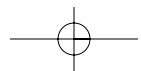


13

Chapter

Education and Religion





Kathy Spiegel was upset. Horace Mann, the school principal in her hometown in Oregon, had asked her to come to his office. He explained that Kathy's 11-year-old twins had been acting up in class. They were disturbing other children and the teacher—and what was Kathy going to do about this?

Kathy didn't want to tell Mr. Mann what he could do with the situation. *That* would have gotten her kicked out of the office. Instead, she bit her tongue and said she would talk to her daughters.

Kathy's 11-year-old twins were disturbing other children and the teacher—and what was Kathy going to do about this?

* * * * *

On the other side of the country, Jim and Julia Attaway were pondering their own problem. When they visited their son's school in the Bronx, they didn't like what they saw. The boys looked like they were gang members, and the girls dressed and acted as though they were sexually active. Their own 13-year-old son had started using street language at home, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to communicate with him.

* * * * *

In Minneapolis, Denzil and Tamika Jefferson were facing a much quieter crisis. They found life frantic as they hurried from one school activity to another. Their 13-year-old son attended a private school, and the demands were so intense that it felt like the junior year in high school. They no longer seemed to have any relaxed family time together.

* * * * *

In Atlanta, Jaime and Maria Morelos were upset at the ideas that their 8-year-old daughter had begun to express at home. As devout first-generation Protestants, Jaime and Maria felt moral issues were a top priority, and they didn't like what they were hearing.

* * * * *

Kathy talked the matter over with her husband, Bob. Jim and Julia discussed their problem, as did Denzil and Tamika and Jaime and Maria. They all came to the same conclusion: The problem was not their children. The problem was the school their children attended. All four sets of parents also came to the same solution: home schooling for their children.

Home schooling might seem to be a radical solution to today's education problems, but it is one that the parents of over a million U.S. children have chosen. We'll come back to this topic, but first let's take a broad look at education.

EDUCATION: TRANSFERRING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Education in Global Perspective

Have you ever wondered why people need a high school diploma to sell cars or to join the U.S. Marines? You will learn what you know on the job. Why do employers insist on diplomas and degrees? Why don't they simply use on-the-job training?

In some cases, job skills must be mastered before you are allowed to do the work. On-the-job training was once adequate to become an engineer or an airline pilot, but with changes in information and technology it is no longer sufficient. This is precisely why doctors display their credentials so prominently. Their framed degrees declare that an institution of higher learning has certified them to work on your body.

But testing in algebra or paragraph construction to sell gizmos at Radio Shack? Sociologist Randall Collins (1979) observed that industrialized nations have become **credential societies**. By this, he means that employers use diplomas and degrees as *sorting devices* to determine who is eligible for a job. Because employers don't know potential workers, they depend on schools to weed out the incapable. For example, when you graduate from college, potential employers will presume that you are a responsible person—that you have shown up

In hunting and gathering societies, there is no separate social institution called *education*. Instead, children learn from their parents and elders. These boys in the Kalahari desert of Botswana are learning survival skills as they watch their father skin a duiker.

for numerous classes, have turned in scores of assignments, and have demonstrated basic writing and thinking skills. They will then graft their particular job skills onto this foundation, which has been certified by your college.

Education and Industrialization

In the early years of the United States, there was no free public education. Parents with an average income could not afford to send their children to grade school. As the country industrialized during the 1800s, political and civic leaders recognized the need for an educated workforce. They also feared the influx of “foreign” values, for this was a period of high immigration. They looked on public education as a way to reach two major goals: producing more educated workers and “Americanizing” immigrants (Hellinger and Judd 1991).

As industrialization progressed and fewer people made their living from farming, formal education came to be regarded as essential to the well-being of society. With the distance to the nearest college too far and the cost of tuition and lodging too great, many high school graduates were unable to attend college. As is discussed



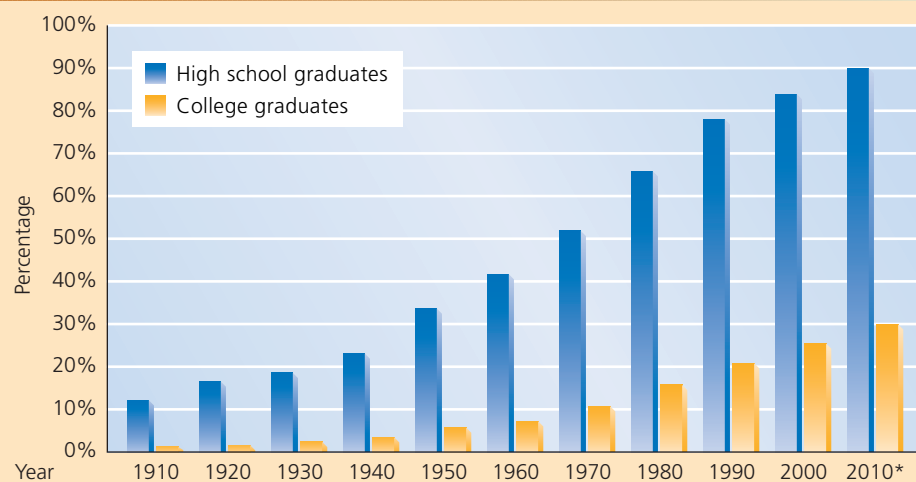


This 1902 photo from Tuskegee, Alabama, provides a glimpse into the past, when free public education, pioneered in the United States, was still in its infancy. In these one-room rural schools, a single teacher had charge of grades 1 to 8. Children were assigned a grade not by age but by mastery of subject matter.

in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page, this predicament gave birth to community colleges. As you can see from Figure 13.1, receiving a bachelor's degree in the United States is now *twice* as common as completing high school used to be.

To further place our own educational system in perspective, let's look at education in three countries at different levels of industrialization. This will help us see how education is related to a nation's culture and its economy.

FIGURE 13.1 Educational Achievement in the United States



Note: Americans 25 years and over. Asterisk indicates author's estimate. Official high school graduation rates should be viewed skeptically. A private study of the high schools of the nation's 50 largest cities found the 2004 graduation rate to be 70 percent (Swanson 2008).

Sources: By the author. Based on National Center for Education Statistics 1991:Table 8; *Statistical Abstract* 2007:Table 214.

Down-to-Earth Sociology

Community Colleges: Challenges Old and New

I attended a junior college in Oakland, California. From there, with fresh diploma in hand, I transferred to a senior college—a college in Fort Wayne, Indiana, that had no freshmen or sophomores.

I didn't realize that my experimental college matched the vision of some of the founders of the community college movement. In the early 1900s, they foresaw a system of local colleges that would be accessible to the average high school graduate—a system so extensive that it would be unnecessary for universities to offer courses at the freshman and sophomore levels (Manzo 2001).

A group with an equally strong opinion questioned whether preparing high school graduates for entry to four-year colleges and universities should be the goal of junior colleges. They insisted that the purpose of junior colleges should be vocational preparation, to equip people for the job market as electricians and other technicians. In some regions, where the proponents of transfer dominated, the admissions requirements for junior colleges were higher than those of Yale (Pedersen 2001). This debate was never won by either side, and you can still hear its echoes today.

The name *junior* college also became a problem. Some felt that the word *junior* made their institution sound as though it weren't quite a real college. A struggle to change the name ensued, and several decades ago *community college* won out.

The name change didn't settle the debate about whether the purpose was preparing students to transfer to universities or training them for jobs, however. Community colleges continue to serve this dual purpose.

Community colleges have become such an essential part of the U.S. educational system that about two of every five of all undergraduates in the United States are enrolled in them (*Statistical Abstract* 2007:Table 268). Most



Community colleges have opened higher education to millions of students who would not otherwise have access to college because of cost or distance.

students are *nontraditional* students: Many are age 25 or older, are from the working class, have jobs, and attend college part time (Bryant 2001; Panzarella 2008).

To help their students transfer to four-year colleges and universities, many community colleges work closely with top-tier public and private universities (Chaker 2003). Some provide admissions guidance on how to enter flagship state schools. Others coordinate courses, making sure that they match the university's title and numbering system, as well as its rigor of instruction and grading. More than a third offer honors programs that prepare talented students to transfer with ease into these schools (Padgett 2005).

The challenges that community colleges face are the usual ones of securing adequate budgets in the face of declining resources, meeting changing job markets, and maintaining quality instruction. New challenges include meeting the shifting needs of students, such as the need to teach students for whom English is a second language and to provide on-campus day care for parents. In their quest to help students complete college, community colleges are also working to improve their orientation programs and to find better ways to monitor their students' progress (Panzarella 2008).

For Your Consideration

Do you think the primary goal of community colleges should be to prepare students for jobs or prepare them to transfer to four-year colleges and universities? Why?

Education in the Most Industrialized Nations: Japan

A central sociological principle of education is that a nation's education reflects its culture. Because a core Japanese value is solidarity with the group, the Japanese discourage competition among individuals. In the workforce, people who are hired together work as a team. They are not expected to compete with one another for promotions; instead, they are promoted as a group (Ouchi 1993). Japanese education reflects this group-centered approach to life. Children in grade school work as a group, all mastering the same skills and materials. On any one day, children all over Japan study the same page from the same textbook (“Less Rote . . .” 2000).

In a fascinating cultural contradiction, college admissions in Japan are highly competitive. The Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), taken by college-bound high school juniors and seniors in the United States, is voluntary, but Japanese seniors who want to attend college must take a national test. U.S. high school graduates who perform poorly on their tests can usually find some college to attend—as long as their parents can pay the tuition. In Japan, however, only the top scorers—rich and poor alike—are admitted to college. Japanese sociologists have found that even though the tests are open to all, children from the richer families are more likely to be admitted to college. The reason is not favoritism on the part of college officials, but, rather, that the children of richer parents score higher on these tests. One reason is that their parents spend more for tutors and intensive training classes to prepare their children for the college entrance exams (Ono 2001).

Education in the Industrializing Nations: Russia

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Soviet Communist party changed the nation's educational system. At that time, as in most countries, education was limited to children of the elite. The communists expanded the educational system until eventually it encompassed all children. Following the sociological principle that education reflects culture, the new government made certain that socialist values dominated its schools, for it saw education as a means to undergird the new political system. As a result, schoolchildren were taught that capitalism was evil and that communism was the salvation of the world. Every classroom was required to prominently display photographs of Lenin and Stalin.

Education, including college, was free. Just as the economy was directed from central headquarters in Moscow, so was education. Schools stressed mathematics and the natural sciences. Each school followed the same state-prescribed curriculum, and all students in the same grade used the same textbooks. To prevent critical thinking, which might lead to criticisms of communism, few courses in the social sciences were taught, and students memorized course materials, repeating lectures on oral exams (Deaver 2001).

Russia's switch from communism to capitalism brought a change in culture—especially new ideas about profit, private property, and personal freedom. This, in turn, meant that the educational system had to adjust to the country's changing values and views of the world. Not only did the photos of Lenin and Stalin come down, but also, for the first time, private, religious, and even foreign-run schools were allowed. For the first time as well, teachers were able to encourage students to think for themselves.

The problems that Russia confronted in “reinventing” its educational system are mind-boggling. Tens of thousands of teachers who were used to teaching rote political answers had to learn new methods of instruction. As the economy faltered during Russia's early transition to capitalism, school budgets dwindled. Some teachers went unpaid for months; instead of money, at one school teachers were given toilet paper and vodka (Deaver 2001). Teachers are now paid regularly (and in money), but the salaries are low. University professors are paid between \$470 and \$980 a month. Abysmal salaries have encouraged corruption, and some students pay for good grades and for admission to the better schools (“Russia Sets Out to . . .” 2007).

Because it is true of education everywhere, we can confidently predict that Russia's educational system will continue to reflect its culture. Its educational system will glorify Russia's historical exploits and reinforce its values and world views—no matter how they might change.

