

"That's a Good Question!" Exploring Motivations for Law and Business School Choice

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Students' accounts of their decisions to attend elite professional schools, although typically couched as preferences, actually reflect deep class-related constraints. In a sample of 79 law and business students, the author found that the majority chose their degrees for similar reasons: professional status, intellectual interest, and an upper-middle-class lifestyle. The students' explanations, which were full of uncertainty and default, upset the assumption that students carefully or consciously choose professional careers. Commitment to a particular career was vague, and for some students, the two degrees could have substituted for one another. However, the students were not investing in specific careers as much as in the maintenance of class status through education. Their motivations were shaped and constrained by individual and organizational factors, including college, peers, work history, and market trends. It is significant that parents played a key role, not through direct occupational inheritance but by communicating the importance of professional-managerial education for safeguarding social status.

Explanations of educational choice at the professional level often emphasize students' preferences for a particular field. Students who are enrolled in professional degree programs are asked about their criteria for deciding on the programs, and scholars have focused narrowly on specific concerns in the decision to enroll in professional schools. Surveys of students frequently encapsulate decisions to enter law school in three preferences: career reasons, intellectual reasons, and social justice reasons (Gee and Jackson 1977; Granfield 1992; Stevens 1973). This approach often excludes other possibilities, including ambivalence, default, parental influence, or class maintenance.

The study of preferences is emphasized

over the possible role of social-class reproduction in shaping students' pursuit of a professional degree. Sociologists have long shown how social class mediates the choice and direction of one's education (Cookson and Persell 1985; Gambetta 1996; Kingston and Lewis 1990; McDonough 1997). Parental education and occupation play a major role in an individual's educational and occupational choices (Blau and Duncan 1967; Mare 1981; Sewell and Hauser 1975), including the decision to enter professional schools (Egerton 1997; Endo 1982; Zemans and Rosenblum 1981). For example, Useem and Karabel (1990) emphasized the influence of social class on attending an elite law or business school and achieving a top position in corporate management.

Nevertheless, some scholars have suggested that social class is playing less and less of a role in explaining choices. For example, Grusky (2000; see also Grusky and Sorenson 1998) argued that workers identify with their occupations more than their social class and that parents transmit preferences for a specific *occupation* to their children that are stronger than class preferences.

In this article, I examine the decision-making processes of 79 students who entered the law and business programs at an elite university. I argue that students' accounts of their decisions to attend professional schools, although usually couched as preferences, actually reflect deep class-related opportunities and constraints. Class background and cultural capital affect the choice to attend law or business school by profoundly shaping elite students' perceptions of their educational choices. Rather than reflect specific occupational preferences, the decisions of these students are based on class maintenance and, in some cases, the fear of *not* doing as well as their parents. Thus, in contrast to Grusky (2000), I found that the law and business students I studied identified not with their chosen occupations, but with the broad professional-managerial occupational grouping that connotes a specific social-class position.¹

Students' perceptions are also fueled by broad trends in education. Steady increases in undergraduate and postgraduate enrollment in recent decades, coupled with increases in the academic credentials needed to obtain upper-level white-collar employment (Collins 1979; Hout 1988; Hurn 1992; Walters and Robinson 1983), mean the stakes are ratcheted up for the middle class. When more than 60 percent of high school graduates enroll in postsecondary programs (Snyder and Wirt 1998), even elite students are caught in the upward spiral. The elite law and business students in this study thought that to stay ahead of the game, they needed postgraduate degrees from the best schools.

Although the students stated a variety of reasons for deciding to attend professional schools, the majority of their motivations reflected class-related issues and socialization. Remarkable similarities between the law and business students transcended individual dis-

ciplines. Nevertheless, the students' accounts revealed great uncertainty and ambivalence. At times, the decision seemed to have been a "default" decision, a ruling out of other options, or a force of patterns that simply carried a student along. The notion of a *decision* in this context seems problematic.

The process of maintaining a class position by attending professional school is not strictly a matter of class or occupational inheritance. Instead, children may inherit from their parents skills and tastes about education related to occupational, rather than class-based, preferences. Cultural capital, defined as the cultural beliefs, personal skills, knowledge, and dispositions that enable one to succeed, also guides the decision-making process. Social class influences one's life chances, but it also shapes one's perception of what the choices are. Such perceptions are shaped by the attitudes and values of the social groups to which individuals belong, a concept that Bourdieu (1977; see also Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) labeled *habitus*. *Habitus* captures the "taken-for-granted" notion of students' decision making, wherein students internalize familial interpretations of their objective chances of success.² Hence, social actors' aspirations are socially derived. Students' subsequent choices of elite professional schooling and occupations reinforce the social order while appearing to be both natural and chosen.

The 79 students in the study, many children of professionals, were subtly encouraged in a number of ways to value professional education and believed it was understood that they would obtain professional degrees. Like the students who chose colleges in McDonough's (1997) study, these students' choice of professional schools was a seamless one, going with the grain of others' expectations. The students' desire to attend was fueled not so much by an ardent interest or perceived aptitude in these fields, but by the need for credentials to remain in and to have the salary, prestige, and lifestyle of the upper middle class. For the handful of students with working-class parents, professional education may have been a class-mobility project. For most, however, professional education was really about *maintaining* a possibly precarious class status (Ehrenreich 1989).

METHOD

I used semistructured interviews to understand the nuanced detail of students' motivations. Using enrollment lists, I randomly sampled in 1992 the first-year law and business students at Graham University [a fictitious name], a prestigious private Midwestern university. Over the course of their first year, I interviewed 37 law students and 42 business students, yielding a response rate of 75 percent of those who were contacted. (I interviewed 86 percent of the students again at the end of the second year.) Most of the interviews, which averaged an hour in length, were conducted in my academic office. The semistructured interview schedule allowed for a flexible yet guided conversation and the raising of unanticipated topics. I asked an open-ended question ("How did it happen that you came to law [or business] school?") and strove for a stream-of-consciousness discussion, without prompting students to address preconceived ideas about motivations. A few of the law students commented that they were more candid with me about their motivations than they had been in law school surveys.

I also conducted observations for three years at the law school and one at the business school, attending lectures, school-sponsored presentations, informal gatherings in student lounges, and parties. Although I do not draw directly on the field notes here, they formed a context for establishing rapport and understanding the class-based nature of students' socialization. There was a constant emphasis on elite careers and lifestyles (mailboxes stuffed with advertisements for executive clothing and vacations), as well as the noblesse oblige aspects of corporate life (constant school-sponsored fund-raisers and volunteer efforts) (Granfield 1992; Schleef 1997b).

