occupational rewards in a pattern of deferred gratification.

An example of this long-range dedication is seen in the following interview excerpt:

Interviewer:
Which is more important to you in your major, satisfaction you get from your school work now, or the satisfaction you expect to get from your work after school?

Student:
I would much rather be satisfied for thirty-five years and unhappy for four or five in school than vice versa. I can put up with almost anything in school for a few years, as long as the long-range satisfaction was worth it.

An example of this in the extreme, i.e., letting the occupational ends justify the academic means, is the student who changed majors out of geology into physical science because of poor job prospects and found he much preferred physical science:

Interviewer:
Would you say your self respect has increased, decreased, or stayed the same in physical science?

Student:
Increased, because in geology I wasn't doing the job I could have done, the main reason being that I didn't enjoy it and the teachers, the professors. And I'm not letting my wife down when she is working. Now I'm getting better grades and "booming" most of my courses.

However, (and this shows his self-denying dedication to extra-college goals) even though this student found physical science much more satisfying, he nevertheless
reported that he would rather have been in geology if he could have been assured of a job. There were three main attractions in geology for him: (1) the promise of a geology position before coming to college (later broken as the job situation worsened), (2) the fact that the job offer was in his wife's home town to which she longed to return, and (3) as he put it, "the color of the job." These three factors originating outside the university would have been sufficient to hold him in his geology major had the job offer not been broken.

The Success Timetable

Another stabilizing condition which has its roots in the extra-university society is that students who contemplate changing majors know that they stand to lose time. This is a precious commodity in our society, where at a given age a man is expected to have assumed a particular occupational role, especially if he is married.

The passage of time exerts its own pressure on the student to hold him to his major. Consider the student who, on the one hand, looked out from his suspended position at men his own age who were more established in the professions. On the other hand, he looked around him and saw that students noticeably younger than he were about to overtake him.

Interviewer: Why is time so pressing?
Student:
Well, it is to me now because I'm seeing the people I've
gone to school with. I see them out working now, making
money and enjoying their lives and finding themselves in
the business world and the world of everything, I guess.
And I find myself, that I'm seeing younger people...Es­
pecially I see a younger girl who seemed very young to me,
and she's a freshman down here now; when I was in high school
she was a small girl. And I'm finding myself, if I'd come
into sociology first, then I'd probably have been out by now.

Further, this passage of time itself and the sheer
accumulation of experiences makes more possible a certainty
of self among students and the stabilization of their choice
of major. The following interview excerpt is suggestive:

Interviewer:
Where did you learn this ability to apply yourself?

Student:
Well, my father has always harped at me, but I didn't pay
too much attention to him anyway! You know it! But the
farther you go along in these things, the more you see that
you yourself have to derive this theory in your own mind and
say, "I have to work; I have to buckle down." It's some­
thing you have to do yourself.

Interviewer:
And the closer to graduation the more pressure is on?

Student:
That's right.

Another student reported similar maturing, almost
too late:

Student:
This sounds funny right when I'm graduating, but I'm finally
going down and studying academic things, not fighting
studying so much, particularly like I did before I went in
the service. I'm finding more academic peace instead of
trying to "play the role."

1When an interviewee mentions being a member of an
academic field other than business administration, liberal
arts, or geology, it may be assumed that he is a Changer-
out of one of these three majors into the major he mentions.
Interviewer: What brought this about?

Student: I finally grew up, I guess.

**Family Strings**

Another important—it cannot be said which is the most important—source of influence which can act to stabilize academic choices is the student's family of orientation. Its desires can be stabilizing, depending on their specificity and the family's power to make them felt. As will be seen, however, the family often forces a premature choice of major which later has to be changed.¹

In the following statement, a student mentioned the family in his summary of several external social factors contributing to the stable choice of academic major.

Interviewer: Why do you want the degree?

Student: Well, the folks will be proud of you when you get the degree, you know. The benefit to me is to say that I've been to college, that I've had an education, and I have a degree, and it'll count a lot on a job.

**Stabilizing Factors Within the University**

Focusing attention now on the specific social system existing in the environment, it is apparent that the university itself generates certain inducements and constraints. ¹*Infra*, p. 38.
Limited Academic Alternatives

First of all, the small state university related to our study offers a limited number of fields a student can choose from. That this can be a stabilizing influence is indicated by three of the informants who reported they would have changed majors had their preferred fields been offered by the university.

Over-specialization

Another stabilizing factor is that, in the course of specializing in his chosen major, it is possible for the student to over-specialize, to the virtual exclusion of alternative choices of major. This student told of such over-specialization, and with some regrets:

Interviewer:
Have you found the business administration major to be lacking in any respects?

Student:
They have a tendency over there to advise you to take as many business courses as possible and I feel I've missed out in that respect. I'll have some ninety business credits when I graduate and I'm only required to have seventy-five. And now, when I'm a senior, I wish I had applied those fifteen credits to perhaps a foreign language, philosophy, or something like that. I don't like the advising system throughout the university. They don't advise at all.

Interviewer:
What do they do?

Student:
They sign your card and that's about it. A person majoring in business is not encouraged to get a liberal education, too. At least I never was. I'm going to take a foreign
language at Northern Montana when I get out. For the last two years I've had only two courses outside of the business school, and a person can get awfully tired of the same building and the same faces, and the same rooms every day.

The Educational Investment Mechanism

Inherent in the university is another mechanism, repeatedly mentioned by the informants, that tended to keep them within their majors. Their accumulating investment in their educational preparation becomes increasingly irreversible. After a student has invested so much time, money and academic credits in a course of study he hesitates to start afresh. His contemporaries would forge ahead of him. He would have to count his past endeavors as wasted effort. Worst of all, he would not be able to graduate in the traditional four years' time.

The following comment is by a student who misjudged the academic market and lost some of his investment:

If you choose a major and decide after two or three quarters, like I did, on what you want, actually you've wasted time. Because you've perhaps taken more courses than you need outside of your specific major and if you do get in a specific major that has a definite four year course, then you've just wasted that whole two quarters entirely, as in forestry. And you've wasted the money that goes along with it. And you haven't gotten anything out of it except the fact that you know that this is one course you don't want, and so it's time to start another.
The Graduation Timetable

Even though the student may entertain some doubts about his choice, the pressure to remain in his original field is strong, especially after the middle point is passed in the graduation timetable:

Interviewer: Do you ever wonder about being in the right major?

Student: You always wonder about halfway through. The typical undergraduate gets all shook and wonders whether it's worth it all. Right at the end of your sophomore year is the hardest because after that you can say you're on the downhill side; you're over halfway. It'll be easier to accomplish then. The last two quarters of my sophomore year I had, you might say, indecision. How? Oh, I didn't feel I was getting what I wanted and my grades weren't the best, and personal reasons.

Again the all-important goal of graduating "on time" was referred to:

It would take quite a bit to get me to change out of this major because I can graduate in three quarters and I couldn't do that in any other major.

Student Identification with the Major Field

Another mechanism which is structured within the university and makes for stable academic choices is the identification the student comes to feel with the field he has chosen. As he increasingly accepts the vocational and/or student roles of the major they more frequently are a part of his answer to the self-put question: "Who am I?"
accepted, these roles become less alterable.

More than liberal arts or business administration, geology provides the student with rather clear-cut cues as to his present and future tasks. This clarity of student and vocational role expectations expedites the student's acceptance of them and thereby can be seen to contribute to his academic stability.

An example of a student deeply identified with the vocational role of his major is the geology student who said:

You can't be an eight-to-five man in geology. It's something that, when you learn about it, you get more interested in it; the more interested you are in it, the more you want to carry it on and study it. Driving down the road I look at all the structures along the road cuts. When I'm up in the hills, hunting and fishing I pick up rocks and look at 'em and see what kind of minerals are in 'em, what type rocks they are. Everyplace I go there's something to do with geology. Down at the service station people bring rocks in there and ask me what they are and what's in 'em. It's something that, when you get into it, you want to get more involved in it. So it's a hobby, an ambition, a job, everything combined.

Another student revealed an intense commitment to the field in spite of real obstacles to his success.

Interviewer:
What do you say to those students who think it's just blind faith to believe you can get a job these days in geology?

Student:
Personally I think I can get a job in geology, even with a bachelor's. How? Go out and beat a few doors down. You might have to beat a lot of them down but I think it's possible. I think it is. I know that jobs are hard to get. You can't just walk out and tell people "Here I am, I want a job," but I think you can find one.

In general, the process of acquiring such an identity

1Because of the recent economic recession the demand by oil and mining corporations for geologists was then at an extreme low.
within a major proceeds in at least two ways as related by the following student: first by adopting the names of the vocation and secondly by differentiating one's identity from that of others.

Student:
The main reason I want to be an accountant more than anything else is because he has a name. When you say I'm a certified public accountant it gives you an honor among men, shall we say. It makes you just a little bit higher than somebody else.

Interviewer:
What didn't you like about being in math, your previous major?

Student:
It seemed to be "Here I am and there they are," and I didn't want to stay there; I was just trying it out. I never did identify myself with the group.

Interviewer:
How do you do that?

Student:
Well, like I say I become an accountant, then I become a CPA, then I'd belong to the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. Okay, now that's identifying one's self with one's group. Now I'm identified with another group: Sigma Chi. What has a math man got to be identified with? I've always had kind of a want to be a social animal, and there's no identification there with the group at all.

Interviewer:
Did some of the other students feel identified with that group?

Student:
Well, I hadn't met any that had.

Interviewer:
Then the lack of group feeling might have been one cause for your lagging interest in math?

Student:
Yes, as I said before, with a mathematician there's no identification with a group. Well, that isn't the biggest problem. I never was identified with that group. I don't see how I could be. I couldn't see myself being a mathematician in a million years, but I could see myself being an accountant. There's a definite difference in those kind of people. You
can't find any definite friendship with those people in math. They always want to be alone, whereas a businessman has to work with people and I like to work with people, and I don't wanta be alone. Also I definitely feel more natural in accounting than in math. I don't feel that I am myself when I'm with mathematics people. I always feel like, well, I could be in the middle of a group and yet I'm really not there at all. I just have to sit and listen to them. I feel I just don't wanta talk to them, it seems like.

One can see the process of identification also proceeding by linking the individual with the fellows in his chosen academic group. Different fields vary in the opportunity they give students for such contacts with other group members and the assimilation of their attitudes. Of the three major fields--business, liberal arts, and geology--geology is relatively well-suited to the development of group feeling, as the following student explains it:

There is real group feeling in geology because it is a small school and all the classes are concentrated in one building and they have their own library. It is one of the few buildings open all night and you get acquainted over there at night.

Other sources of group solidarity are shown in the comparative description of geology and liberal arts as told by an informant who had belonged to both majors:

There is not as much feeling of group solidarity in liberal arts as in geology. You get to know all the students by taking classes together. You take classes together in liberal arts but there are so many students in them. In geology only the geology majors take them. But the lower division courses of liberal arts, everybody takes them. You don't feel any togetherness, or whatever you want to call it. On field trips, pushing your car out of the mud, in a rainstorm or something like that, you get to know all the students fairly well as you go through it.

Another factor that helped the following geology student feel as if he were of the department and not just
it, were the close relationships enjoyed with his professors:

You can approach almost any one of 'em and chat with them. None of this real stuffy stuff that you find in other professors on the campus: "I'm a doctor and you're nothing," you know. It has its effect on people; at least it has on me. I don't lose respect for the doctorate degree and yet I can go and talk to them like I've known them for years.

These are some aspects of the identification process as the informants have reported it. It is necessary to note here that identification with the major field, i.e., acceptance of the major field's roles as part of the student's self-concept, does not necessarily occur with all students who abide in their majors. As will be elaborated in chapter III below, some students refuse to consider a change of major for other reasons, e.g., to graduate:

Interviewer: Is this your final choice, or just a trial run for you?

Student: Oh no, this is final! I'll graduate in it if I grow to hate it. I'll just do something else when I get out of school. Because I wouldn't change it, I couldn't see it.

Interviewer: You'd go ahead and get a degree and work from there?

Student: Sure, because no matter what field you're in you're going to learn something out of it.

In the following instance, far from being personally attached to his major, the student could be described as fortuitously stumbling along toward graduation:

Interviewer: How did you cope with your problem of not wanting to study?

Student: Well, I'm still coping with it. I've many times been

\[\text{Infra, p.}\]
disgusted, but when I'm disgusted I always seem to read a little more, keep studying, and I find that at the end of each quarter I'm not flunking! Although I have had a few bad courses, I've got a couple of F's I think, now that I think about it, I think it was more laziness than anything. But usually I come out with high enough grades to continue on and by the looks of it now--my senior year here--I'll probably graduate!

Summary

The discussion of this chapter has centered about some of the factors seen encouraging our informants to make permanent and unchanging choices of academic major.

First there are factors originating largely outside the university, in its environment, so to speak. Those factors reported by the informants included the following. The college degree itself has considerable value, both as a badge of achievement and as a door-opener for the aspiring young man. He receives social approval for "sticking with it" until he earns his diploma. Getting established in his aspired occupation on time, in cadence and competition with his peers, is another incentive to make his initial academic choice a lasting one. So dedicated are some students to earning the degree that they show a willingness to discountenance any desired changes of major, largely in order to graduate.

Looking inside the university itself, there are other constraints and prescriptions which make for permanent choices of academic majors. As each student progresses through his chosen course of study he accumulates an
investment of time, money, and training in his educational plan which, as a result, becomes increasingly difficult to change. If over-specialization occurs it can also help affix him to his choice by precluding acquaintance with alternative majors. Students commonly become committed to their majors through the last process considered in this chapter--identification. By accepting as his own the names, roles and conscience that go with membership in his departmental group of students and faculty, the student grows to feel he is of the department, not just in it. Providing he then performs adequately, his membership is assured and a change of major is out of the question.

