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Chapter 12

Education and Religion

Social Issues in the News

“America’s First Muslim College to Open This Fall,” the headline said. The United States has hundreds of colleges and universities run by or affiliated with the Catholic Church and several Protestant and Jewish denominations, and now it was about to have its first Muslim college. Zaytuna College in Berkeley, California, had just sent out acceptance letters to students who would make up its inaugural class in the fall of 2010. The school’s founder said it would be a Muslim liberal arts college whose first degrees would be in Islamic law and theology and in the Arabic language. The chair of the college’s academic affairs committee explained, “We are trying to graduate well-rounded students who will be skilled in a liberal arts education with the ability to engage in a wider framework of society and the variety of issues that confront them....We are thinking of how to set up students for success. We don’t see any contradiction between religious and secular subjects.”

The college planned to rent a building in Berkeley during its first several years and was doing fund-raising to pay for the eventual construction or purchase of its own campus. It hoped to obtain academic accreditation within a decade. Because the United States has approximately 6 million Muslims whose numbers have tripled since the 1970s, college officials were optimistic that their new institution would achieve their high hopes for its success. An official with the Islamic Society of North America, which aids Muslim communities and organizations and provides chaplains for the U.S. military, applauded the new college. “It tells me that Muslims are coming of age,” he said. “This is one more thing that makes Muslims part of the mainstream of America. It is an important part of the development of our community.” (Oguntoyinbo, 2010)Oguntoyinbo, L. (2010, May 20). America’s first Muslim college to open this fall. *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://diverseeducation.com/article/13814/america-s-first-muslim-college-to-open-this-fall.html>

The opening of any college is normally cause for celebration, but the news about this particular college aroused a mixed reaction. Some people wrote positive comments on the Web page on which this news article appeared, but two anonymous writers left very negative comments. One asked, “What if they teach

radical Islam?” while the second commented, “Dose [sic] anyone know how Rome fell all those years ago? We are heading down the same road.”

As the reaction to this news story reminds us, religion and especially Islam have certainly been hot topics since 9/11, as America continues to worry about terrorist threats from people with Middle Eastern backgrounds. Many political and religious leaders urge Americans to practice religious tolerance, and advocacy groups have established programs and secondary school curricula to educate the public and students, respectively. Colleges and universities have responded with courses and workshops on Islamic culture, literature, and language.

In all of these ways, two key social institutions, education and religion, have intersected. The news story about Zaytuna College is yet another illustration of this intersection. Education and religion clearly play an important role in American life. Children and adolescents spend most of their weekday waking hours in school or doing homework or participating in extracurricular activities, and many then go on to college. Most Americans believe in a deity, three-fourths pray at least weekly, and more than half attend religious services at least monthly. Educational and religious issues continue to spark national controversy, if only because they involve our dearest values. If we can understand the place of education and religion in our society, we are better able to understand our society itself. This chapter discusses sociological perspectives on both education and religion to show the role they play in our lives and to stimulate your thinking on some of the important issues they raise.

12.1 Education

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Summarize the key developments in the history of education since the colonial period.
2. List the major functions of education.
3. Explain the problems that conflict theory sees in education.
4. Describe how symbolic interactionism understands education.

Education¹ is the social institution through which a society teaches its members the skills, knowledge, norms, and values they need to learn to become good, productive members of their society. As this definition makes clear, education is an important part of socialization. Education is both *formal* and *informal*. Formal education is often referred to as *schooling*, and as this term implies, it occurs in schools under teachers, principals, and other specially trained professionals. Informal education may occur almost anywhere, but for young children it has traditionally occurred primarily in the home, with their parents as their instructors. Day care in industrial societies is an increasing venue for young children's instruction, and education from the early years of life is thus more formal than it used to be.

A Brief History of Education in the United States

Historically, compulsory education in public schools is a relatively recent phenomenon. During the colonial period, the Puritans in what is now Massachusetts required parents to teach their children to read and also required larger towns to have an elementary school, where children learned reading, writing, and religion. In general, though, schooling was not required in the colonies, and only about 10% of colonial children, usually just the wealthiest, went to school, although others became apprentices (Urban, Jennings, & Wagoner, 2008). Urban, W. J., Jennings L., & Wagoner, J. (2008). *American education: A history* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

1. The social institution through which a society teaches its members the skills, knowledge, norms, and values they need to learn to become good, productive members of their society.

To help unify the nation after the Revolutionary War, textbooks were written to standardize spelling and pronunciation and to instill patriotism and religious beliefs in students. At the same time, these textbooks included negative stereotypes of Native Americans and certain immigrant groups. The children going to school continued primarily to be those from wealthy families. By the middle 1800s, a call

for free, compulsory education had begun, and compulsory education became widespread by the end of the century. This was an important development, as children from all social classes could now receive a free, formal education. Compulsory education was intended to further national unity and to teach immigrants “American” values. It also arose because of industrialization, as an industrial economy demanded reading, writing, and math skills much more than an agricultural economy had.

Free, compulsory education, of course, applied only to primary and secondary schools. Until the mid-1900s, very few people went to college, and those who did typically came from the fairly wealthy families. After World War II, however, college enrollments soared, and today more people are attending college than ever before, even though college attendance is still related to social class, as we shall discuss shortly.

At least two themes emerge from this brief history. One is that until very recently in the record of history, formal schooling was restricted to wealthy males. This means that boys who were not white and rich were excluded from formal schooling, as were virtually all girls, whose education was supposed to take place informally at home. Today, as we will see, race, ethnicity, social class, and, to some extent, gender continue to affect both educational achievement and the amount of learning occurring in schools.

Second, although the rise of free, compulsory education was an important development, the reasons for this development trouble some critics (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Cole, 2008). Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America: Educational reforms and the contradictions of economic life*. New York, NY: Basic Books; Cole, M. (2008). *Marxism and educational theory: Origins and issues*. New York, NY: Routledge. Because compulsory schooling began in part to prevent immigrants’ values from corrupting “American” values, they see its origins as smacking of ethnocentrism. They also criticize its intention to teach workers the skills they needed for the new industrial economy. Because most workers were very poor in this economy, these critics say, compulsory education served the interests of the upper/capitalist class much more than it served the interests of workers. It was good that workers became educated, say the critics, but in the long run their education helped the owners of capital much more than it helped the workers themselves. Whose interests are served by education remains an important question addressed by sociological perspectives on education, to which we now turn.

Sociological Perspectives on Education

The major sociological perspectives on education fall nicely into the functional, conflict, and symbolic interactionist approaches (Ballantine & Hammack, 2009). Ballantine, J. H., & Hammack, F. M. (2009). *The sociology of education: A systematic analysis* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. Table 12.1 "Theory Snapshot" summarizes what these approaches say.

Table 12.1 Theory Snapshot

Theoretical perspective	Major assumptions
Functionalism	Education serves several functions for society. These include (a) socialization, (b) social integration, (c) social placement, and (d) social and cultural innovation. Latent functions include child care, the establishment of peer relationships, and lowering unemployment by keeping high school students out of the full-time labor force.
Conflict theory	Education promotes social inequality through the use of tracking and standardized testing and the impact of its “hidden curriculum.” Schools differ widely in their funding and learning conditions, and this type of inequality leads to learning disparities that reinforce social inequality.
Symbolic interactionism	This perspective focuses on social interaction in the classroom, on the playground, and in other school venues. Specific research finds that social interaction in schools affects the development of gender roles and that teachers’ expectations of pupils’ intellectual abilities affect how much pupils learn.

The Functions of Education

Functional theory stresses the functions that education serves in fulfilling a society’s various needs. Perhaps the most important function of education is *socialization*. If children need to learn the norms, values, and skills they need to function in society, then education (as Chapter 3 "Socialization and Social Interaction" noted) is a primary vehicle for such learning. Schools teach the three Rs, as we all know, but they also teach many of the society’s norms and values. In the United States, these norms and values include respect for authority, patriotism (remember the Pledge of Allegiance?), punctuality, individualism, and competition. Regarding these last two values, American students from an early age compete as individuals over grades and other rewards. The situation is quite the opposite in Japan, where, as we saw in Chapter 3 "Socialization and Social Interaction", children learn the traditional Japanese values of harmony and group belonging from their schooling (Schneider & Silverman, 2010). Schneider, L., & Silverman, A.

(2010). *Global sociology: Introducing five contemporary societies* (5th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. They learn to value their membership in their homeroom, or *kumi*, and are evaluated more on their *kumi*'s performance than on their own individual performance. How well a Japanese child's *kumi* does is more important than how well the child does as an individual.

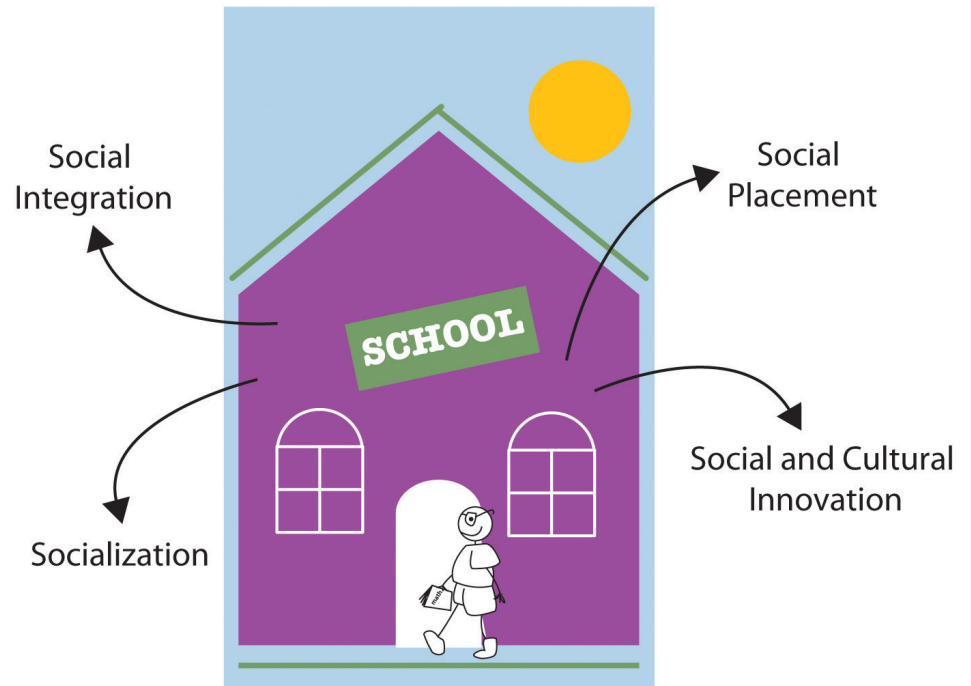
A second function of education is *social integration*. For a society to work, functionalists say, people must subscribe to a common set of beliefs and values. As we saw, the development of such common views was a goal of the system of free, compulsory education that developed in the 19th century. Thousands of immigrant children in the United States today are learning English, U.S. history, and other subjects that help prepare them for the workforce and integrate them into American life. Such integration is a major goal of the English-only movement, whose advocates say that only English should be used to teach children whose native tongue is Spanish, Vietnamese, or whatever other language their parents speak at home. Critics of this movement say it slows down these children's education and weakens their ethnic identity (Schildkraut, 2005). Schildkraut, D. J. (2005). *Press "one" for English: Language policy, public opinion, and American identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

A third function of education is *social placement*. Beginning in grade school, students are identified by teachers and other school officials either as bright and motivated or as less bright and even educationally challenged. Depending on how they are identified, children are taught at the level that is thought to suit them best. In this way they are prepared in the most appropriate way possible for their later station in life. Whether this process works as well as it should is an important issue, and we explore it further when we discuss school tracking shortly.

Social and cultural innovation is a fourth function of education. Our scientists cannot make important scientific discoveries and our artists and thinkers cannot come up with great works of art, poetry, and prose unless they have first been educated in the many subjects they need to know for their chosen path.

Education also involves several *latent* functions, functions that are by-products of going to school and receiving an education rather than a direct effect of the education itself. One of these is *child care*. Once a child starts kindergarten and then first grade, for several hours a day the child is taken care of for free. The *establishment of peer relationships* is another latent function of schooling. Most of us met many of our friends while we were in school at whatever grade level, and some of those friendships endure the rest of our lives. A final latent function of education is that it *keeps millions of high school students out of the full-time labor force*. This fact keeps the unemployment rate lower than it would be if they were in the labor force.

Figure 12.1 *The Functions of Education*



Schools ideally perform many important functions in modern society. These include socialization, social integration, social placement, and social and cultural innovation.

Education and Inequality

Conflict theory does not dispute most of the functions just described. However, it does give some of them a different slant and talks about various ways in which education perpetuates social inequality (Hill, Macrine, & Gabbard, 2010; Liston, 1990). Hill, D., Macrine, S., & Gabbard, D. (Eds.). (2010). *Capitalist education: Globalisation and the politics of inequality*. New York, NY: Routledge; Liston, D. P. (1990). *Capitalist schools: Explanation and ethics in radical studies of schooling*. New York, NY: Routledge. One example involves the function of social placement. As most schools track their students starting in grade school, the students thought by their teachers to be bright are placed in the faster tracks (especially in reading and arithmetic), while the slower students are placed in the slower tracks; in high school, three common tracks are the college track, vocational track, and general track.

Such *tracking* does have its advantages; it helps ensure that bright students learn as much as their abilities allow them, and it helps ensure that slower students are not taught over their heads. But, conflict theorists say, tracking also helps perpetuate

social inequality by *locking* students into faster and lower tracks. Worse yet, several studies show that students' social class and race and ethnicity affect the track into which they are placed, even though their intellectual abilities and potential should be the only things that matter: white, middle-class students are more likely to be tracked "up," while poorer students and students of color are more likely to be tracked "down." Once they are tracked, students learn more if they are tracked up and less if they are tracked down. The latter tend to lose self-esteem and begin to think they have little academic ability and thus do worse in school because they were tracked down. In this way, tracking is thought to be good for those tracked up and bad for those tracked down. Conflict theorists thus say that tracking perpetuates social inequality based on social class and race and ethnicity (Ansalone, 2006; Oakes, 2005). Ansalone, G. (2006). Tracking: A return to Jim Crow. *Race, gender & class*, 13, 1–2; Oakes, J. (2005). *Keeping track: How schools structure inequality* (2nd ed.). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Social inequality is also perpetuated through the widespread use of standardized tests. Critics say these tests continue to be culturally biased, as they include questions whose answers are most likely to be known by white, middle-class students, whose backgrounds have afforded them various experiences that help them answer the questions. They also say that scores on standardized tests reflect students' socioeconomic status and experiences in addition to their academic abilities. To the extent this critique is true, standardized tests perpetuate social inequality (Grotsky, Warren, & Felts, 2008). Grotsky, E., Warren, J. R., & Felts, E. (2008). Testing and social stratification in American education. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34(1), 385–404.