Graham University is a typical setting for the education of the country's elite. Its law and business schools rate among the top 15 programs in annual rankings, such as the one by *U.S. News and World Report*. Its class size, tuition, undergraduate grade point average, starting salaries, and enrollments of women and minorities are comparable to the best law

and business schools in the nation.³ A substantial number of Graham University's graduates go to large, corporate law firms; investment banks; and consulting firms in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles.

MOTIVATIONS OF THE LAW STUDENTS

Altruism, Success, or Default?

The commonly professed motivation for attending law school is hardly rational in the classical sense. If there is a Holy Grail among legal education researchers, it has been to discover why law students, especially elites, enter with *altruistic* aspirations geared toward public service but take jobs in corporate practice upon graduation.⁴ The trend away from a social justice orientation while in law school has been widely documented (Foster 1981, 1985; Shaffer and Redmount 1977; Stover 1989). Indeed, the experiences of law students who abandon their initial goals of public service have long been used to explain the socialization experiences of *all* law students.

Substantial minorities of young people do decide to enter law school for reasons that can be described as altruistic, although the totals vary from year to year and from school to school. Conventional wisdom suggests that law students are less altruistic than they used to be. Yet Kahlenberg (1992) recounted the finding of a poll of students at Harvard law school that 70 percent of his class had expressed a desire to practice in the public interest at entry.

Granfield's (1992:38) survey of Harvard law school in 1986–87 indicated that a quarter gave altruistic reasons ("to restructure society, help people, or seek social justice") as their primary motive for entering law school, and 17 and 19 percent, respectively, added this category as secondary and tertiary motivations. Although career reasons—social status, monetary rewards, and career advancement—ranked first for over 40 percent of the students, Granfield focused on students' socialization away from altruistic pursuits. Documenting the presence of and change in

altruism is not only problematic, but irrelevant for many first-year law students, whose motivations I found to be similar to those of business students. Furthermore, Granfield's emphasis on the loss of idealism precludes a full understanding of the class-based nature of elite students' accounts of their motivations.

The students I interviewed seldom made clear statements about their reasons for attending law school. Realizing what the acceptable categories are *supposed* to be, they sometimes struggled to find an answer that sounded appropriate. A third of the students expressed great ambivalence and uncertainty about why they had chosen law school. Like this student, they stressed the importance of *graduate* education, not *legal* education:

There are lots of different reasons, I guess. I'm not sure I'm satisfied with any of them or really think that one is a particular reason. I wanted graduate school after I got out of the navy; I had always planned to, but I didn't really want to stay in engineering. Engineering as a career or occupation is maybe too narrow. I wanted to do something to do with the navy experience, so I was thinking graduate school, maybe business, but it didn't really interest me that much. I guess through a process of elimination, I came to law school. Law school had seemed like a good idea because it's supposed to give you this broad education, these analytical skills that you could use throughout life. It's supposed to give you the opportunity to work in a whole bunch of different fields.⁵

Others were even more vague, remarking "I don't really know why I'm here," as if they had not made a conscious decision. Such students expressed great confusion about how to answer the question, as the following comment illustrates:

That's the 20-dollar question. I don't know about law school per se; I wanted a good education. So it was between a master's in economics [or] law. This seemed pragmatic. . . . I didn't really think about it. It just kind of happened. . . . I never thought about it seriously, but it was always an option.

When I asked how they made the decision, these students began with, "That's a good question," paused for a moment, and then elaborated with comments on law school as a default choice (the best of all other alternatives) and on the versatility of law (the ability to "leave one's options open"). The language they used to describe their motivations was hesitant and uncertain. Some students even admitted that they chose law school to learn *if* law is a career they want to pursue.

Researchers' distinctions among career, intellectual, and social justice rationales (Gee and Jackson 1977; Granfield 1992; Stevens 1973) were not clear to the students. The students often described their decision to attend as being motivated equally by several factors that *they* did not think were contradictory. One student, who "limited" himself to three motivations, managed to cover all the bases without seeing one as primary: "If I had to limit it . . . to three things, [I'd choose] an interesting career, . . . one where I am able to support myself, and one where I can hopefully effect some good in society."

Furthermore, the categories overlapped. Career reasons could also be intellectual reasons. One student related his career interests to his curiosity about finance. Social justice reasons were also career reasons. A female student said, "The reason I'm going to law school is to be a child advocate," which she saw as a specific career goal and interpreted as altruistic. Social justice and intellectual reasons coincided. For example, a male who was interested in public policy and government said:

I'm very into the issues. A lot of it has to do with putting moral philosophy into practice, which I find really interesting. How do you structure society's institutions, and what kinds of norms do we create to drive people's behaviors and interactions in a pluralistic society with lots of conflicting interests?

It was apparent that although these categories, which are highlighted in the literature, are conceptually distinct to researchers, they often merge in students' minds. Nevertheless, I attempted to compare the students' categories with those in the literature. Table 1 presents the number of students who men-

Table 1. Students' Motivations for Attending Law and Business School

Category	Law Students	Business Students
<i>Percentage Who Mentioned Each Category</i>		
Career	69	93
Intellectual	75	51
Altruistic	43	12
Default	33	44
<i>Percentage Who Stressed Each Category</i>		
Career	11	46
Intellectual	28	12
Altruistic	19	2
Default	14	12
<i>Degree of Overlap of Categories (in raw numbers):</i>		
Career and intellectual	11	13
Career and altruism	4	5
Intellectual and altruism	3	0
Career, intellectual, and altruism	5	2

tioned each type of motivation, the number who stressed each type, and the overlap of the categories mentioned.

The motivations the students offered pointed more to decision making related to social-class position than to law as a specific occupation. Although 69 percent mentioned that career reasons contributed to their choice (see Table 1), these motivations often had less to do with practicing law than with envisioning what one could do with a law *degree*. Career motivations included wanting a career with financial security; wanting the prestige, salary, or types of work in law; gaining marketable credentials and skills; wanting to be a law professor; acknowledging the importance of law to a career in business or politics; and taking advantage of the unlimited opportunities of law as a career. A student who had worked as a underwriter after college remarked:

The career itself is also appealing as opposed to the job I was doing. Several factors went into it, from prestige to salary to the types of work you're doing. . . . I didn't find my job that stimulating; it was partly too mathematical for me, so that's part of it, but . . . it was a career decision. I saw the law as something that I would like to do--being a lawyer.

