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BECOMING A UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR:
CAREER CHOICE PROCESSES OF ACADEMICS


by


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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

# INTRODUCTION

Most of us feel we possess some stable, unique identity or core which characterizes us and sets us apart from other human beings. But at the same time, we recognize that we change -- that we are not the same person today as we were ten or twenty years ago. This theme of permanence versus change in identities has long intrigued social psychologists.

This thesis addresses the theme of permanence versus change in the lives of adults. Specifically, the personal changes and transformations experienced by one group of persons in the process of their assuming the occupation of university professor are discussed.

We know that persons do not freely choose occupations as if in a vacuum. From birth, certain constraints are placed upon choice. For example, we know that certain variables affect a person's life chances -- variables such as gender, race, parents' income, education, occupation, etc. In the past, studying the variables associated with a person's entrance into an occupation (multivariate analysis) has clearly been the favored method by which to explain occupational choice. (For examples pertaining to higher education, see Adams, 1970; Astin, 1969; Duncan, Haller and Portes, 1968; Harrison, Pidgeon, Rigby and Vogler, 1977; Harway and Astin, 1977; Lavin, 1965; Peterson, 1958; Sewell, 1967 and 1968; Shattock and Walker, 1977; Turner, 1962. For examples of studies correlating variables with women's occupational choice and/or persistence in higher education, see Cartwright, 1972; Gysbers, Johnson and Gust, 1968; Hoffman, 1972; Meier, 1972; O'Leary and Hammack, 1975; Parsons, 1976; Peterson, 1958; Picou and Curry, 1973; Tangri, 1972; Tolone, Zey-Ferrell and Walsh, 1976, Weston and Mednick, 1970.)

However, while knowing the effects of such variables adds to our understanding, it cannot explain the <u>decision-making processes and identity changes</u> undergone by persons when choosing occupations. If we are to fully explain occupational choice, research must be undertaken that concentrates on decision-making processes and identity changes. In short, we need research which approaches occupational choice from a different perspective.

This paper explores the decision-making processes and identity changes undergone by one occupational group -- university professors. It seeks to compare the personal changes and transformations experienced by women as compared to men as they become professors.

Information about past experiences was collected from a small group of male and female faculty members who have their doctorates and are employed by a state university. The aim was to begin the construction of an occupational developmental typology based upon subjectively interpreted experiences.

The design of the research derives from a symbolic interactionist critique of occupational choice theories and is patterned after a small body of literature which has used basic tenets of symbolic interaction to explain entrance into occupations.

## THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Very simply, theories of occupational choice attempt to explain why a person enters one occupation rather than another. There are three general groupings of occupational choice theories: psychological theories, purposive theories and the adventitious approach. As will become evident, none of these theories can by itself adequately explain occupational choice.

Psychological theories include the works of Holland (1959, 1963, 1966), Roe (1957) and Roe and Siegelman (1964). Psychological career choice theories see a core personality as having been formed in a person during childhoood. For example, according to Holland, certain modal personal orientations are formed in the individual -- the Intellectual, the Social, the Enterprising, the Artistic -- which influence occupational choice.

Roe sees parental child-rearing techniques as producing a "warm" or "cold" home atmosphere. Persons from warm homes will choose service-oriented occupations, cold home persons will choose non people-oriented occupations. (See Osipow, 1968, for a more complete discussion of psychological theories of occupational choice.)

Criticisms of the psychological approach abound. Becker (1963: 44) points out that psychological explanations cannot account for persons who enter certain groups or occupations but do not possess the supposedly necessary trait for entrance. Also, Becker claims psychological theories have trouble accounting for change over time.

The psychological approach also fails to recognize that "most occupations consist of a number, a bundle, of activities" (Hughes, 1959: 452). To claim a certain trait is needed for entrance into an occupation treats occupations as if they involve one, not many, activities.

The psychological approach also tends to view humans as static. Humans are seen as forming a personality in childhood and when choosing an occupation simply playing or acting out this pre-formed personality. The possibility of personal change in adulthood is discounted (Becker, 1964; Brim and Wheeler, 1966).

A second group of theories, rational-process, or what Sherlock and Cohen (1966) call "purposive" theories, sees occupational choice as a rational

decision-making process. Occupational choice is seen as a series of decisions in which a person fits his or her abilities and interests to "reality." Rational-process theories include the works of Super (1953, 1957) and Ginzberg et al. (1951).

Both Super and Ginzberg et al. view occupational choice as a rational, irreversible decision-making process. The person undergoes a series of developmental stages and at each stage fits his or her self-concept or internal needs and desires with "reality."

By viewing occupational choice as a series of compromises between individual needs and the "real world," Super and Ginzberg et al. treat reality as something outside of the individual with no possibility that reality is "created" or interpreted by people (Berger and Luckmann, 1967).

Also, Super's and Ginzberg's purposive theories discount the possibility that occupational choice may be "nonrational, spontaneous and based upon situational pressures" (Sherlock and Cohen, 1966: 303). Concentrating upon these nonrational, spontaneous aspects of career choice constitutes the third grouping of occupational choice theories -- the "adventitious approach."