As we will see, schools in the United States also differ mightily in their resources, learning conditions, and other aspects, all of which affect how much students can learn in them. Simply put, schools are unequal, and their very inequality helps perpetuate inequality in the larger society. Children going to the worst schools in urban areas face many more obstacles to their learning than those going to well-funded schools in suburban areas. Their lack of learning helps ensure they remain trapped in poverty and its related problems.

Conflict theorists also say that schooling teaches a **hidden curriculum**², by which they mean a set of values and beliefs that support the status quo, including the existing social hierarchy (Booher-Jennings, 2008). Booher-Jennings, J. (2008). Learning to label: Socialisation, gender, and the hidden curriculum of high-stakes testing. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 29, 149–160. Chapter 3 "Socialization and Social Interaction"'s discussion of socialization first presented the concept of the hidden curriculum by having you pretend you were a ruler of a new society who wanted its children to grow up loving their country and respecting your authority. Although no one plots this behind closed doors, our schoolchildren learn patriotic

2. A set of values and beliefs learned in school that support the status quo, including the existing social hierarchy.

values and respect for authority from the books they read and from various classroom activities.

Symbolic Interactionism and School Behavior

Symbolic interactionist studies of education examine social interaction in the classroom, on the playground, and in other school venues. These studies help us understand what happens in the schools themselves, but they also help us also understand how what occurs in school is relevant for the larger society. Some studies, for example, show how children’s playground activities reinforce gender role socialization. Girls tend to play more cooperative games, while boys play more competitive sports (Thorne, 1993) (see [Chapter 8 "Gender and Gender Inequality"](#)). Thorne, B. (1993). *Gender play: Girls and boys in school*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Another body of research shows that teachers’ views about students can affect how much the students learn. When teachers think students are smart, they tend to spend more time with them, to call on them, and to praise them when they give the right answer. Not surprisingly these students learn more because of their teachers’ behavior. But when teachers think students are less bright, they tend to spend less time with them and in other ways act in a way that leads the students to learn less. One of the first studies to find this example of a self-fulfilling prophecy was conducted by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson (1968). Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. (1968). *Pygmalion in the classroom*. New York, NY: Holt. They tested a group of students at the beginning of the school year and told their teachers which were bright and which were not. They tested the students again at the end of the school year; not surprisingly the bright students had learned more during the year than the less bright ones. But it turned out that the researchers had randomly decided which students would be designated bright and less bright. Because the “bright” students learned more during the school year without actually being brighter at the beginning, their teachers’ behavior must have been the reason. In fact, their teachers did spend more time with them and praised them more often than was true for the “less bright” students. To the extent this type of self-fulfilling prophecy occurs, it helps us understand why tracking is bad for the students tracked down.

Figure 12.2



Research guided by the symbolic interactionist perspective suggests that teachers’ expectations may influence how much their students learn. When teachers expect little of their students, their students tend to learn less.

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Other research focuses on how teachers treat girls and boys. Several studies from the 1970s through the 1990s found that teachers call on boys more often and praise them more often (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 1998; Jones & Dindia, 2004). American Association of University Women Educational Foundation. (1998). *Gender gaps: Where schools still fail our children*. Washington, DC: American Association of University Women Educational Foundation; Jones, S. M., & Dindia, K. (2004). A meta-analytic perspective on sex equity in the classroom. *Review of Educational Research*, 74, 443–471. Teachers did not do this consciously, but their behavior nonetheless sent an implicit message to girls that math and science are not for girls and that they are not suited to do well in these subjects. This body of research stimulated efforts to educate teachers about the ways in which they may unwittingly send these messages and about strategies they could use to promote greater interest and achievement by girls in math and science (Battey, Kafai, Nixon, & Kao, 2007). Battey, D., Kafai, Y., Nixon, A. S., & Kao, L. L. (2007). Professional development for teachers on gender equity in the sciences: Initiating the conversation. *Teachers College Record*, 109(1), 221–243.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- At least two themes emerge from the history of education. The first is that until very recently in the record of history, formal schooling was restricted to wealthy males. The second is that the rise of free, compulsory education was an important development that nonetheless has been criticized for orienting workers in the 19th century to be disciplined and to obey authority.
- The functions of education include socialization, social integration, social placement, and social and cultural innovation.
- Education is said for several reasons to contribute to social inequality and to involve a hidden curriculum that stifles independent thinking.

FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Write a brief essay in which you discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the rise of free, compulsory education.
2. Review how the functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist perspectives understand and explain education. Which of these three approaches do you most prefer? Why?

12.2 Education in the United States

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Summarize social class, gender, and racial and ethnic differences in educational attainment.
2. Describe the impact that education has on income.
3. Discuss how education affects social and moral attitudes.

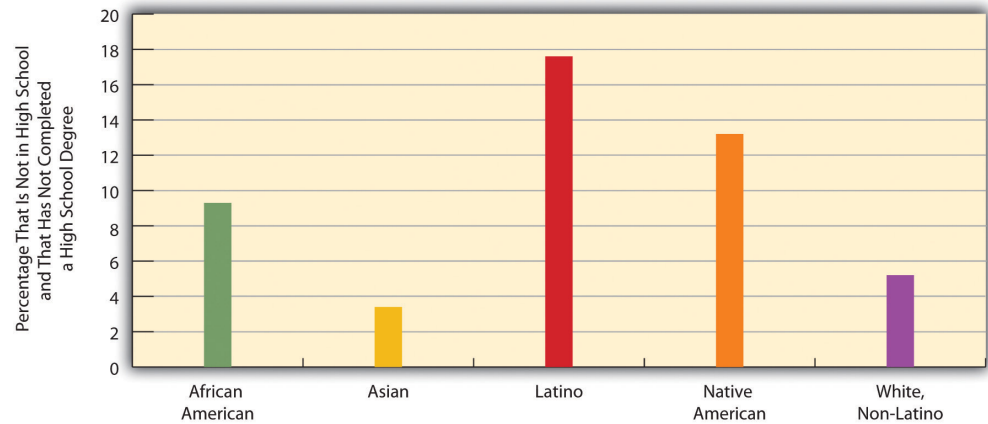
Education in the United States is a massive social institution involving millions of people and billions of dollars. About 75 million people, almost one-fourth of the U.S. population, attend school at all levels. This number includes 40 million in grades pre-K through 8, 16 million in high school, and 19 million in college (including graduate and professional school). They attend some 132,000 elementary and secondary schools and about 4,200 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities and are taught by about 4.8 million teachers and professors (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *Statistical abstract of the United States: 2010*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab> Education is obviously a huge social institution.

Correlates of Educational Attainment

About 65% of U.S. high school graduates enroll in college the following fall. This is a very high figure by international standards, as college in many other industrial nations is reserved for the very small percentage of the population who pass rigorous entrance exams. They are the best of the brightest in their nations, whereas higher education in the United States is open to all who graduate high school. Even though that is true, our chances of achieving a college degree are greatly determined at birth, as social class and race and ethnicity have a significant effect on access to college. They affect whether students drop out of high school, in which case they obviously do not go on to college; they affect the chances of getting good grades in school and good scores on college entrance exams; they affect whether a family can afford to send its children to college; and they affect the chances of staying in college and obtaining a degree versus dropping out. For these reasons, educational attainment depends heavily on family income and race and ethnicity.

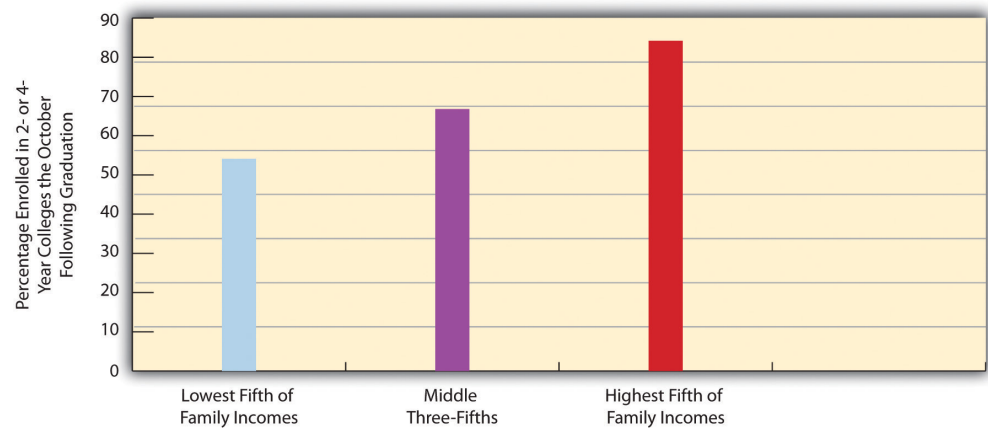
Figure 12.3 "Race, Ethnicity, and High School Dropout Rate, 16–24-Year-Olds, 2009" shows how race and ethnicity affect dropping out of high school. The dropout rate is highest for Latinos and Native Americans and lowest for Asians and whites. One way of illustrating how income and race and ethnicity affect the chances of achieving a college degree is to examine the percentage of high school graduates who enroll in college immediately following graduation. As **Figure 12.4 "Family Income and Percentage of High School Graduates Who Attend College Immediately After Graduation, 2009"** shows, students from families in the highest income bracket are more likely than those in the lowest bracket to attend college. For race/ethnicity, it is useful to see the percentage of persons 25 or older who have at least a 4-year college degree. As **Figure 12.5 "Race, Ethnicity, and Percentage of Persons 25 or Older With a 4-Year College Degree, 2009"** shows, this percentage varies significantly, with African Americans and Latinos least likely to have a degree.

Figure 12.3 Race, Ethnicity, and High School Dropout Rate, 16–24-Year-Olds, 2009



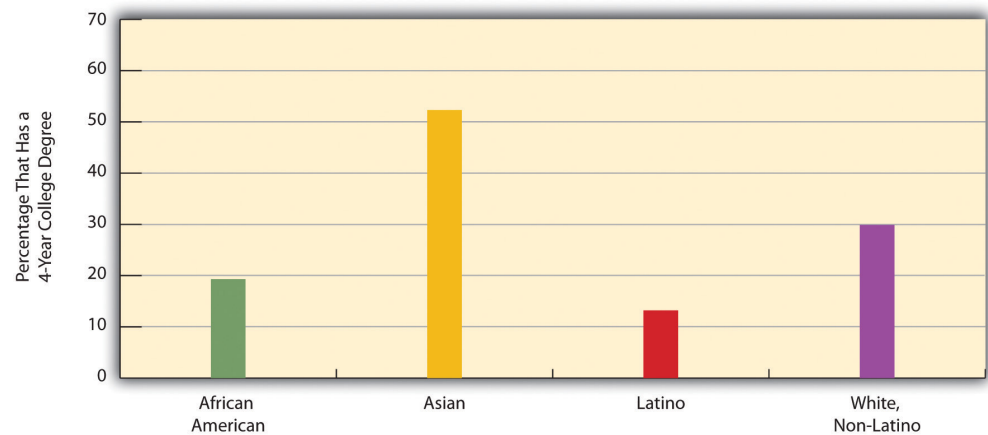
Source: Data from Aud, S., Hussar, W., Kena, G., Bianco, K., Frohlich, L., Kemp, J., & Tahan, K. (2011). *The condition of education 2011* (NCES 2011-033). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

Figure 12.4 Family Income and Percentage of High School Graduates Who Attend College Immediately After Graduation, 2009



Source: Data from Aud, S., Hussar, W., Kena, G., Bianco, K., Frohlich, L., Kemp, J., & Tahan, K. (2011). *The condition of education 2011* (NCES 2011-033). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

Figure 12.5 Race, Ethnicity, and Percentage of Persons 25 or Older With a 4-Year College Degree, 2009



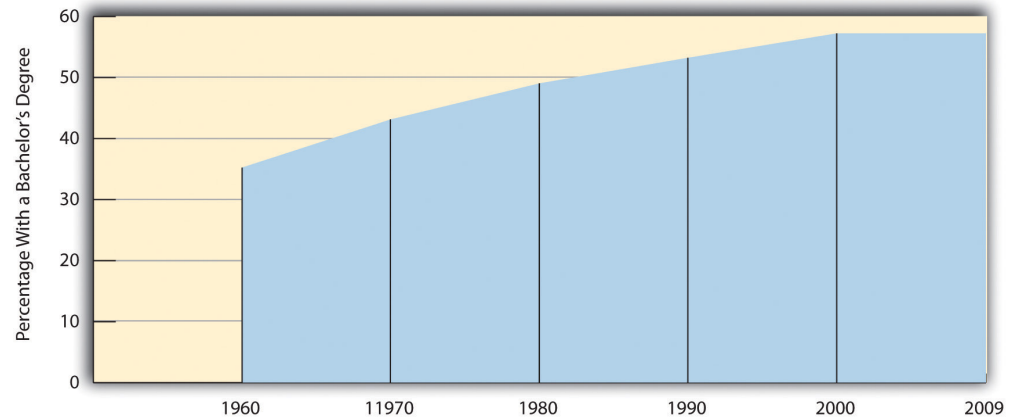
Source: Data from U.S. Census Bureau. (2011). *Statistical abstract of the United States: 2011*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab>.

Why do African Americans and Latinos have lower educational attainment? Two factors are commonly cited: (a) the underfunded and otherwise inadequate schools that children in both groups often attend and (b) the higher poverty of their families and lower education of their parents that often leave them ill-prepared for school even before they enter kindergarten (Ballantine & Hammack, 2009; Yeung &

Pfeiffer, 2009).Ballantine, J. H., & Hammack, F. M. (2009). *The sociology of education: A systematic analysis* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall; Yeung, W.-J. J., & Pfeiffer, K. M. (2009). The black–white test score gap and early home environment. *Social Science Research*, 38(2), 412–437.