Although having a legal career was an important choice in the students' accounts, it was rarely the sole motivation. Only four students (11 percent) stressed career reasons. Each student was given a score of from 0 to 2 for each category: 0 if the motivation was not mentioned, 1 if the motivation was mentioned but not stressed, and 2 if the motivation was overtly stressed or if the student talked about it more than other motivations or returned to that motivation after mentioning others (see Table 2).

Of the 37 law students, 27 (75 percent) mentioned motivations that I coded as intellectual, ranging from vague comments, such as "I thought law would be interesting," to wanting more education to expressing knowledge of specific law school skills (logical thinking, writing, and oral communication) they had or wished to have, as in this comment:

I felt there was this large field which I just didn't understand but found interesting, as though I needed to get my feet wet to get into it. It's interesting, the aspects of logic and economics in it. It's much more like a rhetorical science.

Ten students underscored the importance of the intellectual in their decision to attend law school.

Table 2. Mean Motivations for Attending Law and Business School, on a 3-Point Scale,^a by Gender

	Law Students			Business Students		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Career	.75	.83	.81	1.25	1.42	1.39
Intellectual	.83	1.08	1.00	.63	.64	.63
Social justice	1.00	.42 ^b	.62	.25	.12	.15 ^d
Default	.17	.63 ^c	.47	.38	.61	.56

^a Each student was given a score of 0 to 2 for each category (0 = motivation not mentioned, 1 = motivation mentioned but not stressed, and 2 = motivation stressed).

^b Difference of means between men and women significant at .05.

^c Difference of means between men and women significant at .10.

^d Difference of means between law and business students significant at .05.

I coded as "social justice" the responses that included wanting to make a difference to society or public policy, to help others, to reform laws or legal structures, and to do public-interest work. Of the 37 students, 16 (43 percent), including 70 percent of the female students, reported social justice motives in attending law school. That women were more likely than men to highlight social justice motivations (see Table 2) confirms the findings of other studies (Granfield 1992; LaRussa 1977; Schleef 1997a; Stevens 1973; Taber et al. 1988) that women have different motivations for attending law school than do men, often in a more socially oriented direction. A woman who had left a lucrative career in advertising, which she saw as empty and "not benefiting society," remarked:

I just couldn't see being 50 years old and looking back on my life and saying, "This is what I did with myself," and I thought, "Well, in law, if I can get into environmental law and just do one little thing, prevent toxic dumping into the Gulf of Mexico, I'll feel like my life is worth something." So that's more what's making me go to law school.

Like this woman, many altruistic students indicated that their motivations satisfied an individual personal need, as opposed to stemming from an attachment to a social cause. Moreover, altruistic goals were sometimes sheepishly admitted and were mentioned in

conjunction with other, more pragmatic or instrumental, goals. Discussions of social justice concerns sometimes came much later in the interviews, well after my initial questions about motivations. A number of students were worried that a claim of social justice would sound "corny," a cliché that would not be taken seriously by others. When I asked what was appealing about law, one of these students said:

Sounds like an application to law school: "Why [do] I want to go?" "Justice." I guess there are a couple of reasons, the most salient is I think it's interesting; the reasoning process is interesting to me. It's kind of in an abstract way a reasoning through a puzzle. . . . Then there is the same element that everyone has when they say, "I want to do justice." That does play a part, too.

His altruistic motivations overlapped with intellectual ones, and it was difficult to tell if one was prominent. Nine students *stressed* altruism as their main reason for choosing law school and thought that the majority of other law students were interested solely in money and status and were not concerned about social justice.

In an open-ended format, without fixed-choice prompting, less than one-quarter of the law students stressed social justice concerns, and almost half *never* declared altruistic or public-interest convictions, undermining accounts of how law students are socialized in law school to lose interest in these concerns. Five students

mentioned *all* the traditional categories as relevant to their decision, and 18 mentioned two of the three (together, the 23 students represented 62 percent of the sample). However, almost half the students did not emphasize *any* of the three traditional categories (see Table 1).

"LAW SCHOOL CHOSE ME"

Unlike the argument that students may explicitly choose or identify with occupations (see Grusky 2000), a number of students' accounts called attention to the lack of agency in students' decision making and indicated an unclear yet complicated formation of educational choice. Many students who had difficulty stating a specific motivation said that the decision to attend law school "just kind of happened" or seemed to be the right choice for them after they weighed all the options, unaware that they had already narrowed their options to only professional careers. Moreover, the students appeared guided by a desire to maintain a class position, rather than to achieve a specific *occupational* position. Their strategies corresponded to the dispositions of their habitus, leading them to choices that appeared reasonable, or even inevitable, for people of their social position. What exactly were the influences that led the students to consider law school the inevitable choice?

Fourteen students stated there was no other choice for them because they had always wanted to go to law school. Although they considered and may have even pursued other careers, they kept coming back to law. This statement did not necessarily mean that their decision was well planned and conscious. The students who claimed they had wanted to be lawyers since they were children still had difficulty articulating exactly why they got the idea. Instead, they described law school as "something I always assumed I would do." Often when a parent or close relative was a lawyer, law was such a large part of their lives that it almost seemed as if they were preordained to enter it. Such an early crystallization of a vocational choice was also related to social class and family habitus, as the following comment from a woman makes clear:

I can't actually remember thinking about and making the conscious decision to go to law school. But one of my dad's responsibilities was as the dean of students at a law school, so I grew up around law students. We always had them coming in and out of the house, and I spent a lot of time at the law school, and most of my friends were the sons and daughters of law professors. It's just something that's always been in my sphere of consciousness.

Another woman, whose grandfather and uncle had been federal judges, remarked:

I come from a very legal family background. . . . I have various uncles and aunts who are lawyers, and so . . . [I knew the] legal profession ever since I can remember. I don't know when I said, "Oh, I definitely want to go to law school." I'd always planned on going to law school. So it's kind of a gradual progression, which some people might think is sick. . . . I don't think it was one specific reason.