Sherlock and Cohen (1966) deem the adventitious approach most appropriate for viewing entrance into unskilled or semi-skilled occupations, with the purposive approach being the most appropriate for viewing entrance into the skilled occupations, including the professions. Sherlock and Cohen assume before beginning their observations that choices which are nonrational, spontaneous and situational could not precipitate entrance into the professions because of the long training periods required. In fact, a theoretical perspective which allows for nonrational, spontaneous decisions has seldom been used to explain entrance into professions. The exceptions are Katz and Martin (1962), White and Skipper (1971) and London (1978).

The adventitious approach offers certain advantages over psychological or purposive theories. However, by concentrating on nonrational, spontaneous choices, the adventitious approach restricts inquiry into purposive, rational choices.

In sum, the psychological approach cannot explain change over time, it treats occupations as involving only one set of activities and it cannot explain persons who enter an occupation but do not possess the supposedly necessary trait.

Purposive theories discount the possibility of situational contingencies and pressures affecting the choice process and they treat "reality" as something outside the person rather than having been interpreted and, in part, "created" by persons.

The adventitious approach does not allow for any planning, forethought or rationality in the choice process and it has seldom been applied to entrance into professions.

What is needed is a perspective that allows that occupational choice processes may be purposive at times, spontaneous at others; may involve childhood experiences or may not; may be rational or nonrational. A perspective is needed that allows a search for these possibilities without discounting them before observations begin.

Symbolic interaction as a general perspective allows us to search for the rational and nonrational, purposive and spontaneous, psychological and social psychological aspects of occupational choice. A small body of literature, which I refer to as the "becoming" literature, utilizes the symbolic interactionist perspective to explain entrance into certain occupations and roles. With his study of marijuana users, Howard S. Becker (1963) can be seen as stimulating the publication of the becoming literature.

Following Becker came Lofland and Stark (1965) and Lofland (1966),
Skipper and McCaghy (1970), White and Skipper (1971), Carey, Peterson and
Sharpe (1974), Cross (1977) and London (1978). These works follow basic
tenets of symbolic interaction by paying particular attention to the meanings
arrived at by actors, their social relationships and the fitting together of
lines of action by actors. Each work recognizes the inadequacy of a model of
occupational choice, or "becoming" based only upon background characteristics
and predisposing conditions, and each sees entrance into an occupation as a
process or sequence of steps occurring over time.

It should be noted however, that virtually all of these works concern
entrance into "deviant" occupations (marijuana user, strip-tease, go-go dancer,
etc.) The becoming genre is almost exclusively the product of deviance litera-
ture. This appears to be because researchers have made the a priori assumption
that persons entering deviant occupations or roles could not possibly have
rationally chosen these roles -- that the persons must instead have adventi-
tiously fallen into them. The a priori assumptions are reflected in the ap-
roach and the findings of the researchers. But it appears that this approach
may be useful to the study of occupational entrance in general.

London's (1978) study of the career paths and identities of a group of
community college teachers is one of the few works that does not concern a
"deviant" occupation and London's work is most closely related to the study
to be described below. But London's community college teachers appear to
differ substantially from the group of university professors I have studied.
London's community college teachers were failures, in a sense, having arrived
at their present occupations because of the premature ending of their graduate
or university careers. This does not appear to be the case for university
professors.

In summary, each occupational choice theory discussed cannot by itself adequately explain entrance into an occupation. What is needed is a general perspective that allows us to search for a variety of explanations. Symbolic interaction appears to be such an approach.

The symbolic interactionist approach will be applied by allowing the meanings and interpretations of the actors themselves to take precedence, by searching for the possibility that occupational choice involves a process in which situational contingencies, social relationships, changes and transformations in identity become crucial, and by beginning with the assumption that humans are interpretive rather than responding beings.

## RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The faculty members interviewed were employed by State University, a medium-sized institution with an enrollment of approximately 18,000 students. Ten in-depth focused interviews were conducted, each lasting an average of two hours and twenty minutes. Five men and five women were interviewed. The interviews were conducted in a private office, a private room near the faculty member's office or in the faculty member's home.

To facilitate comparison, older persons (persons who received their Ph.D.s before 1970), persons with long time gaps between degrees, and persons with circuitous job histories were excluded. Also, in an effort to keep objective characteristics as similar as possible, persons in the biological and physical sciences were excluded because of their prevalence to have completed post-doctorates, making comparisons more difficult. Only persons in the social sciences, arts or humanities were included in the pool. The pool of names was obtained by reviewing State University's affirmative action files. Five persons were selected at random from the pool of males, five from the pool of females.

The mean age of interviewees was 32. The average year for receipt of the Ph.D. was 1974. All persons were white and had their doctorates. Four of the males were married and one was single. Four of the females were divorced, with one remarried. One woman was engaged to be married.

During the interviews, faculty members constructed "life histories" covering the time from high school graduation to the present, although they were free to recount earlier experiences. Information elicited included such things as whether or not persons went directly to college, how they decided upon a particular college, how the person thought others viewed him or her during high school, college, graduate school, how decisions were made and what influenced the decisions. The subjective feelings of the persons, how they viewed events and what others influenced decisions were concentrated upon.

<div align="center">FINDINGS</div>

## Turning Points

In general, it appears the process of becoming a university professor involves a series of decisions made in increments to solve immediate problems. These decisions can be seen as having been made at "critical junctures" or "turning points" (Strauss, 1969; Lofland, 1966). The concept turning point offers an appropriate and convenient method of organizing and explaining the occupational choice process.