These are some of the important norms and mechanisms, originating in the university's external environment and within the university itself, which tend to produce stable choices of academic major. Such stability of choice necessarily predominates in the university and forms the fundamental equilibrium within which occurs the central phenomenon of our study--the changing of academic majors. For this reason, factors contributing to stable choices of academic major have been discussed as a preliminary to the next chapter which investigates the factors contributing to unstable choices.
CHAPTER II

SOURCES OF UNSTABLE CHOICES
OF ACADEMIC MAJOR

In the preceding chapter the discussion of factors contributing to the institutional "ground" of permanent academic choices has been preparation for considering the factors contributing to the less frequent and less structured "figure"--impermanent choices of academic major.

The same organizational framework shall be used to discuss unstabilizing factors as was used with the stabilizing factors. This is to arbitrarily divide the factors into (1) those originating in the social environment external to the university, and (2) those generated within the university system itself.

Of those conditions external to the university which tended to lessen the likelihood of our informants choosing a permanent major field the following shall be considered: (1) the incoming freshman's ignorance about the university, (2) remoteness of the university from the world of work, (3) family influences on the informants' academic choices, and (4) the extension of adolescence into college years.

Then, turning inward to the university itself for other conditions which can have unstabilizing effects on
the informants' choices of major, the following will be looked into: (1) new vocational alternatives (2) inadequacy of counsel for the student, (3) administrative permissibility of early changes of major, and (4) an example of a major field which is without several of the common mechanisms which conduce to strong and permanent student commitment to academic majors.

Unstabilizing Factors External to the University

Uninformed Freshmen

Prior to the students' entrance into college, a frequent source of impermanent academic choices is a lack of knowledge of the academic world. In some cases this pre-university factor contributes to simple indifference toward the choice of major and ranges in other from confusion to complete misconception.

One student's comment exemplifies an uncomplicated lack of concern toward the choice:

I was just expected to go to college, so I didn't really give a major field much thought. I just thought that everybody went to college but I really didn't know what I wanted to do.

The sources of guidance the pre-university student has to rely on to reduce his confusion are sometimes remarkably unprofessional, as the following student revealed:

You know, before you come to college, you don't know what it's going to be like or what you're going to feel like
when you get there. And I didn't feel that I could make up my mind and say that I wanted to go into this without having some knowledge of it. And the fact that my cousin was in it and did have a working knowledge of it made me feel he knew what it was all about and would be able to tell me, so I went into geology.

As can be seen from the following description of academic choice, the desire to enter a specific major sometimes has little to do with the student's coming to college. That such an aimless preliminary outside the university would lead to an inconstant choice inside is not surprising:

Student: Well, my purpose in coming to college when I was a freshman, or after graduation from high school, was to keep out of the Korean War and because I didn't want to go to work. And it seemed the thing to do at the time. It was just about the thing to do because quite a few of my fellow students were going, and I just sort of tailed along. I had no purpose in getting an education as such, for any value as social standing.

Interviewer: Did you have any career in mind?

Student: I didn't. I came down here and I said, "I know I'll have to have a major." And someone told me at home, "Just put education down and you can take what courses you want. Just look around the field." They were speaking, of course, of liberal arts courses, as a general student. And I didn't realize that you could be classified under general, so I just put anything, because I didn't know exactly what to do. And I felt a little bit embarrassed about asking, because I thought, "Oh, I should know that." So I just put down education, though I took nothing but liberal arts courses until I changed my major to sociology.

No matter how adequately the prospective student has learned to weather the buffeting of the "outside world," in the realm of academia such experiences can be insufficient. Consider the sheer innocence of this student:
Student:  
I went only through the eighth grade and was admitted to college on the basis of a G.E.D. test taken in the navy.

Interviewer:  
Did you find it hard to compete with students who had been through high school?

Student:  
Well, the first quarter I did, especially because I didn't understand what it was all about. I had been a lot of places, what with five years in the navy, but I had never been around university people at all. Just with sailors, roughnecks and oil-riggers--hardworking, fast-living people, cowboys and that sort of stuff. When I got up here, for instance, I took an English composition test and it said on the blackboard, "Write an essay on some topic," and then there were the topics. Well, I didn't know what an essay was. So when I got to thinking about it I wondered if it was something like a letter or something. I didn't know; I had never heard of it before. There was that much change. It wasn't that the subjects were that hard, it's just the fact of getting acquainted with what they're trying to do, not knowing the terminology. So I didn't write anything, and just turned in the paper with my name on it. So I flunked the test and had to take bonehead English. But if I had known what an essay was I would have done all right.

Before entering college the following informant did not even know the name of his major field, which fact led to misunderstandings and eventual change of major:

Interviewer:  
How did you get into journalism in the first place?

Student:  
It was because of a goof on my part and the part of the university when I filled out the application in New Jersey. I said I wanted to major in journalism and art. But what I really meant was creative writing, by "journalism." But at the time I wrote out the application I had been up all night and various other things, and they stuck me in the "J" school. And as far as I know now I'm not going into it, although I was going to major in art. And I thought I was, too. I figured I'd come here and take five credits of art, composition and humanities or something like that. But (laughing) it didn't work out that way. Should have been more specific in my application.
Remoteness of the University from the World of Work

Another factor contributing to students' uncertainty about their majors has to do with the actual relationship between the university and its external social environment. The university has been set up as an establishment unto itself, quite remote from the outside world of occupational work and success. For the students, this remoteness has the effect of making more unforeseeable their vocational goals which are of paramount importance. The problem appears in this typical statement by a vocationally-oriented geology student: "You don't know what you got out of school until you go out and see if it earns you something to eat."

Similarly, the following comment shows a business administration student's uncertainties about his major because of doubts about its future utility:

Student:
I really can't say that the business courses aren't adequate now. I can't know that until I get out in business. I learn, yes, but I just wonder whether when I get out in the business world I'll use what I learn.

Interviewer:
Do other students have similar doubts?

Student:
Yes, I've had other students tell me they wonder the same thing.

Interviewer:
What do the instructors say to this?

Student:
The only comment I've heard an instructor say is that he
dissatisfied with everything that was in the book.

The college student cannot count on his considerable academic endeavors as being automatic and guaranteed stepping stones to success. Although the aspired vocational goal might be waiting in the outside world, the specific means of attaining it are not completely institutionalized in college. In the words of Robert Merton, the problem arises from the fact that the college student is "situated in a social structure of a culture in which the emphasis on dominant success-goals has become increasingly separated from an equivalent emphasis on institutionalized procedures for seeking these goals."¹

This anomic lack of institutionalized interdependence between the university and the world of work is another condition, originating in the society external to the university, which works an unstabilizing effect on academic choices. For it tends to preclude the student's absolute confidence that his major will bring him the best vocational returns and consequently be most worth his educational investment.

Family Influences

Another possible source of unstabilizing influences outside the university is the family. The usual pattern

as it is for him to rise even higher than his parent's socio-economic position. Partly as a consequence there is less continuity and coordination between parent and son regarding occupational choice. As W. A. Anderson found in a study of college students, only one son in ten accepts the parent's advice in cases where it is given.¹

Nor is the son's occupational goal of particular economic interest to the parent, although he occasionally fears that his offspring may advance, by his choice, into another social class, thus impeding subsequent relationships. One can appreciate in the following example both a lack of continuity between generations in educational level and values; and the son's growing independence from his parent's attitudes:

Student:
My parents were uneducated and didn't know anything about the decisions and what was involved. I think they would have been happy if I would have stayed in math, because I feel funny in some cases when I go home, and they're all about the same class of people, you know, that don't know too much about college. And I tell them that I'm majoring in liberal arts and to them that's, "Well, what's that?" And I say, "It's a general education with a little bit of everything giving you a broad scope, you know?" And they think, "Well, you're sluffing off and can't meet the challenge of a math course or something like that."

Although the family's influence is not usually toward a specific choice, in the following instance the parental influence was of a more decisive sort--more than just the general attitude noted above. Such a pressure contributed to the possibility of a premature choice:

Student:
Originally I was interested in criminology.

Interviewer:
What swayed you away?

Student:
The fact that there are so few schools in the nation that offer it, and that'd mean I'd have to go out of state and my folks wanted me to stay within the state to go to school. And it was almost a cut-and-dried situation that if I went out of state I'd have to pay all my way and if I stayed in state they'd help me. Why? Well, Father feels a lot the way I feel now that we should keep the young people in Montana.

Interviewer:
Did your folks give this in-state ultimatum to keep you out of criminology, since they didn't want you in it?

Student:
I don't know, it may be.

Sometimes, even though the family exerts pressure resulting in an inappropriate choice, the son's desire for an independent decision gradually prevails. In the following case it can be seen that the parents eventually came around to the son's view, allowing him to change to his original preference.

When I was getting around to the point where I was deciding what to take in college, and where to go, folks often asked me, "What are you going to major in in school?" Several times I mentioned music, and this went very unfavorable. They were very disappointed in this. You might say the stereotype idea of a musician is that fellow going around playing in night clubs and bars at night, smoking all through the day, a rough-and-tumble life. Anyway, I met much opposition whenever I expressed the idea that I would study music while I was in college. Then after two years progressed in liberal arts I had spent more and more time in music. The folks began to realize that and they would hear compliments and what-not about my singing. So then after that it was fine, there was no opposition whatsoever. They hadn't heard me very much before coming here, and that probably played an important part in the difference.

Another informant illustrated the confusion which
can ensue from pressures of parents on the one hand and wife and in-laws on the other. For the first of his majors, this student majored in pharmacy, for the sole purpose of taking over his father's lucrative group of drug stores. Then, because a lot of his friends were in business and his wife and in-laws keenly favored it, he changed into business administration, which he himself actually preferred. However, with influence from his mother, this informant reversed himself and changed back into pharmacy! The beleaguered student told about it:

My wife, like most married people in school, wanted to get out of school as soon as possible. And she was tired of living in the strips. And I was thinking about going back into pharmacy, because of my mother. And there was an awful lot of family pressure and arguing about it, and so I went into pharmacy. For some reason my mother thought I should go into pharmacy again, and my wife didn't like the idea, but I did.

However, his second try at pharmacy did not work out: "As I went on in pharmacy I grew more unsure of myself and began to rely on other people's opinions too much. I shoulda done what I thought I shoulda done."

The upshot was that he changed back again into business administration as his final choice for graduation, having changed from pharmacy to business to pharmacy to business—a double-reverse change of majors!

Thus far some possible effects have been seen of the student's family of orientation on his choice of major. It is interesting to note that the absence of a family can have a unique influence as well. With the following informant
the lack of family left him susceptible to dissuasion by a family substitute:

Interviewer:
When you were making your decision to change majors, which other people were also interested in what you were doing?

Student:
I did have a little pressure I guess. I've always been pretty much on my own, since I was fourteen. And I've always done things because I felt they were right, not because somebody told me to. Oh, sometimes you get the feeling that nobody gives a damn, and it doesn't make any difference whether you make a mistake or not, cuz nobody gives a damn. So I think if you have someone that is interested in you, you tend to be more careful in your selection, and such as that. And my fiance' and I talked it over and then I seriously doubted whether I should stay in psychology. She knows my wants and my likes and dislikes, and between the two of us...I more or less had been thinking of going into business entirely and she, she agreed with me.

Interviewer:
Is she the only one who was really interested in what you did?

Student:
Yeah. Mother is dead and my father and I don't get along too well. Had I done it myself I probably would have stayed in psychology.

Extended Adolescence

Another condition which originates outside the university proper, and which militates against permanent academic choices, is the fact that a student's adolescence can easily extend into his college years. Consider the following explanation by a student who reviewed his initial confusion in his choice of study because of a youthful over-reaction to being away from home.
Interviewer: Then would you say a lagging interest in forestry was one of your problems?

Student: Well, I was just an eighteen-year-old kid who joined a fraternity and just thought of drinking and women. It wasn't even so much a lack of interest in forestry, but because I was having such a fine time running around doing these other things. But I wasn't bored with school at all. I was with forestry but that wouldn't explain those other courses. I think it was just being away from home for the first time.

Interviewer: Where was your home?

Student: It was here in town, but I stayed in a fraternity house for the first three quarters.

Since he is aware that he is undergoing changes, the adolescent hesitates to commit himself to a decision. He is not sure what his attitudes will be in the future, since they were unstable in the past. Such unpredictability of self shows up plainly in the following interview excerpt:

Interviewer: Do you ever wonder whether you should be in economics or not?

Student: I think anybody wonders about being in the right field. I might have another idea tomorrow, I can't tell. I do have an interest in teaching but I change my interests so often that I don't know how long I'll keep it, because by the time I get out of school and a couple of more years pass, I can't say that I'll have any interest in that or not, because I didn't have an interest three years ago at all.

As is illustrated in the following informant's statement, obligations to military service can further remove the prospect of occupational responsibilities, so that the student is afforded even more space for exploration as to
what is central in his own role aspirations and self-concept:

I'm not even completely set on econ, really. I was until I joined this Marine Corps. It'll be close to four years before I get out of the Marine Corps. Well, right now I keep telling myself I'm still going to go to law school for security. But now that my chances of going to law school aren't particularly bright, I often wonder about econ.

Unstabilizing Factors

Within the University

New Vocational Alternatives

When incoming freshmen reach the university they are confronted with a multiplicity of new opportunities which can be bewildering to all but the rare student who is absolutely sure of his vocational choice. They encounter new courses of study, especially if their high schools were small and offered only basic courses as is true of many in sparsely-populated Montana. One informant, a Changer-out of business administration, told how he discovered economics since coming to college: "I didn't know econ from 'shmeekon' until I took a course in it!"

The significant impact of these new alternatives is suggested by the finding that 23 of the 30 informants who changed majors had not considered their new choice of major before coming to college.

Professions such as teaching are realistically presented as possible occupational choices since teachers are actually being trained in the university. This informant told of the teaching profession being suggested to him:
The teaching profession was composed of teachers, and that was my idea of teaching. But when I really looked into it it really did appeal to me and looked like a fulfilling job, and that I wouldn't have done if I hadn't come to college.

Inadequate Counselling

If there is an unprecedented number of professions at college, there is also an unprecedented number of people associated with the various fields to serve as possible dissuaders. Unfortunately not all conversation with them is helpful in clarifying the student's preferences, as this informant explains:

I more or less discounted what the students say about the courses. Why? They either belly-ache or brag, depending on whether they're talking about how much they're going to make when they get through school or whether they're griping about the courses they're taking at the time.