Education in the Least Industrialized Nations: Egypt

Education in the Least Industrialized Nations stands in sharp contrast to that in the industrialized world. Because most of the citizens of these nations work the land or take care of families, there is little emphasis on formal schooling. Even if a Least Industrialized Nation has mandatory attendance laws, they are not enforced. Formal education is expensive, and most of these nations

The poverty of some of the Least Industrialized Nations defies the imagination of most people who have been reared in the industrialized world. Their educational systems are similarly marked by poverty. This photo shows a street school in Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso.



cannot afford it. As we saw in Figure 7.2 (pages 186–187), many people in the Least Industrialized Nations live on less than \$1,000 a year. Consequently, in some of these nations few children go to school beyond the first couple of grades. Figure 13.2 on the next page contrasts education in China with that of the United States. As was once common around the globe, it is primarily the wealthy in the Least Industrialized Nations who have the means and the leisure for formal education—especially anything beyond the basics. As an example, let's look at education in Egypt.

Although the Egyptian constitution guarantees five years of free grade school for all children, many poor children receive no education at all. For those who do attend school, qualified teachers are few and classrooms are crowded (Cook 2001). As a result, one-third of Egyptian men and over half of Egyptian women are illiterate (UNESCO 2005). Those who go beyond the five years of grade school attend a preparatory school for three years. High school also lasts for three years. During the first two years, all students take the same courses, but during the third year they specialize in arts, science, or mathematics. The emphasis has been on memorizing facts to pass national tests. Reflecting growing concerns that this approach leaves minds less capable of evaluating life and opens the door to religious extremism, critical thinking is being added to the curriculum (Gauch 2006).

The Functionalist Perspective: Providing Social Benefits

A central position of functionalism is that when the parts of society are working properly, each contributes to the well-being or stability of that society. The positive things that people intend their actions to accomplish are known as **manifest functions**. The positive consequences they did not intend are called **latent functions**. Let's look at the functions of education.

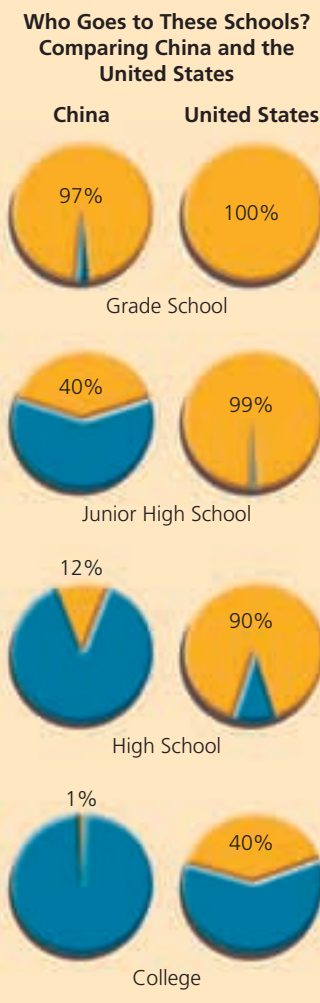
Teaching Knowledge and Skills

Education's most obvious manifest function is to teach knowledge and skills—whether the traditional three R's or their more contemporary counterparts, such as computer literacy. Each generation must train the next to fill the group's significant positions. Because our postindustrial society needs highly educated people, the schools supply them.

Cultural Transmission of Values

Another manifest function of education is the **cultural transmission of values**, a process by which schools pass on a society's core values from one generation to the next. Consequently, schools in a socialist society stress values of

FIGURE 13.2
Education in a Most
Industrialized
(Postindustrial) Nation
and a Least
Industrialized Nation



Note: These are initial attendance rates, not completion rates. The U.S. junior high school total is the author's estimate.

Source: Brauchli 1994; Kahn 2004; Zeng and Wang 2007; *Statistical Abstract* 2007: Tables 208, 210, 262.

socialism, while schools in a capitalist society teach values that support capitalism. U.S. schools, for example, stress respect for private property, individualism, and competition.

Regardless of a country's economic system, loyalty to the state is a cultural value, and schools around the world teach patriotism. U.S. schools—as well as those of Russia, France, China, and others around the world—extol the society's founders, their struggle for freedom from oppression, and the goodness of the country's basic social institutions. Seldom is this function as explicit as it is in Japan, where the law requires that schools “cultivate a respect for tradition and culture, and love for the nation and homeland that have fostered them” (Nakamura 2006).

To visualize this point of the functionalists, consider how differently a course in current events or U.S. history would be taught in Cuba, Iran, and Muncie, Indiana.

Social Integration

Schools also bring about *social integration*. They promote a sense of national identity by having students salute the flag and sing the national anthem, as in the photo on the next page. One of the best examples of how schools promote political integration is how they have taught mainstream ideas and values to tens of millions of immigrants. Coming to regard themselves as Americans, the immigrants gave up their earlier national and cultural identities (Rodriguez 1995; Carper 2000).

This integrative function of education goes far beyond making people similar in their appearance, speech, or even ways of thinking. *To forge a national identity is to stabilize the political system.* If people identify with a society's institutions and *perceive them as the basis of their own welfare*, they have no reason to rebel. This function is especially significant when it comes to the lower social classes, from which most social revolutionaries emerge. The wealthy already have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, but getting the lower classes to identify with a social system *as it is* goes a long way toward preserving the system in its current state.

People with disabilities often have found themselves left out of the mainstream of society. To overcome this, U.S. schools have added a manifest function, **mainstreaming**, or inclusion. This means that educators try to incorporate students with disabilities into regular school activities. As a matter of routine policy, students with disabilities used to be placed in special classes or schools. There, however, they learned to adjust to a specialized situation, leaving them ill prepared to cope with the dominant world. Educational philosophy then shifted to encourage or even to require students with disabilities to attend regular schools. Wheelchair ramps are provided for people who cannot walk; interpreters who use sign language may attend classes with those who

These students are learning that the identity of “American” overrides family, gender, and racial-ethnic identities. They are also learning patriotism and civic duties.



cannot hear. Most students who are blind attend special schools, as do people with severe learning disabilities. Overall, one half of students with disabilities now attend school in regular classrooms (U.S. Department of Education 2007).

Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping, or determining which people will enter what occupations, is another function of education. One type of gatekeeping is *credentialing*—using diplomas and degrees to determine who is eligible for a job—which opens the door of opportunity for some and closes it to others. Gatekeeping is often accomplished by **tracking**, sorting students into different educational programs on the basis of their perceived abilities. Some U.S. high schools funnel students into one of three tracks: general, college prep, or honors. Students on the lowest track are likely to go to work after high school or to take vocational courses. Those on the highest track usually attend prestigious colleges. Those in between usually attend a local college or regional state university. The impact is lifelong, affecting opportunities for jobs, income, and lifestyle. Schools have retreated from formal tracking, but placing students in “ability groups” and “advanced” classes serves the same purpose (Lucas 1999; Tach and Farkas 2003).

Gatekeeping sorts people on the basis of merit, said functionalists Talcott Parsons (1940) and Kingsley Davis and Wilbert Moore (1945). They pioneered a view known as **social placement**, arguing that some jobs require few

skills and can be performed by people of lesser intelligence. Other jobs, however, such as that of physician, require high intelligence and advanced education. To motivate capable people to postpone gratification and to put up with years of rigorous education, rewards of high income and prestige are offered. Thus, functionalists look at education as a system that, to benefit society, sorts people according to their abilities and ambitions.

Replacing Family Functions

Over the years, the functions of U.S. schools have expanded, and they now rival some family functions. Child care is an example. Grade schools do double duty as babysitters for families in which both parents work or for single working mothers. Child care has always been a latent function of formal education, for it was an unintended consequence. Now, however, with two wage earners in most families, child care has become a manifest function, and some schools offer child care both before and after the school day. Some high schools even provide nurseries for the children of their teenaged students (Bosman 2007). Another function is providing sex education and, as in 500 school-based health centers, birth control (Elliott 2007). This has stirred controversy, for some families resent schools taking this function away from them. Disagreement over values has fueled the social movement for home schooling, featured in our opening vignette and in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page.

Down-to-Earth Sociology

Home Schooling: The Search for Quality and Values

“You’re doing what? You’re going to teach your kids at home?” is the typical, incredulous response to parents who decide to home school their children. The unspoken questions are, “How can you teach? You’re not trained. And taking your kids out of the public schools—Do you want your kids to be dumb and social misfits?”

The home-schooling movement was small at first, just a trickle of parents who were dissatisfied with the rigidity of the school bureaucracy, lax discipline, incompetent teachers, low standards, lack of focus on individual needs, and, in some instances, hostility to their religion.

The trickle has grown. While not yet a raging river, the number of children who are being taught at home is more than twice the size of the public school system of Chicago. More than one million children are being home schooled (Princiotta et al. 2004; *Statistical Abstract* 2007:Table 227).

Home schooling is far from new. In the colonial era, home schooling was the *typical* form of education (Carper 2000). Today’s home-schooling movement is restoring this earlier pattern, but it also reflects a fascinating shift in U.S. politics. Political and religious *liberals* began the contemporary home-schooling movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Their objection was that the schools were too conservative. Then the schools changed, and in the 1970s and 1980s, political and religious *conservatives* embraced home schooling (Lines 2000; Stevens 2001). Their objection was that the schools were too liberal. Other parents have no political motivation. They are home schooling their children because of concerns about safety at school and the lack of individual attention (Shellenbarger 2006).

Does home schooling work? Can parents who are not trained as teachers actually teach? The early results of testing home schoolers were promising, but they were limited to small groups or to single states. Then in 1990, a national sample of 2,000 home schoolers showed that these students did better than students who were in public schools. Could this really be true?

To find out, researchers tested 21,000 home schoolers across the nation (Rudner 1999). The results are astounding.

The median scores for every test at every grade were in the 70th to 80th percentiles. The home schoolers outscored students in both public and Catholic schools.

The basic reason for the stunning success of home schooling appears to be the parents’ involvement in their children’s education. Home schoolers receive an intense, one-on-one education. Their curriculum—although it includes the subjects that are required by the state—is designed around the student’s interests and needs. Ninety percent of students are taught by their mothers, ten percent by their fathers (Lines 2000). The parents’ income is also above average.

We do not know what these home schoolers’ test scores would have been if they had been taught in public schools.

With their parents’ involvement in their education, they likely would have done very well there, too. Although the Rudner study was large,

it was not a random sample, and we cannot say how the average home schooler is doing. But, then, we have no random sample of all public school students, either.

What about the children’s social skills? Since they don’t attend school with dozens and even hundreds of other students, do they become social misfits? The studies show that they do just fine on this level, too. They actually have fewer behavior problems than children who attend conventional schools (Lines 2000). Contrary to stereotypes, home-schooled children are not isolated. As part of their educational experience, their parents take them to libraries, museums, factories, and nursing homes (Medlin 2000). Some home schoolers participate in the physical education and sports programs of the public schools. For social activities, many of the children meet with other home-schooled children and go on field trips together. There are even home-schooling associations, which run conferences for parents and children and hold sporting events. As the photo shows, the same companies that sell class rings to public high schools also sell class rings to home schoolers (McGinn and McLure 2003).

For Your Consideration

Two of every one hundred students across the country are being taught at home. Why do you think that home schooling has become so popular? Do you think this social movement could eventually become a threat to U.S. public schools? Would you consider home schooling your children? Why or why not?



As the home schooling social movement has grown, it has become increasingly institutionalized. Home schoolers now have their own class rings.

The Conflict Perspective: Perpetuating Social Inequality

Unlike functionalists, who look at the benefits of education, conflict theorists examine how *the educational system reproduces the social class structure*. By this, they mean that schools perpetuate the social divisions of society and help members of the elite to maintain their dominance. Let's look at how this happens.

The Hidden Curriculum

The term **hidden curriculum** refers to the attitudes and the unwritten rules of behavior that schools teach in addition to the formal curriculum. Examples are obedience to authority and conformity to mainstream norms. Conflict theorists stress that the hidden curriculum helps to perpetuate social inequalities.

To understand this central point, consider the way English is taught. Middle-class schools—whose teachers know where their students are headed—stress “proper” English and “good” manners. In contrast, the teachers in inner-city schools—who also know where *their* students are headed—allow ethnic and street language in the classroom. Each type of school is helping to reproduce the social class structure. That is, each is preparing students to work in positions similar to those of their parents. The social class of some children destines them for higher positions. For these jobs, they need “refined” speech and manners. The social destiny of others is low-status jobs. For this type of work, they need only to obey rules (Bowles and Gintis 1976; 2002). Teaching these students

“refined” speech and manners would be a wasted effort. In other words, even the teaching of English and manners helps keep the social classes intact across generations.