Strauss describes the concept turning points as "critical incidents that occur to force a person to recognize that 'I am not the same as I was, as I used to be'...These critical incidents constitute turning points in the onward movement of personal careers" (1969: 93).

Lofland describes turning points in persons' lives as:

a moment when old lines of action were complete, had failed,

or had been or were about to be disrupted, and when they (are)

faced with the opportunity or necessity for doing something

different with their lives...The significance of these

various kinds of turning points lies in their having produced

an increased awareness of and desire to take some action on

their problems, combined with a new opportunity to do so. Turning

points (are) circumstances in which old obligations and lines

of action (have) diminished, and new involvements (have) become

desirable and possible (1966: 93).

Turning points are not simply sudden changes in a person. The changes may

have been coming on slowly for a long time. It is at a turning point that a

person has a sudden realization of the changes he or she has been experiencing.

To say persons make decisions at critical junctures in order to solve

immediate problems does not mean they have no long-range goals. But if they

have long-range goals they often are diverted from them by events they cannot

control. They may become faced with situations they could not have anticipated

or become involved in social relationships they could not have predicted.

Decisions made at critical junctures result from an interplay between

background characteristics, situational contingencies and social relationships

defined as important by the person. We can better understand the changes and

transformations which occur in the process of becoming a university professor

by tracing critical junctures or turning points which lead people to become

members of the academic profession.

## Becoming Committed to an Academic Area

Becoming personally and academically committed to one area of interest is

the first transformation experienced by persons on their way to becoming

professors. Each person interviewed experienced a critical juncture or turning point which can be seen as having committed the person to an area of study. Two general types of turning points can be identified.

Lack of initial commitment. In the first type of turning point, the person decides to major in one academic area but does not feel committed to it. Some persons begin studies in an area because they are required to choose a major by their college, but they have not yet pared down their interests. Others receive a scholarship they do not want to turn down, even though they are unsure what the discipline is like. For others, it is what they are doing "best" in at the moment they must choose. When there is this initial lack of commitment, the person in every case began to dislike the field as he or she continued in it.

These persons reached critical junctures when they took a class or classes in another field which were pleasing to them and/or experienced an event in their chosen field which they defined as disgusting or displeasing. That is, at the same time their chosen discipline becomes displeasing, another becomes pleasing.

For example, one interviewee, Sam, came from a poor family. He wanted to attend college but his family could not afford tuition. He lived in his state's capitol and learned the state offered scholarships in engineering. He applied and received a scholarship. Although Sam did not feel committed to engineering, he began college in the discipline.

Sam had always had an interest in geography, but his high school had offered no classes in the subject. He decided to take a geography class. His first geography class was taught by a man who enchanted Sam (see Adelson, 1962 on the teacher as a model).

The first class I had in geography at college was taught by
one of the top two or three teachers I have ever known. I
was fascinated. I was overwhelmed. He opened my eyes to
the world. I would leave his class and think about what he
said the rest of the day. After I had that course from him,
I took twelve more hours in geography. But they were totally
useless hours for me -- I couldn't use them toward my degree.

Sam came to dislike his engineering classes as he took more of them. He
may not have discontinued his studies in engineering if it had not been for
an unhappy summer field experience he had to complete. The combination of the
enchanting professor and the unsuccessful field experience marked a turning
point for Sam. Against his parents' wishes, he gave up his scholarship in
engineering, became a geography major and worked part-time and during the
summers to pay his tuition.

In sum, for persons experiencing the first type of turning point, there
is an initial lack of commitment to a discipline, a pleasing experience in
another discipline coupled with increasing disenchantment with the initially
chosen field. In each of the cases of lack of initial commitment, the person
ultimately transferred out of the field.

Weaving together of threads. A second type of turning point leading per-
sons to become committed to a discipline can be called a "weaving together of
threads." In this type of turning point, persons are initially committed to a
discipline. They describe it as part of their "identity." Usually this com-
mitment began long before the person reached college. For example, two persons
had played the same sorts of roles in their families as they were called upon
in their chosen fields. Another person was treated by everyone in her high
school as a practitioner in this field.

These persons have built up an identity in one field, but at college they are bombarded with classes in many other disciplines which interest them. Yet they are too personally committed to forsake their chosen field; that is, too much of who they believe they are is intertwined with their chosen field. They are known by significant others as the "artist," the "counselor," and so on.

These people find themselves with many disconnected threads which interest them but they are unsure how to combine the threads. At this point they are seekers, seeking some way to weave together their diverse interests, yet retain their identity. Most characteristically, they take a course either as an undergraduate or graduate student, in which they suddenly see a way to combine their many threads of interest into a whole.

For example, Lora built up an identity as an artist long before entering college. She lived in a city with a large artist community. Her parents gave her private art instruction. She mentioned that in high school whenever an artist was needed she was called upon. She never considered majoring in any other subject in college.

But at college, she discovered she had interests in two other subjects. She graduated with forty extra credit hours because of her interest in these other subjects. She never considered switching from art, however, and ultimately received her bachelor's degree in art.

Lora began graduate school in art but still had not pared down her interests. While in graduate school, she took classes in art history. She began to like this specialty more and more, realizing it encompassed all her interests. Lora said: "Art history ended up being such a logical choice. It's really a cross-discipline -- it cuts across all fields. It was such a logical choice. It allows me to keep up in all the other fields, but is still art as well."