Even when they seek more professional counselling the students do not always find the information they want. This was one of the many dissatisfactions expressed by the informants about the counselling service:

Actually, all they're good for is a testing center. If they didn't know the information themselves, at least they should have names and addresses of companies I could write to and find out the information I want to know.

The work of Macintosh suggested an hypothesis for studying the amount and type of advice sought by students in their choices of major.\(^1\) In his investigation of unstable vocational (not academic) choices in college, he found that those students who had changed their vocational choice

during the year's duration of his study reported more influence by other people in their decisions than the students who had remained stable in their choice. MacIntosh interpreted this finding to mean that the students who change vocational goals are less sure of their direction and "consequently they seem to be more susceptible to guidance and advice" than the more stable students.

Some findings of the present study speak to this interpretation. The subjects of this sample who had changed majors were asked which of their choices of major did they feel the least sure of. Almost all of them reported their earlier and discarded choice to be the less certain of the two. Now, adapting the MacIntosh explanation to this study: if our informants were less sure of their earlier choices, they might be expected to have more advice from others in those earlier choices, since their uncertainty rendered them "more susceptible to advice."

To investigate this expectation, the subjects were asked in which of their two choices were the opinions of others more important. In most cases these changers of major reported, as might be expected, that their first choice was not only the least certain but the one in which other people's opinions mattered more. In other words, the students generally became more certain and independent in their second choices.

However, among the informants there were enough exceptions to this general tendency to warrant examination. Five of the thirty changers of major reported that their
former decision was both their more uncertain and more independent choice. A possible explanation is offered by the following informant, whose choice of major on coming to college was so fortuitous and inconsequential to him that it did not involve much consultation with other people:

Student:
When I went into forestry it just sort of happened, since I worked that summer with the forest service. Because I was just out of high school, I didn't know what I wanted. In general I thought I knew what I wanted but was still waiting to see. But when I went into geology I talked with a lot of people. In forestry I didn't talk it over with anyone, just decided, if talking it over with someone means being swayed, and it probably does to some extent. In geology I certainly talked to a lot more people about it.

Interviewer:
Because you were more uncertain about it than going into forestry?

Student:
No, because I wanted to be more certain of it. I was actually surer that that was what I wanted but I wanted to make deadly sure.

The above statement also suggests a reason for consulting with more people on the second choice even though it is more certain, i.e., in order to make "deadly sure."

Another informant gave a similar explanation for talking to more people in his second decision even though he was more certain of it:

Interviewer:
Then your changing into management was the more independent decision and yet you talked to more people?

Student:
Yes. I'd say it was the more important decision. And since I was feeling it was more important that's why I went into more detail, making sure I was making a wise decision, getting other people's opinions.

Interviewer:
Why was it more important, again?
Student:
Because I knew I was in my last two years of college and I wanted to make sure I was doing the right thing. That's why I got ideas, jobs that I could go into when I get out, and just getting a well-rounded knowledge of what the field is. Because I wanted to take that when I came back from the service so I'd have what I really wanted and go all the way through with it.

Thus, if the second choice is considered more consequential than the first, the student can be motivated to consult more with other people. In this way the informants suggest that the degree of consultation with other people can be a function of another variable besides the student's uncertainty and consequent "susceptibility to advice," as MacIntosh suggested. More advice and opinions may also be sought when the student considers the decision to be more consequential.

Permissibility of Early Changes of Major

The young man contemplating a college career is not necessarily compelled to choose his final course of study before he arrives on campus. If he is informed about the college curriculum at all, he is aware that his courses the first two years are going to be predominantly general, at least in the less specialized fields. This condition in the university system generates a sense of impermanence about his choice for there is always the assurance in the back of his mind that it is possible to change. One informant expressed it with this statement:
I probably thought it may as well be business because I hadn't any idea of anything else. And also I thought, just like anyone else, if it's not the right choice there's always the possibility of changing.

Another subject reacted to the changeability of majors with an attitude approaching nonchalance:

You don't know what you want to take when you come to college so you start out in something and pretty soon you find out what you're going to do and then you change into something.

The following statement provides further evidence that the university often does not press an initial decision for choice of major upon the student:

Interviewer: Did changing majors change your plans for life?

Student: No, because I didn't have anything definite planned. I was just killing time; there are so many general requirements that you have to take that it doesn't make any difference.

The loose and general structure of the first years of college make possible for the student a lack of involvement, a hesitancy to invest much of himself in a field that may not be of lasting interest. The following excerpt reveals this state of mind:

Interviewer: Was part of your problem due to not being sure you should be in geology in the first place?

Student: That probably had something to do with it because I was a little reluctant to work hard when I didn't know whether I was going to stick with it or not.

For some students, the leniency of the college situation is not a boon. They struggle with the greater responsibility which the freedom of choice entails. For
this student it meant learning self-discipline in study and decision-making:

Interviewer:
Did you learn anything new about your interests or abilities while you were in geology?

Student:
I think one of the things I learned was that you're not "pushed" in college like in high school and consequently you can let things slide. And consequently you can lose interest in the field, because of the fact that you aren't working on it. I think that was the biggest thing I learned when I got here. And also the fact that you had to more or less make up your own mind after you had been here a while.

On the other hand, the looseness of the early college program, while allowing indecision, still proved of great benefit to the following informant who was able to make a desired change of major with little loss in his educational investment:

Student:
Now if I was already in dent school I would have lost time and money by changing majors. But in pre-dent--the first two years of college are almost universal as far as courses are concerned.

However, there is that point in the college career beyond which the changing of fields involves a loss of time and credits--a "point of no return." This student described that particular point and how it precipitated his change of majors:

I couldn't go on in geology too much further beyond that point, cuz then I'd be stuck and I'd have to get my major in geology. Whereas I was at a specific point where I could switch over and lose no credits and get the degree in the same length of time, even shorter, actually. Once you go beyond that point and then switch over, then you have another two years of work.
Liberal Arts: Ambiguity

Institutionalized

The next endeavor is to look at an academic sub-group in the university system which acts in its own unique fashion against the most intense sort of student attachments to it. In the previous chapter the field of geology was cited as embodying several mechanisms that make for permanent student attachments to a field of study, e.g., group solidarity, definite role expectations, etc. In sharp contrast is the liberal arts field in which these mechanisms of identification are operating much less actively. In fact, when compared to geology, the role prescriptions for the liberal arts student—of both his student role and his vocational role—are so indistinct that the major might be said to be an institutionalization of ambiguity.

According to the informants in liberal arts there was no single professional title, ascribed or aspired, to assist in their identification with the major. The following long-standing liberal arts major told of the absence of a liberal arts "title" and went on to state why he preferred it that way:

Interviewer:
Is there any particular professional title that belongs to liberal arts majors or what they're aiming for?

Student:
What do you mean?
Interviewer:
Well, is it all right for me to call you an intellectual, or something like that?

Student:
Well, it's not anything dirty, but I don't quite measure up. I wouldn't mind being called that if I didn't have to write poetry and be a literary critic. But why do you have to identify it? Why does it have to have a title? If a person has a good job and a family he is proud of, and the community sees that his kids aren't any worse than the rest of the kids.

Interviewer:
Some majors have more of this identity than others don't they?

Student:
Yes, I know they do but I think it's a farce, because... a nephew of mine says they have music majors and all kinds of majors working down at this atomic energy plant.

Interviewer:
Why is this identification with a particular occupation not desirable?

Student:
Well, because if I want to do something else, I don't want to be called down for it. Whoever heard of a Fiedler up on a caterpillar or out pushing dirt in a ditch? It is my opinion that intellectuals would frown upon him. "Here he is, wasting his great talent by driving a bulldozer or something!"

There is little if any sense of in-group membership, not to mention morale, among the liberal arts students. The following informant told of the lack of interaction among liberal arts majors:

Interviewer:
Is there much group feeling among liberal arts students?

Student:
Yes, there is.

Interviewer:
Do you know many of them?

Student:
I can't recall their names right now.
Interviewer:  
Is there much group feeling among your acquaintances then?

Student:  
Only the standing joke about liberal arts majors "starving to death on the streets" because they can't find a job after school, because there's no vocation with it.

Interviewer:  
If you see a liberal arts major sitting there, do you have any more tendency to want to know him more than the next guy?

Student:  
Yes, because I'm curious to know why he went into it!

Interviewer:  
What would you speculate about their reasons for going into it?

Student:  
Well, they're guys for the most part without a specific vocation (nervous cough) and without a desire for one; they don't wanta become business ad majors, or pharmacy majors, but they want an education. They don't know exactly why.

The following informant related further how liberal arts is without the informal student groups which help to disseminate an ideology of the major. In addition this informant introduces the next topic of discussion, i.e., the desire among liberal arts majors not to specialize:

Interviewer:  
Is there any group feeling in liberal arts?

Student:  
It depends on how much importance you put on the group. But the field runs around attached to no one. Liberal arts majors don't have the same building, the same interests, and the same jargon as do the pharmacists. They can't specifically say, but that's an advantage in a way. So many business graduates graduate here and they don't know what they're doing. It's too vocational in my estimation. So many business graduates curse their own department, "These stupid mickey mouse courses you have to take."

Because the liberal arts curriculum allows its students to study broadly in several fields of study without
committing themselves to any one in particular, it attracts those students who want to avoid being shunted into a specialized commitment. This characteristic of liberal arts students was evidenced in our study when all five of the informants who had recently changed majors into liberal arts reported that one of the most attractive features about the field was that it allowed them to try out several fields without specializing. As this informant put it: "In specializing I think you're just getting one piece out of the pie. But in liberal arts I feel you can get a better perspective of the whole pie."

The following informant used a different figure of speech: "Another thing you can say for liberal arts is that if your interests change or your occupation changes, it is more or less a stepping stone toward anything you want to put your foot on."

Thus, by majoring in liberal arts, a student can actually major in role-exploration, and, as one informant put it, "snoop around for another major!"

The following student epitomized one sort of dedication to the ambiguity which is somewhat institutionalized in the liberal arts curriculum:

It's a strange type of satisfaction I get from liberal arts, because the more confused I get now about humanity and the more my scope broadens out, the more confused I get, the more satisfied I get. The more I see of the futility of attaining complete understanding of human relations, the more satisfied I feel that at least I'll never run out of cannon fodder. There'll always be so much to throw yourself into.
While the unspecialized nature of the liberal arts field attracts some students, it repels others. Indicatively, all five of the informants who had changed out of liberal arts reported that one of their main dissatisfactions with the field was that it was not specialized enough. More exactly, it did not provide them with the occupational specialty they felt was necessary in getting a job after graduation. Not only the Changers-out, but even some students within liberal arts felt a similar discontentment as did this graduating senior in liberal arts:

I feel dissatisfied with liberal arts because I have spent four years in the university and I'm still not a specialized university graduate. I haven't satisfied myself, probably more than anybody. I do feel that I'm not going to let my family down because I am going to keep on going to school in psychology. But as I am right now I haven't provided them with a better outlook for the future. I'm not a specialist in any one field and couldn't go out here and start right into the big money.

Such concern for a job is commonly derided by the more convinced liberal arts students in defense of their generalized and liberalized major. This interview excerpt illustrates:

Interviewer: What do you think of these students who change out of liberal arts because it isn't specialized enough?

Student: Well, these pragmatists act like life is a timetable. They've got so many years to attend college, and then, right away, as soon as they get their degree, that's the end of it. Or if not, specialize, specialize, specialize, so you buttress your position. Just so you've got the right kind of credentials. I don't look at it that way. I didn't come to college so it would place me in an upper income bracket. (irritated) I think there's more to life than that! Maybe this is idealism, or a romantic attitude, I don't know. You see, it's the way I feel and believe. I believe personally I can do more for myself and more for my family if I do it this
way...In the final analysis you can't divorce philosophy from history or vice versa. You need the knowledge of one to understand the other. So I think that this is where you do get a thorough understanding, not just specializing in one field.

This student's justification for majoring in liberal arts would have been completely convincing if later in the interview he had not given us a deeper and different insight into his attitude toward specializing:

You mention not being specific in liberal arts, but I think you can specialize in one area if you so desire, but it's going to take you a while. But if you go into college with the attitude that it's going to take you four years, and you'll come out with a degree and you'll have something to specialize in that will fit you into a neat little cubby-hole...I just don't believe in it, that's all.

Here he intimates he actually does approve of specializing but not within four years. Actually he does condone the "pragmatic" educational timetable, but he wants to set it back, enough to allow for his general education on the undergraduate level. In this way he could have both his freedom in a diversified liberal education and the security of a vocational specialization.

Another informant reiterated this ambivalent attitude held by many liberal arts students toward specializing in one particular field:

The one thing that scares me more than anything is a "rut." And I'd rather venture around rather than get into one safe, secure little "rut," unless I really like it. If it's what the person actually really likes, then you shouldn't call it a "rut" because the person has an intense interest in the field. That's what I'm looking for.

We would expect this ambivalent attitude to be closer to the actual one held by liberal arts majors than the unqualified reproach of the overly-pragmatic job-seeker. Some
support is provided for this interpretation by the finding that all five informants who had recently changed into liberal arts had, before changing majors, already made vocational plans which did not require a specialized undergraduate degree. Three were planning on academic careers, one on the military, and one on a job promised him in business. These students could understandably afford to speak against the pragmatic evils of specializing as an undergraduate.

If Goffman's instructive conceptualization is applied here, it is as if these convinced liberal arts students were a team of quasi-performers, cooperating to present to their academic and social audiences only what would make for the strongest and most sympathetic self-characterization possible.¹

This somewhat tangential discussion of attitudes toward the lack of vocational specificity in liberal arts has been included here to illuminate another one of the characteristics of a major field which can make for a less expeditious identification with the major.

Summary

This chapter has considered some of the factors, originating both outside and inside the university, which contribute to an impermanent choice of academic majors by students. Of factors outside the university it was seen that a simple lack of knowledge about the college world can

account for certain impermanent choices of major by incoming students.