Tilting the Tests: Discrimination by IQ

Even intelligence tests help to keep the social class system intact. Let's look at an example. How would you answer this question?

A symphony is to a composer as a book is to a(n)
 _____ paper _____ sculptor _____ musician
 _____ author _____ man

You probably had no difficulty coming up with “author” as your choice. Wouldn't any intelligent person have done so?

In point of fact, this question raises a central issue in intelligence testing. Not all intelligent people would know the answer. This question contains *cultural biases*. Children from some backgrounds are more familiar with the concepts of symphonies, composers, and sculptors than are other children. Consequently, the test is tilted in their favor.

To make the bias clearer, try to answer this question:

If you throw two dice and “7” is showing on the top, what is facing down?
 _____ seven _____ snake eyes _____ box cars
 _____ little Joes _____ eleven

Adrian Dove (n.d.), a social worker in Watts, a poor area of Los Angeles, suggested this question. Its cultural bias should be obvious—that it allows children from certain social backgrounds to perform better than others. Unlike the first question, this one is not tilted to the middle-class

Conflict theorists stress that education reproduces a country's social class system. As part of the evidence to support this position, they point out that the U.S. social classes attend separate schools, where they learn perspectives of the world that match their place in it. Shown here is a student at The Andrews School in Willoughby, Ohio. What do you think the *hidden curriculum* is at this school?



experience. In other words, IQ (intelligence quotient) tests measure not only intelligence but also acquired knowledge.

You should now be able to perceive the bias of IQ tests that use such words as *composer* and *symphony*. A lower-class child may have heard about rap, rock, hip hop, or jazz, but not about symphonies. One consequence of this bias to the middle and upper social classes is that the children of the poor score lower on IQ tests. Then, to match their supposedly inferior intelligence, they are assigned to less demanding courses. Their inferior education helps them reach their social destiny, their lower-paying jobs in adult life. As conflict theorists view them, then, IQ tests are another weapon in an arsenal designed to maintain the social class structure across the generations.

Stacking the Deck: Unequal Funding

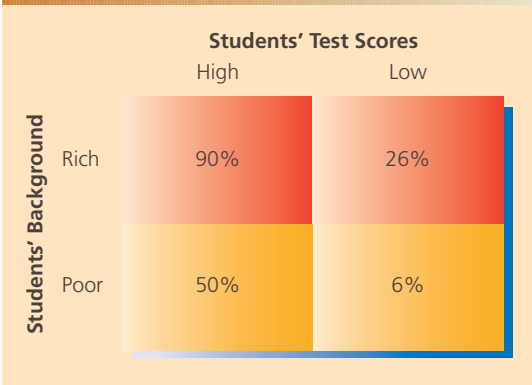
Conflict theorists stress that the way schools are funded stacks the deck against the poor. Because public schools are supported largely by local property taxes, the richer communities (where income and property values are higher) have more to spend on their children, and the poorer communities have less to spend on theirs. Consequently, the richer communities can offer higher salaries and take their pick of the most highly qualified and motivated teachers. They can also afford to buy the latest textbooks, computers, and software, as well as offer courses in foreign languages, music, and the arts.

The Bottom Line: Family Background

Conflict theorists end their analysis of education with a flourish, taking us back to their main point, that education reproduces the social class structure. The end result of the hidden curriculum, IQ tests, and school funding is this: Family background is more important than test scores in predicting who attends college. In a classic study, sociologist Samuel Bowles (1977) compared the college attendance of the brightest 25 percent of high school students with that of the intellectually weakest 25 percent. Figure 13.3 shows the results. Of the *brightest* 25 percent of high school students, 90 percent of those from affluent homes went to college, while only half of those from low-income homes did. Of the *intellectually weakest* students, 26 percent from affluent homes went to college, while only 6 percent from poorer homes did so.

Other sociologists have confirmed this classic research. Anthony Carnevale and Stephen Rose (2003) compared students' college attendance with their intellectual abilities and their parents' social class. Regardless of personal abilities, children from more well-to-do families are more likely not only to go to college but also to attend the nation's most elite schools. This, in turn, piles advantage upon advantage,

FIGURE 13.3 Who Goes to College? Comparing Social Class and Ability in Determining College Attendance



Source: Bowles 1977.

because they get higher paying and more prestigious jobs when they graduate. The elite colleges are the icing on the cake of these students' more privileged birth.

Conflict theorists point out that the educational system reproduces not only the U.S. social class structure but also its racial-ethnic divisions. From Figure 13.4 on the next page, you can see that, compared with whites, African Americans and Latinos are less likely to complete high school and less likely to go to college. Because adults without college degrees usually end up with low-paying, dead-end jobs, you can see how this supports the conflict view—that education is helping to reproduce the racial-ethnic structure for the next generation.

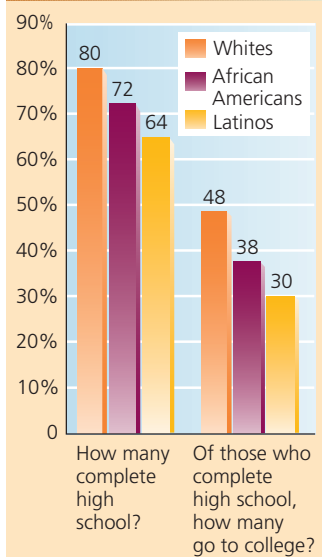
The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective: Teacher Expectations

Functionalists look at how education benefits society, and conflict theorists examine how education perpetuates social inequality. Symbolic interactionists, in contrast, study face-to-face interaction in the classroom. They have found that the expectations of teachers have profound consequences for their students.

The Rist Research

Why do some people get tracked into college prep courses and others into vocational ones? There is no single answer, but in what has become a classic study, sociologist Ray

FIGURE 13.4 The Funneling Effects of Education: Race–Ethnicity



Note: The source gives totals only for these three groups.

Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract 2007*: Table 262.

Rist came up with some intriguing findings. Rist (1970, 2000) did participant observation in an African American grade school with an African American faculty. He found that after only eight days in the classroom, the kindergarten teacher felt that she knew the children's abilities well enough to assign them to three separate worktables. To Table 1, Mrs. Caplow assigned those she considered to be "fast learners." They sat at the front of the room, closest to her. Those whom she saw as "slow learners," she assigned to Table 3, located at the back of the classroom. She placed "average" students at Table 2, in between the other tables.

This seemed strange to Rist. He knew that the children had not been tested for ability, yet their teacher was certain that she could identify the bright and slow children. Investigating further, Rist found that social class was the underlying basis for assigning the children to the different tables. Middle-class students were separated out for Table 1, and children from poorer homes were assigned to Tables 2 and 3. The teacher paid the most attention to the children at Table 1, who were closest to her, less to Table 2, and the least to Table 3. As the year went on, children from Table 1 perceived that they were treated better and came to see

themselves as smarter. They became the leaders in class activities and even ridiculed children at the other tables, calling them "dumb." Eventually, the children at Table 3 disengaged themselves from many classroom activities. At the end of the year, only the children at Table 1 had completed the lessons that prepared them for reading.

This early tracking stuck. Their first-grade teacher looked at the work these students had done, and she placed students from Table 1 at her Table 1. She treated her tables much as the kindergarten teacher had, and the children at Table 1 again led the class.

The children's reputations continued to follow them. The second-grade teacher reviewed their scores and also divided her class into three groups. The first she named the "Tigers" and, befitting their name, gave them challenging readers. Not surprisingly, the Tigers came from the original Table 1 in kindergarten. The second group she called the "Cardinals." They came from the original Tables 2 and 3. Her third group consisted of children she had failed the previous year, whom she called the "Clowns." The Cardinals and Clowns were given less advanced readers.

Rist concluded that *each child's journey through school was determined by the eighth day of kindergarten!* As happened with the Saints and Roughnecks reported in Chapter 4, labels can be so powerful that they can set people on courses of action that affect the rest of their lives.

What occurred was a **self-fulfilling prophecy**. This term, coined by sociologist Robert Merton (1949/1968), refers to a false assumption of something that is going to happen but which then comes true simply because it was predicted. For example, if people believe an unfounded rumor that a credit union is going to fail because its officers have embezzled their money, they all rush to the credit union to demand their money. The prediction—although originally false—is now likely to come true.

How Do Teacher Expectations Work?

Sociologist George Farkas (1990a, 1990b, 1996) became interested in how teacher expectations affect grades. Using a stratified sample of students in a large school district in Texas, he found that teacher expectations produced gender and racial–ethnic biases. *On the gender level:* Even though boys and girls had the same test scores, girls on average were given higher course grades. *On the racial–ethnic level:* Asian Americans who had the same test scores as the other groups averaged higher grades than did African Americans, Latinos, and whites.

At first, this may sound like more of the same old news—another case of discrimination. But this explanation doesn't fit, which is what makes the finding fascinating. Look at who the victims are. It is most unlikely that

the teachers would be prejudiced against boys and whites. To interpret these unexpected results, Farkas used symbolic interactionism. He observed that some students “signal” to their teachers that they are “good students.” They show an eagerness to cooperate, and they quickly agree with what the teacher says. They also show that they are “trying hard.” The teachers pick up these signals and reward these “good students” with better grades. Girls and Asian Americans, the researcher concluded, are better at displaying these characteristics so coveted by teachers.

We do not have enough information on how teachers communicate their expectations to students. Nor do we know much about how students “signal” messages to teachers. Perhaps you will become the educational sociologist who will shed more light on this significant area of human behavior.

Problems in U.S. Education—and Their Solutions

To conclude this section, let’s examine two problems facing U.S. education—and consider their potential solutions.

Problems: Mediocrity and Violence

The Rising Tide of Mediocrity Since I know you love taking tests, let’s see how you do on these three questions:

1. How many goals are on a basketball court?
a. 1 b. 2 c. 3 d. 4
2. How many halves are in a college basketball game?
a. 1 b. 2 c. 3 d. 4
3. How many points does a three-point field goal account for in a basketball game? a. 1 b. 2 c. 3 d. 4

I know that this sounds like a joke, but it isn’t. Sociologist Robert Benford (2007) got his hands on a copy of a 20-question final examination given to basketball players who took a credit course on coaching principles at the University of Georgia. It is usually difficult to refer to athletes, sports, and academics in the same breath, but this is about as mediocre as mediocrity can get.

Here are broader examples of how mediocrity plagues our educational system:

- All Arizona high school sophomores took a math test. It covered the math that sophomores should know. *One of ten passed.*
- Tennessee state officials were so pleased at their test results that they called a news conference. They

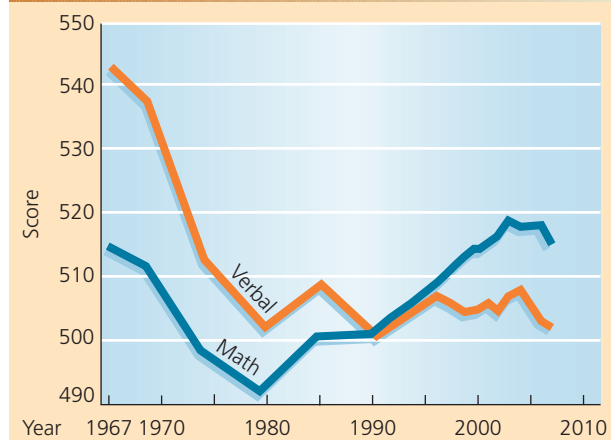
boasted that 87 percent of their students were proficient at math—and they had the test results to prove it. When the federal government retested the students, the results dropped just a bit—to 21 percent (Dillon 2005b).

We haven’t done too well on our SAT tests, either. In Figure 13.5, you can see how the scores dropped from the 1960s to 1980. At that point, educators—and even Congress—expressed concern. Schools raised their standards, and the scores started to climb. The recovery in math has been encouraging. Today’s high school seniors now score the same in math as seniors did in the 1960s. Administrators are requiring more of teachers, and teachers are requiring more of students. Each is performing according to these higher expectations. This looks good, right? But going back to past levels isn’t enough. Compared with students from 40 other nations, U.S. students rank 25th in math (Chaddock 2004).