Eighteen students reported that law school was the strongest remaining option once they had rejected other professional degrees. These students had not chosen law as much as a degree associated with an upper-middle class salary and lifestyle. They remarked that they knew their work had to be *something* professional, and the process of choosing a legal education involved ruling out degrees they felt less suited for. For example, two students considered master's degrees in engineering, and for five others, the choice was between medicine and law, with reasons related not only to the type of work but to common professional characteristics, as in this student's comment:

I took my premed courses [in college], and I really struggled through them. I was also volunteering at hospitals. . . . There's a lot of blood all around, and it was just very nerve-racking every time I had to go. . . . Throughout my life, I was preparing [to be] a doctor, and this was a big switch because I don't think I do have the personality to become a lawyer really. . . . One of the rea-

sons why I wanted to be a doctor was I want to have an effect on society . . . so I figure that's a good way of earning good money and helping people at the same time. So when that option was out, I thought what else is there, maybe law. . . . I had thought but not seriously about going into nursing, but then I thought that's a big step down from becoming a doctor. . . . I guess I'm ambitious and I want my family to be proud of me. . . . A law profession or doctor is very prestigious, and parents like to tell their friends, "My daughter's in law school," so that pushes me, too.

Although this woman was not interested in law (she repeatedly mentioned that she did not think that her personality really suited the law), this feeling was overridden by her desire for a professional degree. When she ruled out medicine, law appeared to be a reasonable option. Other students who ruled out medicine decided they had little aptitude for science.

Some students thought that their liberal arts degrees afforded them only one professional choice: law. Perceiving that they had few marketable skills, they thought that law school seemed like "the thing to do," as the following comment indicates:

As a philosophy and English major undergrad, you have to do a lot of writing and a lot of analysis of ideas, and law seemed like kind of a logical step, especially for somebody who had a lot of verbal training and ability but was a failing artist and didn't know what to do.

Still others viewed their law training as preliminary to a business career. They highlighted the importance of legal training in running a business or understanding a contract. Most had no intention of practicing law, thinking that their law degrees would give them more options in the business world, as this student noted:

I had always thought that I would continue after undergraduate, either business or law. . . . I thought law would be more useful, more intellectual, analytical, and very logical. I wanted to broaden my horizons, I didn't

want to just stay in business. I didn't want to be a number cruncher or anything like that. [A law degree] gives me more options because I don't necessarily have to . . . be a lawyer. I worked this summer and other summers for a money-management company, mutual funds, and it seemed like everything they did involved a lawyer.

Some students believed that their possibilities would be limited if they did not obtain legal training, as this student stated:

Everything is intertwined with law, from negotiating a contract to figuring out what the best way is to protect yourself against liability or negligence. . . . It limits you if you don't know what the law is about . . . and you have to always go to a lawyer. . . . I think [the degree] opens up a lot more possibilities in how you do things.

Five students had thought briefly about getting an MBA instead of a law degree, and five were seriously considering getting an MBA in addition to a law degree.

Many stumbled on law school by ruling out other options and were not even sure they wanted to practice law. Law school as something that students just "fell into" has long been documented for the graduates of nonelite law schools (see Carlin 1962; Van Hoy 1997). Clearly well-to-do students also choose by default, although few researchers have chronicled the extent of such ambivalence. Even Little (1968), who reported that 15 percent of students "drifted" into law school, viewed the choices made by students as primarily rational and pragmatic. Students who have been "lawyers from the cradle" do not make conscious, rational decisions either. Family influence and a habitus in which law and lawyers were always present make the decision seem inevitable.

These accounts not only indicate that the choice of law school was often inchoate and complex; they reveal the students' class-related perceptions that a law degree provides professional prestige and a comfortable lifestyle. Many students could have chosen among several professional degrees that would allow them to replicate their parents' social class. But

there were constraints as well: The majority of the students had never envisioned their lives without an advanced degree. Over half the students had considered only professional schools (law, business, medicine, or engineering) as viable postcollege options, and 25 percent stated that they had never considered *not* getting some postcollege education. Being a lawyer *per se* was not a primary factor that compelled the students to enroll in law school, in contrast to earlier decades, when college graduates made more conscious decisions to practice law or medicine (Becker, Geer, Hughes, and Strauss 1961; Warkov and Zelan 1965). It is suggestive that over half the students believed that by choosing law school, they were "keeping their options open." They thought that a law degree opens many doors but does not limit one to working as a lawyer. In this respect, their motivations were not that divergent from those of the business students.

MOTIVATIONS OF BUSINESS STUDENTS

Acceleration or Ambivalence?

There is little research on the reasons why students choose to obtain MBAs. Since business students are not known for their interest in public service, their motivations are unlikely to revolve around altruistic preferences and may more closely approximate rational, profit-maximization models. Indeed, one widespread assumption is that people who get MBAs simply want more money ("MBA Cost-Benefit Analysis" 1994). Baida (1984-85:24), a graduate of the Wharton business school, wrote, perhaps only partially tongue in cheek, "Greed is the only socially acceptable motive for going to business school. Wealth and power are the only acceptable goals." In recent years, however, the popular business press has noted the importance that business students place on social responsibility and "making an impact" (Deutsch 1993).

Autobiographical accounts of experiences at elite schools provide a few clues to business students' motivations. In the 1970s, "improving the world" with better products motivated Harvard MBAs, while money was a dirty word,

at least according to Cohen (1974). Henry (1983) stressed the practicality of an MBA from Harvard, especially for a woman who was running her own business. However, Reid (1994) chronicled the uncertainty and ambiguity of his and fellow Harvard students' choice of the MBA. At Stanford, Robinson (1994:13-14) emphasized the "make more money" angle, although he stated that the "lack of anything better to do" also played a role.

I found evidence of all these motivations among my respondents, although not quite the extremes of materialism or social responsibility described in the written accounts. The euphemistic language of managers described by Jackall (1988) was apparent in the students' discussions of their goals. For example, "getting rich" was rarely mentioned, but "making a nice living" and "sending my children to private schools" were. The students underscored the importance of intellectual challenge and creativity and de-emphasized their future astronomical salaries.

The most common reason for attending business school was career related (see Table 1). Of the 42 business students I interviewed, 93 percent explicitly called themselves career changers or indicated that career change was a major factor in their decisions. Of course, one can change careers without getting an MBA, so most of the students further qualified their decisions. Some wanted to a change from their previous fields and thought that the easiest way to do so was to obtain an MBA, which offered them a legitimate excuse for leaving their current positions. A male student who had worked for a prominent consumer-products corporation explained:

I wasn't happy as far as my career progression and what I could see in the consumer products business, one, and with that company, two, 10 years from now. Would I be to the level where I would really be happy at, income, responsibility, etc.? The answer invariably was no, every time I thought about the question, so I was thinking what ideally is my dream job, what do I want to do? I had always wanted to be on Wall Street in an atmosphere where people are crazy, ripping each other's heads off, deal making, dealing with clients, but very much

on the cutting edge. . . . The answer came back to me that I'm going to need an MBA to really open a lot of doors to these firms.