Does gender affect educational attainment? The answer is yes, but perhaps not in the way you expect. If we do not take age into account, slightly more men than women have a college degree: 30.1% of men and 29.1% of women. This difference reflects the fact that women were less likely than men in earlier generations to go to college. But now there is a gender difference in the other direction: women now earn more than 57% of all bachelor’s degrees, up from just 35% in 1960 (see [Figure 12.6 "Percentage of All Bachelor’s Degrees Received by Women, 1960–2009"](#)).

Figure 12.6 Percentage of All Bachelor’s Degrees Received by Women, 1960–2009



Source: Data from U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *Statistical abstract of the United States: 2010*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab>.

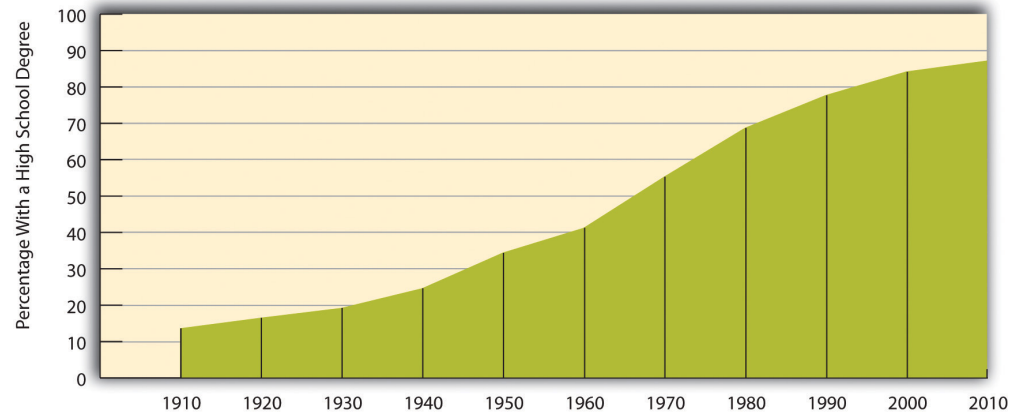
The Difference Education Makes: Income

Have you ever applied for a job that required a high school degree? Are you going to college in part because you realize you will need a college degree for a higher-paying job? As these questions imply, the United States is a **credential society**³ (Collins, 1979). Collins, R. (1979). *The credential society: An historical sociology of education and stratification*. New York, NY: Academic Press. This means at least two things. First, a high school or college degree (or beyond) indicates that a person has acquired the needed knowledge and skills for various jobs. Second, a degree at some level is a requirement for most jobs. As you know full well, a college degree today is a virtual requirement for a decent-paying job. Over the years the ante has been upped considerably, as in earlier generations a high school degree, if even that, was

3. A society in which higher education is seen as evidence of the attainment of the needed knowledge and skills for various kinds of jobs.

all that was needed, if only because so few people graduated from high school to begin with (see [Figure 12.7 "Percentage of Population 25 or Older With at Least a High School Degree, 1910–2010"](#)). With so many people graduating from high school today, a high school degree is not worth as much. Then, too, today's technological and knowledge-based postindustrial society increasingly requires skills and knowledge that only a college education brings.

Figure 12.7 Percentage of Population 25 or Older With at Least a High School Degree, 1910–2010



Source: Data from Snyder, T. D., & Dillow, S. A. (2011). *Digest of education statistics 2010*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

A credential society also means that people with more educational attainment achieve higher incomes. Annual earnings are indeed much higher for people with more education (see [Figure 12.9 "Educational Attainment and Mean Annual Earnings, 2009"](#)). As earlier chapters indicated, gender and race/ethnicity affect the payoff we get from our education, but education itself still makes a huge difference for our incomes.

Figure 12.8

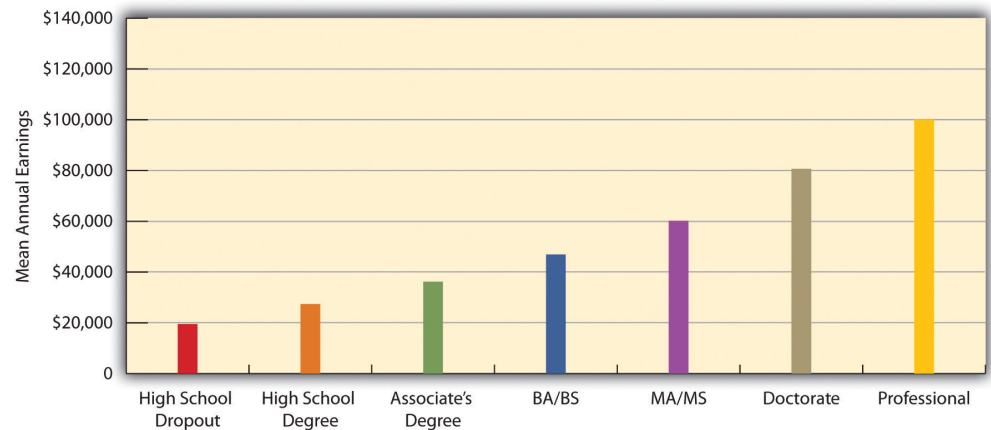


On the average, college graduates have much higher annual earnings than high school graduates. How much does this

Figure 12.9 Educational Attainment and Mean Annual Earnings, 2009

consequence affect why you decided to go to college?

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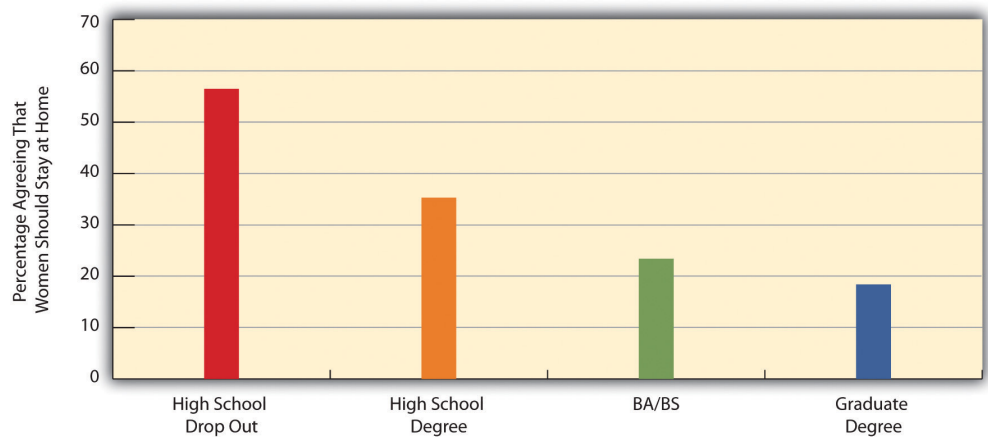
Source: Data from U.S. Census Bureau. (2011). *Statistical abstract of the United States: 2011*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab>.

The Difference Education Makes: Attitudes

Education also makes a difference for our attitudes. Researchers use different strategies to determine this effect. They compare adults with different levels of education; they compare college seniors with first-year college students; and sometimes they even study a group of students when they begin college and again when they are about to graduate. However they do so, they typically find that education leads us to be more tolerant and even approving of nontraditional beliefs and behaviors and less likely to hold various kinds of prejudices (McClelland & Linnander, 2006; Moore & Ovardia, 2006).McClelland, K., & Linnander, E. (2006). The role of contact and information in racial attitude change among white college students. *Sociological Inquiry*, 76(1), 81–115; Moore, L. M., & Ovardia, S. (2006). Accounting for spatial variation in tolerance: The effects of education and religion. *Social Forces*, 84(4), 2205–2222. Racial prejudice and sexism, two types of belief explored in previous chapters, all reduce with education. Education has these effects because the material we learn in classes and the experiences we undergo with greater schooling all teach us new things and challenge traditional ways of thinking and acting.

We see evidence of education’s effect in [Figure 12.10 "Education and Agreement That “It Is Much Better for Everyone Involved if the Man Is the Achiever Outside the Home and the Woman Takes Care of the Home and Family”](#)”, which depicts the relationship in the General Social Survey between education and agreement with the statement that “it is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.” College-educated respondents are much less likely than those without a high school degree to agree with this statement.

Figure 12.10 Education and Agreement That “It Is Much Better for Everyone Involved if the Man Is the Achiever Outside the Home and the Woman Takes Care of the Home and Family”



Source: Data from General Social Survey, 2010.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Social class, race and ethnicity, and gender all influence the degree of educational attainment.
- Education has a significant impact both on income and on social and cultural attitudes. Higher levels of education are associated with higher incomes and with less conservative beliefs on social and cultural issues.

FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Do you think the government should take steps to try to reduce racial and ethnic differences in education, or do you think it should take a hands-off approach? Explain your answer.
2. Why do you think lower levels of education are associated with more conservative beliefs and social and cultural issues? What is it about education that often leads to less conservative beliefs on these issues?

12.3 Issues and Problems in Education

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe how schooling in the United States helps perpetuate social inequality.
2. Explain the difference between de jure segregation and de facto segregation.
3. Summarize the evidence on the effectiveness of single-sex education.
4. Describe the extent of school violence and the controversy over zero-tolerance policies.

The education system today faces many issues and problems of interest not just to educators and families but also to sociologists and other social scientists. We cannot discuss all of these issues here, but we will highlight some of the most interesting and important.

Schools and Inequality

Earlier we mentioned that schools differ greatly in their funding, their conditions, and other aspects. Noted author and education critic Jonathan Kozol refers to these differences as “savage inequalities,” to quote the title of one of his books (Kozol, 1991). Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America’s schools*. New York, NY: Crown. Kozol’s concern over inequality in the schools stemmed from his experience as a young teacher in a public elementary school in a Boston inner-city neighborhood in the 1960s. Kozol was shocked to see that his school was literally falling apart. The physical plant was decrepit, with plaster falling off the walls and bathrooms and other facilities substandard. Classes were large, and the school was so overcrowded that Kozol’s fourth-grade class had to meet in an auditorium, which it shared with another class, the school choir, and, for a time, a group of students practicing for the Christmas play. Kozol’s observations led to the writing of his first, award-winning book, *Death at an Early Age* (Kozol, 1967). Kozol, J. (1967). *Death at an early age: The destruction of the hearts and minds of Negro children in the Boston public schools*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Figure 12.11



Jonathan Kozol has written movingly of “savage inequalities” in American schools arising from large differences in their funding and in the condition of their physical facilities.

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Kozol left this school after being fired for departing from the prescribed curriculum by teaching poems by Robert Frost and Langston Hughes to his fourth graders. He then taught in a wealthy school in one of Boston's suburbs, where his class had only 21 students. The conditions he saw there were far superior to those in his inner-city Boston school. "The shock of going from one of the poorest schools to one of the wealthiest cannot be overstated," he later wrote (Kozol, 1991, p. 2). Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools*. New York, NY: Crown.

During the late 1980s, Kozol (1991) Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools*. New York, NY: Crown. traveled around the country and systematically compared public schools in several cities' inner-city neighborhoods to those in the cities' suburbs. Everywhere he went, he found great discrepancies in school spending and in the quality of instruction. In schools in Camden, New Jersey, for example, spending per pupil was less than half the amount spent in the nearby, much wealthier town of Princeton. Chicago and New York City schools spent only about half the amount that some of their suburbs spent.

Learning From Other Societies

Successful Schooling in Denmark

Denmark's model for schooling from the earliest years up through high school offers several important lessons for U.S. education. The Danish model reflects that nation's strong belief that significant income inequality causes many problems and that it is the role of government to help the poorest members of society. This philosophy is seen in both the Danish approach to early childhood education and its approach to secondary schooling (Morrill, 2007). Morrill, R. (2007). Denmark: Lessons for American principals and teachers? In D. S. Eitzen (Ed.), *Solutions to social problems: Lessons from other societies* (pp. 125–130). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

In early childhood education, Denmark's policies also reflect its recognition of the importance of child cognitive and emotional development during the first few years of life, as well as its recognition to take special steps to help children of families living in poverty. Accordingly, along with several other Nordic and Western European nations, Denmark provides preschool and day care education for all children. According to one Danish scholar, "intervention in day-care/pre-school is considered the best way to give children a good beginning in life, particularly socially endangered children. [T]he dominant view is that the earlier children develop academic skills and knowledge the better, as these skills will enable them to participate in society on equal terms with children of the same age" (Jensen, 2009, p. 6). Jensen, B. (2009). A nordic approach to early childhood education (ECE) and socially endangered children. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 17(1), 7–21.

Once students start elementary school, they join a class of about 20 students. Rather than being tracked (grouped by ability), students are simply assigned to a class with other children from their neighborhood. The class remains with the same "class teacher" from grades 1 through 9; this teacher instructs them in Danish language and literature. Other teachers teach them subjects such as arithmetic/mathematics, music, social studies, and science. Because the "class teacher" is with the students for so many years, they get to know each other very well, and the teacher and each child's parents also become very well acquainted. These rather close relationships help the teacher deal with any academic or behavioral problems that might occur. Because a class stays together for 9 years, the students develop close relationships with each other

and a special sense of belonging to their class and to their school (Morrill, 2007).Morrill, R. (2007). Denmark: Lessons for American principals and teachers? In D. S. Eitzen (Ed.), *Solutions to social problems: Lessons from other societies* (pp. 125–130). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

The commitment to free or low-cost, high-quality early childhood education found in Denmark and many other Nordic and Western European nations is lacking in the United States, where parents who desire such education for their children usually must pay hundreds of dollars monthly. Many education scholars think the United States would do well to follow the example of these other nations in this regard. The interesting “class teacher” model in Denmark’s lower grades seems to provide several advantages that the United States should also consider. In both these respects, the United States may have much to learn from Denmark’s approach to how children should learn.

These numbers were reflected in other differences Kozol found when he visited city and suburban schools. In East St. Louis, Illinois, where most of the residents are poor and almost all are African American, schools had to shut down once because of sewage backups. The high school’s science labs were 30 to 50 years out of date when Kozol visited them; the biology lab had no dissecting kits. A history teacher had 110 students but only 26 textbooks, some of which were missing their first 100 pages. At one of the city’s junior high schools, many window frames lacked any glass, and the hallways were dark because light bulbs were missing or not working. Visitors could smell urinals 100 feet from the bathroom. When he visited an urban high school in New Jersey, Kozol found it had no showers for gym students, who had to wait 20 minutes to shoot one basketball because seven classes would use the school’s gym at the same time.

