

Race, Class, Culture, Privilege, and Choosing a College Major: Is it Really a Choice?

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When we discuss students and the majors they choose, the world of sociology has done extensive work on how these choices are tied to gender. We, as a field, have become well aware of gendered patterns behind certain majors and career paths. While this is an important discussion of privilege and education on one level, limited work has been done to expand past this lens of gender. Furthermore, what little work has been done is overwhelmingly quantitative and outdated, leaving little regard for nuanced experiences of the modern day. This article seeks to explore this gap in discussions of privilege and education by delving into the effect that different levels of privilege have on how students choose their major. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, I investigate the educational experiences and choices of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's undergraduate student body, and how they are tied to their experiences of privilege. Here, I argue that privilege tied to race, class, and culture leaves certain groups more likely to consider external pressures as opposed to personal interest in choosing their college major. This creates a tie between the experiences of privilege and the freedom to choose your own major, something I am referring to as the "privilege of autonomy."