Allen described how he played the role of counselor at home and with friends. When he entered college, he knew exactly what he wanted to study.

Ever since I was little, ever since I was seven years old, for Christ's sake, I've been the person who helped people -- who people could talk to. I mean I'm just an average shmo. I was always just average -- I'm not the best, I'm not the worst. I fit in the middle, I got by by helping people. It became an identity with me...I wanted to get into a profession where I could counsel people.

In college Allen found that although he had gotten into a field in which he could help people (psychology), this was too general. He lacked a specific interest. He had many threads of interest, but could not fit them together.

Then in graduate school Allen took a class in the family and all the threads were woven together for him. Allen said, "before this I had had courses in the family, but they treated the family in an abstract way...I had this course in family and for the first time, it all fit...All my interests before suddenly fit together. So I decided to change my emphasis to the family."

In summary, I have identified two routes a person takes in becoming committed to an area of study. One route is characterized by an initial lack of commitment and a later transferring out of the field. The other route involves an initial commitment based upon an identity built up over the years coupled with interests in other fields. Later, the person discovers a specific area that encompasses his or her varied interests.

Everett C. Hughes (1959: 453) has noted that "(o)ccupations vary greatly in the degree to which they become the master determinants of the social

identity, self-conception, and social status of the people in them." The fact that interviewees for this project became personally committed to a discipline as a first step in becoming a professor seems to indicate a strong degree of social identity and self-concept invested in their chosen fields. But whether or not this personal commitment is a necessary precondition for entrance into academe, we cannot say on the basis of the evidence collected.

It is interesting to note that for each interviewee, the initial commitment was to a field of interest, not to becoming a professor. The decision to enter academe per se came at a much later time for the interviewees. We turn now to a second critical juncture in the process of becoming a professor.

## The Decision to Pursue Graduate Studies

For some persons the pursuance of graduate studies is a natural continuation of their educations and is seen as the minimum amount of education they should receive. For others, the decision is traumatic and they settle upon it with great difficulty. That is, one group makes no decision while the other group undergoes a decision-making process before pursuing graduate studies.

Persons who perceived a break -- and therefore had to make a decision -- between undergraduate and graduate years either arrived at college with vague notions about their future or had very specific plans, but these plans did not initially include graduate school.

Persons who had difficulty deciding to pursue graduate studies experienced two types of turning points which marked the solidification of their decisions. After they experienced a turning point the persons pointed themselves firmly in the direction of graduate studies. For three persons, the decision to attend graduate school was created by a job-related experience.

<u>Job-related turning points.</u> Carla had no intention of going beyond the bachelor's level when she entered college. Her goal was to teach high school and she completed her teaching certificate simultaneously with her bachelor's degree. She felt she modeled herself around an influential high school teacher who taught human relations.

Ironically, the year Carla finished her degree was the year the influential teacher left her job. Carla ended up taking her former teacher's job. But things did not work out as expected.

> I wanted to teach in high school just like Miss____. I
> changed when I got in that position...I didn't have the
> skills to do what I wanted to do...In our high school, guid-
> ance counselors were there to get you into college, but they
> didn't try to interpret your growth. The human relations
> person did. It was very rewarding, but I had not been
> trained in counseling...After one year of this I was moti-
> vated to go on for my master's...The experience of teaching
> motivated me. I felt inadequate. I wanted to be better at
> it.

Carla's feelings of inadequacy once she got into a job situation were directly responsible for motivating her to continue her studies. Also, because Carla, like other interviewees, had been an achiever before and throughout high school and college, she was not accustomed to being unprepared.

Once Lisa became committed to computer science she began to work in her chosen field during the summers. It was during her summer employment that Lisa became committed to pursuing graduate studies.

I knew I wanted to go to graduate school.  It was because

of my summer jobs.  With a bachelor's all you could be was

a programmer.  You couldn't advance any except to manage-

ment.  I didn't want to just do the same sort of programming.

Beginning anew in graduate studies.  Persons experiencing a second type of

turning point leading to graduate studies became committed to an area late in

their undergraduate years.  By then, however, they were committed to receiving

their bachelor's degree in a discipline with which they were disenchanted.  By

attending graduate school, they could begin again in their newfound areas of

interest.

For example, Dan's original plans were to complete a bachelor's degree and

masters in English and teach at the high school level.  However, toward the end

of his undergraduate years, he became increasingly disenchanted with English.

During Dan's senior year he was recommended for and received a grant to

complete a master's degree in English, a grant he felt obligated to accept.

By this time Dan had become enthused about the field of mass communications -

radio/tv.  Dan saw his only choices as teaching in a field with which he was

disenchanted (English) or pursuing a Ph.D. in mass communications.  Due to

encouragement from his wife and a good friend he decided to pursue his Ph.D.

In summary, there are persons who see a break between their undergraduate

and graduate years, and those who do not.  Even though there is an institu-

tional break between the bachelor's degree and graduate work, this break does

not conform to all people's subjective conceptions.

Of persons who felt a decision had to be made to pursue graduate studies,

there were those who had vague plans upon entering college or had specific plans

which did not initially include graduate school.  Two types of turning points

were experienced by this group -- one type related to a job experience, the other the chance to begin anew in a discipline they had come to like too late to receive an undergraduate degree in.