Contrast these schools with those Kozol visited in suburbs. A high school in a Chicago suburb had seven gyms and an Olympic-size swimming pool. Students there could take classes in seven foreign languages. A suburban New Jersey high school offered 14 AP courses, fencing, golf, ice hockey, and lacrosse, and the school district there had 10 music teachers and an extensive music program.

From his observations, Kozol concluded that the United States is shortchanging its children in poor rural and urban areas. As we saw in [Chapter 11 "The Family"](#), poor children start out in life with many strikes against them. The schools they attend compound their problems and help ensure that the American ideal of equal opportunity for all remains just that—an ideal—rather than reality. As Kozol (1991,

p. 233)Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools*. New York, NY: Crown. observed, "All our children ought to be allowed a stake in the enormous richness of America. Whether they were born to poor white Appalachians or to wealthy Texans, to poor black people in the Bronx or to rich people in Manhasset or Winnetka, they are all quite wonderful and innocent when they are small. We soil them needlessly."

Although the book in which Kozol reported these conditions was published about 20 years ago, ample evidence indicates that little, if anything, has changed in the poor schools of the United States since then, with large funding differences continuing. In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for example, annual per-pupil expenditure is about \$9,000; in nearby Lower Merion Township, it is more than twice as high, at about \$19,000. Just a few years ago, a news report discussed public schools in Washington, DC. More than 75% of the schools in the city had a leaking roof at the time the report was published, and 87% had electrical problems, some of which involved shocks or sparks. Most of the schools' cafeterias, 85%, had health violations, including peeling paint near food and rodent and roach infestation. Thousands of requests for building repairs, including 1,100 labeled "urgent" or "dangerous," had been waiting more than a year to be addressed. More than one-third of the schools had a mouse infestation, and in one elementary school, there were so many mice that the students gave them names and drew their pictures. An official with the city's school system said, "I don't know if anybody knows the magnitude of problems at D.C. public schools. It's mind-boggling" (Keating & Haynes, 2007, p. A1).Keating, D., & Haynes, V. D. (2007, June 10). Can D.C. schools be fixed? *The Washington Post*, p. A1.

Although it is widely assumed that school conditions like the ones in Washington, DC, and those depicted in Kozol's books impair student learning, there is surprisingly little research on this issue. Addressing this scholarly neglect, a recent study found that poor school conditions indeed impair learning, in part because they reduce students' attendance, which in turn impairs their learning (Durán-Narucki, 2008).Durán-Narucki, V. (2008). School building condition, school attendance, and academic achievement in New York City public schools: A mediation model. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 28(3), 278–286.

School Segregation

A related issue to inequality in the schools is school segregation. Before 1954, schools in the South were segregated by law (**de jure segregation**⁴). Communities and states had laws that dictated which schools white children attended and which schools African American children attended. Schools were either all white or all African American, and, inevitably, white schools were much better funded than African American schools. Then in 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed de jure

4. School segregation stemming from legal requirements.

school segregation in its famous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. In this decision the Court explicitly overturned its earlier, 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which said that schools could be racially separate but equal. *Brown* rejected this conclusion as contrary to American egalitarian ideals and as also not supported by empirical evidence, which finds that segregated schools are indeed unequal. Southern school districts fought the *Brown* decision with legal machinations, and de jure school segregation did not really end in the South until the civil rights movement won its major victories a decade later.

Meanwhile, northern schools were also segregated and, in the years since the *Brown* decision, have become even more segregated. School segregation in the North stemmed, both then and now, not from the law but from neighborhood residential patterns. Because children usually go to schools near their homes, if adjacent neighborhoods are all white or all African American, then the schools children from these neighborhoods attend will also be all white or all African American, or mostly so. This type of segregation is called **de facto segregation**⁵.

Today many children continue to go to schools that are segregated because of neighborhood residential patterns, a situation that Kozol (2005) Kozol, J. (2005). *The shame of the nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America*. New York, NY: Crown. calls “apartheid schooling.” About 40% of African American and Latino children attend schools that are very segregated (at least 90% of their students are of color); this level of segregation is higher than it was four decades ago. Although such segregation is legal, it still results in schools that are all African American and/or all Latino and that suffer severely from lack of funding, poor physical facilities, and inadequate teachers (Orfield, 2009). Orfield, G. (2009). *Reviving the goal of an integrated society: A 21st century challenge*. Los Angeles: The Civil Rights Project, University of California at Los Angeles.

During the 1960s and 1970s, states, municipalities, and federal courts tried to reduce de facto segregation by busing urban African American children to suburban white schools and, less often, by busing white suburban children to African American urban schools. Busing inflamed passions as perhaps few other issues during those decades (Lukas, 1985). Lukas, J. A. (1985). *Common ground: A turbulent decade in the lives of three American families*. New York, NY: Knopf. White parents opposed it because they did not want their children bused to urban schools, where, they feared, the children would receive an inferior education and face risks to their safety. The racial prejudice that many white parents shared heightened their concerns over these issues. African American parents were more likely to see the need for busing, but they, too, wondered about its merits, especially because it was their children who were bused most often and faced racial hostility when they entered formerly all-white schools.

5. School segregation stemming from neighborhood residential patterns.

As one possible solution to reduce school segregation, some cities have established *magnet schools*, schools for high-achieving students of all races to which the students and their families apply for admission (Davis, 2007). Davis, M. R. (2007). Magnet schools and diversity. *Education Week*, 26(18), 9. Although these schools do help some students whose families are poor and of color, their impact on school segregation has been minimal because the number of magnet schools is low and because they are open only to the very best students who, by definition, are also few in number. Some critics also say that magnet schools siphon needed resources from public school systems and that their reliance on standardized tests makes it difficult for African American and Latino students to gain admission.

School Vouchers and School Choice

Another issue involving schools today is *school choice*. In a school choice program, the government gives parents certificates, or vouchers, that they can use as tuition at private or parochial (religious) schools.

Advocates of school choice programs say they give poor parents an option for high-quality education they otherwise would not be able to afford. These programs, the advocates add, also help improve the public schools by forcing them to compete for students with their private and parochial counterparts. In order to keep a large number of parents from using vouchers to send their children to the latter schools, public schools have to upgrade their facilities, improve their instruction, and undertake other steps to make their brand of education an attractive alternative. In this way, school choice advocates argue, vouchers have a “competitive impact” that forces public schools to make themselves more attractive to prospective students (Walberg, 2007). Walberg, H. J. (2007). *School choice: The findings*. Washington, DC: Cato Institute.

Critics of school choice programs say they hurt the public schools by decreasing their enrollments and therefore their funding. Public schools do not have the money now to compete with private and parochial ones, and neither will they have the money to compete with them if vouchers become more widespread. Critics also worry that voucher programs will lead to a “brain drain” of the most academically motivated children and families from low-income schools (Caldas & Bankston, 2005). Caldas, S. J., & Bankston, C. L., III. (2005). *Forced to fail: The paradox of school desegregation*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Because school choice programs and school voucher systems are still relatively new, scholars have not yet had time to assess whether they improve the academic achievement of the students who attend them. Although some studies do find small improvements, methodological problems make it difficult to reach any firm

conclusions at this point (DeLuca & Dayton, 2009). DeLuca, S., & Dayton, E. (2009). Switching social contexts: The effects of housing mobility and school choice programs on youth outcomes. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 35(1), 457–491. Although there is similarly little research on the impact of school choice programs on funding and other aspects of public school systems, some evidence does indicate a negative impact. In Milwaukee, for example, enrollment decline from the use of vouchers cost the school system \$26 million in state aid during the 1990s, forcing a rise in property taxes to replace the lost funds. Because the students who left the Milwaukee school system came from most of its 157 public schools, only a few left any one school, diluting the voucher system’s competitive impact. Another city, Cleveland, also lost state aid in the late 1990s because of the use of vouchers, and there, too, the competitive impact was small. Thus, although school choice programs may give some families alternatives to public schools, they might not have the competitive impact on public schools that their advocates claim, and they may cost public school systems state aid (Cooper, 1999; Lewin, 1999). Cooper, K. J. (1999, June 25). Under vouchers, status quo rules. *The Washington Post*, p. A3; Lewin, T. (1999, March 27). Few clear lessons from nation’s first school-choice program. *The New York Times*, p. A10.

Single-Sex Schools and Classes

Before the late 1960s and early 1970s, many colleges and universities, including several highly selective campuses, were single-sex institutions. Since that time, almost all the male colleges and many of the female colleges have gone coed. A few women’s colleges still remain, as their administrators and alumnae say that women can achieve much more in a women’s college than in a coed institution. The issue of single-sex institutions has been more muted at the secondary school level, as most public schools have been coeducational since the advent of free, compulsory education during the 19th century. However, several private schools were single-sex ones from their outset, and many of these remain today. Still, the trend throughout the educational world was toward coeducation.

Since the 1990s, however, some education specialists and other observers have considered whether single-sex secondary schools, or at least single-sex classes, might make sense for girls or for boys; in response, single-sex classes and single-sex schools have arisen in at least 17

Figure 12.12



Single-sex schools and classes have become more popular for several reasons. The research so far indicates that single-sex education may be beneficial in

U.S. cities. The argument for single-sex learning for girls rests on the same reasons advanced by advocates for women's colleges: girls can do better academically, and perhaps especially in math and science classes, when they are by themselves. The argument for boys rests on a different set of reasons (Sax, 2009). Sax, L. (2009). *Boys adrift: The five factors driving the growing epidemic of unmotivated boys and underachieving young men*. New York, NY: Basic Books. Boys in classes with girls are more likely to act "macho" and thus to engage in disruptive behavior; in single-sex classes, boys thus behave better and are more committed to their studies. They also feel freer to exhibit an interest in music, the arts, and other subjects not usually thought of as "macho" topics. Furthermore, because the best students in coed schools are often girls, many boys tend to devalue academic success in coed settings and are more likely to value it in single-sex settings. Finally, in a boys-only setting, teachers can use examples and certain teaching techniques that boys may find especially interesting, such as the use of snakes to teach biology. To the extent that single-sex education may benefit boys for any of these reasons, these benefits are often thought to be highest for boys from families living in poverty or near poverty.

certain respects for the students experiencing it.

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What does the research evidence say about the benefits of single-sex schooling? A recent review of several dozen studies concluded that the results of single-sex schooling are mixed overall but that there are slightly more favorable outcomes for single-sex schools compared to coeducational schools: "There is some support for the premise that single-sex schooling can be helpful, especially for certain outcomes related to academic achievement and more positive academic aspirations. For many outcomes, there is no evidence of either benefit or harm" (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). U.S. Department of Education. (2005). *Single-sex versus secondary schooling: A systematic review*. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, U.S. Department of Education. None of the studies involved random assignment of students to single-sex or coeducational schooling, and the review cautioned that firmer conclusions must await higher-quality research of this nature (which may be ideal in terms of the research process but difficult and perhaps impossible to perform in real life). Also, because all the studies involved high school students and a majority involved students in Catholic schools, the review called for additional studies of younger students and those in public schools.

School Violence

The issue of school violence won major headlines during the 1990s, when many children, teachers, and other individuals died in the nation's schools. From 1992 until 1999, 248 students, teachers, and other people died from violent acts

(including suicide) on school property, during travel to and from school, or at a school-related event, for an average of about 35 violent deaths per year (Zuckoff, 1999). Zuckoff, M. (1999, May 21). Fear is spread around nation. *The Boston Globe*, p. A1. Against this backdrop, the infamous April 1999 school shootings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, where two students murdered 12 other students and one teacher before killing themselves, led to national soul-searching over the causes of teen and school violence and on possible ways to reduce it.

The murders in Littleton were so numerous and cold-blooded that they would have aroused national concern under any circumstances, but they also followed a string of other mass shootings at schools. In just a few examples, in December 1997 a student in a Kentucky high school shot and killed three students in a before-school prayer group. In March 1998 two middle school students in Arkansas pulled a fire alarm to evacuate their school and then shot and killed four students and one teacher as they emerged. Two months later an Oregon high school student killed his parents and then went to his school cafeteria, where he killed two students and wounded 22 others. Against this backdrop, Littleton seemed like the last straw. Within days, school after school across the nation installed metal detectors, located police at building entrances and in hallways, and began questioning or suspending students joking about committing violence. People everywhere wondered why the schools were becoming so violent and what could be done about it (Zuckoff, 1999). Zuckoff, M. (1999, May 21). Fear is spread around nation. *The Boston Globe*, p. A1.

Violence can obviously also happen on college and university campuses, although shootings are very rare. However, two recent examples illustrate that students and faculty are not immune from gun violence. In February 2010, Amy Bishop, a biology professor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville who had recently been denied tenure, allegedly shot and killed three faculty at a department meeting and wounded three others. Almost 3 years earlier, a student at Virginia Tech University went on a shooting rampage and killed 32 students and faculty before killing himself.

Sociology Making a Difference

School Bonding and Delinquency

As discussed in [Chapter 5 "Deviance, Crime, and Social Control"](#), the social control theory of delinquency assumes that weak social bonds to family, schools, and other social institutions help to promote juvenile delinquency. This theory was developed by sociologist Travis Hirschi (1969) Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of delinquency*. Berkeley: University of California Press. about four decades ago. Hirschi's emphasis on social bonds was inspired by the work of sociology founder Émile Durkheim, who more broadly emphasized the importance of strong ties to society for social cohesion and individual well-being.

Since the development of social bonding theory, most studies testing it have focused on family and school bonds. They generally support Hirschi's view that weak bonds to family and school help promote delinquency. One issue that has received less study is whether *strong* bonds to school might help prevent delinquency by youths who otherwise might be at high risk for such behavior, for example, those who were born to a teenaged mother, who exhibited aggressive behavior during childhood, or who have delinquent friends.