Sometimes the confusion about a choice of major arises from family desires for and reactions to the study interests of their offspring. The common parental expectation is for the son to rise higher than their social attainments, providing he does not ascend beyond easy communication. At the same time, the son struggles for independence and unfettered pursuit of his own interests. The conflict sometimes results in a premature choice of major.

A third factor originating outside the university is the period of adolescence that extends into the student's college career. Not being well acquainted with himself and the roles compatible with his self-concept, he runs a greater risk of making immature decisions, of being more easily distracted from his work.

Certain factors within the university setting also were mentioned in this chapter. One source of confusion was the mere presence of courses previously unknown to the incoming freshmen. This opened up new possibilities for their consideration.

Inadequate counselling was another element in the campus setting which caused confusion in choices of major. Fellow students often proved unhelpful as advisers, and the counselling service as well came in for a share of criticism.

Also investigated were the relative amounts of
advice our informants received from other people in choosing their first and second academic majors. It was found that the informants generally sought more advice in the choice they felt less certain about—usually their first choice. It appeared, as MacIntosh suggested, that their uncertainty had tended to make them "more susceptible to advice."

In addition, however, there was found a significant number of exceptional cases in which the students sought more advice in the choice they felt more certain about—usually their second choice of academic major. It was because these students had considered their second choice to be more consequential than the first, that they had "wanted to make deadly sure," as one informant put it, and so had sought more opinions and advice from other people about their choice. Thus the informants suggested that the degree of consultation with other people can be a function of another variable besides uncertainty; more or less advice may be sought according to how consequential the decision is thought to be.

One difficulty the student encounters in his college career is that of bridging the gap between the campus and the world of work. The unforeseeable future gives rise to doubts about his choice of field and how much use his courses will actually be to him on the job. Most often the informants concluded that they would not be able to resolve these doubts until they were out of school and on the job.
Still another factor contributing to an impermanent choice of major was the administrative permissibility of early changes in major fields. At least up to a certain "point of no return" in the college career, changes from one unspecialized major to another can be made easily and with little loss of educational investments of time, money, and training. Knowing this, some students make their first choices with a proportionate tentativeness.

In contrast to the tightly-knit department of geology cited in the previous chapter, we have here noted liberal arts to be a major field which is lacking in several of the mechanisms which can make for permanent attachments to a field. There is so little interaction between departmental members that, in the sociological sense, they might be said not to comprise a group at all, but rather a social category, i.e., a class of individuals with similar statuses but with only negligible interrelationships. The absence of both a commonly-aspired vocational goal and a common professional title is also a factor which contributes to making liberal arts an academic field in which certain ambiguities are institutionalized.
CHAPTER III

STUDENTS WHO CHANGE

ACADEMIC MAJORS

In the previous two chapters some of the sources of stable and unstable choices of academic major have been discussed. Now it is opportune to investigate more specifically those students who have perceived the unstabilizing influences to be dominant and so have changed their majors.

Some of the general questions to be dealt with are: What do students think of changing majors and the person who changes majors? How are Changers distinguishable from Non-changers, and how are they similar?

The Student Concept of Changing Majors

To find out how students view changing majors, I asked the interviewees, "What does it mean to change majors?" Further, "What do you think of a person who changes majors?"

Because of the considerable social expectation that the aspiring young man "stick to it" in matters of
career, it was originally anticipated that at least some reprehension of changing majors would be found. As expected, some students expressed this attitude. But other students expressed attitudes ranging through toleration to approval. The following interview excerpts show the range of variation:

Interviewer:
What does it mean if somebody changes majors?

Student:
It means to me that the person isn't blowing very hot in what he's doing!

In another interview:

Interviewer:
What do you think of a person who changes majors?

Student:
Some people say that he doesn't know what he's doing; he's flightly.

These students showed the mild censure that was anticipated in the study. However, the following student told how he altered just such an attitude toward changers of major:

Interviewer:
What do you think of a person who changes majors?

Student:
Before I did, I thought he was unstable. But now I look at him and say he's just like 90% of the other guys.

Still other students agreed that changing majors is an approved practice by saying, as one student did, "It is not a mark against a person to change majors; if they don't like it they should get out." Another student
The following student expressed general approbation but specified one type of change that is unadvisable:

I think he (the Changer) is trying to go' from an uncertainty to a certainty, so he can go into the right field. I think it's fine. I think he's making a mistake if he won't cross bridges, but I wouldn't advise just switching around because you don't like one course after the other.'1

The following students based their judgement of Changers mostly on their own experience, further illustrating the lack of uniformity in attitudes toward them:

Interviewer:
What do you think of a person who changes majors?

Student:
They probably were like I was. They were just not certain what they wanted to do. Maybe some of them are not trying to find it but are just skipping around. Maybe that's what I was doing, I don't know.

In another interview:

Interviewer:
What do you think of a student who changes majors?

Student:
He's looking for an easier course. That's what I did, and I think that's what most people do.

1 A case of such "switching around," or floundering from major to major for various reasons (low grades, indeterminate interests) was one of the informants who began in geology, changed to chemistry, to history, to music, and then finally returned to geology, his original major. Even at the time of the interview his future plans were hardly definitive: "Right now I'm just doing what I can do and not worrying about the future."
From such excerpts it can be seen that the student concept of a person who changes majors is not at all uniform. The responses do not consistently suggest any particular description or evaluation of the changer of majors.

One explanation for such inconsistency was suggested by an interviewee who volunteered his personal classification of changers of major: "There are three classes: they can't hack it; it is not what they want and they find something they like; and they don't know what they want to do."

The picture becomes less hazy, however, when attention is focused on students as they relate to specific academic fields. Here, stronger personal attachments to specialized vocational goals and groups of colleagues often intensifies the emotional significance of changing majors. For instance, when a student changes majors out of a tightly-knit department such as geology he is sometimes looked upon as a mild sort of turncoat by the students who did not change, i.e., the old guard.

The types of changes of major are discussed below in chapters V and VI.

Vocational identification is discussed more fully on pages 26-31 above.
The following interview with a long-standing member of the geology department yields instructive insight into the process whereby adversity can strengthen in-group morale and influence the old-guard's view of the turncoat changer of major:

Interviewer:
Is there any stigma attached to changing majors?

Student:
Certainly not in changing in because they're just proving that you were right all the time in choosing it in the first place, and somebody else thinks this is true too. But I think some in changing out. I know there are several other students who are changing out into physical science, and I think possibly some little bit. Maybe it's because you hate to think you might have been wrong too. Certainly not a great deal. There is the feeling they're not quite one of the gang that face the same problems you will when you graduate.

Interviewer:
Is there much gang feeling?

Student:
Yes, there is a gang morale quite strong, at least as much as in any other major.

Interviewer:
Where can you see it?

Student:
Mostly I think it's--well, there's an awful strange department over there. Has anyone told you about some of the weird ones that teach?...And he's a terrible grader. There was a kid last quarter--there were two tests and a final and no assignments due and he got B's on both the tests and a C on the final and got a D for the course. And that's pretty common the way he grades. And the guys don't have the faintest idea of how they're doing. I don't know where they picked that crew up they got teaching. They're all doing notable research. Partly for these strange instructors and their irrational ideas and perhaps the bad job situation has something to do with it, everyone's in the same boat. Then too the average age is older.... It's really quite clannish. The juniors and seniors stick pretty much together and never meet a freshman or sophomore. When someone leaves it's not that you feel that geology is
being sold down the river—it's not quite that strong. It's just that all of a sudden you don't quite have that in common with them anymore. When they go over for coffee or something and one of these other guys comes along, it's just a little bit different. From a group with a common future you're suddenly one who faces an entirely different future, plus the fact that you may prove that I was wrong for getting in there in the first place. He's seen that there's a better deal, plus that.

Present and future adversity, then, are among the pressures which can point up a "consciousness of kind" among departmental members and make for rejection of the student who dissociates. For not only is he now an outsider but he has openly made light of his dedication to the group and now, for anyone who is in doubt, threatens to prove he is right in doing so.

The students who change out of geology, on the other hand, combat this rejection by seeking new group supports in place of old. They may even justify relinquishing their former identities by denouncing the old guard, as did this convinced changer out of geology: "They put a lot of blind faith in the job possibilities.... They know they're not gonna get a job, and yet won't change!"

Thus it is apparent that the skirmish lines between Changers and Non-changers are more clearly drawn when reconnaissance is limited to specific academic fields.

The Old Guard and the Newcomer:

Degree of Commitment

In the last-cited interview the long-standing geology major reported there was no stigma attached to
"changing in because they're just proving you were right all the time in choosing it (geology) in the first place, and somebody else thinks this is true too." Here the old guard is welcoming newcomers as reinforcement to its ranks and ideology.

However, one might ask if the newcomer can be depended on to remain loyal; after all, he has abandoned one major, will he this one also? Will he be as intensely committed to the new major as the old guard has been?

In a research project related to this one, MacIntosh has suggested the answer is negative. Studying change of vocational goals (not academic majors) he administered a questionnaire two times to the same students, at an interval of one year. When he later interviewed the students he found that those who had a history of change on the second questionnaire exhibited a striking tendency to report additional change in the period between the second questionnaire and the interview. On the other hand, those who had a history of being stable through the second questionnaire showed a negligible tendency to exhibit further change at the time of the interview. In sum, those who changed goals once had a greater tendency to change twice than did the stable student to change once.

The preliminary interviews of the present study revealed considerable uncertainty among students who had changed majors, thereby suggesting that the MacIntosh

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1 MacIntosh, Ph. D. Thesis, Univ. of Pennsylvania, 34.
findings might be applicable to changes of academic major as well as to changes of vocational choice. Thus the working hypothesis was germinated, that students who change majors would indicate less commitment to their new major than students who had not changed.

Some of the quantitative data of this study seemed to support this hypothesis. Eleven of the thirty Changers had changed majors more than once, including seven who changed twice and four who changed three or more times. In brief, about one-third of the Changers had changed majors repetitively.

However, it must be noted that this finding refers mostly to changes made in the freshman and sophomore years. To find the frequency of repeated change among juniors and seniors like those in our sample, one would obviously have to study graduate students, i.e., students who had had full opportunity to change majors as juniors and seniors. So it is not necessarily true that one-third of the Changers in our sample are likely to change majors again, revealing less intense commitment to their majors than the long-standing members.

Next the qualitative data of the interviews will be considered. The differential degrees of commitment among Changers and Non-changers were inquired into by asking each subject about such things as the finality of his present choice of major and the desirability of his present major.
A central and somewhat surprising finding yielded by the interviews was that not a single subject considered his present major to be "just a trial run"—for each it was his "final choice." One student concisely told why: "It's a little late for a trial run. I've got to settle down to something."

At that stage in his college career the student perceived the costs in time, money, academic effort, etc. to be too great for him to contemplate changing majors. Apparently it was this definition of the situation that had reinforced others to the point where the commitment of our subjects to their present majors was equally strong—their present choices of major were final, largely because it was too late to change.

The same sort of imposed commitment showed up in responses to other interview questions such as: Is this the most desirable possible major for you?" and, "What would it take to get you to change to another major?" Both Changers and Non-changers reported their present major to be the most desirable possible choice, and virtually unchangeable, often because of the perceived impossibility of changing it.¹

However, other interview questions evoked expressions of commitment which, when compared to the above, were less constrained and more personalized. Sometimes

¹It is a temptation to speculate whether our informants would express such a strong commitment to their major fields a few years hence, when they would no longer be constrained by university norms.
the commitment was only lukewarm, and such was not limited to changers of major but showed up among old guard students as well. The following excerpt from an interview with a graduating senior in geology is illustrative:

Interviewer:
What do you think of a person who changes out of geology?

Student:
Sometimes I wonder if he's not smart to get out of geology. I wonder if it wouldn't be the right thing to do.

Interviewer:
Why is it that you're interested in geology and not anything else?

Student:
Right now that's my background, as far as education goes I don't have too much of a background in anything else. Although I believe that if I had a background in some other field I could develop an interest and would develop an interest and enjoy working in it also, if it were outdoors and I could make a living at it.

Interviewer:
But, as you said before, there's nothing about geology in particular that you can take more pride in than other professions?

Student:
That's right.

Other interviewees more openly expressed dissatisfaction with their major, and again, this included Non-changers who had long been nominally committed to theirs. Such was the case with one long-standing liberal arts major who complained about his major in this way:

People always ask "What's it good for?" And I say, "Business," which really implies "Nothing." A broad education sounds nice but it has something to be desired in a vocational goal, because when I go looking for a job I don't have anything to offer.

Still another Non-changer revealed an extreme lack
of psychological commitment to his major, liberal arts, even though he was a graduating senior. The interview conversation follows:

Interviewer: Have you learned anything new about your interests since you've been in liberal arts?

Student: Well, I went to the counselling center and took some tests. I know now I'm one of those people who don't know what they really want to do.

Interviewer: Do you ever wonder whether you should be in this major or not?

Student: I think the biggest thing about liberal arts is that you can't really see what you're going to do, or where you're going to go because when you graduate you're not really a qualified anything!

Interviewer: What compensates for this?

Student: Well, probably the idea that I'll probably run onto something. You get exposed to a lot of things even though you might not be a qualified anything or even a qualified beginner in something.

Interviewer: Would you rather be known as a liberal arts graduate than some other?

Student: I'd rather have a degree in psychology right now, or in general, a degree in any specialized major.

This student revealed not only real dissatisfactions with his present major, but floundering attitudes about majors in general. And yet he remained nominally committed to liberal arts at least until graduation.

Thus our last three informants have suggested how dissatisfaction, uncertainty and lack of self-involvement
in the major is not necessarily limited to students who change majors, but can be found among the old guard as well.

To summarize, the data did not support the original expectation that Changers would indicate a less intense commitment to their major than Non-changers. On the one hand, both categories reported an equal degree of finality and desirability of their choice of major. On the other, both Changers and Non-changers expressed frequent deficits in their psychological commitment to their majors.

So, in terms of this section's heading, the old guard need not suspect the newcomer's loyalty any more than its own, for if a differential degree of commitment does exist between them it is not evident from this inquiry.