The students wanted a greater variety of options and thought that having an MBA would give them more flexibility. In addition, they often evoked the accelerative nature of the degree, stating that they could eventually advance in any position but that an MBA would give them the ability to advance much more rapidly. As one student put it:

I think I was doing well where I was, but looking ahead, it was a much longer career path to get to manage the business. I could be a decent engineer or a good product manager, but without the specific analytical skills from business school and the jump to get the opportunity coming out of business school. . . . [he trails off]. As an MBA, you're typically in a level of much higher responsibility, and your salary is double. It's a significant jump; you get very quick payback from that.

This student typified the perception that with an MBA, a graduate can enter a career track that is exponential, rather than incremental, allowing him or her to leap over job seekers without MBAs. It is no coincidence, then, that an MBA from a top business school is called "the golden passport" (Van Maanen 1983).

"The MBA as a credential" was another important theme; 40 percent of the students thought that the MBA was essential for the positions they were seeking. Seldom had an employer explicitly demanded the degree; it was simply made clear that they would not be able to go much further without it, as this student indicated:

The major driving force [for business school]? At some point I knew that I would need to get an advanced degree just due to the increasing competition . . . in the area of business. . . . Ten years from now if I don't have it, I won't be as competitive with other people within the company or other companies. So I really thought that it's becoming more of a standard for most upper-level executives to have MBAs.

Many of the business students already inhabited a world that included expectations of acquiring an MBA from a top program and advancing rapidly up a career ladder to the upper echelons of a corporation, as this comment makes clear:

Looking around me at [the company where I was working], all the people in my department had MBAs. All the people in senior management, which is where I envisioned myself being some day, all had MBAs. I sort of looked on it as a minimum requirement more than anything to get into upper-level management.

The students had often found that attending a business school was built into their previous employers' formal training programs. According to nine students, who were hired as college graduates into training programs in large corporations, consulting firms, or investment firms, these organizations had little intention of moving them to other positions once the training programs were over. They felt they had no alternative but to attend business school after two or three years. As one student stated:

Most of the people there go get an MBA for advancing in the firm, and so it was almost expected if I were to stay in that field, that I'd have to leave after a couple years. The traditional career track in investment banking is you come in as a analyst, work for two years, go to business school, then go back as an associate, and then climb the ranks.

Although the need for an MBA was usually implied, employers occasionally stated outright that the MBA was required for promotion and even offered to reimburse employees for the tuition in the hopes of getting them to return to the firms.

Other career reasons for attending business school included obtaining a higher salary (which was often implicit in the desire for a career change), networking, covering a lack of practical experience, and gaining a built-in respectability to raise venture capital. Eight students did not plan to change careers, but to

advance with their current employers (most of the international students fell into this group).

Over half the students offered intellectual reasons for attending business school, mainly in addition to career reasons. For example, they mentioned the importance of acquiring specific business skills beyond those necessary for advancing in their careers, for personal or self-esteem reasons. Eight students wanted "to grow" in business school—experience more challenges or stimulation than in previous jobs. One young manager, who had already risen to a top position in his company, said:

My time was largely spent with people that I had hired who were not the kind of people that just challenged the daylights out of me in terms of my thinking and being creative. What I was looking for was kind of a quality-of-life issue. . . . [Attending business school] was really to raise my level of thinking, to just expand my world.

Other intellectual reasons included the general desire to gain more education or to experience another country. Only 12 percent of the students stressed the intellectual component.

As might be expected, few students expressed socially oriented reasons for attending business school. Unlike the law students, the business students were not hampered by cultural expectations of social justice in their choice of careers. However, a few indicated altruistic motivations, usually secondary to career and intellectual motivations. Such students defined their role in business as one of "helping others." Late in his interview, a student who had worked as a manager in Eastern Europe said:

For me in business, I want to know that I'm helping people, doing some good. . . . employing people, making sure they have job security, that they can support a family. That's on the top level. Beneath that, I'll be in a position where I'll be having a lot of people reporting to me or supervising a lot of people. And I think in that role you can also change their way of looking at life, their approach to life. . . . [I want to] take some of my attitude and distill it in other people.

In some cases, altruistic motives reflected a

student's desire for a sense of purpose. A student who was switching from sales to financial planning said:

What I would consider satisfying is seeing companies that are in distress for one reason or another and a need for management and capital and then making it better. There's a real side of me that has a real desire to have whatever I do be meaningful. That's why in a lot of ways I got out of the food business; I just didn't think I was changing anyone's life. Whereas with financial planning, there's clients of mine that still call me here and ask me questions 'cause I feel like I was really affecting their lives. So whatever I do, that's going to be something that's important to me—that I can feel it has sort of a social significance.

A few students wanted to work in the public sector. But only one student, who said she was "turned on" by nonprofit management, indicated that her choice of business school was motivated *primarily* by altruism and public service: "When I think back on my application, embodied in what I was talking about doing as my main objective in life [and] my career was related to providing something for other people and that kind of thing."

Almost 45 percent of the business students noted the role of default in their decision making. And 13 students (30 percent) had never seriously considered alternatives to getting an MBA; they had always known that they wanted to pursue a career in business, as this student noted:

A business degree is what I wanted to get. I've known since I was 16 that I was going to get one. I've always been interested in business. . . . I've always wanted to run a company to some extent, [to] be a corporate officer; that's my goal.

However, for many students, the decision to attend business school was tinged with ambivalence. These were students who chose the degree because they did not really know what they wanted to do or viewed the experience as an opportunity for career counseling, as in this comment:

I want to be in business, I want to be self-employed, but I don't know what I want to do. . . . So I figured [I'd] go to business school, meet people, learn different aspects of business, and I might get a lightbulb on top of my head [pantomimed getting an inspiration].

Another student reported that part of his decision to attend business school involved "not wanting to look back and wondering 'what if?'"

Such students found an MBA to be the best option available, even inevitable, given their education and class backgrounds. Echoing the rationale that the law students had offered, they said that getting an MBA was "just what one does" with a liberal arts education and the skills they had acquired as undergraduates. One student put it this way:

It just seemed that for someone who wasn't sure what they wanted to do, who has certain quantitative abilities, [who] was also interested in productive activities, like making things happen . . . [and] politics to an extent—all these things, plus *certain* skills, it seemed like the best choice.