A Canadian team of researchers examined this possibility with national data on youths studied from childhood to young adulthood (Sprott, Jenkins, & Doob, 2005). Sprott, J. B., Jenkins, J. M., & Doob, A. N. (2005). The importance of school: Protecting at-risk youth from early offending. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice*, 3(1), 59–77. They identified children aged 10–11 with various risk factors for antisocial behavior and measured how strongly bonded they felt to their schools, based on their responses to several questions (including how much they liked their school and how often they finish their homework). They also determined the extent of their delinquency at ages 12–13 based on the youths' responses to a series of questions. Confirming their hypothesis, the researchers found that high-risk children were less likely to be delinquent at ages 12–13 if they had strong school bonds at ages 10–11 than if they had weak bonds. The researchers concluded that strong school bonds help prevent delinquency even by high-risk children, and they further speculated that zero-tolerance policies (as discussed in the text) that lead to suspension or expulsion may ironically promote delinquency because they weaken school bonding for the children who leave school.

As should be clear, the body of research on school bonding and delinquency inspired by social control theory suggests that schools play an important role in whether students misbehave both inside and outside school. It also suggests that efforts to improve the nation's schools will also reduce delinquency because these efforts will almost certainly strengthen the bonds children feel to their schools. As social control theory is ultimately rooted in the work of Émile Durkheim, sociology is again making a difference.

Fortunately, school violence has declined during the past decade, as fewer students and other people have died at the nation's schools than during 1990s. As this trend indicates, the risk of school violence should not be exaggerated: statistically speaking, schools are very safe. Less than 1% of homicides involving school-age children take place in or near school. About 56 million students attend elementary and secondary schools. With about 17 student homicides a year, the chances are less than one in 3 million that a student will be killed at school. The annual rate of other serious violence (rape and sexual assault, aggravated assault, and robbery) is only three crimes per 100 students; although this is still three too many, it does indicate that 97% of students do not suffer these crimes. Bullying is a much more common problem, with about one-third of students reporting being bullied annually (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, 2010). National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. (2010). *Understanding school violence fact sheet*. Washington, DC: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

To reduce school violence, many school districts have *zero-tolerance* policies involving weapons. These policies call for automatic suspension or expulsion of a student who has anything resembling a weapon for any reason. For better or worse, however, there have been many instances in which these policies have been applied too rigidly. In a recent example, a 6-year-old boy in Delaware excitedly took his new camping utensil—a combination of knife, fork, and spoon—from Cub Scouts to school to use at lunch. He was suspended for having a knife and ordered to spend 45 days in reform school. His mother said her son certainly posed no threat to anyone at school, but school officials replied that their policy had to be strictly enforced because it is difficult to determine who actually poses a threat from who does not (Urbina, 2009). Urbina, I. (2009, October 11). It's a fork, it's a spoon, it's a...weapon? *The New York Times*, p. A1. In another case, a ninth grader took a knife and cigarette lighter away from a student who had used them to threaten a fellow classmate. The ninth grader was suspended for the rest of the school year for possessing a weapon, even though he obviously had them only because he was protecting his classmate. According to a news story about this case, the school's reaction was "vigilance to a

fault” (Walker, 2010, p. A12). Walker, A. (2010, January 23). Vigilance to a fault. *The Boston Globe*, p. A12.

Ironically, one reason many school districts have very strict policies is to avoid the racial discrimination that was seen to occur in districts whose officials had more discretion in deciding which students needed to be suspended or expelled. In these districts, African American students with weapons or “near-weapons” were more likely than white students with the same objects to be punished in this manner. Regardless of the degree of discretion afforded officials in zero-tolerance policies, these policies have not been shown to be effective in reducing school violence and may actually raise rates of violence by the students who are suspended or expelled under these policies (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Skiba, R. J., & Rausch, M. K. (2006). Zero tolerance, suspension, and expulsion: Questions of equity and effectiveness. In C. M. Evertson & C. S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice, and contemporary issues* (pp. 1063–1089). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Schools in America are unequal: they differ greatly in the extent in their funding, in the quality of their physical facilities, and in other respects. Jonathan Kozol calls these differences “savage inequalities.”
- Single-sex education at the secondary level has become more popular. Preliminary evidence indicates that this form of education may be beneficial for several reasons, but more evidence on this issue is needed.
- Although school violence has declined since the 1990s, it continues to concern many Americans. Bullying at school is a common problem and can lead to more serious violence by the children who are bullied.

FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. If you were the principal of a middle school, would you favor or oppose single-sex classes? Explain your answer.
2. If you were the principal of a middle school, what steps would you take to reduce bullying?

12.4 Religion

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe key developments in the history of religion since ancient times.
2. List the major religions in the world today.
3. Summarize the major functions of religion.
4. Explain the views of religion held by the conflict and symbolic interactionist perspectives.
5. Understand the differences among the major types of religious organizations.

Religion⁶ is the set of beliefs and practices regarding sacred things that help a society understand the meaning and purpose of life. Émile Durkheim (1915/1947) Durkheim, E. (1947). *The elementary forms of religious life* (J. Swain, Trans.). Glencoe, IL: Free Press. (Original work published 1915) observed long ago that every society has beliefs about things that are supernatural and awe-inspiring and beliefs about things that are more practical and down-to-earth. He called the former beliefs **sacred**⁷ beliefs and the latter beliefs **profane**⁸ beliefs. Religious beliefs and practices involve the sacred: they involve things our senses cannot readily observe, and they involve things that inspire in us awe, reverence, and even fear.

Durkheim did not try to prove or disprove religious beliefs. Religion, he acknowledged, is a matter of faith, and faith is not provable or disprovable through scientific inquiry. Rather, Durkheim tried to understand the role played by religion in social life and the impact on religion of social structure and social change. In short, he treated religion as a social institution.

Sociologists since his time have treated religion in the same way. Anthropologists, historians, and other scholars have also studied religion. The remainder of this chapter reviews what we know about religion as a social institution and the role it plays in American life.

A Brief History of Religion

Every known society has practiced religion, although the nature of religious belief and practice has differed from one society to the next. Prehistoric people turned to religion to help them understand birth, death, and natural events such as hurricanes. They also relied on religion for help in dealing with their daily needs for

6. The set of beliefs and practices regarding sacred things that help a society understand the meaning and purpose of life.
7. Aspects of life that are supernatural and awe-inspiring.
8. Aspects of life that are practical and down-to-earth.

existence: good weather, a good crop, an abundance of animals to hunt (Noss & Grangaard, 2008). Noss, D. S., & Grangaard, B. R. (2008). *A history of the world's religions* (12th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Although the world's most popular religions today are *monotheistic* (believing in one god), many societies in ancient times, most notably Egypt, Greece, and Rome, were *polytheistic* (believing in more than one god). You have been familiar with their names since childhood: Aphrodite, Apollo, Athena, Mars, Zeus, and many others. Each god “specialized” in one area; Aphrodite, for example, was the Greek goddess of love, while Mars was the Roman god of war (Noss & Grangaard, 2008). Noss, D. S., & Grangaard, B. R. (2008). *A history of the world's religions* (12th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

During the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church dominated European life. The Church's control began to weaken with the Protestant Reformation, which began in 1517 when Martin Luther, a German monk, spoke out against Church practices. By the end of the century, Protestantism had taken hold in much of Europe. Another founder of sociology, Max Weber, argued a century ago that the rise of Protestantism in turn led to the rise of capitalism. In his great book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber wrote that Protestant belief in the need for hard work and economic success as a sign of eternal salvation helped lead to the rise of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution (Weber, 1904/1958). Weber, M. (1958). *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (T. Parsons, Trans.). New York, NY: Scribner. (Original work published 1904) Although some scholars challenge Weber's views for several reasons, including the fact that capitalism also developed among non-Protestants, his analysis remains a compelling treatment of the relationship between religion and society.

Figure 12.13



Ancient Greece and Rome were polytheistic, as they believed in many gods. This statue depicts Zeus, the king of gods in Greek mythology.

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Moving from Europe to the United States, historians have documented the importance of religion since the colonial period. Many colonists came to the new land to escape religious persecution in their home countries. The colonists were generally very religious, and their beliefs guided their daily lives and, in many cases, the operation of their governments and other institutions. In essence, government and religion were virtually the same entity in many locations, and church and state were not separate. Church officials performed many of the duties that the government performs today, and the church was not only a place of

worship but also a community center in most of the colonies (Gaustad & Schmidt, 2004). Gaustad, E. S., & Schmidt, L. E. (2004). *The religious history of America*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco. The Puritans of what came to be Massachusetts refused to accept religious beliefs and practices different from their own and persecuted people with different religious views. They expelled Anne Hutchinson in 1637 for disagreeing with the beliefs of the Puritans' Congregational Church and hanged Mary Dyer in 1660 for practicing her Quaker faith.

Key World Religions Today

Today the world's largest religion is Christianity, to which more than 2 billion people, or about one-third the world's population, subscribe. Christianity began 2,000 years ago in Palestine under the charismatic influence of Jesus of Nazareth and today is a Western religion, as most Christians live in the Americas and in Europe. Beginning as a cult, Christianity spread through the Mediterranean and later through Europe before becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire. Today, dozens of Christian denominations exist in the United States and other nations. Their views differ in many respects, but generally they all regard Jesus as the son of God, and many believe that salvation awaits them if they follow his example (Young, 2010). Young, W. A. (2010). *The world's religions: Worldviews and contemporary issues* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

The second largest religion is Islam, which includes about 1.6 billion Muslims, most of them in the Middle East, northern Africa, and parts of Asia. Muhammad founded Islam in the 600s A.D. and is regarded today as a prophet who was a descendant of Abraham. Whereas the sacred book of Christianity and Judaism is the Bible, the sacred book of Islam is the Koran. The Five Pillars of Islam guide Muslim life: (a) the acceptance of Allah as God and Muhammad as his messenger; (b) ritual worship, including daily prayers facing Mecca, the birthplace of Muhammad; (c) observing Ramadan, a month of prayer and fasting; (d) giving alms to the poor; and (e) making a holy pilgrimage to Mecca at least once before one dies.

The third largest religion is Hinduism, which includes more than 800 million people, most of whom live in India and Pakistan. Hinduism began about 2000 B.C. and, unlike Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, has no historic linkage to any one person and no real belief in one omnipotent deity. Hindus live instead according to a set of religious precepts called *dharma*. For these reasons Hinduism is often called an *ethical religion*. Hindus believe in reincarnation, and their religious belief in general is closely related to India's caste system (see [Chapter 6 "Social Stratification"](#)), as an important aspect of Hindu belief is that one should live according to the rules of one's caste.

Buddhism is another key religion and claims almost 400 million followers, most of whom live in Asia. Buddhism developed out of Hinduism and was founded by Siddhartha Gautama more than 500 years before the birth of Jesus. Siddhartha is said to have given up a comfortable upper-caste Hindu existence for one of wandering and poverty. He eventually achieved enlightenment and acquired the name of Buddha, or “enlightened one.” His teachings are now called the *dhamma*, and over the centuries they have influenced Buddhists to lead a moral life. Like Hindus, Buddhists generally believe in reincarnation, and they also believe that people experience suffering unless they give up material concerns and follow other Buddhist principles.

Another key religion is Judaism, which claims more than 13 million adherents throughout the world, most of them in Israel and the United States. Judaism began about 4,000 years ago when, according to tradition, Abraham was chosen by God to become the progenitor of his “chosen people,” first called Hebrews or Israelites and now called Jews. The Jewish people have been persecuted throughout their history, with anti-Semitism having its ugliest manifestation during the Holocaust of the 1940s, when 6 million Jews died at the hands of the Nazis. One of the first monotheistic religions, Judaism relies heavily on the *Torah*, which is the first five books of the Bible, and the *Talmud* and the *Mishnah*, both collections of religious laws and ancient rabbinical interpretations of these laws. The three main Jewish dominations are the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform branches, listed in order from the most traditional to the least traditional. Orthodox Jews take the Bible very literally and closely follow the teachings and rules of the *Torah*, *Talmud*, and *Mishnah*, while Reform Jews think the Bible is mainly a historical document and do not follow many traditional Jewish practices. Conservative Jews fall in between these two branches.

A final key religion in the world today is Confucianism, which reigned in China for centuries but was officially abolished in 1949 after the Chinese Revolution ended in Communist control. People who practice Confucianism today do so secretly, and its number of adherents is estimated at some 5 or 6 million. Confucianism was founded by K’ung Fu-tzu, from whom it gets its name, about 500 years before the birth of Jesus. His teachings, which were compiled in a book called the *Analects*, were essentially a code of moral conduct involving self-discipline, respect for authority and tradition, and the kind treatment of everyone. Despite the official abolition of Confucianism, its principles continue to be important for Chinese family and cultural life.

As this overview indicates, religion takes many forms in different societies. No matter what shape it takes, however, religion has important consequences. These consequences can be both good and bad for the society and the individuals in it. Sociological perspectives expand on these consequences, and we now turn to them.

Sociological Perspectives on Religion

Sociological perspectives on religion are similar to those on education in that they try to understand the functions religion serves, the inequality and other problems it can reinforce and perpetuate, and the role it plays in our daily lives (Emerson, Monahan, & Mirola, 2011). Emerson, M. O., Monahan, S. C., & Mirola, W. A. (2011). *Religion matters: What sociology teaches us about religion in our world*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. **Table 12.2 "Theory Snapshot"** summarizes what these perspectives say.

Table 12.2 Theory Snapshot

Theoretical perspective	Major assumptions
Functionalism	Religion serves several functions for society. These include (a) giving meaning and purpose to life, (b) reinforcing social unity and stability, (c) serving as an agent of social control of behavior, (d) promoting physical and psychological well-being, and (e) motivating people to work for positive social change.
Conflict theory	Religion reinforces and promotes social inequality and social conflict. It helps to convince the poor to accept their lot in life, and it leads to hostility and violence motivated by religious differences.
Symbolic interactionism	This perspective focuses on the ways in which individuals interpret their religious experiences. It emphasizes that beliefs and practices are not sacred unless people regard them as such. Once they are regarded as sacred, they take on special significance and give meaning to people's lives.

The Functions of Religion

Much of the work of Émile Durkheim stressed the functions that religion serves for society regardless of how it is practiced or of what specific religious beliefs a society favors. Durkheim's insights continue to influence sociological thinking today on the functions of religion.

First, religion *gives meaning and purpose to life*. Many things in life are difficult to understand. That was certainly true, as we have seen, in prehistoric times, but even in today's highly scientific age, much of life and death remains a mystery, and religious faith and belief help many people make sense of the things science cannot tell us.