As you can see from Figure 13.5, the verbal scores have not returned to earlier levels. Today’s students perform so poorly that the makers of the SAT eliminated the analogy part of the verbal test. Analogies demand penetrating thinking, and, unfortunately, today’s students just couldn’t handle it. No one knows exactly why the verbal scores are so low, but the culprits are often identified as “dummied down” textbooks, less rigorous teaching, and less reading because of watching television and playing video and computer games.

How to Cheat on the SATs If you receive poor grades this semester, wouldn’t you like to use a magic marker—

FIGURE 13.5 National Results of the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT)



Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract* 2008:Table 258.

to—presto!—change them into higher grades? I suppose every student would. Now imagine that you had that power. Would you use it?

Some people in authority apparently have found such a magic marker, and they have used it to raise our low national SAT scores. Table 274 of the 1996 edition of the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* reports that in 1995 only 8.3 percent of students earned 600 or more on the verbal portion of the SAT test. The very next edition, in 1997, however, holds a pleasant surprise. Table 276 tells us that it was really 21.9 percent of students who scored 600 or higher in 1995. Later editions of this source retain the higher figure. What a magic marker!

In the twinkle of an eye, we get another bonus. Somehow, between 1996 and 1997 the scores of *everyone* who took the test in previous years improved. Now that's the kind of power we all would like to have. Students, grab your report cards. Workers, change those numbers on your paycheck.

It certainly is easier to give simpler tests than to teach more effectively. And this is what has happened to the SAT. The results were so embarrassing to U.S. educators that the SAT was made easier. Not only was testing on antonyms and analogies dropped, but the test was also shortened and students were given more time to answer the fewer questions. The test makers then “rescored” the totals of previous years to match the easier test. This “dummying down” of the SAT is yet another form of grade inflation, the topic to which we shall now turn.

Grade Inflation, Social Promotion, and Functional Illiteracy High school teachers used to give about twice as many *C*'s as *A*'s, but now they give more *A*'s than *C*'s. Grades are so inflated that some of today's *A*'s are the *C*'s of years past. **Grade inflation** is so pervasive that 47 percent of all college freshmen have an overall high school grade point average of *A*. This is more than *twice* what it was in 1970 (*Statistical Abstract* 2007:Table 274). Grade inflation has also hit the Ivy League. At Harvard University, *half* of the course grades are *A*'s and *A-*'s. *Ninety* percent of Harvard students graduate with honors. To rein in the “honor inflation,” the Harvard faculty voted to limit the number of students who graduate with honors to 60 percent of a class (Hartocollis 2002; Douthat 2005).

Grade inflation in the face of declining standards has been accompanied by **social promotion**, passing students from one grade to the next even though they have not mastered the basic materials. One result is **functional illiteracy**, high school graduates having difficulty with reading and writing. Some high school graduates cannot fill out job applications; others can't even figure out whether they get the right change at the grocery store.

The Influence of Peer Groups What do you think is the most important factor in how teenagers do in school? Two psychologists and a sociologist, who studied 20,000 high school students in California and Wisconsin, found that it is the student's peer group (Steinberg et al. 1996). Simply put: Teens who hang out with good students tend to do well, and those who hang out with friends who do poorly in school do poorly. Student subcultures include informal norms about grades. Some groups have norms of classroom excellence, while others sneer at good grades. The applied question that arises from this research, of course, is how to build educational achievement into student culture.

Violence in Schools Some U.S. schools have deteriorated to the point that safety is an issue. In these schools, uniformed guards and metal detectors have become permanent fixtures. Some grade schools even supplement their traditional fire drills with “drive-by shooting drills.” Because they might be targeted by terrorists, other schools hold “Code Blue” drills: The classrooms—each equipped with a phone—are locked, the windows are locked, and the shades are drawn. Whether these measures create feelings of security or produce fear is yet to be studied by sociologists.

School shootings are another concern. For a surprising analysis of deaths at school, read the Mass Media box on the next page.

Solutions: Safety and Standards

It is one thing to identify problems, quite another to find solutions for them. Let's consider solutions to the problems we just reviewed.

A Secure Learning Environment The first step in offering a good education is to keep students safe and free from fear. With the high rate of violence in U.S. society, we can expect some violence to spill over into the schools. To minimize this spillover, school administrators can expel all students who threaten the welfare of others. They also can refuse to tolerate threats, violence, and weapons. The zero tolerance policy for guns and other weapons on school property that school boards and administrators have adopted helps to make schools safer.

Higher Standards for Teachers and Students To offer a quality education, we need quality teachers. Don't we already have them? Most teachers are qualified and, if motivated, can do an excellent job. But a large number of teachers are not qualified. Consider just a couple of items. California requires that its teachers pass an educational skills test. California's teachers did so poorly that to get enough teachers to fill their classrooms, officials had to drop the passing grade to the tenth-grade level. These are college graduates who are teachers—and they are expected

MASS MEDIA in SOCIAL LIFE

School Shootings: Exploring a Myth

The media sprinkle their reports of school shootings with such dramatic phrases as “alarming proportions,” “outbreak of violence,” and “out of control.” They give us the impression that wackos walk our hallways, ready to spray our schools with gunfire. Parents used to consider schools safe havens, but no longer. Those naïve thoughts have been shattered by the bullets that have ripped through schools—or at least by the media’s portrayal of growing danger and violence in our schools.

Have our schools really become war zones, as the mass media would have us believe? Certainly events such as those at Columbine High School and Virginia Tech are disturbing, but we need to probe deeper than newspaper headlines and televised images.

When we do, we find that the media’s sensationalist reporting has created a myth. Contrary to “what everyone knows,” there is



This frame from a home video shows Eric Harris (on the left) and Dylan Klebold (on the right) as they pretend that they are searching for victims. They put their desires into practice in the infamous Columbine High School shootings.

TABLE 13.1 Exploding a Myth: Deaths at U.S. Schools¹

School Year	Shooting Deaths	Other Deaths ²	VICTIMS		Total
			Boys	Girls	
1992–1993	45	11	49	7	56
1993–1994	41	12	41	12	53
1994–1995	16	5	18	3	21
1995–1996	29	7	26	10	36
1996–1997	15	11	18	8	26
1997–1998	36	8	27	17	44
1998–1999	25	6	24	7	31
1999–2000	16	16	26	6	32
2000–2001	19	5	20	4	24
2001–2002	4	1	5	0	5
2002–2003	14	8	16	6	22
2003–2004	29	13	37	5	42
2004–2005	20	8	20	8	28
2005–2006	5	0	4	1	5
2006–2007	16	3	12	7	19
Total 1992–2007	330	114	343	101	444
Mean 1992–2007	22.0	7.6	22.9	6.7	29.6

¹ Includes all school-related homicides, even those that occurred on the way to or from school. Includes suicides, school personnel killed at school by other adults, and even adults who had nothing to do with the school but who were found dead on school property. Source does not report on deaths at colleges, only K–12 (kindergarten through high school).

² Beating, hanging, jumping, stabbing, slashing, strangling, or heart attack.
Source: By the author. Based on National School Safety Center 2007.

no trend toward greater school violence. In fact, the situation is just the opposite—the trend is toward greater safety. Despite the dramatic school shootings that make headlines, as Table 13.1 shows, shooting deaths at schools are decreasing.

This is not to say that school shootings are not a serious problem. Even one student being wounded or killed is too many. But, contrary to the impression fostered by the media, we are not seeing an increase of school shooting deaths.

This is one reason that we need sociology: to quietly, dispassionately search for facts so we can better understand the events that shape our lives. The first requirement for solving any problem is accurate data, for how can we create rational solutions that are based on hysteria? The information presented in this box may not make for sensational headlines, but it does serve to explode one of the myths that the media have created.

For Your Consideration

How do you think we can reduce school shootings? How about school violence of any sort?

to perform at the tenth-grade level! It gets even worse. For fifteen of our states, teachers need to be able to read only at the lowest quarter of the national average (Schemo 2002). I don't know about you, but I think this situation is a national disgrace. If we want to improve teaching, we need to insist that teachers meet high standards.

What else can we do to improve the quality of education? An older study by sociologists James Coleman and Thomas Hoffer (1987) provides helpful guidelines. They wanted to see why the test scores of students in Roman Catholic schools average 15 to 20 percent higher than those of students in public schools. Is it because Catholic schools attract better students, while public schools have to put up with everyone? To find out, they tested 15,000 students in public and Catholic high schools.

Their findings? From the sophomore through the senior years, students at Catholic schools pull ahead of public school students by a full grade in verbal and math skills. The superior test performance of students in Catholic schools, they concluded, is due not to better students, but to higher standards. Catholic schools have not watered down their curricula as have public schools. The researchers also underscored the importance of parental involvement. Parents and teachers in Catholic schools reinforce each other's commitment to learning.

A Warning About Higher Standards If we raise standards, we can expect protest. It is less upsetting to use low standards and to tell students that they are doing well than it is to do rigorous teaching and use high standards to measure student performance. When Florida decided that its high school seniors needed to pass an assessment test in order to receive a diploma, 13,000 students failed the test. Parents of failed students banded together—not to demand better teaching but to pressure the state to drop the new test. They asked people to boycott Disney World and to not buy Florida orange juice (Canedy 2003). Those actions would certainly improve their children's learning!



RELIGION: ESTABLISHING MEANING

Let's look at the main characteristics of a second significant social institution.

What Is Religion?

Sociologists who do research on religion analyze the relationship between society and religion and study the role that religion plays in people's lives. They do not try to prove that one religion is better than another. Nor is it their goal to verify or disprove anyone's faith. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, sociologists have no tools for deciding that one course of action is more moral than another, much less for determining that one religion is "the" correct one. Religion is a matter of faith—and sociologists deal with empirical matters, things they can observe or measure. When it comes to religion, then, sociologists study the effects of religious beliefs and practices on people's lives. They also analyze how religion is related to stratification systems. Unlike theologians, however, sociologists do not try to evaluate the truth of a religion's teachings.

In 1912 Emile Durkheim published an influential book, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, in which he tried to identify the elements that are common to all religions. After surveying religions around the world, Durkheim could find no specific belief or practice that all religions share. He did find, however, that all religions develop a community around their practices and beliefs. All religions also separate the sacred from the profane. By **sacred**, Durkheim referred to aspects of life having to do with the supernatural that inspire awe, reverence, deep respect, even fear. By **profane**, he meant aspects of life that are not concerned with religion or religious purposes but, instead, are part of ordinary, everyday life.

Durkheim (1912/1965) summarized his conclusions by saying:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.

When I visited a Hindu temple in Chattisgarh, India, I was impressed by the colorful and expressive figures on its roof. Each figure represents one of the millions of gods that Hindus worship, each deity considered part of the same divine energy or Supreme Being.

Religion, then, has three elements:

1. *Beliefs* that some things are sacred (forbidden, set apart from the profane)
2. *Practices* (rituals) centering on the things considered sacred
3. *A moral community* (a church) resulting from a group's beliefs and practices

Durkheim used the word **church** in an unusual sense, to refer to any “moral community” centered on beliefs and practices regarding the sacred. In Durkheim's sense, *church* refers to Buddhists bowing before a shrine, Hindus dipping in the Ganges River, and Confucians offering food to their ancestors. Similarly, the term *moral community* does not imply morality in the sense familiar to most of us—of ethical conduct. Rather, a moral community is simply a group of people who are united by their religious practices—and that would include sixteenth-century Aztec priests who each day gathered around an altar to pluck out the beating heart of a virgin.

To better understand the sociological approach to religion, let's see what pictures emerge when we apply the three theoretical perspectives.

The Functionalist Perspective

Functionalists stress that religion is universal because it meets basic human needs. Let's look at some of the functions—and dysfunctions—of religion.

Functions of Religion

Questions about Ultimate Meaning Around the world, religions provide answers to perplexing questions about ultimate meaning—such as the purpose of life, why people suffer, and the existence of an afterlife. Those answers give followers a sense of purpose, a framework in which to live. Instead of seeing themselves buffeted by random events in an aimless existence, believers see their lives as fitting into a divine plan.