When I asked an economics major who had been living in Japan and was unsure of what to do with his life why he was in business school, he commented:

That's a very good question. Seriously. I was afraid of coming back to America with nothing set up. . . . Also I felt that I had hit kind of a ceiling where I was going and I had to get my ticket punched; I had to get an MBA to go out and get a decent job. . . . The kind of background that I had looked like the kind of thing that business schools were looking for. It was real easy to write those [application] essays.

Furthermore, corporate experience persuaded many students that "everyone was doing it." The students had often encountered an atmosphere in which literally everyone in their training programs was going to business school. One student attributed his choice of business school to the influence of his former employer, a large commercial bank, as well as to class status:

If you looked at my training class, it's almost like growing up in a way, where if you come from certain backgrounds, be it upper class, certain things are expected of you. You're going to get a decent high school education, you're going to go to a very good college, and then maybe you'll go on to get a very good job, maybe you'll pursue graduate [studies]. I felt [that] in my training class, . . . every single one of us has gone to business school, pretty much. . . . Everybody else was doing it, and I felt at the same time I was in line with everybody else with my abilities, so that's something that I should look at doing. So it's kind of interesting that it was ingrained in us that we were going to go on and pursue it.

In his account of the first year at Harvard Business School, Reid (1994) labeled the arbitrariness of students' decision making the "Great Lemming March." He proposed that few MBA students made conscious career decisions. First, there was the siren song of consulting or investment banking, then training programs that funneled students to the top business schools. Students applied without any detailed examination of their long-term professional goals. Reid thought that he and his fellow business students could not attribute their choices to "the logical culmination of years of academic and personal preparation. Indeed, [they] couldn't really attribute them to interests that were more than just a few months old" (p. 24).

Law as an Alternative

Like the law students, those who chose business school often ruled out other professional options, as this student indicated:

I knew coming out of [college] that I'd be going back to graduate school at some level . . . whether it was law school or business school I wasn't sure. I ruled out med school early on. Tenth-grade biology did that for me. . . . I felt that I kind of needed [graduate school] to get ahead and be what I wanted to be.

Law school was an attractive, reassuring alter-

native for those who did not know what they wanted to do, especially when they lacked technical degrees. Forty percent of the business students also considered law school, some briefly, others long enough to take the law school admissions test. Their reasons for eventually choosing business school over law might seem trivial, as in the following comment:

I actually did take the law school admissions test. I didn't know if I wanted to be in school for three whole years, so I didn't [accept]. I got the impression that it was just basically boring. . . . It's just too much individual work, too much grunt work.

Others thought seriously about law but then decided that law was perhaps not what they thought it was and that their skills and personality were more in line with a business degree, as this student said:

I always thought I wanted to be a lawyer mainly because I just feel that I have good communication skills and I am persuasive and I felt I could be a good courtroom-type lawyer. Then as I grew older, I realized that all courtroom stuff wasn't Perry Mason stuff, and my dad's a litigator; then, my sister went to law school. I realized so much of it is written communication, and if there's one thing in the world I hate doing, it's writing papers. . . . And I just looked at it as kind of monotonous, and I didn't think it would stimulate me in the way a business setting would.

Some students ruled out law because they had worked with lawyers, realized that they did not really want to practice law, and therefore deemed a law degree unnecessary. Although legal training might be useful in business, as one student remarked, "there will be plenty of lawyers to go to." Many students thought that the MBA provided more occupational flexibility than law, as in this comment:

[It] seems like a lot of people who go to business school at one point in passing had law school flash by. . . . I felt like in business school you maybe have a broader range of opportunity. If you're in law

school, you're going to be a lawyer. . . . I think that maybe going to law school . . . might be a little bit more rigorous academically, and I don't know that I have the drive to really excel because there's a lot of lawyers out there now! An MBA is a little more flexible in what you could do.

At least one student was still considering a joint law-business degree. He thought that the law degree, unlike an MBA, was "something nobody can take away from you," a license with real meaning in the market.

There were several similarities, then, in the decisions that the law and business students made (see Table 2). The respondents related lengthy stories about their choices that did not fit into clearly defined categories. For some elite students, the level of commitment to either field was vague, and they continued to consider careers in both law and business. Both the law and business students chose their degrees to gain general analytic abilities (such as learning to "think like a lawyer") that would allow them to choose from a number of careers. In this respect, law and business degrees appear to provide the same high-level, all-purpose credentials that the liberal arts bachelor's degree provided a generation or two ago. The class-based nature of students' decision making can be better understood by considering parental influence.

THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL BACKGROUND

Educational decisions are highly contextual and cannot be separated from social class and family background. Although the effects of parental education and occupation have been considered in students' choice of attending law school,⁶ they have not been examined in conjunction with students' self-described motives. One of the strongest parental influences was the emphasis placed on graduate school; it was stronger than any push to a specific discipline.

First, the parents of the respondents directly modeled graduate education. The majority of the fathers of the students in both samples had

Table 3: Education of the Students' Parents (percentages; raw counts in parentheses)

Parents' Education	Law Students	Business Students
<i>Mother's Education</i>		
Some high school	0 (0)	0 (0)
High school graduate	20 (7)	17 (6)
Some college	23 (8)	17 (6)
College graduate	43 (15)	31 (11)
Graduate-professional subtotal	14 (5)	35 (12)
MA	8 (3)	20 (7)
MBA	0 (0)	3 (1)
MD	3 (1)	3 (1)
Ph.D.	3 (1)	3 (1)
JD	0 (0)	6 (2)
Total	100 (35)	100 (5)
Missing N	2	7
<i>Fathers' Education</i>		
Some high school	3 (1)	3 (1)
High school graduate	14 (5)	6 (2)
Some college	9 (3)	9 (3)
College graduate	26 (9)	34 (12)
Graduate-professional subtotal	49 (17)	49 (17)
MA	9 (3)	3 (1)
MBA	9 (3)	23 (8)
MD	14 (5)	6 (2)
Ph.D.	3 (1)	6 (2)
JD	14 (5)	11 (4)
Total	100 (35)	100 (35)
Missing N	2	7

Note: Numbers may not total 100 percent because of rounding.

college degrees, and half the fathers in each group had graduate or professional degrees (see Table 3). The mothers were almost as well educated; 57 percent of the business students' mothers and 64 percent of the law students' mothers had at least a college degree, and 34 percent and 14 percent, respectively, had graduate or professional degrees. Moreover, 12 of the 37 law students and 15 of the 42 business students had at least one parent with a professional degree specifically in law, medicine, or business (not including the 7 students whose mothers were nurses).