Second, religion *reinforces social unity and stability*. This was one of Durkheim's most important insights. Religion strengthens social stability in at least two ways. First, it gives people a common set of beliefs and thus is an important agent of socialization (see [Chapter 3 "Socialization and Social Interaction"](#)). Second, the communal practice of religion, as in houses of worship, brings people together physically, facilitates their communication and other social interaction, and thus strengthens their social bonds.

A third function of religion is related to the one just discussed. Religion *is an agent of social control and thus strengthens social order*. Religion teaches people moral behavior and thus helps them learn how to be good members of society. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Ten Commandments are perhaps the most famous set of rules for moral behavior.

A fourth function of religion is *greater psychological and physical well-being*. Religious faith and practice can enhance psychological well-being by being a source of comfort to people in times of distress and by enhancing their social interaction with others in places of worship. Many studies find that people of all ages, not just the elderly, are happier and more satisfied with their lives if they are religious. Religiosity also apparently promotes better physical health, and some studies even find that religious people tend to live longer than those who are not religious (Moberg, 2008). Moberg, D. O. (2008). Spirituality and aging: Research and implications. *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging*, 20, 95–134. We return to this function later.

A final function of religion is that it may *motivate people to work for positive social change*. Religion played a central role in the development of the Southern civil rights movement a few decades ago. Religious beliefs motivated Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights activists to risk their lives to desegregate the South. Black churches in the South also served as settings in which the civil rights movement held meetings, recruited new members, and raised money (Morris, 1984). Morris, A. (1984). *The origins of the civil rights movement: Black communities organizing for change*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Figure 12.14



The communal practice of religion in a house of worship brings people together and allows them to interact and communicate. In this way religion helps to reinforce social unity and stability. This function of religion was one of Émile Durkheim's most important insights.

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Religion, Inequality, and Conflict

Religion has all of these benefits, but, according to conflict theory, it can also reinforce and promote social inequality and social conflict. This view is partly inspired by the work of Karl Marx, who said that religion was the “opiate of the masses” (Marx, 1964). Marx, K. (1964). *Karl Marx: Selected writings in sociology and social philosophy* (T. B. Bottomore, Trans.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. By this he meant that religion, like a drug, makes people happy with their existing conditions. Marx repeatedly stressed that workers needed to rise up and overthrow the bourgeoisie. To do so, he said, they needed first to recognize that their poverty stemmed from their oppression by the bourgeoisie. But people who are religious, he said, tend to view their poverty in religious terms. They think it is God’s will that they are poor, either because he is testing their faith in him or because they have violated his rules. Many people believe that if they endure their suffering, they will be rewarded in the afterlife. Their religious views lead them not to blame the capitalist class for their poverty and thus not to revolt. For these reasons, said Marx, religion leads the poor to accept their fate and helps to maintain the existing system of social inequality.

As [Chapter 8 "Gender and Gender Inequality"](#) discussed, religion also promotes gender inequality by presenting negative stereotypes about women and by reinforcing traditional views about their subordination to men (Klassen, 2009). Klassen, P. (Ed.). (2009). *Women and religion*. New York, NY: Routledge. A declaration a decade ago by the Southern Baptist Convention that a wife should “submit herself graciously” to her husband’s leadership reflected traditional religious belief (Gundy-Volf, 1998). Gundy-Volf, J. (1998, September–October). Neither biblical nor just: Southern Baptists and the subordination of women. *Sojourners*, 12–13.

As the Puritans’ persecution of non-Puritans illustrates, religion can also promote social conflict, and the history of the world shows that individual people and whole communities and nations are quite ready to persecute, kill, and go to war over religious differences. We see this today and in the recent past in central Europe, the Middle East, and Northern Ireland. Jews and other religious groups have been persecuted and killed since ancient times. Religion can be the source of social unity and cohesion, but over the centuries it also has led to persecution, torture, and wanton bloodshed.

News reports going back since the 1990s indicate a final problem that religion can cause, and that is sexual abuse, at least in the Catholic Church. As you undoubtedly have heard, an unknown number of children were sexually abused by Catholic priests and deacons in the United States, Canada, and many other nations going back at least to the 1960s. There is much evidence that the Church hierarchy did

little or nothing to stop the abuse or to sanction the offenders who were committing it, and that they did not report it to law enforcement agencies. Various divisions of the Church have paid tens of millions of dollars to settle lawsuits. The numbers of priests, deacons, and children involved will almost certainly never be known, but it is estimated that at least 4,400 priests and deacons in the United States, or about 4% of all such officials, have been accused of sexual abuse, although fewer than 2,000 had the allegations against them proven (Terry & Smith, 2006). Terry, K., & Smith, M. L. (2006). *The nature and scope of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic priests and deacons in the United States: Supplementary data analysis*. Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Given these estimates, the number of children who were abused probably runs into the thousands.

Symbolic Interactionism and Religion

While functional and conflict theories look at the macro aspects of religion and society, symbolic interactionism looks at the micro aspects. It examines the role that religion plays in our daily lives and the ways in which we interpret religious experiences. For example, it emphasizes that beliefs and practices are not sacred unless people regard them as such. Once we regard them as sacred, they take on special significance and give meaning to our lives. Symbolic interactionists study the ways in which people practice their faith and interact in houses of worship and other religious settings, and they study how and why religious faith and practice have positive consequences for individual psychological and physical well-being.

Religious symbols indicate the value of the symbolic interactionist approach. A crescent moon and a star are just two shapes in the sky, but together they constitute the international symbol of Islam. A cross is merely two lines or bars in the shape of a “t,” but to tens of millions of Christians it is a symbol with deeply religious significance. A Star of David consists of two superimposed triangles in the shape of a six-pointed star, but to Jews around the world it is a sign of their religious faith and a reminder of their history of persecution.

Religious rituals and ceremonies also illustrate the symbolic interactionist approach. They can be deeply intense and can involve crying, laughing, screaming, trancelike conditions, a feeling of oneness with those around you, and other emotional and psychological states. For many people they can be transformative experiences, while for others they are not transformative but are deeply moving nonetheless.

Types of Religious Organizations

Many types of religious organizations exist in modern societies. Sociologists usually group them according to their size and influence. Categorized this way, three types of religious organizations exist: church, sect, and cult (Emerson et al., 2011). Emerson, M. O., Monahan, S. C., & Mirola, W. A. (2011). *Religion matters: What sociology teaches us about religion in our world*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall. A church further has two subtypes: the ecclesia and denomination. We first discuss the largest and most influential of the types of religious organization, the ecclesia, and work our way down to the smallest and least influential, the cult.

Church: The Ecclesia and Denomination

A **church**⁹ is a large, bureaucratically organized religious organization that is closely integrated into the larger society. Two types of church organizations exist. The first is the **ecclesia**¹⁰, a large, bureaucratic religious organization that is a formal part of the state and has most or all of a state's citizens as its members. As such, the ecclesia is the national or state religion. People ordinarily do not join an ecclesia; instead they automatically become members when they are born. A few ecclesiae exist in the world today, including Islam in Saudi Arabia and some other Middle Eastern nations, the Catholic Church in Spain, the Lutheran Church in Sweden, and the Anglican Church in England.

As should be clear, in an ecclesiastic society there may be little separation of church and state, because the ecclesia and the state are so intertwined. In some ecclesiastic societies, such as those in the Middle East, religious leaders rule the state or have much influence over it, while in others, such as Sweden and England, they have little or no influence. In general the close ties that ecclesiae have to the state help ensure they will support state policies and practices. For this reason, ecclesiae often help the state solidify its control over the populace.

The second type of church organization is the **denomination**¹¹, a large, bureaucratic religious organization that is closely integrated into the larger society but is not a formal part of the state. In modern pluralistic nations, several denominations coexist. Most people are members of a specific denomination because their parents were members. They are born into a denomination and generally consider themselves members of it the rest of their lives, whether or not they actively practice their faith, unless they convert to another denomination or abandon religion altogether.

9. A large, bureaucratically organized religious organization that's closely integrated into the larger society.
10. A large, bureaucratically organized religious organization that is a formal part of the state and has most or all of a state's citizens as its members.
11. A large, bureaucratically organized religious organization that is closely integrated into the larger society but is not a formal part of the state.

The Megachurch

A relatively recent development in religious organizations is the rise of the so-called *megachurch*, a church at which more than 2,000 people worship every weekend on the average. Several dozen have at least 10,000 worshippers (Priest, Wilson, & Johnson, 2010; Warf & Winsberg, 2010); Priest, R. J., Wilson, D., & Johnson, A. (2010). U.S. megachurches and new patterns of global mission. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 34(2), 97–104; Warf, B., & Winsberg, M. (2010). Geographies of megachurches in the United States. *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 27(1), 33–51. the largest U.S. megachurch, in Houston, has more than 35,000 worshippers and is nicknamed a “gigachurch.” There are more than 1,300 megachurches in the United States, a steep increase from the 50 that existed in 1970, and their total membership exceeds 4 million. About half of today’s megachurches are in the South, and only 5% are in the Northeast. About one-third are nondenominational, and one-fifth are Southern Baptist, with the remainder primarily of other Protestant denominations. A third spend more than 10% of their budget on ministry on other nations. Some have a strong television presence, with Americans in the local area or sometimes around the country watching services and/or preaching by televangelists and providing financial contributions in response to information presented on the television screen.

Compared to traditional, smaller churches, megachurches are more concerned with meeting their members’ practical needs in addition to helping them achieve religious fulfillment. Some even conduct market surveys to determine these needs and how best to address them. As might be expected, their buildings are huge by any standard, and they often feature bookstores, food courts, and sports and recreation facilities. They also provide day care, psychological counseling, and youth outreach programs. Their services often feature electronic music and light shows.

Although megachurches are obviously popular, they have been criticized for being so big that members are unable to develop the close bonds with each other and with members of the clergy characteristic of smaller houses of worship. Their supporters say that megachurches involve many people in religion who would otherwise not be involved.

Sect

A **sect**¹² is a relatively small religious organization that is not closely integrated within the larger society and that often conflicts with at least some of its norms and values. Typically a sect has broken away from a larger denomination in an effort to restore what members of the sect regard as the original views of the denomination. Because sects are relatively small, they usually lack the bureaucracy of denominations and ecclesiae and often also lack clergy who have received official training. Their worship services can be intensely emotional experiences, often more so than those typical of many denominations, where worship tends to be more formal and restrained. Members of many sects typically proselytize and try to recruit new members into the sect. If a sect succeeds in attracting many new members, it gradually grows, becomes more bureaucratic, and, ironically, eventually evolves into a denomination. Many of today's Protestant denominations began as sects, as did the Mennonites, Quakers, and other groups. The Amish in the United States are perhaps the most well-known example of a current sect.

Figure 12.15



The Amish, who live in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and many other states, are perhaps the most well-known example of a sect in the United States today.

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Cult

A **cult**¹³ is a small religious organization that is at great odds with the norms and values of the larger society. Cults are similar to sects but differ in at least three respects. First, they generally have not broken away from a larger denomination and instead originate outside the mainstream religious tradition. Second, they are often secretive and do not proselytize as much. Third, they are at least somewhat more likely than sects to rely on *charismatic leadership* based on the extraordinary personal qualities of the cult's leader.

12. A relatively small religious organization that is not closely integrated within the larger society and that often conflicts with at least some of its norms and values.
13. A small religious organization that is at great odds with the norms and values of the larger society.

Although the term *cult* today raises negative images of crazy, violent, small groups of people, it is important to keep in mind that major world religions, including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, and denominations such as the Mormons all began as cults. Research challenges several popular beliefs about cults, including the ideas that they brainwash people into joining them and that their members are mentally ill. In a study of the Unification Church (Moonies), Eileen Barker (1984) Barker, E. (1984). *The making of a moonie: Choice or brainwashing*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. found no more signs of mental illness among people who joined

the Moonies than in those who did not. She also found no evidence that people who joined the Moonies had been brainwashed into doing so.

Another image of cults is that they are violent. In fact, most are not violent. However, some cults have committed violence in the recent past. In 1995 the *Aum Shinrikyo* (Supreme Truth) cult in Japan killed 10 people and injured thousands more when it released bombs of deadly nerve gas in several Tokyo subway lines (Strasser & Post, 1995). Strasser, S., & Post, T. (1995, April 3). A cloud of terror—and suspicion. *Newsweek*, p. 36–41. Two years earlier, the Branch Davidian cult engaged in an armed standoff with federal agents in Waco, Texas. When the agents attacked its compound, a fire broke out and killed 80 members of the cult, including 19 children; the origin of the fire remains unknown (Tabor & Gallagher, 1995). Tabor, J. D., & Gallagher, E. V. (1995). *Why Waco? Cults and the battle for religious freedom in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press. A few cults have also committed mass suicide. In another example from the 1990s, more than three dozen members of the Heaven's Gate killed themselves in California in March 1997 in an effort to communicate with aliens from outer space (Hoffman & Burke, 1997). Hoffman, B., & Burke, K. (1997). *Heaven's Gate: Cult suicide in San Diego*. New York, NY: Harper Paperbacks. Some two decades earlier, more than 900 members of the People's Temple cult killed themselves in Guyana under orders from the cult's leader, Jim Jones (Stoen, 1997). Stoen, T. (1997, April 7). The most horrible night of my life. *Newsweek*, p. 44–45.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Every known society has practiced religion. Ancient Greece and Rome were polytheistic, while in the Middle Ages the Catholic Church was the dominant religious force in Europe.
- The major religions in the world today are Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Confucianism.
- Religion ideally serves several functions. It gives meaning and purpose to life, reinforces social unity and stability, serves as an agent of social control, promotes psychological and physical well-being, and may motivate people to work for positive social change.
- On the other hand, religion may help keep poor people happy with their lot in life, promote traditional views about gender roles, and engender intolerance toward people whose religious faith differs from one's own.
- The three major types of religious organizations are the church, sect, and cult. The two types of churches are the ecclesia and the denomination.

FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Describe the assumptions of the functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist approaches of religion.
2. Write a brief essay in which you indicate which of these three approaches you most favor and state the reasons for your choice.

12.5 Religion in the United States

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the extent and correlates of religious affiliation.
2. Explain the different dimensions of religiosity.