Emotional Comfort The answers that religion provides about ultimate meaning also comfort people by assuring them that there is a purpose to life, even to suffering. Similarly, religious rituals that enshroud crucial events such as illness and death provide emotional comfort at times of crisis. The individual knows that others care and can find consolation in following familiar rituals.

Social Solidarity Religious teachings and practices unite believers into a community that shares values and perspectives (“we Jews,” “we Christians,” “we Muslims”). The religious rituals that surround marriage, for example, link the bride and groom with a broader community that wishes them well. So do other religious rituals, such as those that celebrate birth and mourn death.

Guidelines for Everyday Life The teachings of religion are not all abstractions. They also provide practical instructions. For example, four of the ten commandments delivered by Moses to the Israelites concern God, but the other six contain instructions on how to live everyday life, from how to get along with parents and neighbors to warnings about lying, stealing, and having affairs.



Religion can promote social change, as was evident in the U.S. civil rights movement. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a Baptist minister, shown here in his famous “I have a dream” speech, was the foremost leader of this movement.

The consequences for people who follow these guidelines can be measured. People who attend church are less likely to abuse alcohol, nicotine, and illegal drugs than are people who don't go to church (Gillum 2005; Wallace et al. 2007). In general, churchgoers follow a healthier lifestyle, and they live longer than those who don't go to church.

Social Control Religion not only provides guidelines for everyday life but also sets limits on people's behaviors. Most norms of a religious group apply only to its members, but nonmembers also feel a spillover. Religious teachings, for example, are incorporated into criminal law. In the United States, blasphemy and adultery were once crimes for which people could be arrested, tried, and sentenced. Some states still have laws that prohibit the sale of alcohol before noon on Sunday, laws whose purpose was to get people out of the saloons and into the churches.

Social Change Although religion is often so bound up with the prevailing social order that it resists social change, religion occasionally spearheads change. In the 1960s, for example, the civil rights movement, whose goal was to desegregate public facilities and abolish racial discrimination at southern polls, was led by religious leaders, especially leaders of African American churches such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Churches also served as centers at which demonstrators were trained and rallies were organized.

Dysfunctions of Religion

Functionalists also examine ways in which religion is *dysfunctional*—that is, how it can bring harmful results. Two dysfunctions are religious persecution and war and terrorism.

Religion as Justification for Persecution Beginning in the 1200s and continuing into the 1800s, in what has become known as the Inquisition, special commissions of the Roman Catholic Church tortured women to make them confess that they were witches and then burned them at the stake. In 1692, Protestant leaders in Salem, Massachusetts, executed twenty-one women and men who were accused of being witches. In 2001, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, about 1,000 alleged witches were hacked to death (Jenkins 2002). Similarly, it seems fair to say that the Aztec religion had its dysfunctions—at least for the virgins who were offered to appease angry gods. In short, religion has been used to justify oppression and any number of brutal acts.

War and Terrorism History is filled with wars based on religion—commingled with politics. Between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, for example, Christian monarchs conducted nine bloody Crusades in an attempt to

wrest control of the region they called the Holy Land from the Muslims. Terrorist acts, too, are sometimes committed in the name of religion, as discussed in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page.

The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

Symbolic interactionists focus on the meanings that people give their experiences, especially how they use symbols. Let's apply this perspective to religious symbols, rituals, and beliefs to see how they help to forge a community of like-minded people.

Religious Symbols

Suppose that it is about two thousand years ago, and you have just joined a new religion. You have come to believe that a recently crucified Jew named Jesus is the Messiah, the Lamb of God offered for your sins. The Roman leaders are persecuting the followers of Jesus. They hate your religion because you and your fellow believers will not acknowledge Caesar as God.

Christians are few in number, and you are eager to have fellowship with other believers. But how can you tell who is a believer? Spies are everywhere. The government has sworn to destroy this new religion, and you do not relish the thought of being fed to lions in the Colosseum.

You use a simple technique. While talking with a stranger, as though doodling absentmindedly in the sand or dust, you casually trace the outline of a fish. Only fellow believers know the meaning—that, taken together, the first letter of each word in the Greek sentence “Jesus (is) Christ the Son of God” spell the Greek word for fish. If the other person gives no response, you rub out the outline and continue the interaction as usual. If there is a response, you eagerly talk about your new faith.

All religions use symbols to provide identity and social solidarity for their members. For Muslims, the primary symbol is the crescent moon and star; for Jews, the Star of David; for Christians, the cross. For members, these are not ordinary symbols, but sacred emblems that evoke feelings of awe and reverence. In Durkheim's terms, religions use symbols to represent what the group considers sacred and to separate the sacred from the profane.

A symbol is a condensed way of communicating. Worn by a fundamentalist Christian, for example, the cross says, “I am a follower of Jesus Christ. I believe that He is the Messiah, the promised Son of God, that He loves me, that

Down-to-Earth Sociology

Terrorism and the Mind of God

WARNING:The “equal time” contents of this box are likely to offend just about everyone.

After September 11, 2001, the question on many people’s minds was some form of “How can people do such evil in the name of God?”

To answer this question, we need to broaden the context. The question is fine, but it cannot be directed solely at Islamic terrorists. If it is, it misses the point.

We need to consider other religions, too. For Christians, we don’t have to go back centuries to the Inquisition or to the Children’s Crusades. We only have to look at Ireland and the bombings in Belfast. There, Protestants and Catholics slaughtered each other in the name of God.

In the United States, we can consider the killing of abortion doctors. Paul Hill, a minister who was executed for killing a doctor in Florida, was convinced that his act was good, that he had saved the lives of unborn babies. Before his execution, he said that he was looking forward to heaven.

Since I want to give equal time to the major religions, we can’t forget the Jews. Dr. Baruch Goldstein was convinced that Yahweh wanted him to take an assault rifle, go to the Tomb of the Patriarchs, and shoot into a crowd of praying Palestinian men and boys. His admirers built a monument on his grave (Juergensmeyer 2000).

Finally, for the sake of equality, let’s not let the Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs off the hook. In India, they continue to slaughter one another. In the name of their gods, they attack the houses of worship of the others and blow one another up. (The Hindus are actually equal opportunists—they kill Christians, too. I visited a state in India where Hindus had doused a jeep with gasoline and burned alive an Australian missionary and his two sons.)

None of these terrorists—Islamic, Christian, Jew, Sikh, Buddhist, or Hindu—represent the mainstream of their religion, but they do commit violence for religious reasons. How can they do so? Here are five elements that religious terrorists seem to have in common.

First, the individuals believe that they are under attack. Evil forces are bent on destroying the good of their world—whether that be their religion, their way of life, or unborn babies.



Woodcuts (prints made from engraved blocks of wood coated with ink to leave an impression on paper) were used to illustrate books shortly after the printing press was invented. This woodcut commemorates a dysfunction of religion, the burning of witches at the stake. This particular event occurred at Demeburg, Germany, in 1555.

Second, they become convinced that God wants the evil destroyed.

Third, they conclude that only violence will resolve the situation.

Fourth, they become convinced that God has chosen them for this task.

Fifth, these perspectives are nurtured by a community, a group in which the individuals find identity. This group may realize that most members of their faith do not support their views, but those others are mistaken. The smaller community holds the truth.

Under these conditions, morality is turned upside down. Killing becomes a moral act, a good done for a greater cause.

There is just enough truth in these points of view to keep the delusion alive. After all, wouldn’t it have been better for the millions of victims of Hitler, Stalin, or Pol Pot if someone had had the nerve and foresight to kill them? Wouldn’t their deaths and one’s own self-sacrifice have been a greater good? Today, there are those bad Protestants, those bad Catholics, those bad Jews, those bad Palestinians, those bad abortionists, those bad Americans—an endless list. And the violence is for the Greater Good: what God wants.

Once people buy into this closed system of thought, they become convinced that they have access to the mind of God.

For Your Consideration

How do you think this type of thinking can be broken?

One of the functions of religion is to create community—a sense of being connected with one another and, in this case, also a sense of being connected with God. To help accomplish this, religions often use rituals. Shown here are Javanese Muslim women in Surinam as they celebrate Id al Fatr at the end of Ramadan.

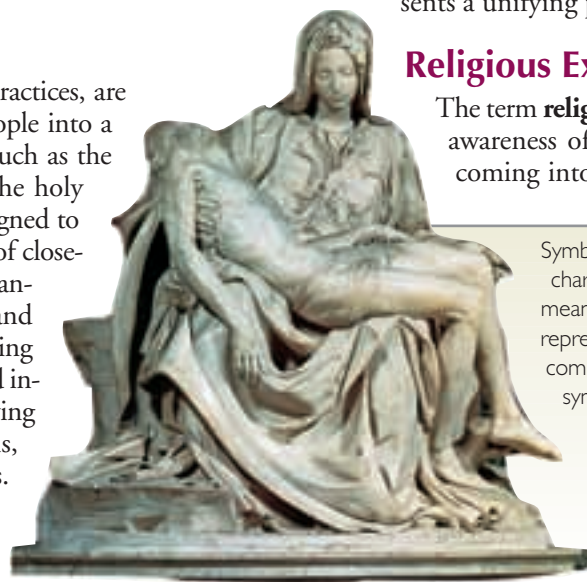


He died to take away my sins, that He rose from the dead and is going to return to earth, and that through Him I will receive eternal life.”

That is a lot to pack into one symbol—and it is only part of what the symbol means to a fundamentalist believer. To people in other traditions of Christianity, the cross conveys somewhat different meanings—but to all Christians, the cross is a shorthand way of expressing many meanings. So it is with the Star of David, the crescent moon and star, the cow (expressing to Hindus the unity of all living things), and the various symbols of the world’s many other religions.

Rituals

Rituals, ceremonies or repetitive practices, are also symbols that help to unite people into a moral community. Some rituals, such as the bar mitzvah of Jewish boys and the holy communion of Christians, are designed to create in devout believers a feeling of closeness with God and unity with one another. Rituals include kneeling and praying at set times; bowing; crossing oneself; singing; lighting candles and incense; reading scripture; and following prescribed traditions at processions, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. The photo essay on pages 380–381 features annual rituals held in Spain during Holy Week.



Beliefs

Symbols, including rituals, develop from beliefs. The belief may be vague (“God is”) or highly specific (“God wants us to prostrate ourselves and face Mecca five times each day”). Religious beliefs include not only *values* (what is considered good and desirable in life—how we ought to live) but also a **cosmology**, a unified picture of the world. For example, the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim belief that there is only one God, the creator of the universe, who is concerned about the actions of humans and who will hold us accountable for what we do, is a cosmology. It presents a unifying picture of the universe.

Religious Experience

The term **religious experience** refers to a sudden awareness of the supernatural or a feeling of coming into contact with God. Some people

Symbolic interactionists stress that a basic characteristic of humans is that they attach meaning to objects and events and then use representations of those objects or events to communicate with one another. Some religious symbols are used to communicate feelings of awe and reverence. Michaelangelo’s *Pietà*, depicting Mary tenderly holding her son, Jesus, after his crucifixion, is one of the most acclaimed symbols in the Western world. It is admired for its beauty by believers and nonbelievers alike.

undergo a mild version, such as feeling closer to God when they look at a mountain, watch a sunset, or listen to a certain piece of music. Others report a life-transforming experience. St. Francis of Assisi, for example, said that he became aware of God's presence in every living thing.

Some Protestants use the term **born again** to describe people who have undergone a life-transforming religious experience. These people say that they came to the realization that they had sinned, that Jesus had died for their sins, and that God wants them to live a new life. Their worlds become transformed. They look forward to the Resurrection and to a new life in heaven, and they see relationships with spouses, parents, children, and even bosses in a new light. They also report a need to make changes in how they interact with others so that their lives reflect their new, personal commitment to Jesus as their "Savior and Lord." They describe a feeling of beginning life anew; hence the term *born again*.

The Conflict Perspective

In general, conflict theorists are highly critical of religion. They stress that religion supports the status quo and helps to maintain social inequalities. Let's look at some of their analyses.

Opium of the People

Karl Marx, an avowed atheist who believed that the existence of God was impossible, set the tone for conflict theorists with his most famous statement on this subject: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world. . . . It is the opium of the people" (Marx 1844/1964). By this statement, Marx meant that oppressed workers find escape in religion. For them, religion is like a drug that helps them to forget their misery. By diverting their thoughts toward future happiness in an afterlife, religion takes their eyes off their suffering in this world, reducing the possibility that they will rebel against their oppressors.