Class continuity depends less on students following directly in the occupations of their

parents; only three of the law students had a parent who actually practiced law. In fact, the law students were more likely to have parents who were physicians than parents who were lawyers (see Table 4). There was more intergenerational continuity for the business students; 22 had at least one parent who was in business (including parents who owned small businesses).⁷ In the main, however, occupational inheritance was a matter of a general socialization toward professional-managerial careers. Over half the law students and almost three-quarters of the business students had at least one parent who was a professional or manager.

Table 4: Occupations of Students' Parents (percentages; raw counts in parentheses)

Parents' Occupation	Law Students	Business Students
<i>Mothers' Occupation</i>		
Professional	21 (7)	23 (8)
Business	9 (3)	23 (8)
Other white-collar jobs	26 (9)	34 (12)
Pink-collar/service jobs	15 (5)	0 (0)
Homemaker	29 (10)	20 (7)
Total	100 (34)	100 (35)
Missing <i>N</i>	3	7
<i>Fathers' Occupation</i>		
Professional	25 (7)	16 (6)
Business	25 (3)	54 (20)
Other white-collar jobs	33 (9)	27 (10)
Blue-collar/service jobs	17 (5)	2 (2)
Total	100 (36)	100 (37)
Missing <i>N</i> (including raised solely by mother)	1	5

Note: Numbers may not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

Parents, either by unconscious occupational example or through conscious statement, communicated the importance of having a professional career. As one law student remarked:

I wouldn't call this family pressures, but everyone in my extended family are all professionals, not businessmen, but mainly doctors, professors, so it's always been kind of directing me to be a professional. . . . [It's] a more noble-type thing, hence medicine and law, professors.

Many students, however, did not recognize that parental education and occupation played a role in their decisions. Although some students drew attention to the insignificance of parental influence, they focused on not following directly in their parents' footsteps. One business student said, "I knew it wasn't going to be med school or law school. My dad is a doctor—not that that would have any bearing on whether I would or wouldn't be interested in medicine." In fact, a number of students argued that they attended law or business school *in spite of* outright

parental encouragement to do something else. According to one business student, "My dad, when I first said I wanted to get an MBA [said], 'You don't want to get an MBA; that's so stupid. Two years to waste, you don't learn anything real,' and he has one." Typically, the parents had encouraged their children to acquire graduate degrees of equal status but unlike their own. For example, a business student whose father was a corporate lawyer strongly suggested that his son get an MBA, rather than a law degree.

Given the small number of parents in blue-collar occupations, the degree was a form of intergenerational upward mobility for less than a third of the students. Instead, professional-managerial education was the best insurance that they would do as well as their parents or replicate what they had experienced growing up. Comments about family and income made clear the connection between the students' reasons for choosing the degree and social-class maintenance, as did those by a law student and a business student, respectively:

I want my kids to be able to pursue whatever educational things that they want

without worrying about that type of thing. I don't have loans with law school, which is, I think, in large part why I can pursue this type of career. I think it would be a lot harder if I was looking at \$100,000 in loans by the time I finish law school . . . and so I want to give my kids that same opportunity.

I keep making reference to my parents. . . . My parents had four kids, and we all went to private universities and my parents paid for it; we all went to summer camps [and] had horseback riding and piano lessons. I want to be able to have those things for my kids.

A substantial number of parents had paid for their children's college education, and one-fifth were also paying for their children's graduate school education.⁸ The students felt obligated to provide the same possibilities to their own children.

These students exhibited the anxiety over the loss of status examined in accounts of the American middle class (Ehrenreich 1989; Newman 1988). Their fear of "falling" involved a perception of the declining value of middle-class income, sometimes fueled by real economic trends, such as the downsizing of middle managers or the firing of law partners. These students were concerned that a college degree would not provide them with enough to keep up, and this feeling, more than anything else, formed their need to acquire professional degrees that would provide a measure of comfort and safety. Although income played a significant role in their decisions, their choices of law or business were clearly not only about money, but about the prestige and standard of living that could be found in professional or managerial occupations.

CONCLUSION

For elites, a professional degree now appears to fill the place of the liberal arts bachelor's degree a generation or two ago—an all-purpose degree that provides high-level credentials and the opportunity (in theory) to pursue a variety of different careers. For the students in this study, a bachelor's degree was no longer enough to sustain their social-class

positions. Thus, they sought professional degrees that would provide intellectual interest, flexibility, professional or semiprofessional status, and an upper-middle-class lifestyle.

Although the literature emphasizes the social justice motivations of law students, only a small subset of the law students strongly expressed altruistic motives. Except for this significant difference in altruism, Graham University's law and business students had similar motivations at entry. For many students, the two degrees could have substituted for one another.

The findings suggest that the students' choices cannot be perceived as fully rational preferences. The students' accounts upset the assumption that students carefully, or even consciously, chose their careers. Instead, the students' decision-making patterns were full of uncertainty and a large dash of default.⁹ This appears to be a lot of expensive investing in education (up to \$30,000 a year) toward an ambiguous future ("keeping my options open").

But the students were making investments in human capital, not long-term occupational decisions. Through both overt statements and veiled references, they showed that maintaining the professional-class status of their parents was a priority and that their commitment to enter careers in law or business *per se* was low. For many, the two degrees could have substituted for one another.

Although occupational concerns were not absent from the students' decisions, the choices did not revolve around specific occupational identities, such as Grusky (2000) suggested. However, the students' decision making did not operate at the level of aggregate class status either. Rather, the students' choices were "occupation *cum* class"; that is, the students did not distinguish between choosing professional-managerial degrees and maintaining a professional-managerial class status. If students are understood to be maximizing their utility toward maintaining class status, not toward a particular field, their motivations made a great deal of sense. Coming from upper-middle class families, their defaulted decisions translated into remarkable class continuity.¹⁰

Although the students certainly viewed

their choices as individual preferences, the language they used ("I knew it had to be something professional," "That's more what's making me go," "It just kind of happened") pointed to a lack of agency. Habitus is a useful concept for understanding how such choices were shaped and constrained. The context of students' family lives, college, and even work histories created preferences for professional schooling. The students' habitus included the often-unspoken expectations that they would attain professional degrees, frequently manifested as a feeling of inevitability. Parental influence was strongly felt through the importance placed on professional degrees and status. Many parents also directly modeled professional degrees. Occupational inheritance did not happen directly, however; the students seldom aspired to the exact occupations as their parents and rarely did so at the urging of their parents, who suggested other, albeit still professional, degrees.