In many ways, the United States is a religious nation, although it is not more religious than many other nations. In a 2002 international survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, 59% of Americans said that religion is “very important” in their lives, a figure that ranked the United States 29th out of 42 nations. In a 2007 Pew survey conducted in the United States, about 83% of Americans expressed a religious preference, 61% were official members of a local house of worship, and 39% attended religious services at least weekly (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008). Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. (2008). *U.S. religious landscape survey*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

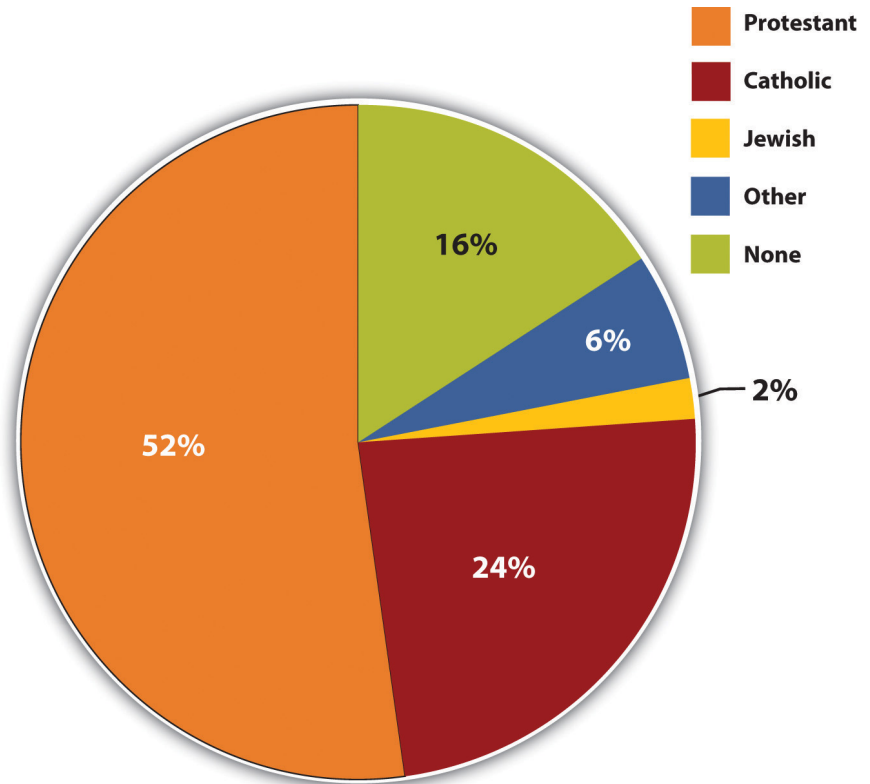
Religious Affiliation and Religious Identification

Let’s look at religious affiliation a bit more closely. *Religious affiliation* is a term that can mean actual membership in a church or synagogue, or just a stated *identification* with a particular religion, whether or not someone actually is a member of a church or synagogue. As the figures just listed indicate, more people identify with a religion than actually belong to it. Another term for religious affiliation is *religious preference*.

The 2007 Pew survey included some excellent data on religious identification (see [Figure 12.16 "Religious Preference in the United States"](#)). Slightly more than half the public say their religious preference is Protestant, while about 24% call themselves Catholic. Almost 2% say they are Jewish, while 6% state another religious preference and 16% say they have no religious preference. Although Protestants are thus a majority of the country, the Protestant religion includes several denominations. About 34% of Protestants are Baptists; 12% are Methodists; 9% are Lutherans; 9% are Pentecostals; 5% are Presbyterians; and 3% are Episcopalians. The remainder identify with other Protestant denominations or say their faith is nondenominational. Based on their religious beliefs, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists are typically grouped together as Liberal Protestants; Methodists, Lutherans, and a few other denominations as Moderate

Protestants; and Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, and many other denominations as Conservative Protestants.

Figure 12.16 Religious Preference in the United States



Source: Data from Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. (2008). *U.S. religious landscape survey*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

Correlates of Religious Affiliation

The religious affiliations just listed differ widely in the nature of their religious belief and practice, but they also differ in demographic variables of interest to sociologists (Finke & Stark, 2005). Finke, R., & Stark, R. (2005). *The churched of America: Winners and losers in our religious economy* (2nd ed.). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. For example, Liberal Protestants tend to live in the Northeast and to be well educated and relatively wealthy, while Conservative Protestants tend to live in the South and to be less educated and working-class. In their education and incomes, Catholics and Moderate Protestants fall in between these two groups. Like Liberal Protestants, Jews also tend to be well educated and relatively wealthy.

Race and ethnicity are also related to religious affiliation. African Americans are overwhelmingly Protestant, usually Conservative Protestants (Baptists), while Latinos are primarily Catholic. Asian Americans and Native Americans tend to hold religious preferences other than Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish.

Age is yet another factor related to religious affiliation, as older people are more likely than younger people to belong to a church or synagogue. As young people marry and “put roots down,” their religious affiliation increases, partly because many wish to expose their children to a religious education. In the Pew survey, 25% of people aged 18–29 expressed no religious preference, compared to only 8% of those 70 or older.

Figure 12.17



Race and ethnicity are related to religious affiliation. African Americans are overwhelmingly Protestant, for example, while Latinos are primarily Catholic.

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Religiosity

People can belong to a church, synagogue, or mosque or claim a religious preference, but that does not necessarily mean they are very religious. For this reason, sociologists consider **religiosity**¹⁴, or the significance of religion in a person’s life, an important topic of investigation.

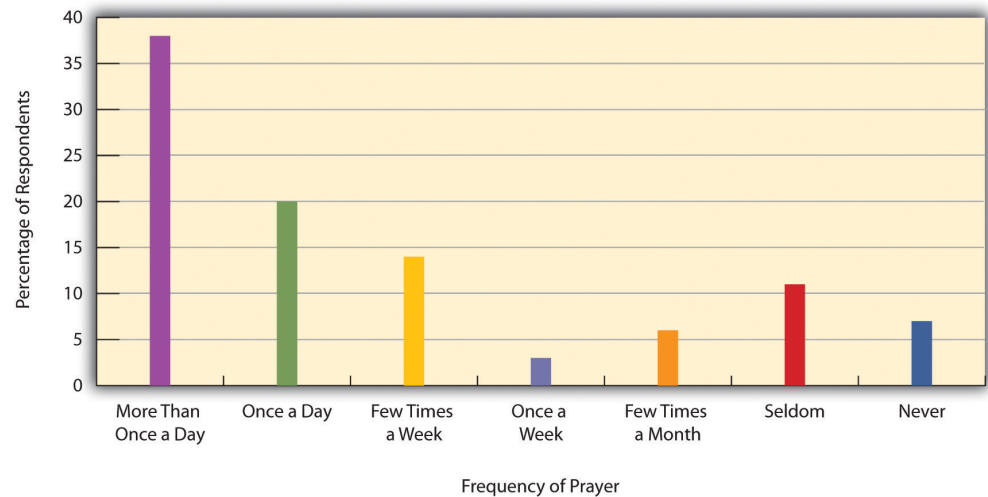
Religiosity has a simple definition but actually is a very complex topic. What if someone prays every day but does not attend religious services? What if someone attends religious services but never prays at home and does not claim to be very religious? Someone can pray and read a book of scriptures daily, while someone else can read a book of scriptures daily but pray only sometimes. As these possibilities indicate, a person can be religious in some ways but not in other ways.

For this reason, religiosity is best conceived of as a concept involving several dimensions: experiential, ritualistic, ideological, intellectual, and consequential (Stark & Glock, 1968). Stark, R., & Glock, C. Y. (1968). *Patterns of religious commitment*. Berkeley: University of California Press. *Experiential* religiosity refers to how important people consider religion to be in their lives. *Ritualistic* religiosity refers to the extent of their involvement in prayer, reading a book of scriptures, and attendance at a house of worship. *Ideological* religiosity involves the degree to which people accept religious doctrine and includes the nature of their belief in a deity, while *intellectual* religiosity concerns the extent of their knowledge of their religion’s history and teachings. Finally, *consequential* religiosity refers to the extent to which religion affects their daily behavior.

14. The significance of religion in a person’s life.

National data on prayer are perhaps especially interesting (see [Figure 12.18 "Frequency of Prayer"](#)), as prayer occurs both with others and by oneself. Almost 60% of Americans say they pray at least once daily outside of religious services, and only 7% say they never pray (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008). Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. (2008). *U.S. religious landscape survey*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Daily praying is more common among older people than younger people.

Figure 12.18 Frequency of Prayer



Source: Data from Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. (2008). *U.S. religious landscape survey*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

When we try to determine why some people are more religious than others, we are treating religiosity as a *dependent variable*. But religiosity itself can also be an *independent variable*, as it affects attitudes on a wide range of social, political, and moral issues. Generally speaking, the more religious people are, the more conservative their attitudes in these areas (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). Adamczyk, A., & Pitt, C. (2009). Shaping attitudes about homosexuality: The role of religion and cultural context. *Social Science Research*, 38(2), 338–351. An example of this relationship appears in [Table 12.3 "Frequency of Prayer and Belief That Homosexual Sex Is "Always Wrong"'](#), which shows that people who pray daily are *much* more opposed to homosexual sex. The relationship in the table once again provides clear evidence of the sociological perspective's emphasis on the importance of social backgrounds for attitudes.

Table 12.3 Frequency of Prayer and Belief That Homosexual Sex Is “Always Wrong”

	Several times a day	Once a day	Several times a week	Once a week	Less than once a week	Never
Percentage saying “always wrong”	65.2	49.5	40.8	43.3	34.0	17.0

Source: Data from General Social Survey, 2010.

Religiosity and College Students

The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles, conducted a national longitudinal survey during the last decade of college students’ religiosity and religious beliefs (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2010). Astin, A. W., Astin, H. S., & Lindholm, J. A. (2010). *Cultivating the spirit: How college can enhance students’ inner lives*. Hoboken NJ: Jossey-Bass. They interviewed more than 112,000 entering students in 2004 and more than 14,000 of these students in spring 2007 toward the end of their junior year. This research design enabled the researchers to assess whether and how various aspects of religious belief and religiosity change during college. Several findings were notable.

First, *religious commitment* (measures of the students’ assessment of how important religion is to them) stayed fairly stable during college. Students who drank alcohol and partied the most were more likely to experience a decline in religious commitment, although cause and effect here are difficult to determine.

Second, *religious engagement* (measures of religious services attendance, praying, religious singing, and reading sacred texts) declined during the college years. This decline was especially steep for religious attendance. Almost 40% of juniors reported less frequent attendance than during their high school years, while only 7% reported more frequent attendance.

Third, *religious skepticism* (measures of how well religion explains various phenomena compared to science) stayed fairly stable. Skepticism tended to rise among students who partied a lot, went on a study-abroad program, and attended a college with students who were very liberal politically.

Fourth, *religious/social conservatism* (views on such things as abortion, casual sex, and atheism) tended to decline during college, although the decline was not at all steep. This set of findings is in line with the research discussed earlier showing that

students tend to become more liberal during their college years. To the extent students' views became more liberal, the beliefs of their friends among the student body mattered much more than the beliefs of their faculty.

Fifth, *religious struggle* (measures of questioning one's religious beliefs, disagreeing with parents about religion, feeling distant from God, and the like) tended to increase during college. This increase was especially high at campuses where a higher proportion of students were experiencing religious struggle when they entered college. Students who drank alcohol and watched television more often and who had a close friend or family member die were more likely to experience religious struggle, although cause and effect are again difficult to determine.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The United States is a fairly religious nation, with most people expressing a religious preference. About half of Americans are Protestants and one-fourth are Catholics.
- Religiosity is composed of several dimensions. Almost 60% of Americans say they pray at least once daily outside of religious services.
- Generally speaking, higher levels of religiosity are associated with more conservative views on social, moral, and political issues.

FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. Do you consider yourself religious? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think religiosity is associated with more conservative views on social, moral, and political issues? What is it about religiosity that helps lead to such beliefs?

12.6 Trends in Religious Belief and Activity

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Summarize the evidence on the nature and extent of secularization.
2. Discuss trends in regard to religious conservatism in the United States.
3. Describe the relationship between religiosity and deviant behavior.

Because religion is such an important part of our society, sociologists and other observers have examined how religious thought and practice have changed in the last few decades. We discuss two of the most important trends here.

Secularization

Secularization¹⁵ refers to the weakening importance of religion in a society. It plays less of a role in people's lives, as they are less guided in their daily behavior by religious beliefs. The influence of religious organizations in society also declines, and some individual houses of worship give more emphasis to worldly concerns such as soup kitchens than to spiritual issues. There is no doubt that religion is less important in modern society than it was before the rise of science in the 17th and 18th centuries. Scholars of religion have tried to determine the degree to which the United States has become more secularized during the last few decades (Finke & Stark, 2005; Fenn, 2001). Finke, R., & Stark, R. (2005). *The churching of America: Winners and losers in our religious economy* (2nd ed.). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press; Fenn, R. K. (2001). *Beyond idols: The shape of a secular society*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

The best evidence shows that religion has declined in importance since the 1960s but still remains a potent force in American society as a whole and for the individual lives of Americans (Finke & Scheitle, 2005). Finke, R., & Scheitle, C. (2005). Accounting for the uncounted: Computing correctives for the 2000 RCMS data. *Review of Religious Research*, 47, 5–22. Although membership in mainstream Protestant denominations has declined since the 1960s, membership in conservative denominations has risen. Most people (92% in the Pew survey) still believe in God, and, as already noted, more than half of all Americans pray daily.

Scholars also point to the continuing importance of **civil religion**¹⁶, or the devotion of a nation's citizens to their society and government (Santiago, 2009). Santiago, J. (2009). From "civil religion" to nationalism as the religion of modern times:

15. The weakening importance of religion in a society.

16. The devotion of a nation's citizens to their society and government that's the secular equivalent of religion.

Rethinking a complex relationship. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 48(2), 394–401. In the United States, love of country—patriotism—and admiration for many of its ideals are widespread. Citizens routinely engage in rituals, such as reciting the Pledge of Allegiance or singing the National Anthem, that express their love of the United States. These beliefs and practices are the secular equivalent of traditional religious beliefs and practices and thus a functional equivalent of religion.