A Legitimation of Social Inequalities

Conflict theorists say that religion legitimates the social inequalities of the larger society. By this, they mean that religion teaches that the existing social arrangements of a society represent what God desires. For example, during the Middle Ages, Christian theologians decreed the *divine right of kings*. This doctrine meant that God determined who would become king and set him on the throne. The king ruled in God's place, and it was the duty of a king's

subjects to be loyal to him (and to pay their taxes). To disobey the king was to disobey God.

In what was perhaps the supreme technique of legitimating the social order (and one that went even a step farther than the *divine right of kings*), the religion of ancient Egypt held that the pharaoh himself was a god. The emperor of Japan was similarly declared divine. If this were so, who could ever question his decisions? Today's politicians would give their right arm for such a religious teaching.

Conflict theorists point to many other examples of how religion legitimates the social order. In India, Hinduism supports the caste system by teaching that an individual who tries to change caste will come back in the next life as a member of a lower caste—or even as an animal. In the decades before the American Civil War, Southern ministers used scripture to defend slavery, saying that it was God's will—while Northern ministers legitimated *their* region's social structure by using scripture to denounce slavery as evil (Ernst 1988; Nauta 1993; White 1995).

Religion and the Spirit of Capitalism

Sociologist Max Weber disagreed with Marx that religion merely reflects and legitimates the social order. Weber had become intrigued with the origin of *capitalism*. Why, he wondered, did some societies embrace capitalism while others clung to their traditional ways? As Weber explored this puzzle, he found the answer in an unexpected place, in religion's focus on the afterlife.

To explain his conclusions, Weber wrote *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–1905/1958). He said that

1. Capitalism is not just a superficial change. Rather, capitalism represents a fundamentally different way of thinking about work and money. *Traditionally, people worked just enough to meet their basic needs, not so that they could have a surplus to invest.* To accumulate money (capital) as an end in itself, not just to spend it, was a radical departure from traditional thinking. People even came to consider it a duty to invest money so they could make profits. They reinvested these profits to make even more profits. Weber called this new approach to work and money the **spirit of capitalism**.
2. Why did the spirit of capitalism develop in Europe and not, for example, in China or India, where the people had similar material resources and education? According to Weber, *religion was the key*. The religions of China and India, and indeed Roman Catholicism

THROUGH THE AUTHOR'S LENS

Holy Week in Spain

Religious groups develop rituals designed to evoke memories, create awe, inspire reverence, and stimulate social solidarity. One of the primary means by which groups, religious and secular, accomplish these goals is through the display of symbols.

I took these photos during Holy Week in Spain—in Malaga and Almuñecar. Throughout Spain, elaborate processions

feature *tronos* that depict the biblical account of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. During the processions in Malaga, the participants walk slowly for one or two minutes, then because of the weight of the *tronos*, they rest for one or two minutes. This process repeats for about six hours.



One group of participants exiting the Church of the Incarnation for Malaga's Easter procession.



Parents gave a lot of attention to their children both during the preparations and during the processions. This photo was taken during one of the recurring short breaks.



The procession in the village was more informal. This Roman soldier has an interesting way of participating—and keeping tabs—on his little daughter. The girl is distributing candy.



Bands, sometimes several of them, are part of the processions.



For the Good Friday procession, I was fortunate to be able to photograph the behind-the-scenes preparations, which are seldom seen by visitors. Shown here are finishing touches being given to the Mary figure.



During the short breaks at the night processions, children from the audience would rush to collect dripping wax to make wax balls. This was one way that the audience made themselves participants in the drama.



Beneath the costumes are townspeople and church members who know one another well. They enjoy themselves prior to the procession. This man is about ready to put on his hood.



The town square was packed with people awaiting the procession. From one corner of the square, the *trono* of Jesus was brought in. Then from another; that of Mary ("reuniting" them, as I was told). During this climactic scene the priest on the balcony on the left read a message.



These parents are giving last-minute instructions to their children, who are dressed alike. Although the processions were made up primarily of men and boys, girls and women also participated.



Some *tronos* were so heavy that they required many men to carry them. (Some required over 100 men.) This photo was taken in Malaga, on Monday of Holy Week.

in Europe, encouraged a traditional approach to life, not thrift and investment. Capitalism appeared when Protestantism came on the scene.

3. What was different about Protestantism, especially Calvinism? John Calvin taught that God had predestined some people to go to heaven and others to hell. Neither church membership nor feelings about your relationship with God could assure you that you were saved. You wouldn't know your fate until after you died.
4. This doctrine created intense anxiety among Calvin's followers: "Am I predestined to hell or to heaven?" they wondered. As Calvinists wrestled with this question, they concluded that church members have a duty to prove that they are one of God's elect and to live as though they are predestined to heaven—for good works are a demonstration of salvation.
5. This conclusion motivated Calvinists to lead moral lives *and* to work hard, to use their time productively, and to be frugal—for idleness and needless spending were signs of worldliness. Weber called this self-denying approach to life the **Protestant ethic**.
6. As people worked hard and spent money only on necessities (a pair of earrings or a second pair of dress shoes would have been defined as sinful luxuries), they had money left over. Because it couldn't be spent, this capital was invested, which led to a surge in production.
7. Weber's analysis can be summed up this way: The change in religion (from Catholicism to Protestantism, especially Calvinism) led to a fundamental change in thought and behavior (the *Protestant ethic*). The result was the *spirit of capitalism*. For this reason, capitalism originated in Europe and not in places where religion did not encourage capitalism's essential elements: the accumulation of capital and its investment and reinvestment.

At this point in history, the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism are not confined to any specific religion or even to any one part of the world. Rather, they have become cultural traits that have spread to societies around the globe (Greeley 1964;

For some Americans, religion is an "easy-going, makes-little-difference" matter, as expressed in this cartoon. For others, religious matters are firmly held, and followers find even slight differences of faith to be significant.

Yinger 1970). U.S. Catholics have about the same approach to life as do U.S. Protestants. In addition, Hong Kong, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan—not exactly Protestant countries—have embraced capitalism (Levy 1992). China is in the midst of doing so.

Types of Religious Groups

Sociologists have identified four types of religious groups: cult, sect, church, and ecclesia. Why do some of these groups meet with hostility, while others are more accepted? For an explanation, look at Figure 13.6.

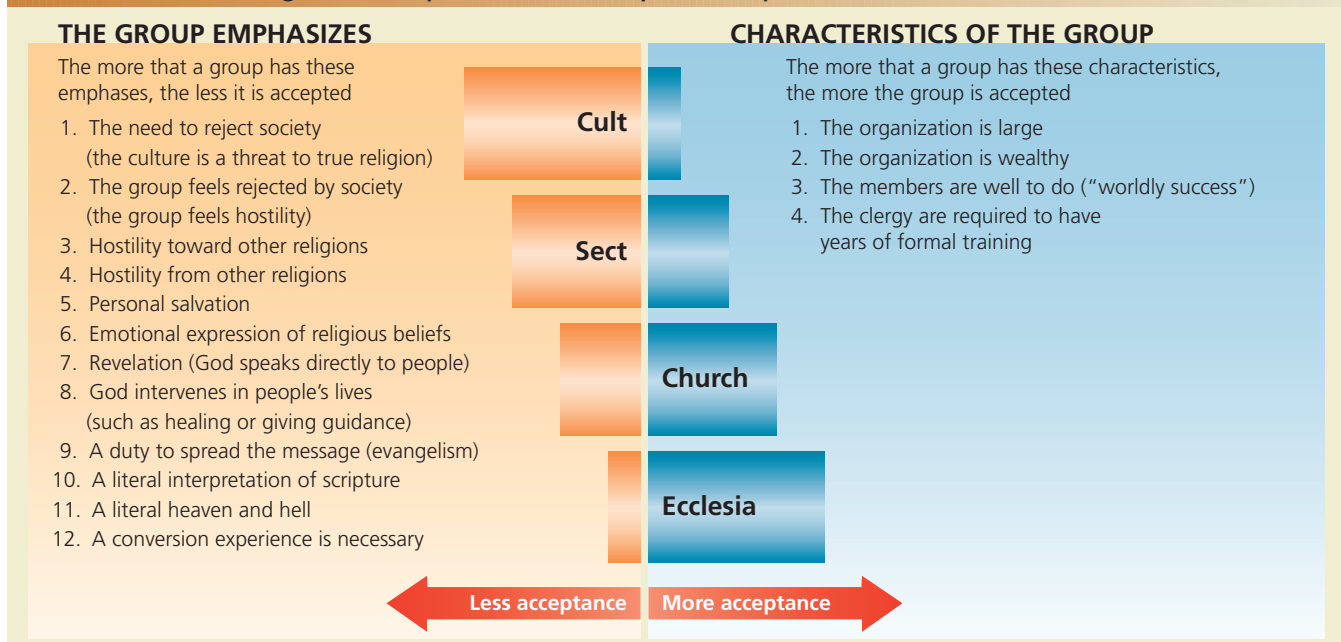
Let's explore what sociologists have found about these four types of religious groups. The summary that follows is a modification of analyses by sociologists Ernst Troeltsch (1931), Liston Pope (1942), and Benton Johnson (1963).

Cult

The word *cult* conjures up bizarre images—shaven heads, weird music, brainwashing—even ritual suicide may come to mind. Cults, however, are not necessarily weird, and few practice "brainwashing" or bizarre rituals. In fact, *all religions began as cults* (Stark 1989). A **cult** is simply a new or different religion whose teachings and practices put it at odds with the dominant culture and religion. Because the term *cult* arouses such negative meanings in the public mind, however, some scholars prefer to use the term *new religion* instead.



"We're thinking maybe it's time you started getting some religious instruction. There's Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish—any of those sound good to you?"

FIGURE 13.6 Religious Groups: From Hostility to Acceptance

Note: Any religious organization can be placed somewhere on this continuum, based on its having "more" or "less" of these characteristics and emphases. The varying proportions of the rectangles are intended to represent the group's relative characteristics and emphases.

Source: By the author. Based on Troeltsch 1931; Pope 1942; and Johnson 1963.

Cults often originate with a **charismatic leader**, an individual who inspires people because he or she seems to have extraordinary qualities. **Charisma** refers to an outstanding gift or to some exceptional quality. People feel drawn to both the person and the message because they find something highly appealing about the individual—in some instances, almost a magnetic charm.

The most popular religion in the world began as a cult. Its handful of followers believed that an unschooled carpenter who preached in remote villages in a backwater country was the Son of God, that he was killed and came back to life. Those beliefs made the early Christians a cult, setting them apart from the rest of their society. Persecuted by both religious and political authorities, these early believers clung to one another for support. Many cut off associations with friends who didn't accept the new message. To others, the early Christians must have seemed deluded and brainwashed.

Most cults fail. Not many people believe the new message, and the cult fades into obscurity. Some, however, succeed and make history. Over time, large numbers of people may come to accept the message and become followers of the religion. If this happens, the new religion changes from a cult to a sect.

Sect

A **sect** is larger than a cult, but its members still feel tension between their views and the prevailing beliefs and values of the broader society. A sect may even be hostile to the society in which it is located. At the very least, its members remain uncomfortable with many of the emphases of the dominant culture; in turn, nonmembers tend to be uncomfortable with members of the sect.

If a sect grows, its members tend to gradually make peace with the rest of society. To appeal to a broader base, the sect shifts some of its doctrines, redefining matters to remove some of the rough edges that create tension between it and the rest of society. As the members become more respectable in the eyes of the society, they feel less hostility and little, if any, isolation. If a sect follows this course, as it grows and becomes more integrated into society, it changes into a church.

Church

At this point, the religious group is highly bureaucratized—probably with national and international headquarters that give direction to the local congregations, enforce rules about who can be ordained, and control finances.

The relationship with God has grown less intense. The group is likely to have less emphasis on personal salvation and emotional expression. Worship services are likely to be more sedate, with sermons more formal and written prayers read before the congregation. Rather than being recruited from the outside by fervent, personal evangelism, most new members now come from within, from children born to existing members. Rather than joining through conversion—seeing the new truth—children may be baptized, circumcised, or dedicated in some other way. At some designated age, children may be asked to affirm the group's beliefs in a confirmation or bar mitzvah ceremony.