## The Decision to Enter Academe

Once the person enters graduate school, he or she must somehow manage to remain there until receipt of the Ph.D. The interpersonal environment in graduate school seems to be important for persons if they are to remain. If it is chilling, the person may leave. One woman entered a graduate department as the only female and the youngest graduate student. The other graduate students were so unfriendly she left school for awhile.

Another woman planned to stay only until receipt of her masters. But she claimed that for some reason her record always said she was there to earn a Ph.D. "Also, I had become such a part of the graduate students and faculty there. They were a family to me...I didn't want to leave."

If the person remains long enough to receive the Ph.D., he or she is faced with post-Ph.D. plans. Some persons decide very early they want to be a university professor, others delay the decision.

The decision to enter academe appears to revolve around the research/teaching dichotomy. Persons began to want to enter academe when they experienced an attitude change during which they began to think of themselves as a researcher or a teacher.

It is interesting to note that of the ten interviewees, eight claimed the desire to teach was their primary reason for wanting to enter academe. This is not surprising since at State University there is not as much emphasis on research as one would find at institutions with lighter teaching loads.

However, Fulton and Trow (1974) recently found that in all levels of academe, teaching plays a crucial part. Fulton and Trow found that even in what they call "high quality" universities, "only half of the respondents defined themselves as even primarily researchers" (1974: 35). If the majority of persons decide to enter academe only when they have come to think of themselves as teachers, we have a possible explanation for Fulton and Trow's findings. Perhaps the decision-making process which precipitates entrance into academe has a lot to do with the self-conceptions persons have once they are members of the profession.

The one interviewee who claimed her desire to do research and to be a researcher were the primary motivations for her desire to enter academe, left State University a few months after our interview in order to accept a position at an institution with better resources for her research.

One interviewee never came to think of himself as a teacher or researcher. He spoke of having had no choice but to enter academe if he were to continue graduate studies in linguistics. He claimed there was little else to do with a Ph.D. in linguistics.

Persons began to think of themselves as teachers when they had a particularly rewarding teaching experience. For example, Lisa never thought of herself as a teacher. She wanted to do research, perhaps in industry. The turning point for Lisa came when she had to teach. Teaching experience was part of her graduate school funding. Lisa flatly stated that it was the teaching that caused her to want to enter academe. "I wanted to get into academia after I discovered I was successful at teaching. This occurred after my first year in graduate school."

Another man had purposely chosen psychology because he did not want to teach and he knew there were other job possibilities besides teaching in

psychology. But an experience in graduate school with teaching convinced him to enter academe.

In addition to favorable teaching experiences, students' professors help some persons gain first-hand knowledge of the duties and lifestyles of professors. One woman dated a professor during graduate school and she said "the life looked good."

In addition to favorable teaching experiences, a constellation of factors such as contact with and knowledge of the duties of professors and the goals of other significant graduate students appear to come together to push persons in the direction of academe.

It would be interesting to know how this group of interviewees differs from persons who acquire their Ph.D.s but never enter academe. It is possible that persons who choose not to enter academe had unfavorable teaching experiences, or had no teaching experiences at all. One of the men interviewed for this project was prepared to take a high-salaried position outside academe. But his last year in graduate school he tried teaching and found it so rewarding he decided to enter academe. We can speculate that he may not have entered academe if not for his teaching experiences.

It would also be fruitful to conduct in the future a project which compares these findings with data on professors from clearly research-oriented schools with light teaching loads.

The First Job

Looking for a position within academe is the final step in becoming a professor. For each of the persons interviewed their present positions were their first upon receipt of their Ph.D.s.

None of the persons interviewed applied for every job in their area for which they knew there was an opening. Their first step in job-hunting was to attempt to narrow down the available jobs into an acceptable pool. What was seen as "acceptable" differed for each person. Some persons limited themselves to applying for jobs in a limited geographical region. Others applied only for positions at schools which had graduate programs in their areas.

Persons placing the most advanced restrictions on the positions for which they applied were the persons most confident about their abilities to get a job and most confident about the health of the job market in their field.

Once the positions were narrowed to an acceptable pool and applications made, most persons went for three interviews. Whether or not the persons accepted any offer from these first two or three places was dependent upon a number of influences and what they saw as their alternatives at the time.

Whether or not the interview experience was enjoyable was of crucial importance to each of the interviewees. Usually by the time persons were invited for interviews, they saw their range of choices as being only those places which had invited them for interviews. These places were then rated by the persons using such criteria as the physical environment, proximity to an urban area, their potential colleagues, students, etc.

The more similarity between the schools, the more detailed the considerations became. If one characteristic was equally pleasing between the schools, the person shifted to a second, less important characteristic. If this was equally pleasing, he or she shifted to a third, and so on. Quite simply, the person had to have some feature with which to distinguish between the various alternatives. If the similarities are great, the person will continue to seek out more features with which to distinguish between the alternatives.

In some cases, persons accepted positions at State University but still harbored misgivings about the place. To deal with the misgivings, the persons employed what have been described as "techniques of neutralization" (Sykes and Matza, 1957). Techniques of neutralization, in this case, can be called rationalizations or justifications which helped to make the person more comfortable with his or her decision.

Techniques of neutralization were employed when two types of situations occurred. First, neutralizations were employed when the person accepted the position at State University before he or she felt certain all alternatives had been explored. This occurred when the job market was perceived by the person as especially tight and/or he or she had a compelling reason to accept the offer, such as a family to support. Given either or both of these conditions, the person felt it was dangerous to turn down the job offer.