Further Comparison of Changers and Non-changers

Data were also collected to see if Changers were distinguishable from Non-changers in the contemporary characteristics of age, marital status, percentage of self-support, and academic grades. This is how Changers compared with Non-changers in these respects.

The average age of Changers was 23.6 years as compared to 24.4 for Non-changers. This difference of one year can be explained by the fact that the longer a student waits to change majors, the more time and money
he stands to waste. As a result, students change majors mostly before their senior year, making the Changer category younger than the Non-changer category, which includes more senior students.

Table 1. below shows how Changers and Non-changers compare in marital status and percentage of self-support.

**TABLE 1. -- Marital Status, Percent of Self-support of Changers and Non-changers of Academic Major**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Changers (N=30)</th>
<th>Non-changers (N=15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of self-support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75% or more</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 75%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from the table, more Non-changers (40%) than Changers (23%) were married. This is possibly a function of older age among Non-changers, as cited above. We might also speculate that this difference is partially a result of increased family constraints toward stability of major.

Table 1. above further shows no difference at all between Changers and Non-changers in the percent of financial self-support; the same percentage (73) of both Changers and Non-changers reported earning more than 75% of their income at the time of the interview.

Table 2. below shows the distribution of grades
TABLE 2. -- Approximate Academic Grade Levels of Changers and Non-changers of Academic Major

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Changers (N=30)</th>
<th>Non-changers (N=15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A......</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B plus.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B minus.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C......</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D......</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total...</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows Changers and Non-changers to be distributed almost identically through the different grade levels.

Other data were collected to indicate whether Changers were different from Non-changers in the general way they planned, or didn't plan their life. They were asked "Would you say that in living your life in general, you like to know in advance exactly what's going to happen to you if possible, or do you prefer to act spontaneously, on the spur of the moment and occasionally take chances?"

Tabulation showed that 14 or 46% of the Changers were willing to take chances, whereas five, or 33% of the Non-changers so described themselves. This would seem to support an earlier finding of Rosenberg. He found in a
study of stability of occupational choice (not academic major) that "far-sighted" college students had more stability in their choice of occupation than "myopics."¹ However, since the questions in the two studies are not exactly comparable, all that can be offered here is tentative support for the reliability of his finding.

From this group of statistical findings it can be seen that, of the students in our small sample, those who had recently changed majors were similar to Non-changers in percent of self-support and academic grade level. However, Changers did show some contrast to Non-changers in three other selected characteristics: they tended to be younger, less often married, and less far-sighted in planning their lives in general.

**Summary**

In this chapter there have been explored three possible ways of answering the general question, "Who are the students who change academic majors?"

The first inquiry had to do with what the informants thought of the students who change majors. Unexpectedly, there was no uniform attitude of either

¹Morris Rosenberg, "Factors Influencing Change of Occupational Choice," in The Language of Social Research, ed. Paul Lazarsfeld and Morris Rosenberg, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1955), p. 254. The "far-sighted"s were those students who considered it very or fairly important to have their plans known in advance; the "myopics" thought it not very important or not at all important.
reprehension or approval expressed toward Changers in general. However, when the investigative scope was limited to the specific academic fields a slightly more distinct image of the Changer was found, especially where relations with a departmental in-group were affected.

Next the investigation probed from a different direction to see if Changers and Non-changers were actually distinguishable in the degree of commitment to their major. The hunch that newcomers might show less dedication than the old guard was not supported, for, if there was a difference in commitment, this study did not show it.

The third and final examination consisted of a statistical comparison of Changers and Non-changers in certain personal characteristics. In tabulating it was found that the Changer category tended to be younger, less often married, and less far-sighted in planning their lives than the Non-changers; but equal to them in academic grades and percent of self-support.
CHAPTER IV

CLASSIFICATION OF CHANGES
OF ACADEMIC MAJOR

Thus far there have been discussed (1) factors contributing to permanent and impermanent choices of academic majors; and (2) the particular students who have reacted to these influences by changing majors. Now there remains to be considered changing academic majors as a behavioral process.

In one sense, changes of major are unique to each student because his decisions are in part determined by definitions of the situation and self-perceptions which are socially-acquired but never fully shared. On the other hand, changes of major are similar in that each one involves a more or less crucial exchange of one student role for another, along with the particular sets of aspirations and self-other relationships connected with the roles. There are also common motives and attitudes which regularly recurred among our informants. These intervening variables will serve as the bases for the classification of changes of major and the discussion of the personal functions that apparently have been served by the behavior.
The broadest and most obvious classification of changes of major is into two categories: Compulsory (because of grade deficiencies) and Voluntary (without grade deficiencies). The Compulsory type will be seen to be subdivisible into (1) Bona Fide, and (2) Pretended sub-categories, the latter being an inconclusive and provisional suggestion of a classification which needs further empirical substantiation. Voluntary changes, on the other hand, will be broken down according to four attitudes of the Changers toward their former and new majors: (1) Protest Against Former Student Role, (2) Protest Against Former Vocational Role, (3) Attraction to New Student Role, and (4) Attraction to New Vocational Role.

Compulsory Changes

Many students are forced to change majors by being virtually expelled from their major because of grade deficiencies. One student told graphically what happens in the process: "The fact that I couldn't pass those courses was the springboard that got me out of geology."

In a study of vocational aspirations of college students, W. H. Brown suggests that the compulsory type of change is the most prevalent. He observes, "It

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appears that the students enter college with their minds made up about the area in which they desire to major and that they tend to stick to their choices until they are forced by failure or other circumstances to change their majors. (underlining mine)

On the basis of this observation it can be hypothesized that the informants would report more forced changes of major than voluntary ones. To investigate, we first sought to distinguish the compulsory changes by asking the interviewees two questions: (1) Did any of your problems in your former major have to do with grades? and (2) At the time of changing majors would you have preferred to remain in your former major if your problems had been solved?¹ The informants who answered "yes" to both questions were considered to have been compelled to change majors and were classified as compulsory changers.

When the responses were tabulated it was found that only seven out of thirty of the changes of major had been compulsory. This finding did not support either the hypothesis or the observation by Brown.²

Compulsory types of changes of major were necessarily subdivided into two types: (1) Bona Fide

¹Subjects answered freely about their grade deficiencies because these questions did not broach the threatening topics of inability implied by low grades, or of being forced to change majors against one's will.

²It should be remembered that our sample was purposively selected with but thirty students from three academic fields.
in which the grade deficiencies were unintentionally incurred, and (2) Pretended—in which the grade deficiencies were purposely incurred for reasons which will be discussed later.

Bona Fide Compulsory

Four out of the seven compulsory changes of major were necessitated by grade deficiencies which were incurred involuntarily. That is to say, four students made a more or less concerted effort to earn satisfactory marks in order to avoid having to change majors.

An extreme example of a student being forced against his will to change majors is an informant who will be called Stan. Stan was devoted to his field of geology. He wanted to emulate the success of Vernon Pick who found the uranium mine on the Colorado Plateau. What is more, Stan conceived of his fellow students as having similar lofty aims. He opined: "A lot of fellows think, 'Well, why not go to college and get a degree in geology and then go out and find yourself a gold mine or a fluorspar mine,' you see?"

As will be seen below, Stan was willing to work hard to be a success in the field. He was intensely interested in the work and relished the thought of working outdoors. As he said: "I like rocks; I like to pick them up and look at them. I like to prospect out
As for his family's place in this endeavor (he was father of four children) he had this to say: "My family life wouldn't be very good, but it would be compensated by enjoyment of my work. If I was single, outdoor work would be the first thing I'd want because I'm always out hunting."

It would appear thus far that Stan was admirably suited to his chosen field, but the first hint otherwise came in this comparison of himself with his colleagues in geology: "Some had more scientific aptitude, but not more interest."

After two and a half years of college Stan was still "interested" in geology but it was evident he would have to compromise that interest if he was to stay in school. The (for him) unconquerable mathematics and chemistry courses forced him out of geology. Looking back, he said, "I liked geology, but I didn't like what went along with it. I was bitter from the beginning at not being able to do the work."

That he was almost fixated to his aspired role of geologist is shown in the following description of his determination to succeed in spite of failing grades and intense dislike for certain courses:

Now just to give you an example of how I didn't like what went along with geology I took college algebra three times and flunked it three times in a row! I took trigonometry three times and flunked it three times in a row! So something's wrong, see? And I told Dr.
Phillips (of the counselling center) that, when he was here, and he said, "Well, what's wrong? What do you think?" And I said, "Well, I don't like math." At the first part of the course I was going all right, but then my interest just waned and I hate the thing. The first quarter chemistry I had was a "D", and second quarter was an "F." And I took it over again and got another "F." And those are three courses that gave me my deficiency score.

These events left Stan the choice of either switching majors or being forced out of school altogether, because of grade deficiencies. For the moment, he left school: "I hated to give up something I started and that I liked, so I dropped out of school for two quarters because geology was my first love."¹

Even the compulsory Changer who does not drop out of school undergoes a more or less painful realization that he is subject to manipulation by the university administration. Not only has it expelled him from one major field but, if he does no better in his next, it stands as a proven threat to his role as college student. As one informant described it:

I would have done it differently if I had it to do over again, so I wouldn't have been pushed into a decision. I would like to be able to say, "Well, I can do this and I can do this; I wonder which one I can do best." No, "I can't do this, so I'd better be able to do this." I was lucky I was interested in these other things, or otherwise I wouldn't have been able to go to school.

Stan later decided to come back into the university and enter the liberal arts field. There he found certain

¹Students who have dropped out of college as an alternative to changing majors, are not included in the sample of this study.
compensations for relinquishing his former identity, and after all, he could still keep geology as a hobby. Even though he missed his old friends in geology, his feelings about himself and self-other relationships improved. He talked about the change in his self respect due to his improved grades:

You have to consider the respect of your fellow men. If you make a better mark in class they respect you for it. They say, "I hear you got a B this quarter!" You know, more respect from your fellow men. And also from your wife. She knows how you're feeling all the time. You go home and she can tell. Also it goes toward your relations with your children and your wife. It shows up very easily there. Yes, as other people respect you more you can respect yourself more—you know, the looking-mirror, or whatever you call it in sociology?

Apparently Stan's basis of confidence was only temporarily weakened because he came back to school to attain even greater personal respectability. He had reached the point where he required, but could not earn, the ratification of society for his dreams of geological glory. Thus he was helped to discard one particular role that was impracticable for him to play, with the result that his identity came to be founded more on his better potentialities. This is probably the most common personal function served in the compulsory type of changing majors.

In retrospect it is interesting to note how Stan employed three different mechanisms to resolve the conflict between his aspired and imposed roles: he withdrew, by dropping out of school to escape the conflict;
he compartmentalized the conflicting roles by taking up geology as a hobby; and he compromised by settling for a degree in liberal arts instead of his "first love"—geology.

Hence, Stan has provided the study with some informative behavior about what can happen when a change of major is made compulsory.

Pretended Compulsory: A Provisional Classification

Before gathering the final data of this study, only one form of compulsory change was expected to be found. So it was somewhat surprising to find three of the informants not fitting the usual pattern as epitomized by Stan. Contrary to the usual occurrence, these students apparently had not incurred their grade deficiencies involuntarily, but rather to serve some personal function of their own. The evidence presented below seemed significant but of insufficient quality and quantity to warrant more than a provisional suggestion that a Pretended subcategory might exist. Further research is needed for verification.

The first informant exhibiting the behavior was a student (who will be called Bill) who had recently changed majors out of pre-dentistry into geology. Ostensibly, Bill left his pre-dentistry major because his grades
in organic chemistry were low enough to preclude his acceptance into dentistry school. However, in the interview Bill gave indications that there was more to it than that:

Interviewer:
Did you learn anything new about your interests while you were in pre-dent?

Student:
I learned I didn't want to be cooped up in an office all my life.

(later)

Interviewer:
How are you different from the students who stayed in pre-dent and didn't change out?

Student:
Maybe they had too much family pressure on them and couldn't get out. Maybe they were not in a position to make their own choice. Maybe they like dentistry.

(later)

Interviewer:

Interviewer:
Which major fits your interests better, pre-dent or geology?

Student:
Geology, because I like to work outdoors and geology keeps me there. I would enjoy prospecting on my own. The field itself presents quite a challenge. If you can figure out the structures and how they're formed it gives you a feeling of accomplishment. And if you're a good geologist and people know you are, and you know that they know that you know what you're talking about; that's satisfaction and prestige. Not that I want to deprive the knowledge of everyone else, but it sort of sets a person aside.

It is rather clear from the above that geology was much more to Bill's liking than pre-dent. It is no accident that he thought of his fellow pre-dent
as staying in the field because of even greater family pressure--only considering as an afterthought that they might actually prefer it. We can get a clearer picture of the family pressure in Bill's situation from the following interview excerpt:

Interviewer:
How did you feel about not being accepted into dental school?

Student:
I wasn't really disappointed about it. Why? Maybe I just didn't work as hard as I should have.

Interviewer:
What did your family think of your changing out of dentistry?

Student:
Most of my family felt it was too bad that I switched. I imagine all three of them did. My two sisters and my dad were disappointed because they wanted to see me get up in the world and dentistry is a fine field for getting up in the world....Like I say, to me dentistry doesn't mean much; it's probably more important to my family that I be higher on the ladder than for myself, because they feel that if they couldn't do it maybe someone in the family can.

Interviewer:
What were the things holding you in dentistry so that you didn't change sooner?

Student:
It goes back to the family again. I felt if I could make it, I'd give it a try; if it didn't work out that way, then I'd do what I wanted to do. And it so happened that when I didn't get accepted into dent school then I was free to follow my own course, the real choice I had, probably.

Interviewer:
Do you sometimes wonder whether you didn't set that up as an excuse to have to move out of pre-dent?

Student:
Yes, that just might be the case. I have thought about it some and that kinda might be it.
It was here that Bill suggested that his was not a simple compulsory change of majors. Taken totally, his responses gave some reason to believe, on the contrary, that he was motivated to permit the grade deficiencies to occur so that he could satisfy both himself, by changing into geology, and his parents, by making the withdrawal from pre-dentistry appear unavoidably forced upon him.