Moreover, the students were often located in organizations, both colleges and post-college training programs, in which many peers were also applying to professional schools. The elite undergraduate schools and work organizations were structured to emphasize attendance at graduate school, by providing expectations and resources to guide the students in their decisions and by limiting other options. The students thought that liberal arts training in elite universities dictated certain occupational paths by teaching few marketable skills. For the business students, work settings stressed the importance of the MBA to career advancement. They conveyed that the training programs in corporate America did not train them for anything but additional education.

Habitus connected the students to wider cultural understandings specific to their time and economic context, which may explain why the students had fewer of the motivations found in earlier studies. Thus, their decisions were related to the times—the early 1990s—when there was degree inflation, highly competitive law and business school admissions, shrinking opportunities in the labor market, and media accounts of falling middle-class fortunes. Parental socialization had reinforced the idea that they would be able to achieve no mat-

ter what they did, so the students felt entitled to a certain level of education, status, and salary (see McDonough 1997). This sense of entitlement, however, was a double-edged sword. Coupled with the students' perceptions of available opportunities in the marketplace, consciousness about advantage also meant apprehension about not doing as well as their parents—worries that disposed the students to aspirations and that ultimately reproduced class status.

NOTES

1. Of course, it is possible that identification with a specific occupation can emerge during the socialization process in school (Schleef 1997a).

2. According to Bourdieu (1977; see also Swartz 1997), habitus is a set of deeply internalized dispositions and principles, resulting from early socialization, that organize social action. Although MacLeod's (1995) explanation of the role of family habitus in leveling working-class students' aspirations is consonant with both Bourdieu's and Swartz's interpretations, MacLeod also extended the concept of habitus to the greater surroundings of peer groups and public housing, arguing that students' motivations are influenced by later socialization experiences as well. Because I discuss the educational decisions of adults, I also mention college peer influences and the culture and dispositions of undergraduate schools and corporate training programs. These are important aspects of students' decision making, although they usually work to reinforce parental habitus.

3. The respondents were representative of the populations in many respects. The distribution of the jobs in my samples matched the overall distribution for the schools. The law school sample was 35 percent women (compared to 42 percent nationwide), as was the class of 1995 at the university. About 30 percent of the class of 1995 were minority students, compared to 38 percent in my sample. Elite schools report far larger percentages of minority students than do law schools nationally; according to 1991–92 enrollments, about 25 percent of the students in the top

25 law schools versus 15 percent nationwide, were minority students (American Bar Association 1992). Breakdowns by racial category were as follows: African Americans—6 percent nationally in 1991 and 11 percent in my sample, Hispanic Americans—4 percent nationally and 8 percent in my sample, and Asian Americans—4 percent nationally and 19 percent in my sample.

Twenty-six percent of my business school sample were international students, which roughly matched the 22 percent for the class. The percentage of minorities was the same for the class overall—about 10 percent, excluding foreign students of color (the top 20 business schools reported an average of 8 percent American minority enrollments in 1992; see Bryne 1993). However, the class of 1994 at Graham University was 29 percent women, compared to 27 percent among the top 25 schools in 1992 (Bryne 1993). Although the sampling frame matched this percentage, of the students who agreed to be interviewed, only 19 percent were women.

4. Much of this research is now 20 or more years old. In Stevens's (1973) study of the alumni and then-current students of eight law schools, the intellectual draws of law school were the most important motivations to attend. However, the "desire to serve the underprivileged" increased greatly from 1960 to 1972, perhaps as a result of the social activism of the 1960s. In another cross-sectional study of first-year law students at Brigham Young University in 1974 (Hedegard 1979:814), 31 percent believed that the "desire for restructuring society" was of great importance in choosing law, and to "be of service to the underprivileged" was of great importance for 18 percent. Among the first-year students surveyed by Erlanger and Klegon (1978) at the University of Wisconsin in the early 1970s, half stated some social service or reform motivation, mixed with other motivations, and 21 percent cited *only* activist motivations.

Some reports of altruistic motivations were inconsistent, however. When students in Gee and Jackson's (1977:948) study were asked the most important reason for choosing law, "opportunity to be helpful to others and/or useful to society in general" ranked second after "a desire for independence," but only 2

percent of the students chose "desire to be of service to the underprivileged." Finally, in their survey of lawyers, Zemans and Rosenblum (1981) noted the predominance of pragmatic reasons, rather than the desire to have an impact on society.

5. I edited the quotations from the interviews for readability (pauses and false starts removed), but left the substance intact. Four ellipses indicate the omission of two or more sentences; three ellipses indicate the omission of one or several words.

6. Law students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds have predominated. In Heinz and Laumann's (1982:187) study, almost 90 percent of the graduates of elite law schools had fathers in professional, managerial, or technical occupations. Indeed, Warkov and Zelan (1965) found that direct occupational inheritance, in the form of a parent who was a lawyer, was the strongest predictor of entry into law school.

7. Although Egerton (1997) found that there is more occupational and educational inheritance among professional students than among business students in Great Britain, there was more occupational inheritance among the business students in my sample, perhaps because of the school's strong connection to the upper echelons of management. Egerton also noted considerable cross-pollination between professional and managerial families in terms of occupational inheritance.

8. The rest of the students financed their education with personal savings and astronomical loans (up to \$80,000), and a few used governmental financial aid or subsidies from future employers.

9. The decision-making process discussed here may be related to persistence and satisfaction. Seymour and Hewitt (1996) found that those who choose college majors in science, mathematics, or engineering out of default or career-enhancement motivations, rather than intrinsic interest, are less likely to persist in the majors. Students who chose law or business school for similar reasons may not have enough interest to sustain them in the long term, which may explain why so many choose to opt out of these careers.

10. Like most authors who write about professional education, I have focused on elites. It would be sensible to explore the occupational

decision-making processes of those at less elite schools, where mobility may be a more prominent motivation. Research should also investigate whether these findings about social class and ambiguity are true for those who pursue other professional degrees, particularly medicine and engineering, which require an earlier vocational crystallization—and potentially less financial payoff—than business or law.

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