In the second situation in which a technique of neutralization was employed, the person believed he or she was fully aware of the alternatives. State University did not meet all the important criteria, but other alternatives met his or her criteria even less. The person felt compelled to compromise.

The neutralization technique used to relieve their misgivings was to tell themselves the position would be temporary -- that they would remain at State University for a few years, then move on. They told themselves they could put up with the anticipated discomfort if it was only for a few years. "I thought I would just stay here for two or three years, then move on." Or, "I thought of it as a good place to begin -- I didn't think of it as permanent."

In summary, obtaining a position after receipt of the Ph.D. appears to involve a process in which the range of alternatives is successively narrowed.

We turn now to two final aspects of becoming a professor -- the special case of women and the special case of the working class male.

## The Special Case of Women

No systematic differences between the subjective definitions placed upon events by men versus women have been found in this project except one. Women, at some point, faced the decision of whether or not they would have a career, be a homemaker or combine the two. It is this career-domesticity-or-both decision which women faced and men did not. This is the only systematic difference found between the men and women interviewed. It was during their high school years that these women began to believe a career was possible. It should be noted that all of the mothers of these women, except one, were homemakers.

The point which seems to emerge in this section is similar to the overall perspective from which this project was approached. Women cannot be seen as becoming career-oriented because of a stimulus received by them (such as a role-model or an employed mother) and they in turn give off a response (becoming career-oriented). The process by which a woman comes to believe it is possible for her to have a career is a complicated process and again is characterized by turning points. The decision involves a constellation of significant others, situational contingencies and the woman's self-definition.

To illustrate: Lisa's mother was a housewife. Lisa described her mother as a creative person, but she had not finished high school. Lisa attended a high school with high academic standards.

When Lisa was a high school senior her father died. Lisa said she saw her mother left a widow, having to take mundane jobs to support herself.

I kind of think that when my mother was left a widow -- I
saw her taking boring, low-level jobs. She hated them. She
was creative and if she had had more education she could have
gotten better jobs. I think this made me want to get an
education.

Another interviewee, Kathy, described herself as an achiever throughout
high school. But she felt ugly.

I was seen as being smart. I didn't know this when I was in
high school, but I found out these things later. When I was
in high school I didn't go out a lot. At the time I thought
I wasn't attractive. But really what was happening was that
the boys were just scared of me because I was so bright and
smart.

Kathy said she always had a traditional viewpoint about women and careers.
Pretty girls got married, ugly ones had a career.

I really had a traditional viewpoint. I remember once when I
was young and a friend of mine in school said she wanted to
be a surgeon. I encouraged her not to become one. I was just
shocked that someone who was as cute as her would do anything
but get married and have kids. I thought only weird or ugly
girls had careers. I couldn't see combining the two either.
I didn't think of myself as marriageable....I always assumed I
wouldn't get married.

Another woman, Dianne, always wanted to get married and have children.
She saw going to college as just filling in time before she would marry. "I
thought I would work for a while, then have a family. I wasn't career-
oriented." It was not until graduate school that Dianne became close friends

with another older female graduate who combined the pursuance of career with a family. At the same time Dianne came to know two faculty members who combined their careers and families. Dianne also felt her older sister, who combined career and marriage, helped her to see that it was possible. Dianne has not changed her desire for marriage and family, but her conception of combining career and marriage has changed as a result of social relationships.

We can learn from these examples first, that behavior does not always match a person's subjective meanings and definitions. Although Dianne behaved as if she were pursuing a career, she never felt committed to the idea until graduate school.

Also we can learn from these examples that the situations in which persons find themselves and how these situations are interpreted have long-lasting implications. We can almost never predict if and/or when certain situations will arise.

The particular situation in which Lisa was involved could not have been predicted. We cannot assume that a father's death will always cause his daughter to become career-oriented, or that a widowed mother taking mundane jobs will produce a career-oriented woman. It was the particular interpretation placed upon this situation which was crucial in Lisa's case. Lisa could have concluded from this incident that she should marry a rich man so that she would be taken care of if he should die. Given Lisa's achievements in school, her mother's encouragement of her achievements and the fact that she attended an academically oriented high school, she did not interpret her father's death in this way.

I can offer here only clues about how we should go about answering the question of what makes some women career- and some women domestically-

oriented. The symbolic interactionist approach appears to offer us an alternative view of how women become career-oriented.

Past research (for example, Sewell and Shah, 1967 and 1968; Astin, 1969; Adams, 1970; Almquist and Angrist, 1971; Hawley, 1972; Harway and Astin, 1977; Cummings, 1977; Ridgeway, 1978; and Perrucci and Targ, 1978) has tended to use multivariate analysis in attempts to explain why some women but not others work outside the home. The approach taken here suggests that it might be fruitful to regard women's decisions as a process in which situational contingencies and subjective meanings and interpretations are important.

## Working Class Males and the Illegitimacy of Higher Education

Two of the males interviewed for this project came from working class families. One man's father had been a factory worker and a fork lift operator, the other man's father had been an elevator operator and worked himself up to a supervisory position. A curious phenomenon occurred for each of these men during the time they were attending graduate school. Both felt compelled to finish their graduate degrees as quickly as possible. They pushed themselves constantly and each felt he was under extreme pressure.