Ecclesia

Finally, some groups become so well integrated into a culture, and so strongly allied with their government, that it is difficult to tell where one leaves off and the other takes over. In these *state religions*, also called **ecclesia**, the government and religion work together to try to shape society. There is no recruitment of members, for citizenship makes everyone a member. For most people in the society, the religion provides little meaning: The religion is part of a cultural identity, not an eye-opening experience. Sweden provides a good example of how extensively religion and government intertwine in an ecclesia. In the 1860s, all citizens had to memorize Luther's *Small Catechism* and be tested on it yearly (Anderson 1995). Today, Lutheranism is still associated with the state, but most Swedes come to church only for baptisms, marriages, and funerals.

Variations in Patterns

Obviously, not all religious groups go through all these stages—from cult to sect to church to ecclesia. Some die out because they fail to attract enough members. Others, such as the Amish, remain sects. And, as is evident from the few countries that have state religions, very few religions ever become ecclesias.

In addition, these classifications are not perfectly matched in the real world. For example, although the Amish are a sect, they place little or no emphasis on recruiting others. The early Quakers, another sect, shied away from emotional expressions of their beliefs. They would quietly meditate in church, with no one speaking, until God gave someone a message to share with others. Finally, some groups that become churches may retain a few characteristics of sects, such as an emphasis on evangelism (recruiting members) or a personal relationship with God.

Although all religions began as cults, not all varieties of a particular religion begin that way. For example, some

denominations—“brand names” within a major religion, such as Methodism or Reform Judaism—begin as splinter groups. Some members of a church disagree with *particular* aspects of the church's teachings (not its major message), and they break away to form their own organization. An example is the Southern Baptist Convention, which was formed in 1845 to defend the right to own slaves (Ernst 1988; Nauta 1993; White 1995).

Religion in the United States

To better understand religion in U.S. society, let's first find out who belongs to religious groups and then look at the groups they belong to.

Characteristics of Members

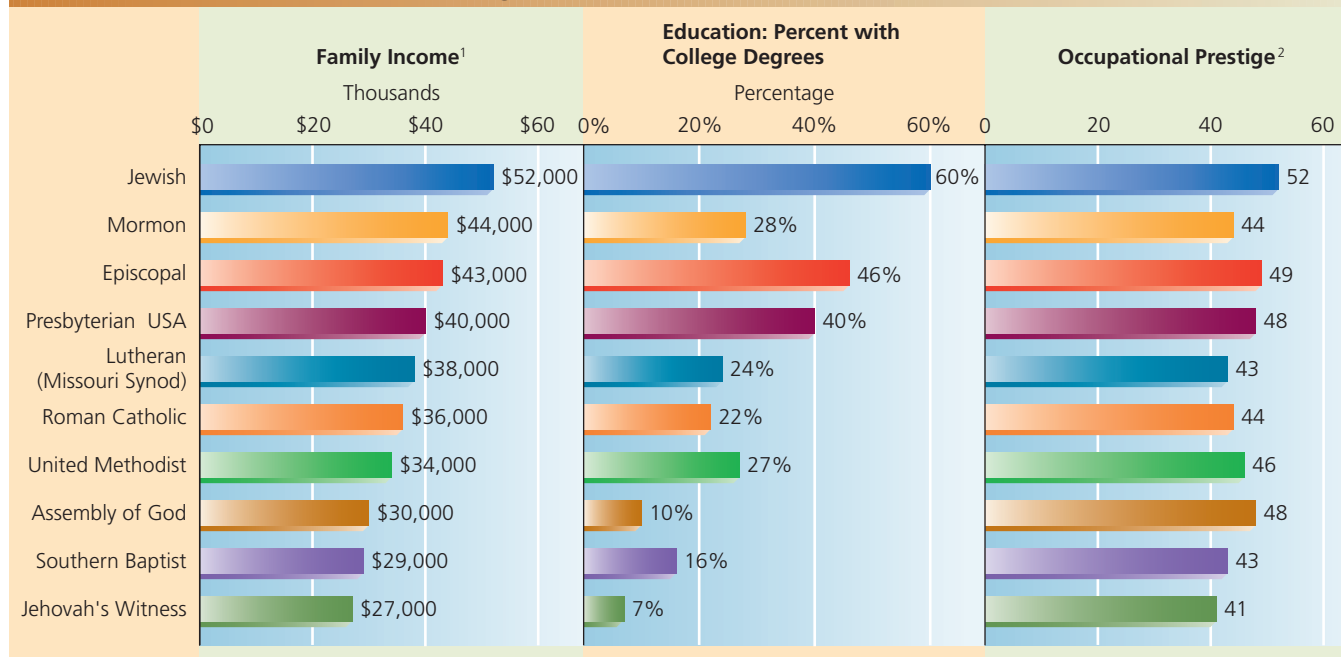
As you can see from Table 13.2, about 62 percent of Americans belong to a church, synagogue, or mosque. What are the characteristics of people who hold formal membership in a religion?

Social Class Religion in the United States is stratified by social class. As you can see from Figure 13.7 on the next page, some religious groups are “top-heavy,” and others are “bottom-heavy.” The most top-heavy are Jews and Episcopalians; the most bottom-heavy are Assembly of God, Southern Baptists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. This figure provides further confirmation that church-like groups tend to appeal to people who are more economically successful, while the more sectlike groups attract the less successful.

TABLE 13.2 Growth in Religious Membership

The Percentage of Americans Who Belong to a Church or Synagogue	
Year	Percentage Who Claim Membership
1776	17%
1860	37%
1890	45%
1926	58%
1975	71%
2000	68%
2007	62%

Note: The sources do not contain data on mosque membership.
Sources: Finke and Starke 1992; *Statistical Abstract* 2002: Table 64. Gallup Poll 2007.

FIGURE 13.7 Social Class and Religious Affiliation

¹ Since the income data were reported, inflation has run approximately 24 percent.

² Higher numbers mean that more of the group's members work at occupations that have higher prestige, generally those that require more education and pay more. For more information on occupational prestige, see Table 8.2 on page 203.

Source: By the author. Based on Smith and Faris 2005.

From this figure, you can see how *status consistency* (a concept we reviewed in Chapter 4) applies to religious groups. If a group ranks high (or low) on education, it is also likely to rank high (or low) on income and occupational prestige. Jews, for example, rank the highest on education, income, and occupational prestige, while Jehovah's Witnesses rank the lowest on these three measures of social class. As you can see, the Mormons are status inconsistent. They rank second in income, fourth in education, and tie for sixth in occupational prestige. Even more status inconsistent is the Assembly of God. Their members tie for third in occupational prestige but rank only eighth in income and ninth in education. This inconsistency is so jarring that there could be a problem with the sample.

Race–Ethnicity All major religious groups draw from the nation's many racial–ethnic groups. Like social class, however, race–ethnicity tends to cluster. People of Irish descent are likely to be Roman Catholics; those with Greek ancestors are likely to belong to the Greek Orthodox Church. African Americans are likely to be Protestants—

more specifically, Baptists—or to belong to fundamentalist sects.

Although many churches are integrated, it is with good reason that Sunday morning between 10 and 11 A.M. has been called “the most segregated hour in the United States.” African Americans tend to belong to African American churches, while most whites see only whites in theirs. The segregation of churches is based on custom, not on law.

Characteristics of Religious Groups

Let's examine features of the religious groups in the United States.

Diversity With its 300,000 congregations and hundreds of denominations, no religious group even comes close to being a dominant religion in the United States (*Statistical Abstract 2007*: Tables 73, 74). Table 13.3 on the next page illustrates some of this remarkable diversity.

Competition and Recruitment The many religious groups of the United States compete for clients. They even

TABLE 13.3 How U.S. Adults Identify with Religion¹

Christian	160,000,000
Protestant	108,000,000
Baptist	34,000,000
No denomination	21,300,000
Methodist	14,000,000
Lutheran	9,600,000
Pentecostal	7,600,000
Presbyterian	5,600,000
Churches of Christ	4,000,000
Episcopalian/Anglican	3,500,000
Mormon	2,800,000
United Church of Christ	1,400,000
Jehovah's Witness	1,300,000
Evangelical Church	1,000,000
Seventh Day Adventist	700,000
Church of the Nazarene	550,000
Disciples of Christ	500,000
Reformed Churches	500,000
Church of the Brethren	360,000
Mennonite	350,000
Quakers	200,000
Other	350,000
Roman Catholic	51,000,000
Eastern Orthodox	650,000
Other Religions	8,000,000
Jewish	2,800,000
Islamic	2,300,000
Buddhist	1,100,000
Hindu	800,000
Unitarian/Universalist	600,000
Pagan	150,000
Wican	150,000
Native American	100,000
Spiritualist	100,000
Other and unclassified	850,000
No Religion	30,000,000
Refused to answer	11,000,000

¹All totals must be taken as approximate. Some groups ignore reporting forms. Totals are rounded to the nearest 100,000.

Sources: *Muslim Americans 2007* (for Muslim total); *Statistical Abstract 2000*: Table 74; 2007: Table 73.

advertise in the Yellow Pages of the telephone directory and insert appealing advertising—under the guise of news—in the religion section of the Saturday or Sunday edition of the local newspapers.

The Electronic Church What began as a ministry to shut-ins and those who do not belong to a church blos-

somed into its own type of church. Its preachers, called “televangelists,” reach millions of viewers and raise millions of dollars. Some of its most famous ministries are those of Joyce Meyer, Robert Schuller (the “Crystal Cathedral”), and Pat Robertson (the 700 Club).

Many local ministers view the electronic church as a competitor. They complain that it competes for the attention and dollars of their members. Leaders of the electronic church reply that the money goes to good causes and that through its conversions, the electronic church feeds members into the local churches, strengthening, not weakening them.

Fundamentalist Revival The fundamentalist Christian churches are undergoing a revival. They teach that the Bible is literally true and that salvation comes only through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They also denounce what they see as the degeneration of U.S. culture: flagrant sex on television, in movies, and in videos; abortion; corruption in public office; premarital sex and cohabitation; and drug abuse. Their answer to these problems is firm, simple, and direct: People whose hearts are changed through religious conversion will change their lives. The mainstream churches, which offer a more remote God and less emotional involvement, fail to meet the basic religious needs of large numbers of Americans. For an example, see the Cultural Diversity in the United States box on the next page.

Secularization and the Splintering of U.S. Churches

As the model, fashionably slender, paused before the head table of African American community leaders, her gold necklace glimmering above the low-cut bodice of her emerald-green dress, the hostess, a member of the Church of God in Christ, said, “It’s now OK to wear more revealing clothes—as long as it’s done in good taste.” Then she added, “You couldn’t do this when I was a girl, but now it’s OK—and you can still worship God.” (Author’s files)

When I heard these words, I grabbed a napkin and quickly jotted them down, my sociological imagination stirred by their deep implication. As strange as it may seem, this simple event pinpoints the essence of why the Christian churches in the United States have splintered. Let’s see how this could possibly be.

The simplest explanation for why Christians don’t have just one church, or at most several, instead of the hundreds of sects and denominations that dot the U.S. landscape, is disagreements about doctrine (church teaching).

Cultural Diversity in the United States

The New Face of Religion: Pentecostals and the Spanish-Speaking Immigrants

That millions of immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries have become part of the U.S. social scene is not news. That most of them are poor isn't news, either. Almost all the immigrants who came before them were poor, too.

What is news is that many of these Latinos are abandoning the Roman Catholic religion and are embracing a form of Protestantism called Pentecostalism. Pentecostals, often referred to by the derisive term *holy rollers*, take the Bible literally. They believe there is a real heaven and hell. They lay hands on each other and pray for healings. They expect God to act in their lives in a personal way. They speak in tongues.

And they are noisily joyful about their faith.

Go into one of their storefront churches, such as those on Amsterdam Avenue in New York City—or in any of the thousands of little churches that have sprung up around the country. You'll hear music and clapping. The preachers talk about a God who is concerned about the troubles people are going through. They warn the congregation, too, about the dangers of sin—the adultery that seductively beckons; the downfall of drugs and alcohol; the dead end of laziness and extravagance. They also extol the values of thrift and hard work. As the preacher preaches, the congregation breaks out into “Amen.” “Amen, brother! Bring it on!” will shout one person, while another says, “Amen, sister. Tell it like it is!”