It could be assumed from this information that if Bill could start college over again he would consider the choice of pre-dent to have been a mistake, and would have simply eliminated it in favor of geology. Surprisingly enough, however, he had this to say about such a prospect:

Interviewer:
If you could start college over again, knowing what you know now, would you do it any differently?

Student:
Well, probably not. Cuz, like I said I wasn't really disappointed because I was turned down for dent school. But I can't say that I would do it any differently than what I have done. But whatever way it did turn out, I would have studied harder. If I had gotten into dent school, I would have worked harder on organic chemistry for sure. If I had started originally in geology I would have worked harder at that too, cuz I feel that a mediocre person doesn't get too far.... I guess for me, geology is more or less a second choice now. I wasn't able to make it in the first one, so I had to choose the next best one. I'm fairly satisfied and I feel that it is, it probably will be for the best.

Interviewer:
And if you were to die tomorrow?

Student:
I'd die happy. But, in the over-all outcome, if everything was behind me, and which would I rather be, it
would probably be dentistry, due to the fact that there's more money, prestige, and well, he's looked upon as being a better man, being a dentist, than almost anything else.

The greater prestige and money of dentistry still held Bill's fancy, even though he preferred geology's outdoor work and field of knowledge enough to change into it against his family's desires. He had internalized his family's aspirations for him, but not to the extent that he could endure the required deferment of his gratifications. Rather, he sought more immediate satisfactions in a role more to his liking at the time—geology.

Another informant, who will be called Don, presented a case strikingly similar to Bill's. A total of five significant similarities were notable:

1. Don's former major was also prestigious—pharmacy.

2. Don's family of orientation also had hopes that he would "stick with it," since a pharmacy degree was a legal necessity if he was to take over his father's group of drug stores.

3. Don also changed into a less prestigious new major, business administration, which he definitely preferred to his former major. He especially enjoyed the clerical work, more class participation and friendships in business administration.

4. Although with a lesser degree of recognition
than Bill, Don also indicated some possible pre-structuring of his ostensibly compulsory change of major:

Interviewer:
What was the thing that finally came about to make you change majors when you did and not sooner?

Student:
I flunked math. I could pass the chem and physics which were actually the same thing as math. Funny thing!

Interviewer:
Do you think it is possible that you did it on purpose to make it appear to your parents as though you had been forced to change?

Student:
Yes, it is possible. That's possible. It came so hard for me, that math. It's easier to sluff a hard course like math than it is an easy one, I guess. It's hard, cuz when you don't want to do it in the first place, then it's more of a chore than anything else. Business courses writing up reports, I enjoy that. It wasn't the satisfaction from pharmacy itself, but what it could do for me was the whole thing.

By making the change of majors appear unavoidable these two students acquired attractive new roles while at the same time "saving face" before significant others who were disappointed in the change.

5. Just thinking about "what it could do" for him made Don similar to our previous informant, Bill, in still another regard: if Don could have started college again he would also have considered starting in his discarded major again! As dentistry had tantalized Bill, so had pharmacy abided in Don's idealized ambitions.

This was true in spite of their actual preferences having been authenticated by their changing majors to less demanding, more satisfying fields of study. In
other words, the explanation might be offered that the ideal selves of the two informants were still holding out for a try at prestige, even though their actual selves had voluntarily relinquished the prestigious identities for ones that were less costly and more immediately satisfying. Don explained some of this discrepancy between the ideal and real selves: "You think ahead but you don't think of going through it. You think of what'll happen when you do make it but going through it is hell!" Evidently the forces of hell prevailed when Bill and Don changed their majors!

Don was less aware than Bill of the extent to which he had feigned being forced to change majors. In contrast, the third and last informant, Alex, was more acquainted than either of them with his real motives. Under pressure from his family, Alex originally majored in chemistry: "My dad always wishes he had gone into chemistry." Although Alex earned high grades in chemistry at first, he grew increasingly dissuaded by his long-time interest in the humanities.

His family, however, tried to forestall a change of major: "They have almost a dislike for art and literature which I've always like a great deal. They consider it a waste of time even though my dad teaches English in high school."

But when things got bad enough, Alex changed anyway. As he said: "I despised it, I didn't like anything
about it. And I was nearing the point where I would graduate in chemistry if I didn't change majors. Then I had a quarter with only chemistry and physics and I about went buggy. I changed then."

It is how he changed majors that is of interest here. In the interview Alex apoke openly of deliberately permitting his grade average to drop from 3.00 to .5 for purposes of escaping family strictures: "That was the only way you could convince them you were serious. They had to let me change then."

Thus Alex incurred the low grades more intentionally than the previous two informants, but for similar purposes related to his overly-manipulative family.  

Before turning from these Compulsory changes to Voluntary changes, a basic similarity between the two types should be pointed out. The Compulsory change of major involves a significant share of voluntary behavior. For even though a student be compelled to leave one major, it is up to him to decide on his new objective and then compare and choose the particular major he feels to be the best means for reaching that objective. Realizing this interrelationship between the two main categories of change, we can direct our attention to the second one--Voluntary types of changes of major.

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1 It is interesting to note that Alex was not as free from his parents as he might have thought, in view of his felt obligation to prove to them that he was serious about wanting to change majors. Nonetheless, his far-reaching decision, made in opposition to them, resulted in gains in independence for him.
Voluntary Changes of
Academic Major

Among the student informants who voluntarily changed majors there were considerable variations in motivations, both to dissociate from the former majors and to enter the new ones. These motivational variations lent themselves to a fourfold classification based upon the students' conceptions of their former and newly-entered major fields: (1) Protest Against the Former Student Role, (2) Protest Against the Former Vocational Role, (3) Attraction to the New Student Role, and (4) Attraction to the New Vocational Role.

Protest Against Former Student Role

In a pertinent study, Alfred L. Brophy has empirically studied the relationships between job satisfaction, role, and the self. Although the present data relates to academic majors rather than to jobs, it indirectly supports Brophy's findings by indicating that, in a major field, "satisfaction is negatively related to the discrepancy between the self-concept and the imposed (student) role." In other words, if the major

did not allow the student to play the kind of role he wanted to play—if its prescribed role did not complement his most vivid self-picture—he was strongly motivated to change majors. A case in point is the following student who changed out of liberal arts because it did not afford the specialization he desired:

I felt hindered in that I felt that I was just going around in circles as far as these courses were concerned. Like I mentioned before, as far as a varied program of courses, I felt that it seemed like a never-ending circle—taking courses that weren't leading up to anything.

The following protestations of a student reveal the strong antipathy he developed against significant others associated with his former student role:

They've got six men over there and two of 'em are teachers and four of 'em are ______. And they just can't put it across. They know their stuff but they're not teachers. And the head of the department is anything but inspiring. He is a social problem himself! He's real self-conscious, and he walks around with his head on his chest. I feel the head of the department should be someone who can really spur you along, and give you a jab when you need a jab. And when you're letting down in some course he should be telling you about it and he should be telling you when you're doing a good job, too. I had experiences with some of the professors where the grade I got and the grade I deserved were two different things. On the other hand a couple of the others will bend over backward to help you. In one course I got an A on my talk, an A on my paper, a C on the mid-term and a B on the final, and a C for my final grade. And this other fellow who was more or less illiterate got a B. Well, that was the straw that broke the camel's back! Because no matter what anyone says, it's what's on that transcript that makes the difference.

In contrast to the above informant's objection to what he considered to be an unfair withholding of deserved grades, the following student felt something
akin to insult when the academic rewards were too easily earned in his former major of business administration:

For the majority of the students I talked to, it was just an easy mark. They wanted that sheepskin and the business school was the easiest school to get it in. In fact, I think I've put in more work in the last two quarters in economics than I did in the two years I was in the business school. I never run into a course that was a challenge the whole time I was there.... Geez, some of the courses I took over there, I never picked up a book and walked out of the course with a B or an A or a C and I felt like I knew more when I walked in the course than when I walked out.

Protest Against Former Vocational Role

Besides objecting to their student roles, some of the informants protested against aspects of the expected occupational role. Studying to become a geologist is one thing, but being a geologist is another, as witness this informant for whom the travel required of a geologist was obviously incompatible with what he wanted from life: "My ambition is to stay in one place, raise a family and race boats!"

One informant was successful enough as a student, but contemplating the role demands of the actual job repelled him sufficiently to force him out of journalism altogether. As he put it:

In journalism you have to be too much like a salesman--walk up to people and ask them to buy your product or give you some information. I don't like to force people to say things. Business and journalism are both too commercial.
Two other informants changed majors out of geology largely because poor job prospects, due to a wide-spread economic recession, faced them with the possibility of not even having a professional role to perform, compatible or not.

As can be seen, these students were not merely squirming within the harnesses of their roles as students, but questioning the very terms, requisites, and rewards of the occupations, with the result that they changed their major academic fields.

Attraction to New Student Role

This motivational pattern for Voluntary changes of major can best be studied by first reviewing some data considered previously in this study. When discussing Pretended Compulsory changes of major it was noted that the two remarkably similar informants, Bill and Don, had changed majors to protect and enhance their selves by acquiring new and more compatible role prescriptions. Their previously held goals of dentistry and pharmacy had been prestigious, to be sure, but were too distant and cost too much effort. They wanted to have more of their satisfaction while attaining their professional status. When they had first come to school the vocational ends had justified the educational means. But now the
educational means justified the vocational ends.

A similar shift in values was seen to occur among other informants as they changed majors. As interviewees they were asked, "Which of the following stand out to you as the more important or attractive in your present major: (a) the satisfaction you get from your school work now; or (b) the satisfaction you expect to get from your work after school?" The subjects were then asked also to compare the attractiveness of these two items—short- and long-range goals—in their former majors.

In tabulating, nine students were found to have changed the range of their goals when they changed majors. Eight of those nine had changed from long- to short-range goals, as did our two Pretended Compulsory changers of major. An interpretation might be tentatively offered that this shift in values indicated a process of maturing in which actual self-demands were being increasingly discerned and enhanced, with a resultant modification of aspirations of the ideal self.

An instructive example is that of a student who saw in his new major an unprecedented opportunity to unload certain inhibitions to his self-expression. He had defected from his original major of automotive mechanics ("Who wants grease in his eyes all the time?") and entered military science. Later he changed into liberal arts. While in that major he took an introductory
drama course. It was here he discovered an unexpected ability and satisfaction and entered the major post haste. He told of his good fortune:

Interviewer:
How can you tell you're more at ease in drama than in liberal arts?

Student:
Well, you kinda learn to get used to yourself, more or less. You learn not to have to cover up for every little action and put on more or less of a front all the time.... It's hard to be self-conscious, really, if you're really trying while you're on stage. You just kinda push it aside, and more or less learn not to be. You're not so afraid that people are looking at you. You don't really care whether they are or not.

Interviewer: Why not?

Student:
Well, I mean you care, but not to the extent that you're afraid they're going to laugh at you. It's more that you do away with self-consciousness, and not always worried that what you're doing might be frowned on.... You're not afraid to do what you want to do, in the sense that you don't hold yourself in check and worry about what the other person thinks of you. When I'm in a drama group I do things I wouldn't do if I were alone, like cut up and things like that. But in liberal arts I used to walk around and worry about little things that you do and people wondering "What's he?" you know? As it is now, I can hardly wait to take some of these drama courses coming up!

The release and enhanced self-assurance which the new major afforded this student revealed new dimensions in his personality which he was heretofore unable to enjoy. Thus changing majors served a vital function in his self-discovery.

Among most of the informants there was another more observable sort of evidence that they had been attracted into more advantageous fields. All but four
of the Changers, both voluntary and compulsory, reported that their grades had improved in the newly-entered majors—a significant personal function to be served.¹

The following student told how improved grades could be contributory to a self-assurance as gratifying as that mentioned above:

**Interviewer:**
Would you say that your self-respect has increased, decreased, or stayed the same since you've been in finance?

**Student:**
Increased.

**Interviewer:**
How do you judge this?

**Student:**
I've got some good grades in finance. Now grades aren't everything but in the university they do demand a certain amount of respect—I've found that out. And I've found that students show a different respect when you have good grades than when you have just mediocre grades. How? Oh, sometimes they'll come right out and tell you, "You don't have to worry about it because you always come out on top." Or, "I wish I could get grades like you have," or, "I wish I could settle down and study the way you do." I've had a lot of students tell me that. And there are other ways. When I was majoring in accounting, that's a course where it's a good idea to have a buddy to work with. And uh, I didn't because I was just a little bit slow. But the better students that could have helped me some, and some of them good friends of mine, they didn't seem to care to study with me. But once I've changed my field of concentration and went into finance, and I liked it and was doing well in it, it's surprising the number of people that want to study with me! That changes a person's self-respect. Instead of having to go for help, they come to you for help.

¹The causes of the improved grades, e.g., the greater compatibility of the new majors and/or the increased conscientiousness of the students, do not concern us here.
Attraction to New Vocational Role

In studying Voluntary changes of major as motivated by attraction to new vocational role, data were collected which would relate to an observation by Ginzberg and associates in a previous study of occupational choice. Basing their observations on ninety-one single interviews with students ranging from sixth graders to graduate students, they maintained that "the crystallization of occupational choice inevitably has the quality of a compromise," between the individual's ideal preferences and his actual expectations.\(^1\) In other words, realistic occupational choices typically involve giving up old aspirations in favor of more limited objectives.

If some basic similarities can be assumed to exist between the choices of occupation and academic majors, two of the findings of this study throw some doubt upon the Ginzberg observation. First, when the changes of major were classified into Compulsory and Voluntary categories by the method previously described,\(^2\) 23 of the 30 changes studied were found to be Voluntary.

This majority was not forced to change by grade deficiencies.


\(^2\)Supra, p. 79.
as one might expect if vocational choices "inevitably had the quality of a compromise."

The second finding of this study pertaining to the Ginzberg observation resulted from interview questions regarding the aspirations of the Voluntary Changers: "Before you changed majors, would you rather have been called a "_____" (professional title of former major), or a "_____" (professional title of new major)? All of the respondents indicated that, at the time of changing majors, they aspired to the vocational title of the field into which they were changing. As in our first finding, inevitable compromise was not indicated here.