> I don't know why I kept that pace. I've asked myself that, but I really don't know. You know I had imaginary pains and sicknesses. I would get up real early and not be able to sleep. I couldn't eat a lot of times and I lost weight. It was a bad time period...I had put out a lot of effort. I guess I didn't want to waste all the effort I had in it.

The other male, Allen, hurried through graduate school at an amazing pace. He had his Ph.D. at the age of 24.

I really busted my ass. No time off, no vacation except

two weeks to get married...I guess I wanted to finish fast

because I was afraid if I ever stopped that I'd never get

back.

Allen said that his parents, especially his father, disapproved of grad-

uate school.

My parents thought I was off my ass. They didn't support

me at all. Not a positive word...My mother was just neutral

about grad school. My dad disapproved. I was an adult.

Going to college was okay with him, but once I got out, it

was time for full employment. He couldn't understand why I

was going to free-load three more years -- that's what he

thought of it as -- free-loading. He just didn't understand.

He thought it was insanity.

Allen's comments about his father's career preferences can explain why

both of these men felt a compulsion to finish their graduate studies so

rapidly. The parents of both of these males viewed education beyond the

undergraduate level as unnecessary and illegitimate. They saw their sons as

afraid to work. It is perhaps because of their parents' views that these men

tried to finish as soon as possible so they could get a job, which would be

seen as more legitimate.

It seems these men would have been likely candidates for dropping out of

graduate school if not for the encouragement they received from friends and

professors.

It should be noted that it is unlikely that all or a majority of working

class males would feel extreme pressure while in graduate school. It is not

so much the socioeconomic status of the families as it is their view of higher education as illegitimate.

It would be difficult to test for this phenomenon by attempting to correlate number of years spent in graduate school with socioeconomic status. The important factor here is the pressures these men felt. Some men may feel these pressures, yet be unable to finish their studies rapidly. In short, their subjective feelings about events may differ from their objective behavior.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

An attempt has been made here to view entrance into the occupation of university professor as a process in which decisions are made at critical junctures or turning points. The end result of the steps outlined is entrance into the occupation of university professor, but individually the steps may not be "teleologically oriented to that course of action" (Katz and Martin, 1962: 154).

The steps identified included becoming committed to a discipline, either through an "initial lack of commitment" or through a "weaving together of threads." The second step, that of deciding to pursue graduate studies was undergone only by persons whose initial plans did not include graduate studies. These persons made their decision to pursue graduate studies either because of a job-related experience or because they saw it as the only way to pursue studies in a newly-found discipline. The third step, the decision to enter academe, occurred when a constellation of factors merged to cause the person to think of himself or herself as a teacher or researcher.

The first job after receipt of the doctorate was decided upon by a successive narrowing of alternatives. Considerations were more detailed when a

person believed he or she had numerous alternatives and perceived the job market to be favorable. Techniques of neutralization were employed by persons when they could not explore all alternatives and still harbored misgivings about State University.

Finally, the only difference between men and women occurred because women at some point chose between having careers, being homemakers or combining the two. In addition, working class males whose parents viewed graduate studies as illegitimate described themselves as under enormous pressures during their graduate years.

This research, it must be stressed, is exploratory. By interviewing ten persons I did not feel I reached a point of "saturation" in which I saw "similar instances over and over again" and became "empirically confident that a category (was) saturated" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 61).

The significance of this research lies in its attempt to apply an alternative perspective to entrance into a profession. It is a perspective which sees entrance as a process. The project is hardly definitive in itself, but is meant to offer us clues as to how the symbolic interactionist perspective can be used to help explain occupational choice processes.

The importance of the findings presented here are in the fact that at first glance, becoming a professor <u>appears</u> to require advanced planning and commitment because of the long training period. What is interesting is that people did <u>not</u> enter the occupation as a result of long-term planning but rather, became professors in quite a fortuitous, unpredictable manner. People entered the occupation after a series of situational events such as disliking their first job after college, happening to teach a class their last year of graduate school, enrolling in a certain class and so on.

On the basis of these findings, one could almost argue that the longer training period required to reach a profession, the less likely a person is to have set the occupation as his or her goal. It is possible that people have less contact in daily life with persons in professions that require long training periods and are therefore less likely to aspire to these occupations. Or perhaps, if the long training periods were initially contemplated they would seem overwhelming, so the person arrives at such occupations only in increments. At any rate, the symbolic interactionist perspective appears to be promising in the study of entrance into professions. But of course, more work is needed in this area.

Future research on occupational choice could explore the following:

a) The impact of the 60s and the Viet Nam war on career choice processes. Some of the males interviewed for this project mentioned the draft as constraining their choices. More importantly, a number of interviewees spoke of the 60s as producing in them a need to feel through their professions that they were doing something immediate, practical and connected with everyday life. The whole question of "eras" -- or as Mannheim (1952) said, "the problem of generations" -- is an intriguing one. This brings us to the next suggestion.

b) It would be interesting to compare the career choice processes of an older group of university professors with a younger group. A comparison between an older and a younger group could allow for a more penetrating analysis of the impact of eras and differing social structures on personal choice.

c) Also, we need to know if becoming personally committed to an academic field is a necessary precondition for entrance into academe. It would be

interesting to compare members of the academic profession with members

of other occupational groups on this issue. For instance, does becoming

a professor require more or less of an investment of identity in a field

than is true for members of other occupations? It is possible that where-

as becoming personally committed to an area of interest appears to be the

first step in becoming a professor, it could occur at a much later time

for members of other occupations.

d)   Finally, as we previously noted, the interviewees for this project

initially became personally committed to an academic area of interest,

not to becoming university professors per se. Do persons who enter other

occupations experience an initial but vague commitment to an area of

interest, then hone their desires as they proceed (see Becker et al.,

1977 on medical students' views of specialties), or is this true only of

persons who enter professions with long training periods? We certainly

could profit from a comparison of entrance processes into the profes-

sions versus entrance processes into occupations without long training

periods.