The preachers know what they are talking about. They work at factory jobs during the day. They know what it is to sweat for a living and that J-O-B is really spelled B-R-O-K-E. Cantankerous bosses, unpaid bills, and paychecks that run out before the month does are part of their own lives.



Religion often helps immigrants adapt to their new culture. What indications of this do you see in this photo?

As people clap and sway to the sounds of the drums and guitars—like salsa music with religious lyrics—some pray silently in tongues. Others shout out the strange sounds. Some

tongues, they believe, are messages straight from God. But no one can understand them unless someone else is given the interpretation. When this happens, people listen intently for what God has to say to them personally.

The worshippers don't come just for an hour on Sunday mornings. They come night after night, finding comfort in community and encouragement in the message and music. They can also give expression to their emotions among a like-minded people.

Pentecostalism is the fastest-growing religion in the United States, and there are perhaps 400 million

Pentecostals worldwide. This religion is also being welcomed by some among the middle class and the educated, but the middle-class arms aren't open as wide. The appeal is mainly to the poor. When the poor make the transition to the middle class—as their religion, with its emphasis on work and thrift will help them do—they are likely to seek new forms of religious expression.

When this happens, we can expect that Pentecostalism will also adapt, that the form will remain recognizable, but the fervor will be lost. For now, though, it is the fervor—the intensity that connects the individuals to God and to one another—that is the driving force of this religion. The Pentecostals would phrase this a little differently. They would say that the fervor is merely the expression of the driving force of their religion, which is the Holy Spirit.

Either way you put it, these people are on fire. And that fire is burning a new imprint on the face of religion.

For Your Consideration

Why do you think the Pentecostals are growing so fast? What effect do you think they might have on mainstream Christianity?



As theologian and sociologist Richard Niebuhr pointed out, however, there are many ways of settling doctrinal disputes besides splintering off and forming other religious organizations. Niebuhr (1929) suggested that the answer lies more in *social* change than it does in *religious* conflict.

The explanation goes like this. As was noted earlier, when a sect becomes more churchlike, tension lessens between it and the mainstream culture. Quite likely, when a sect is first established, its founders and first members are poor, or at least not very successful in worldly pursuits. Feeling like strangers in the dominant culture, they derive a good part of their identity from their religion. In their church services and lifestyle, they stress how different their values are from those of the dominant culture. They are also likely to emphasize the joys of the coming afterlife, when they will be able to escape from their present pain.

As time passes, the group's values—such as frugality and the avoidance of gambling, alcohol, and drugs—help the members become successful. As their children attain more education and become more middle class, members of this group grow more respectable in the eyes of society. They no longer experience the alienation that was felt by the founders of their group. Life's burdens don't seem as heavy, and the need for relief through an afterlife becomes less pressing. Similarly, the pleasures of the world no longer appear as threatening to the "truth." As is illustrated by the woman at the fashion show, people then attempt to harmonize their religious beliefs with their changing ideas about the culture.

This process is called the **secularization of religion**—shifting the focus from spiritual matters to the affairs of this world. Anyone familiar with today's mainstream Methodists would be surprised to know that they once were a sect. Methodists used to ban playing cards, dancing, and going to movies. They even considered circuses to be sinful. As Methodists grew more middle class, however, they began to change their views on sin. They started to dismantle the barriers that they had constructed between themselves and the outside world (Finke and Stark 1992).

Secularization leads to a splintering of the group. Adjusting to the secular culture displeases some of the group's members, especially those who have had less worldly success. These people still feel a gulf between themselves and the broader culture. For them, tension and hostility continue to be real. They see secularization

as deserting the group's fundamental truths, a "selling out" to the secular world.

After futile attempts to bring the group back to its senses, the group splinters. Those who protested the secularization of Methodism, for example, were kicked out—even though *they* represented the values around which the group had organized in the first place. The dissatisfied—who have come to be viewed as complainers—then form a sect that once again stresses its differences from the world; the need for more personal, emotional religious experiences; and salvation from the pain of living in this world. As time passes, the cycle repeats: adjustment to the dominant culture by some, continued dissatisfaction by others, and further splintering.

This process is not limited to sects, but also occurs in churches. When U.S. Episcopalians elected an openly gay bishop in 2003, some pastors and congregations splintered from the U.S. church and affiliated with the more conservative African archbishops. In an ironic twist, this made them mission congregations from Africa. Sociologists have not yet compared the income or wealth of those who stayed with the group that elected the gay bishop and those who joined the splinter groups. If such a study is done and it turns out that there is no difference, we will have to modify the secularization thesis.

The Future of Religion

Religion thrives in the most advanced scientific nations—and, as officials of Soviet Russia were disheartened to learn—in even the most ideologically hostile climate. Humans are inquiring creatures. As they reflect on life, they ask: What is the purpose of it all? Why are we born? Is there an afterlife? If so, where are we going? Out of these concerns arises this question: If there is a God, what does God want of us in this life? Does God have a preference about how we should live?

Science, including sociology, cannot answer such questions. By its very nature, science cannot tell us about four main concerns that many people have:

1. *The existence of God.* About this, science has nothing to say. No test tube has either isolated God or refuted God's existence.
2. *The purpose of life.* Although science can provide a definition of life and describe the characteristics of

living organisms, it has nothing to say about ultimate purpose.

3. *An afterlife.* Science can offer no information on this at all, for it has no tests to prove or disprove a “hereafter.”
4. *Morality.* Science can demonstrate the consequences of behavior, but not the moral superiority of one action compared with another. This means that science cannot even prove that loving your family and neighbor is superior to hurting and killing them. Science can describe death and measure consequences, but it cannot determine the moral superiority of any action, even in such an extreme example.

There is no doubt that religion will last as long as humanity lasts, for what could replace it? And if something did, and answered such questions, would it not be religion under a different name?



A basic principle of symbolic interactionism is that meaning is not inherent in an object or event, but is determined by people as they interpret the object or event. Old bones and fossils are an excellent illustration of this principle. Does this skull of *Homo erectus* “prove” evolution? Does it “disprove” creation? Such “proof” and “disproof” lie in the eye of the beholder, based on the background assumptions by which it is interpreted.

SUMMARY *and* REVIEW

Education in Global Perspective

What is a credential society, and how did it develop?

A **credential society** is one in which employers use diplomas and degrees to determine who is eligible for a job. One reason that credentialism developed is that large, anonymous societies lack the personal knowledge common to smaller groups. Educational certification is taken as evidence of a person’s ability. P. 360.

How does education compare among the Most Industrialized, Industrializing, and Least Industrialized Nations?

In general, formal education reflects a nation’s economy. Consequently, education is extensive in the Most Industrialized Nations, undergoing vast change in the Industrializing Nations, and spotty in the Least Industrialized Nations.

Japan, Russia, and Egypt provide examples of education in countries at three levels of industrialization. Pp. 363–364.

The Functionalist Perspective: Providing Social Benefits

What is the functionalist perspective on education?

Among the functions of education are the teaching of knowledge and skills, **cultural transmission of values**, social integration, **gatekeeping**, and **mainstreaming**. Functionalists also note that education has replaced some traditional family functions. Pp. 364–367.

The Conflict Perspective: Perpetuating Social Inequality

What is the conflict perspective on education?

The basic view of conflict theorists is that *education reproduces the social class structure*; that is, through such mechanisms as the **hidden curriculum** and the unequal

funding of schools, education perpetuates a society's basic social inequalities from one generation to the next. Pp. 368–369.

The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective: Teacher Expectations

What is the symbolic interactionist perspective on education?

Symbolic interactionists focus on face-to-face interaction. In examining what occurs in the classroom, they have found that student performance tends to conform to teacher and peer expectations, whether they are high or low. Pp. 369–371.

Problems in U.S. Education— and Their Solutions

What are the chief problems that face U.S. education?

In addition to violence, the major problems are low achievement as shown by SAT scores and international comparisons, **grade inflation**, **social promotion**, and **functional illiteracy**. Pp. 371–372.

What are the potential solutions to these problems?

The primary solution is to restore high educational standards, which can be done only after providing basic security for students. Any solution for improving quality must be based on expecting more of *both* students and teachers. Pp. 372–374.

What Is Religion?

Durkheim identified three essential characteristics of religion: beliefs that set the **sacred** apart from the **profane**, **rituals**, and a moral community (a **church**). Pp. 374–375.

The Functionalist Perspective

What are the functions and dysfunctions of religion?

Among the functions of religion are answering questions about ultimate meaning, providing emotional comfort, social solidarity, guidelines for everyday life, social control, and fostering social change. Among the dysfunctions of religion are religious persecution and war and terrorism. Pp. 375–376.

The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective

What aspects of religion do symbolic interactionists study?

Symbolic interactionists focus on the meanings of religion for its followers. They examine religious symbols, **rituals**, beliefs, and **religious experiences**. Pp. 376–379.

The Conflict Perspective

What aspects of religion do conflict theorists study?

Conflict theorists examine the relationship of religion to social inequalities, especially how religion reinforces a society's stratification system. P. 379.

Religion and the Spirit of Capitalism

What does the spirit of capitalism have to do with religion?

Max Weber saw religion as a primary source of social change. He analyzed how Protestantism gave rise to the **Protestant ethic**, which stimulated what he called the **spirit of capitalism**. The result was capitalism, which transformed society. Pp. 379–382.

Types of Religious Groups

What types of religious groups are there?

Sociologists divide religious groups into cults, sects, churches, and ecclesias. All religions began as **cults**. Those that survive tend to develop into **sects** and eventually into **churches**. **Ecclesias**, or state religions, are rare. Pp. 382–384.

Religion in the United States

What are the main characteristics of religion in the United States?

Membership varies by social class and race–ethnicity. Major characteristics of religious groups are diversity, competition, the electronic church, and a fundamentalist revival. Pp. 384–386.

What is the connection between secularization of religion and the splintering of churches?

Secularization of religion, a change in a religion's focus from spiritual matters to concerns of "this world," is the key to understanding why churches divide. Basically, as a cult or sect changes to accommodate its members' upward social class mobility, it changes into a church. Left dissatisfied are members who are not upwardly mobile. They tend to splinter off and form a new cult or sect, and the cycle repeats itself. Pp. 386–388.

The Future of Religion

What is the future of religion?

Because science cannot answer questions about ultimate meaning, the existence of God, or an afterlife—nor provide guidelines for morality—the need for religion will remain. In any foreseeable future, religion will prosper. Pp. 388–389.


THINKING CRITICALLY *about* Chapter 13

1. How have your experiences in education (including teachers and assignments) influenced your goals, attitudes, and values? How have your classmates influenced you? Be specific.
2. How do you think that U.S. schools can be improved?
3. Since 9/11, many people have wondered how anyone can use religion to defend or promote terrorism. How does the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on terrorism and the mind of God on page 377 help to answer this question? How do the analyses of group-think in Chapter 5 (pages 136–137) and dehumanization in Chapter 11 (pages 308–311) fit into your analysis?

BY THE NUMBERS: Changes Over Time

- Percentage of U.S. population that were college graduates in 1960: **8%**
- Percentage of U.S. population that are college graduates today: **30%**
- National average verbal scores on SATs in 1967: **543**
- National average verbal scores on SATs today: **503**
- National average math scores on SATs in 1967: **516**
- National average math scores on SATs today: **518**
- Percentage of Americans claiming membership in a church or synagogue in 1890: **45%**
- Percentage of Americans claiming membership in a church or synagogue today: **65%**
- Number of violent deaths of students at school, K–12, in 1992: **56**
- Number of violent deaths of students at school, K–12, today: **19**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

What can you find in MySocLab?  www.mysoclab.com

- **Complete Ebook**
- **Practice Tests and Video and Audio activities**
- **Mapping and Data Analysis exercises**
- **Sociology in the News**
- **Classic Readings in Sociology**
- **Research and Writing advice**

Where Can I Read More on This Topic?

Suggested readings for this chapter are listed at the back of this book.