These two findings, albeit from a purposively-selected sample, do not increase one's confidence in the veracity of the Ginzberg observation. Rather, they seem to support the theoretical work of D. E. Super. He presents an equally plausible hypothesis deducible from the general theory of vocational choice, but which would lead to the expectation of more voluntariness in vocational choices than Ginzberg's. He maintains that each successive choice in the individual's vocational development is not just a process of "compromise" between his preferences and ambitions, but one of "synthesizing" all previous types of choices the individual has made.¹

An example of this is an informant who changed into liberal arts partly because he saw there an occupation he could aspire to; whereas in his former major of journalism he had none. This is how he told of his new prospect:

In liberal arts I didn't know what I was doing, just working along and couldn't make up my mind whether to go into the service, or wait to be drafted, or whether to buy a new car or what. I didn't know what I was doing and I still don't. It's real corny but I got an idea now. What? Well, somewhere in the back of my mind I'd like to be a professor of English in a university someplace! (laughter)

Another probe of this study was intended to explore the particular aspects of the vocational roles that were most attractive to students who changed their majors. Changers were asked in the interviews to compare the degrees of attractiveness of two features of the vocations of their former and present majors: (a) anticipated income, and what it could buy, and (b) anticipated satisfaction from the work itself.

Upon tabulating, it was found that 22 of the 30 Changers were more attracted by the anticipated work satisfaction than the income of their present major. More pertinent to our study was the finding that 17 of the 30 Changers reported switching their preference. Fourteen of the seventeen altered their preference from income to work satisfaction. This left only three who were attracted more by income in their second major.

One of the majority who changed toward a more
satisfying job described his feelings thus: "Any kid at seventeen or eighteen thinks mostly about making money. But as you grow older the money becomes secondary unless you're extremely self-centered."

Another informant told of the part job satisfaction played in his decision to change majors from liberal arts to music:

I think in liberal arts I was more concerned with things like salary, or what kind of job, or where I'd be, or anything that would enter into as far as work. As far as the idea of satisfaction, or any part of that, it would have played very little part in liberal arts. I feel it played a very definite part as far as this decision about music goes, moreso than the idea of what the job has to offer in salary.

Of the exceptional three informants who changed majors toward preferred income is one who changed from liberal arts to business administration with this to say:

I liked the courses in liberal arts better than business, but I thought I'd better get a practical background. I'm not overwhelmingly interested in business even now, but it's broader and I won't be restricted to the field. Sometimes I get pretty bored, but it seemed liberal arts should be an avocation, not for money-making.

While investigating students being attracted to new vocational roles of their new majors, some light was shed on the relationship between academic choice and occupational choice. On the basis of the data it cannot be assumed that changing majors represents a vocational turning point—that the student is changing his vocational plans. In the study, changing majors did not represent a change in the life plans for 14 out of
30 Changers of major. The reasons included: "No, because I didn't have any plans before I changed and now I do." Also, changing majors may not be a vocational turning point for the reason that it is just a different path toward the same vocational goal. Or, it can be just a different path which is no more related to the vocational goal than was the first major. The latter case can be explained by the fact that there were several major fields which could serve as acceptable preparation for the vocational goals of some of our informants, e.g., business, military services, commercial flying, etc.

Pretended Voluntary: Merely a Logical Possibility

In the first section of this chapter, when Compulsory types of changes were investigated, a Pretended Compulsory subcategory was tentatively constructed to include three informants who had purposefully incurred their grade deficiencies, thereby permitting themselves to be "forced" out of their unwanted majors. In view of this Pretended Compulsory sub-category, one is sensitized to the logical possibility of a "Pretended Voluntary" subcategory. Hypothetically it might include Changers who reported changing majors of their own accord but, in actuality, had been compelled to change because of
grade deficiencies.

However, such falsification was precluded in the interviews by the non-threatening method of questioning the interviewees about their academic problems and their preferences at the time of changing majors.¹ Moreover, the realization that their grades were a matter of record discouraged the informants from pretending voluntariness when actually their grade deficiencies had compelled them to change majors.

This does not mean that the Compulsory Changers did not indulge themselves in a considerable amount of rationalizing, because they did. First, they had to exonerate themselves in the eyes of both their ideal selves and significant others for their inability to meet demands of the preferred role of their former majors. Secondly, when the range of the possible fields open to them was narrowed, alternative majors suddenly had to be made to seem desirable, if they had not seemed so in the past.

The following Compulsory Changer, compelled to relinquish business administration for education, illustrated the perceived necessity for such rationalizing, and some of the problematical self-doubts that can accompany the intellectual contortions sometimes required to accept an imposed new academic and vocational role:

¹Supra, p. 79.
Interviewer: Since you would rather have stayed in business administration, would you say you could take more pride in being a businessman than a teacher?

Student: No, because I've seen a lot of businessmen that I wouldn't be proud to be like they are. And I've seen very few teachers that I wouldn't like to be like, even though they were strict and dealt harshly with the students.

Interviewer: And you'd rather be called a businessman than a teacher, as you said?

Student: Well, it sounds better. I don't know how to explain it.

Interviewer: He stands higher in the community?

Student: Yes, that's what I mean. Say I was on a trip to Europe and some people asked me what I did for a living. You'd feel like much more if you said "I'm a businessman in the States," rather than "a teacher." It wouldn't make me feel any less but it would to them. I believe it would to them.

Interviewer: How about on this campus?

Student: I think students probably think that he's going to be more if he's going to be a businessman than if he's going to be a teacher. I think I can safely say that.

Interviewer: But you yourself don't feel that way?

Student: I don't think so. I believe other people are different because that's the way I used to believe before I got into education. Now it could be that I'm just sticking up for it because that's what I'm going to be but I really feel that way.

Hence, rationalization was understandably prevalent among the Compulsory Changers, but it did not make them pretend to have been Voluntary Changers and result in a
"Pretended Voluntary" classification. This was largely because the interview questions did not give the Compulsory Changers cause to conceal their grade deficiencies which, moreover, were ascertainable from university records.

Summary

In this chapter the endeavor has been to classify the changes of academic major and discuss some of the personal functions subserved by the various types of changes. Since the university both forces and affords changes of major, the classificatory system included the broad classifications of Compulsory and Voluntary Changes.

The Compulsory category was constructed to include Bona Fide and Pretended subcategories, while the Voluntary category included four subcategories based on the dominant self-demands of the students who changed majors, viz. (1) Protest Against Former Student Role, (2) Protest Against Former Vocational Role, (3) Attraction to New Student Role, and (4) Attraction to New Vocational Role.

Reviewing the categories individually, the Compulsory Changers were those students who had been virtually expelled from their former majors because of grade deficiencies. For four of the Compulsory Changers, this grade deficiency was incurred in spite of their more or less serious effort to earn acceptable grades. These students were classed as Bona Fide Compulsory Changers.
The case of Stan exemplified the personal function that can be served through a Compulsory Change of majors. He was helped to discard an impractical aspiration with the result that his identity came to be founded more on his better potentialities.

In exceptional but essential contrast to the usual Bona Fide type, three of the Compulsory Changers gave suggestive evidence of incurring their low grades more or less deliberately in order to make it appear to themselves and their families as if they had been compelled to change majors. These students were provisionally classed as Pretended Compulsory Changers. By changing majors all three of these informants were stepping down in social prestige and so were staging this performance largely to obviate criticism from overly-manipulative families.

Surprisingly, two of the informants indicated that, in spite of gaining significantly greater satisfaction from their new majors, they would consider starting college over again in their former, more prestigious majors! The explanation was offered by this researcher that both informants' ideal selves were still wishfully holding out for a try at prestige, even though their actual selves had rebelled against the required deferment of gratification ("going through it is hell!") and had changed majors.

Upon investigating the relative prevalence of Compulsory and Voluntary changes, it was found that
seven out of thirty Changers were Compulsory. This finding did not support the expectation of this study, based on an observation by Brown, that the majority of Changers would report having been "forced by failure" to change majors.

The second broad category of changes of major, Voluntary, was divided into four subcategories discussed below.

1. Protest against former student role.- In this category the Voluntary Changers perceived the role prescription of their former majors as not meshing sufficiently with their most strongly held self-concept.

2. Protest against former vocational role.- In this category the Voluntary Changers objected to the prospective rewards and requirements of the anticipated vocational goals within the former major.

3. Attraction to new student role.- In this category the Voluntary Changers preferred and selected a new and more compatible student role. One finding having to do with the nature of the attraction was that nine out of thirty Changers, when they changed majors, shifted the point in time at which their majors held more attraction for them. Eight of those nine shifted from long- to short-range attraction; that is, from preferring the after-college satisfactions of their former majors to preferring the in-college satisfactions of their new majors. This was interpreted to
indicate a possible tendency among Changers of major to increasingly discern and enhance their actual selves as ends in themselves, rather than perceiving them merely as means to more distant vocational ends.¹

Academic grades were found to have improved with almost all changes of major. This, coupled with increased respect from colleagues for their improved role performance, provided the Changers with accumulating success experiences and increasing awareness of their personal preferences for the new academic roles. These are obviously significant personal functions to be subserved by this ostensibly unstable pattern of behavior.

4. Attraction to new vocational role.- In this category the Voluntary Changers were largely motivated to change majors by the attractiveness of the vocational role expectation provided by the new major. The finding that fourteen out of thirty Changers did not alter their vocational plans when they changed majors was interpreted to indicate that in research in this area, instability of academic major is not to be equated with instability of vocational choice.

In general, these various types of changes of major represent ways in which the academic and vocational exploratory activities take place for college students.¹

¹Before accepting such an interpretation, however, further research should be undertaken with academic fields ascribed higher social prestige than the fields selected for this study.
By eliminating impractical and incompatible goals; and by illuminating the ones desired for their own, the Changers explore both their ideal selves and their perceptions of themselves, hoping to find the vocation which offers the best opportunity for the integration of these two.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This has been a sociological inquiry into the behavior of changing academic majors in college. Since the phenomena had not been investigated previously, exploratory probes have been made from several directions, seeking data to describe unstable academic choices in terms of their social origins, their student participants, their forms and functions.

Research Procedures

Data pertaining to the above topics were obtained from single formal interviews with fifty-seven students of Montana State University who had changed academic majors within the current academic year.

For preliminary interviews twelve students were selected of varying age, sex, and academic major. On the basis of these interviews and a review of the literature an interview guide was constructed to focus the final interviews on the chosen areas of inquiry.\(^1\)

\(^{1}\)See Questionnaire Guide, p. 127 infra.
selected to include only junior and senior men, in order to maximize the degree of personal significance and consequent research value of the academic decisions under observation. Further, the final interviewees included only students who were related to the academic fields of business administration, geology, and liberal arts. These diverse fields were chosen for the purpose of comparing their effects on the students' decisions to change majors.

From each academic field fifteen students were chosen to provide three different perspectives: (1) five students who had recently changed into the field, (2) five students who had recently changed out of the field, and (3) five students who had been in the field at least a year and a half. Combining the categories from all three academic fields, there was a total of fifteen Changers-in, fifteen Changers-out, and fifteen Non-changers.

The interviews were tape recorded so that, when all interviews had been completed, they could be reviewed, codified with the aid of the Codification Guide,¹ and selectively transcribed verbatim. Only exact verbatim transcriptions appeared in the discussion of findings.

¹See Codification Guide, p. 130 infra.
Results of the Investigation

By their cooperative responses to the interview questioning, the informants provided sufficient data on which can be based at least partial answers to the four broadly-posed questions which have guided our inquiry:

1. What are the social factors influencing stability and instability in choices of academic major?

2. Who are the students who change academic majors?

3. How can the various changes of major be classified?

4. What functions does changing academic majors serve in the evolving self-conceptions of the students who change?

In the discussion which follows, the more salient contributions of the data in regard to each of these questions will be summarized.

Factors Influencing Stable and Unstable Choices

In the university system it is the stable academic choices which predominate and form the institutional equilibrium necessary to accommodate the unstable choices.
Consequently, social factors contributing to stable choices of academic major were discussed first in the presentation of findings. There was no analysis of all the divergent influences affecting the informants, nor all the reasons for the students' differential selections and responses to them, since the reasons were too closely related to their very different personalities. However, there were certain influences, contributing to lasting choices of major, which were reported with sufficient prominence and regularity to be considered essential and to warrant discussion.

In this section, instead of repeating the factors contributing to stable and unstable academic choices as present in chapters I and II, they shall be summarized more concisely and memorably by employing a common conceptual device. Two "ideal-typical" students shall be constructed with academic careers which illustrate the two types of factors. Of course this will be an artificial process of synthesizing into the careers of each imaginary student some of the main factors reported by the informants as tending to stabilize or unstabilize their choices of academic major.

Since the first student will not be a concrete actuality, and will be stable rather than unstable in his academic choice, he will be named "Brick." Brick was a geology student who had gone through college without once even contemplating a change of academic majors. What
factors in his ideal-typical background contributed to such academic permanence?

Long before coming to college Brick had dreamt of geologic glories and had been aware of how essential a college degree in geology would be to fulfilling his aspirations. Looking ahead to college he perceived the geology training as merely an academic means to his definite occupational ends, so he felt he could certainly put up with whatever was required for four years, even if it entailed a considerable deferment of other gratifications. It would make his parents proud, and besides, "All young men who want to get anywhere should be able to 'stick to it,'" he thought.

When Brick entered the university he found the geology department to be a small close-knit academic group, with all its classes and its own library in one building. He found he had soon developed quite an intense identification with geology. In the library late at night and on the geology field trips he shared informal experiences with his colleagues and assimilated their professional conscience, with the result that he began to feel as if he were of the group, not just in it. His social circle of "rock-hounds" provided him with clear-cut cues as to what was acceptable behavior in his student and vocational roles, so that he increasingly accepted the title and the role of "geologist" as his own. By this time, changing majors was simply out of the
question for the imaginary Brick.

Willing to increase his involvement with the field, Brick accepted the advice of his adviser and took all the geology courses he could get, thus further minimizing the possibility of being distracted by other fields. By the time Brick reached his junior year his educational investment had accumulated to the point where it would have been too costly to change majors even if he had wanted to. Not only would it have cost money and considerable effort but he would have had to drop behind his colleagues in the graduation timetable and forego getting his occupational start in cadence and competition with them.