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APPENDIX

TABLE I

CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMALE INTERVIEWEES

|        | Age | Marital Status | Yr. Granted Ph.D. | Discipline Granted Ph.D. |
|--------|-----|----------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Lori   | 28  | R              | 1974              | Computer Science         |
| Kathy  | 31  | D              | 1976              | Psychology               |
| Carla  | 32  | D              | 1975              | Family and Child Dev.    |
| Lora   | 40  | D              | 1975              | Art History              |
| Dianne | 30  | E              | 1975              | Foods and Nutrition      |

Key:  M—married, S—single, D—divorced, R—remarried, E—engaged.


TABLE II

CHARACTERISTICS OF MALE INTERVIEWEES

|       | Age | Marital Status | Yr. Granted Ph.D. | Discipline Granted Ph.D. |
|-------|-----|----------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Allen | 30  | M              | 1972              | Family and Child Dev.    |
| Dan   | 34  | M              | 1972              | Radio/TV Communications  |
| Sam   | 30  | M              | 1974              | Geography                |
| Jack  | 37  | M              | 1973              | Linguistics              |
| Ron   | 31  | S              | 1974              | Psychology               |

Key:  M—married, S—single, D—divorced, R—remarried, E—engaged.

SAMPLE DATA SHEET

1) Age

2) Gender

3) Racial/ethnic group

4) Highest educational degree completed

5) Field in which degree completed

6) Marital status, length of marriage

7) Number of children and their ages

8) Spouse's employment

9) Spouse's employment since marriage

10) Spouse's education

11) Parent's occupations and education

12) Number of brothers and sisters

13) Birth order

14) Siblings' occupations and education

15) Type of geographic area most of childhood spent in

16) Population of childhood city or home

17) Parents divorced, living

SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE

## High School

Describe your high school. Was it large or small, academically competi-
tive, etc. Did most of your high school classmates attend college? Did your
parents expect you to attend college? How would you describe yourself in high
school? How do you believe most people regarded you in high school? Did you
see or entertain any alternatives to college?

## College

Did you see any alternatives to attending college? How many colleges did
you apply to? What made you choose the college you attended? How many col-
leges did you attend? How do you think you were regarded in college? Did
this change any over time? How and why? How would you describe yourself at
this time? Were there any influential people -- teachers, friends, other --
that you can recall during college? Were you employed during college? At
what? How and why did you obtain your job?

## Major

How and when did you choose your major? What factors caused you to
choose this discipline? Were students in your college required to choose a
major by a certain time? Did you ever switch majors? Why, why not? How did
your parents (and other significant persons) view your choice of majors?

## Graduate School

How did you decide to pursue graduate study? What did you see as your
alternatives? How did you decide upon the discipline and the school. Who or
what influenced your decision? Did you work after your undergraduate years?

As what and why? Describe yourself during graduate school. How do you think you were regarded by others? What made you remain in graduate school to receive your Ph.D.? Did you ever consider not going on for your Ph.D.? What did you see as your alternatives to the Ph.D.?

## Academe

When and how did you decide to enter academe? What did you see as your alternatives? What made you choose academe over other alternatives? When and how did you begin looking for employment in academe? Describe the process you went through. How did you decide upon State University? What factors were important to you? What did you see as your alternatives?

## State University

How do you think you are regarded here? Do you plan to remain here? How are you regarded now by your family, friends, parents, etc.? What are your future plans? What things are most important to you in your present job? What do you think you'll be doing ten years from now?

(It should be noted that this is just a guide. Because the method used was the focused interview, the above questions were not all asked in the same way or order for each interviewee. Also, many of the questions were not asked at all. A subject would be introduced and the interviewee would talk at length about the topic, usually answering numerous questions in the course of his or her monologue. The object was to allow the interviewee to freely recount events, feelings and experiences that were seen by the interviewees as most important with the guide being used to make sure certain topics were covered. See Merton and Kendall, (1946) for a complete explanation of the focused interview method.)

BECOMING A UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR:
CAREER CHOICE PROCESSES OF ACADEMICS

by

JOANN ELAINE HAMICK

B.A., Kansas State University, 1978

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S THESIS

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Sociology, Anthropology

and Social Work

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1980

This is a study of the personal changes and transformations of one group of persons in the process of their assuming the occupation of university professor. The research design derives from a symbolic interactionist critique of occupational choice theories and is patterned after a small body of research referred to as the "becoming" literature. Data is collected through in-depth, focused interviews with university professors employed by a medium-sized institution. The decision making processes undergone by women as compared to men who become university professors are described and analyzed. The concept of turning points or critical junctures is used to trace the developmental paths of persons who become academics. The research is an attempt to approach occupational choice from a differing perspective that has seldom been used to explain entrance into professions for which there are long training periods.