The Rise of Religious Conservatism

The rise of religious conservatism also challenges the notion that secularization is displacing religion in American life. **Religious conservatism**¹⁷ in the U.S. context is the belief that the Bible is the actual word of God. As noted earlier, religious conservatism includes the various Baptist denominations and any number of evangelical organizations, and its rapid rise was partly the result of fears that the United States was becoming too secularized. Many religious conservatives believe that a return to the teachings of the Bible and religious spirituality is necessary to combat the corrupting influences of modern life (Almond, Appleby, & Sivan, 2003). Almond, G. A., Appleby, R. S., & Sivan, E. (2003). *Strong religion: The rise of fundamentalisms around the world*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Today about one-third of Americans state a religious preference for a conservative denomination (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008). Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. (2008). *U.S. religious landscape survey*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Because of their growing numbers, religious conservatives have been the subject of increasing research. They tend to hold politically conservative views on many issues, including abortion and the punishment of criminals, and are more likely than people with other religious beliefs to believe in such things as the corporal punishment of children (Burdette, Ellison, & Hill, 2005). Burdette, A. M., Ellison, C. G., & Hill, T. D. (2005). Conservative protestantism and tolerance toward homosexuals: An examination of potential mechanisms. *Sociological Inquiry*, 75(2), 177–196. They are also more likely to believe in traditional roles for women.

Figure 12.19



The rise of religious conservatism in the United States was partly the result of fears that the nation was becoming too secularized.

17. The belief that a return to the teachings of the Bible and religious spirituality is necessary to combat the corrupting influences of modern life.

Closely related to the rise of religious conservatism has been the increasing influence of what has been termed the “new religious right” in American politics (Martin, 2005; Capps, 1990; Moen, 1992). Martin, W. C. (2005). *With*

God on our side: The rise of the religious Right in America. New York, NY:

Broadway Books; Capps, W. H. (1990). *The new religious Right: Piety,*

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patriotism, and politics. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press;

Moen, M. (1992). *The transformation of the Christian Right.* Tuscaloosa:

University of Alabama Press. Since the 1980s, the religious right has

been a potent force in the political scene at both the national and local levels, with groups like the Moral Majority and Christian Coalition effective in raising money, using the media, and lobbying elected officials. As its name implies, the religious right tries to advance a conservative political agenda consistent with conservative religious concerns. Among other issues, it opposes legal abortion, gay rights, and violence and sex in the media, and it also advocates an increased religious presence in public schools. Although the influence of the religious right has waned since the 1990s, its influence on American politics is bound to be controversial for many years to come.

Religiosity and Deviant Behavior

As discussed earlier, Durkheim considered religion a moral force for socialization and social bonding. Building on this insight, sociologists and other scholars have thought that religiosity might reduce participation in “deviant” behaviors such as drinking, illegal drug use, delinquency, and certain forms of sexual behavior. A growing body of research, almost all of it on adolescents, finds that this is indeed the case. Holding other factors constant, more religious adolescents are less likely than other adolescents to drink and take drugs, to commit various kinds of delinquency, to have sex during early adolescence or at all, and to have sex frequently if they do start having sex (Regenerus, 2007). Regenerus, M. D. (2007). *Forbidden fruit: Sex & religion in the lives of American teenagers.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

There is much less research on whether this relationship continues to hold true during adulthood. If religion might have more of an impact during adolescence, an impressionable period of one’s life, then the relationship found during adolescence may not persist into adulthood. However, two recent studies did find that more religious, unmarried adults were less likely than other unmarried adults to have premarital sex partners (Barkan, 2006; Uecker, 2008). Barkan, S. E. (2006). Religiosity and premarital sex during adulthood. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 45, 407–417; Uecker, J. E. (2008). Religion, pledging, and the premarital sexual behavior of married young adults. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(3), 728–744. These results suggest that religiosity may indeed continue to affect sexual behavior and perhaps other behaviors during adulthood.

Religiosity, Physical Health, and Psychological Well-Being

Sociologists and other scholars have also built on Durkheim's insights to assess whether religious involvement promotes better physical health and psychological well-being. As noted earlier, a growing body of research finds that various measures of religious involvement, but perhaps especially attendance at religious services, are positively associated with better physical and mental health. Religious involvement is linked in many studies to lower rates of cardiovascular disease, hypertension (high blood pressure), and mortality (Ellison & Hummer, 2010; Green & Elliott, 2010). Ellison, C. G., & Hummer, R. A. (Eds.). (2010). *Religion, families, and health: Population-based research in the United States*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press; Green, M., & Elliott, M. (2010). Religion, health, and psychological well-being. *Journal of Religion & Health*, 49(2), 149–163. doi:10.1007/s10943-009-9242-1 It is also linked to higher rates of happiness and lower rates of depression and anxiety.

These effects are thought to stem from several reasons. First, religious attendance increases social ties that provide emotional and practical support when someone has various problems and that also raise one's self-esteem. Second, personal religious belief can provide spiritual comfort in times of trouble. Third, and as noted in the preceding section, religious involvement promotes healthy lifestyles for at least some people, including lower use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs, as well as other risky behaviors such as gambling and unsafe sex. Lower participation in all of these activities helps in turn to increase one's physical and mental health.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Despite concerns among many observers that secularization has been occurring, religion remains important in many Americans' lives and a potent force in American society.
- Membership in conservative denominations has increased in the United States in recent decades. Today about one-third of Americans state a religious preference for a conservative denomination.
- Higher levels of religiosity are associated with lower involvement in drinking, illegal drug use, sexual behavior, and some forms of delinquency.

FOR YOUR REVIEW

1. What evidence that you have observed suggests to you that the United States has become a secular society? What evidence suggests to you that it remains a fairly religious society?
2. Why do you think religiosity is associated with lower levels of involvement in deviant behavior? What is it about religiosity that might reduce deviant behavior?

Addressing Educational and Religious Issues: What Sociology Suggests

Sociological theory and research have helped people to understand the reasons for various issues arising in education and religion. Accordingly, this final section discusses strategies suggested by this body of work for addressing a few of these issues.

Education

Two major issues are school inequality and school violence. The inequality that exists in American society finds its way into the schools, and inequality in the schools in turn contributes to inequality in the larger society. Although scholars continue to debate the relative importance of family backgrounds and school funding and other school factors for academic achievement, it is clear that schools with decaying buildings and uncommitted teachers cannot be expected to produce students with high or even adequate academic achievement. At a minimum, schools need to be smaller and better funded, teachers need to be held accountable for their students' learning, and decaying buildings need to be repaired. On the national level, these steps will cost billions of dollars, but this expenditure promises to have a significant payoff (Smerdon & Borman, 2009). Smerdon, B. A., & Borman, K. M. (Eds.). (2009). *Saving America's high schools*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.

School violence is another issue that needs to be addressed. The steps just outlined should reduce school violence, but other measures should also help. One example involves antibullying programs, which include regular parent meetings, strengthened playground supervision, and appropriate discipline when warranted. Research indicates that these programs reduce bullying by 20%–23% on the average (Farrington & Trofi, 2009). Farrington, D. P., & Trofi, M. M. (2009). School-based programs to reduce bullying and victimization. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 6, 1–148. doi:10.4073/csr.2009.6 Any reduction in bullying should in turn help reduce the likelihood of school massacres like Columbine, as many of the students committing these massacres were humiliated and bullied by other students (Adler & Springen, 1999). Adler, J., & Springen, K. (1999, May 3). How to fight back. *Newsweek*, p. 36–38.

Experts also think that reducing the size of schools and the size of classes will reduce school violence, as having smaller classes and schools should help create a less alienating atmosphere, allow for more personal attention, and make students' attitudes toward their school more positive (Levin & Fox, 1999). Levin, J., & Fox, J. A. (1999, April 25). Schools learning a grim lesson (but will society flunk?). *The Boston Globe*, p. C1. More generally, because the roots of school violence are also similar to the roots of youth violence outside the schools, measures that reduce youth violence should also reduce school violence. As discussed in previous chapters, such measures include early childhood prevention programs for youths at risk for developmental and behavioral problems, and policies that provide income and jobs for families living in poverty (Welsh & Farrington, 2007). Welsh, B. C., & Farrington, D. P. (Eds.). (2007). *Preventing crime: What works for children, offenders, victims and places*. New York, NY: Springer.

Religion

One major religious issue today is religious intolerance. Émile Durkheim did not stress the hatred and conflict that religion has promoted over the centuries, but this aspect of conflict theory's view of religion should not be forgotten. Certainly religious tolerance should be promoted among all peoples, and strategies for doing so include education efforts about the world's religions and interfaith activities for youth and adults. The Center for Religious Tolerance (<http://www.c-r-t.org/index.php>), headquartered in Sarasota, Florida, is one of the many local and national organizations in the United States that strive to promote interfaith understanding. In view of the hostility toward Muslims that increased in the United States after 9/11, it is perhaps particularly important for education efforts and other activities to promote understanding of Islam.

Religion may also help address other social issues. In this regard, we noted earlier that religious belief and practice seem to promote physical health and psychological well-being. To the extent this is true, efforts that promote the practice of one's faith may enhance their physical and mental health. In view of the health problems of older people and also their greater religiosity, some scholars urge that such efforts be especially undertaken for people in their older years (Moberg, 2008). Moberg, D. O. (2008). Spirituality and aging: Research and implications. *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging*, 20, 95–134. We also noted that religiosity helps to reduce drinking, drug use, and sexual behavior among adolescents and perhaps among adults. This does not mean that religion should be forced on anyone against their will, but this body of

research does suggest that efforts by houses of worship to promote religious activities among their adolescents and younger children may help prevent or otherwise minimize risky behaviors during this important period of the life course.

12.7 End-of-Chapter Material

Summary

1. Education is both formal and informal. Formal education occurs in schools under specially trained teachers, while informal education takes place primarily in the home, with parents as instructors. For much of human history, education was informal, especially before the beginning of writing and numbers. As societies became more complex economically and socially, schools began to develop, but they were usually restricted to relatively wealthy boys.
2. In the early 19th century in the United States, a movement for free, compulsory education began. Reasons for interest in such education included the perceived needs to unify the country, to “Americanize” immigrants, and to give members of the working class the skills, knowledge, and discipline they needed to be productive workers.
3. Sociological perspectives on education fall into the functionalist, conflict, and symbolic interactionist approaches discussed in earlier chapters. Functional theory stresses the functions education serves for society, including socialization, social placement, social integration, and social and cultural innovation. Conflict theory stresses that education perpetuates and reinforces existing social inequality for several reasons, including the use of tracking and inequality in schooling between rich and poor communities. Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the social interaction that’s part of schooling and calls attention to the ways in which the treatment of students as smart or dull can affect how much they end up learning.
4. In the United States, social class, race and ethnicity, and gender all affect educational attainment. Poor people end up with less schooling than middle- and upper-class people, and African Americans and Latinos have lower educational attainment than whites and Asian Americans. Although women had less schooling than men in the past, today they are more likely to graduate from high school and to attend college.
5. Education in the United States has a significant impact on two areas. One is income: the higher the education, the higher the income. The second is attitudes: the higher the education, the greater the tolerance for nontraditional behaviors and viewpoints.
6. Several issues and problems affect education in the United States today. Many schools are poor and run-down and lack sufficient books and equipment. Many schools are also segregated by race and ethnicity. These twin problems make it difficult for students in these schools to receive a good education. Increasing interest in school choice has led to controversy over whether the government should provide aid to parents to send their children to private and parochial schools. Additional controversy surrounds the issue of single-sex schools for girls, which their advocates say promotes girls’ learning, especially in math, science, and technology. Finally, school violence is an issue of continuing concern and received even more attention after the massacre at a high school in Littleton, Colorado. Despite this concern, the best evidence indicates that the vast majority of schools are very safe for their students, teachers, and other personnel.
7. All societies have beliefs and practices that help them understand supernatural and spiritual phenomena. Religion takes different forms in the many types of societies that have existed, but ultimately it seeks to make sense out of life, death, and the other mysteries of human existence.

8. The world's major religions today include Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Judaism. They differ in many respects, including the nature of their belief in God, whether their religion began with the efforts of one particular individual, and whether a sacred text is involved.
9. Religion serves several functions for society. It gives meaning and purpose to life, reinforces social stability and social control, and promotes physical and psychological well-being. Yet religion can also perpetuate social inequality and promote social conflict among peoples with different religious faiths. Traditionally religion has also reinforced gender inequality. Symbolic interactionism explores the micro side of religion and focuses on the role religion plays in our daily lives and the ways in which we interpret religious experiences.
10. The primary types of religious organization include the church (either an ecclesia or a denomination), sect, and cult. These types differ in many ways, including their size and integration into society. Cults have a very negative image, but Christianity, Judaism, and various denominations all began as cults.
11. The United States is, according to many measures, one of the most religious societies in the industrial world. Most people believe in God, and a strong majority belong to a church or synagogue. Religious affiliation is related to several demographic variables in which sociologists are interested, including social class and race. Liberal Protestants and Jews tend to be relatively wealthy and well educated, while Conservative Protestants tend to be poorer and less educated. Catholics and Moderate Protestants tend to occupy a middle ground on these variables.
12. Religiosity is a multidimensional concept that gets beyond actual membership in a church or synagogue. The more religious people are, the more conservative they tend to be on various social and moral issues.
13. Two religious trends in recent decades in the United States include secularization and the rise of religious conservatism. Despite fears that the United States is becoming a less religious society, the best evidence indicates that religion continues to play an important role in the lives of individuals and their families. The rise of religious conservatism has an important and controversial impact on national political affairs.

USING SOCIOLOGY

It is October, and you are now in your second year of teaching fifth graders in a poor urban neighborhood. You don't have enough textbooks for your 40 students, and the ones you do have are very much out of date. Worse yet, there is a leak in your classroom ceiling that seems to be getting worse every week, even though you asked that it be repaired, and a foul odor arose a few days ago from a nearby bathroom and also seems to be getting worse. You decide you have at least four choices: (a) quit your job immediately and look for another job; (b) stay through the end of the academic year and then quit, while keeping quiet about your concerns about the school; (c) complain to the principal and/or perhaps to school district officials; or (d) ask for an interview with the local newspaper to bring your school's problems to light. What do you decide to do? Explain your answer.