In the college career of this imaginary student, "Brick," we have brought together synthetically many of the factors in our data which can make for stable and unchanging academic choices.¹

Turning now to unstable academic choices, the second imaginary student can be considered. At the opposite extreme from Brick, he will represent an abstract synthesis of the factors predisposing students toward changes of academic majors. He will be called "Oliver."

Oliver arrived at the university excitedly naive about campus life and comfortably naive about academic

¹For a more complete listing and description of these factors, see pp. 17-32 supra.
life. This being his first extended period away from his parents, he was taken with the institutionalized youth culture of fraternity life and, for a while, his concern was with "drinking and women."

At the same time he was uncomfortably aware of his parents' intense desire that he become "cultur(ed)." They admired the arts and wanted for him that refinement of life which their lower-middle class status had not afforded them in their youth. Accordingly, Oliver registered in liberal arts, although with no real dedication. For he was still basically an adolescent; not sure what his interests would be in the future because they had been unstable in the past. Moreover, there seemed to be no real "rush" to make certain of his major, for he knew that in the first couple of years he could change it if he changed his mind and not lose much of his educational investment.

As time went on, Oliver's attachment to the liberal arts major did not deepen. He could not see how it was specialized enough to assure him of security or success in the outside world of work. Liberal arts offered no vocational goals to strive for. Not only that, but Oliver did not like being unable to feel part of an actual liberal arts group. Everyone seemed to be going his own way, taking his own courses, planning his own future. There were some students who liked this about liberal arts but Oliver was not one of them.
As he grew increasingly dissatisfied with the liberal arts major, Oliver realized that he was now in his sophomore year and approaching the time when he could no longer change majors and still graduate in the traditional four years. And yet he knew he wanted to change majors: he knew now that his parents had channeled him into a premature choice. But what new major would he choose? When Oliver had first entered college he had encountered numerous new academic possibilities. "It would not be hard to find a more suitable major than liberal arts," Oliver thought.

As "Brick" did before him, the ideal-typical "Oliver" has provided a single college career in which could be synthesized some of the real factors influencing stability and instability in academic choices. Taken together, their social backgrounds, campus experiences, and academic fields stand as partial answers to the first guiding question of this study: What are the social factors predisposing college students to stable and unstable choices of academic majors?

The Students Who Change Majors

The second question which guided this inquiry was: Who are the students who change academic majors? Implicit in this question is the more testable query: How are Changers different, if at all, from Non-changers?
Or, calling upon the imaginary students again, one might ask, How are the "Olivers" different from the "Bricks," if at all?

Upon tabulating the data obtained from the interviews, there was no difference revealed in terms of the personal variables of present academic grades and percent of self-support. On the other hand, the data suggested that Changers are younger, less often married and less far-sighted in planning their lives, than the Non-changers.¹

But the question, "Who are the Changers?," also demanded that we seek an identification of the Changers by our informants. The interview data indicated that students do not consistently describe or evaluate Changers as being different from Non-changers in any reprehensible way, such as having "flunked out," or having not "stuck with it." In other words, the interviewees did not suggest a definite answer to "Who are the Changers?" They did not consistently identify the "Oliver's" as being different from the "Brick's."

However, more definite attitudes were discernable when attention was focused on specific academic departments. When a student dissociated from the especially tight-knit department of geology he sometimes was looked upon as a mild sort of turn-coat by students who remained.

¹These suggestions must be evaluated very cautiously in view of the small sample of this exploratory study.
loyal to geology. Changers into geology, however, were reportedly welcomed by departmental members as reinforcements to their ranks. And reinforcements they apparently were, for the data did not suggest that newcomers to the majors were any less loyal to them than the Non-changers within the major.

Hence, changers of major were most clearly identified in terms of the effect of their transitional loyalty upon specific academic groups.

Classification of Changes of Major

"How can the various changes of major be classified?" was the third question originally posed for this study. The classificatory system which seemed to best fit the data was composed of two main types: Compulsory (seven students, with grade deficiencies) and Voluntary (twenty-three students, without grade deficiencies). When it appeared that the Compulsory type of change might not be fully explainable by grade deficiencies alone, it was subdivided into Bona Fide and Pretended subcategories, according to whether the grade deficiencies were incurred unintentionally or intentionally, respectively. Because the substantiating evidence for the Pretended category was suggestive rather than conclusive, the category was offered provisionally, depending on the degree of support in subsequent research.
The Voluntary type of change included four subcategories based upon the students' dominant motivations for changing majors: (1) Protest Against Former Student Role, (2) Protest Against Former Vocational Role, (3) Attraction to New Student Role, and (4) Attraction to New Vocational Role.

Personal Functions of Changing Academic Majors

Broadly speaking, the decision to change majors may be viewed as but one of a whole series of tentative decisions, compulsory and voluntary, that are made in the narrowing down and unfolding process of the student's vocational development. Further, since the vocational role is a dominant one in our society, changing academic majors also represents one of a series of turning points in exploring self by exploring academic and vocational roles. This brings up the final guiding question asked of this research: "What functions does changing academic majors serve in the evolving self-conceptions of the students who change?"

It was found that, for the Compulsory Changer, his inadequate performance in his former major may have shown him that he actually was not able to live up to a former ideal picture of himself. So, by being forced to change majors, a student can be helped to discard one
particular role that it was impracticable for him to play, with the result that his identity comes to be founded more on his better potentialities. In this way a greater integration can be wrought between his actual self and his self-ideal.

For the student who is not compelled to change majors, but who leaves his major voluntarily, there are other personal functions that may be served. Although his grades were acceptably high, he may have come to feel that the imposed student role and/or expected vocational role of his former major were not sufficiently compatible with his most strongly held self-conceptions. In learning this he learned one more role he did not want to play and eliminated one more alternative role he would not accept as his own. Hence, there can be served the personal function of decreasing his adolescent ambiguity of self which in turn expedites his progress in self-discovery.

For both the Compulsory and Voluntary Changer, the choice of a new major may represent their first far-reaching decision made while living away from home—a step toward personal autonomy. Further, if in their new majors they get better grades and enjoy more self-respect (as did almost all the informants) they stand to validate their independent choices. In this way their personal autonomy can be doubly served by changing majors.

From this brief overview it can be seen that
significant personal functions can be served by changing majors in that the self-identity of the Changer stands to gain in at least three areas: (1) in congruence between self-ideal and actual self by eliminating impracticable roles, (2) in self-discovery, by eliminating roles peripheral to his central preferences, and (3) in autonomy, by independently making an important change for the better.

Suggestions for Further Research

These of course have been only partial answers to the guiding questions of this investigation. This is understandable in light of the fact that this has been an exploratory study of a class of students heretofore uninvestigated. Moreover the answers must be considered as suggestive rather than conclusive since it was decided to circumscribe the area of the investigation by purposively selecting the sample according to age, sex, and academic major. In spite of the obvious probability that the findings are not representative, it is hoped that they have revealed the sociological fertility of the phenomena under study to the extent of inviting further research in this area.

For instance, the sample of this study was selected for comparative purposes from only three academic fields. Certainly other fields will be of equal interest to the
researcher and provide the necessary representativeness in this regard. It would be interesting to see whether informants from other fields evidenced similar ratios of Voluntary and Compulsory types of changes. More specifically an investigator might hypothesize that the Pretended Compulsory type of change would be found to occur only in changes from high-prestige majors to ones of lower prestige.

Further, the present sample was limited to junior and senior men. A study of freshmen and sophomores would undoubtedly reveal different insights into mechanisms and motivations of changing academic majors.

A longitudinal study would be very much in order for studying the change of major in process. Data could be first obtained from a large representative sample of freshmen and later from those of the sample who had changed majors. This would provide an almost incomparable opportunity to study decision points and turning points in the career of a college student, especially as they reflect changes in his attitudes since coming to college. Many educators are somewhat chagrined at the repeated reports from empirical studies that the impact of college on the central values of college students is usually insignificant. Those educators who are serious in their chagrin would undoubtedly welcome the findings of a longitudinal study of college students who had changed their values enough to change majors.
Contributions of the Study

This last research proposal suggests what is probably the central contribution of this study, i.e., to focus research attention on changing academic majors. The phenomenon invites research for at least three reasons:

1. It is part of an important, decision-making class of social behavior.
2. Changing majors clearly illustrates a problematic transformation of students' self-conceptions through an exchange of roles which are easily identifiable with academic departments.
3. Changing majors is significantly relevant to the motivation and progress of student careers in particular, and occupational careers in general.

When the future research is undertaken, it is hoped that this study can facilitate it by having organized the data, especially by the classification of changes of major, so that it will not have to be done again.

Besides having research value for sociologists, this study would presumably hold some practical value for several other types of readers:

1. College and high school advisers and counsellors who want to explore amid natural circumstances
the effect of their work and the need for it.

2. College administrators and faculty members who are interested in the strength of the mechanisms which attract and attach students to their academic departments.

3. College students who have changed, or are contemplating changing academic majors, and are interested to know how their peers have done it.

4. And finally, individuals who want to understand more about the social influences, on and off campus, which have an impact on the college student sufficient to cause him to change academic majors.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE GUIDE

Name, major field at present?
How old are you?
What is your father's occupation?
Are you married?
Approximately what fraction of your income do you earn?
How long have you been in other majors at this school or at other schools?
How did you happen to get into your former major?
Can you remember how long ago it was that you first thought you might like to go into it?
What was your main aim in entering it? Was it a trial run?
What were the problems that came up in it? Grades?
Were the problems any more difficult because you weren't sure you should be in it in the first place?
Did you find any new things you were able to do while you were in your former major? Not able to do?
Did you find any new things you wanted to do? Did not want to do?
How are you different from those students in your former major who did not do as you did?
As you think back to when you were deciding to change your major, who were the most important people who were interested in your change of major?
Did you care about them? Who could you get for some assistance in thinking about it? In which of your decisions on a major were other people more interested? In which were you more concerned for their feelings? Which was the more independent decision? Which one were you less sure of?
What finally came about to make you change majors when you did and not sooner?
What was the most difficult or uncomfortable thing about deciding to change majors for you? What got you through this?
What do you think of a person who changes majors in general? From your field in particular? Is there any stigma attached to changing majors?
If your particular problems could have been solved, at the time of changing majors, would you rather have remained in your former major?
What would have been required for you to stay in your
APPENDIX A (cont.)

Do you think your present major is the most desirable possible major for you? Why?

Do you ever wonder whether you should be in this field or not? When?

What would it take to get you to change to another alternative major?

Is this your final choice, or just a "trial run?"

If you were able to do it all over again, knowing what you know now, how would you do it? Why?

What information have you learned which, if you had known it at the time, would have helped you to do it in this preferred way?

In the light of your personal experience, what would you advise an incoming freshman to do to avoid any important mistakes you might have made in choosing your major?

What do you plan to do after college?

Did changing majors change your plans for your life?

Is this further from the ambitions you have always had for yourself? What is your reaction to this?

Before you changed majors, would you rather have been called a "former title" than a "present title?"

Do you feel the same way now? Why would you like to be called a "_______?"

In living your life in general, would you say you're the kind of person who likes to know in advance exactly what's going to happen to you, if possible, or do you prefer to do things on the spur of the moment and take chances occasionally?

Would you say you are closer to being the kind of student you want to be in your present major than in your former? How do you judge this?

Which of the two majors "fits" you better as an individual with your own particular personal characteristics? How can you tell? Your own interests? Abilities? Which, considering your family's desires for you? Which, considering your own way of life? Former ambitions? Hopes for membership in favorite groups you think essential to your happiness?

Do you find it easier or harder to act natural and just be yourself in your present major? How do you judge this?

Would you say your self-respect has increased, decreased, or stayed the same since you've been in your present major? Why is this? Do you like yourself better?

What one thing would you say makes your present major the best major for you personally, of other majors? Would you tell me which of these two stands out to you as

128
Which of the following is the more attractive thing about your present major?
(a) The satisfaction you are getting from your school work now; or
(b) The satisfaction you expect to get from your work after graduation.
APPENDIX B

CODIFICATION GUIDE

Name________________ Age____ Married, Single; ___% self-supporting. Informant "takes chances," or is conservative in planning his life in general.

Academic majors and approximate time in each:
A_____________B_____________C_____________D_______________

Home town_________________Father's occupation______________

Type of change of major: Voluntary, Compulsory, Pretended Compulsory. Reason:__________________________________________

Academic grades a problem in former major: Yes No

At the time of changing majors, subject would have preferred to remain in former major, if problems had been solved: Yes No

New self-knowledge gained from former major:
Abilities__________________________
Inabilities__________________________
New interests__________________________
Waning interests__________________________
Other__________________________

Perceived differences from students who did differently from informant: (changed or did not change majors)

Experience precipitating the change of majors__________________________

Reasons for not changing sooner or later__________________________

Difficulties of deciding to change majors__________________________

-130-
APPENDIX B (cont.)

Difficulties alleviated by

Present major is most desirable possible: Yes No

Alternative possibilities:

Present major is final choice, or "trial run."

Plans after college

Changing majors also changed vocational plans: Yes No

Importance of change
Subject's reaction to change

The Two Majors Compared

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<th>FORMER MAJOR</th>
<th>PRESENT MAJOR</th>
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<td>If repeating college, informant would choose:</td>
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-131-
APPENDIX B (cont.)

| Informant is preferable student in which major: |  |  |
| How judged: | _________________ |  |
| Grades |  |  |
| Satisfactions |  |  |

| Which major better "fits" in: |  |  |
| Personal characteristics | __ | __ |
| Interests |  |  |
| Abilities |  |  |
| Personal relationships |  |  |
| Personal ambitions |  |  |
| Family ambitions |  |  |

| More "at ease" in: |  |  |
| Variations in self-respect: |  |  |

| Greatest single attractions of each major: |  |  |

| Short of long-range goals preferred in each major: | __ | __ |

| Work itself, or income preferred in each major: | __ | __ |
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-133-


