

Religion and Education

Introduction to Sociology

Religion

- Religion describes the beliefs, values, and practices related to sacred or spiritual concerns
- It is a social institution, because it includes beliefs and practices that serve the needs of society
- Religion is a cultural universal, because it is found in all societies in one form or another

Sociological Terms for Discussing Religion

- **religious experience**: the conviction or sensation that one is connected to “the divine”
- **religious beliefs**: specific ideas that members of a particular faith hold to be true
- **religious rituals**: behaviors or practices that are either required for or expected of the members of a particular group

Functionalist View of Religion

Religion serves several purposes:

- providing answers to spiritual mysteries
- offering emotional comfort
- creating a place for social interaction and social control



Conflict Theory on Religion

- Religion is an institution that helps maintain patterns of social inequality that keep poor people poor and disempowered
- Feminist theorists focus on gender inequality and promote leadership roles for women in religion



Symbolic-Interactionist Views on Religion

Symbolic-interactionists study:

- the interaction between religious leaders and practitioners
- the role of religion in the ordinary components of everyday life
- the ways people interpret and express religious values in social interactions

Organization of Religious Groups

Cults, sects, denominations, and ecclesia represent a continuum, with increasing influence on society, where cults are least influential and ecclesia are most influential

One Method of Classifying Religions

| Religious Classification | What/Who Is Divine | Example |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Polytheism | Multiple gods | Belief systems of the ancient Greeks and Romans |
| Monotheism | Single god | Judaism, Islam |
| Atheism | No deities | Atheism |
| Animism | Nonhuman beings (animals, plants, natural world) | Indigenous nature worship (Shinto) |
| Totemism | Human-natural being connection | Ojibwa (Native American) beliefs |

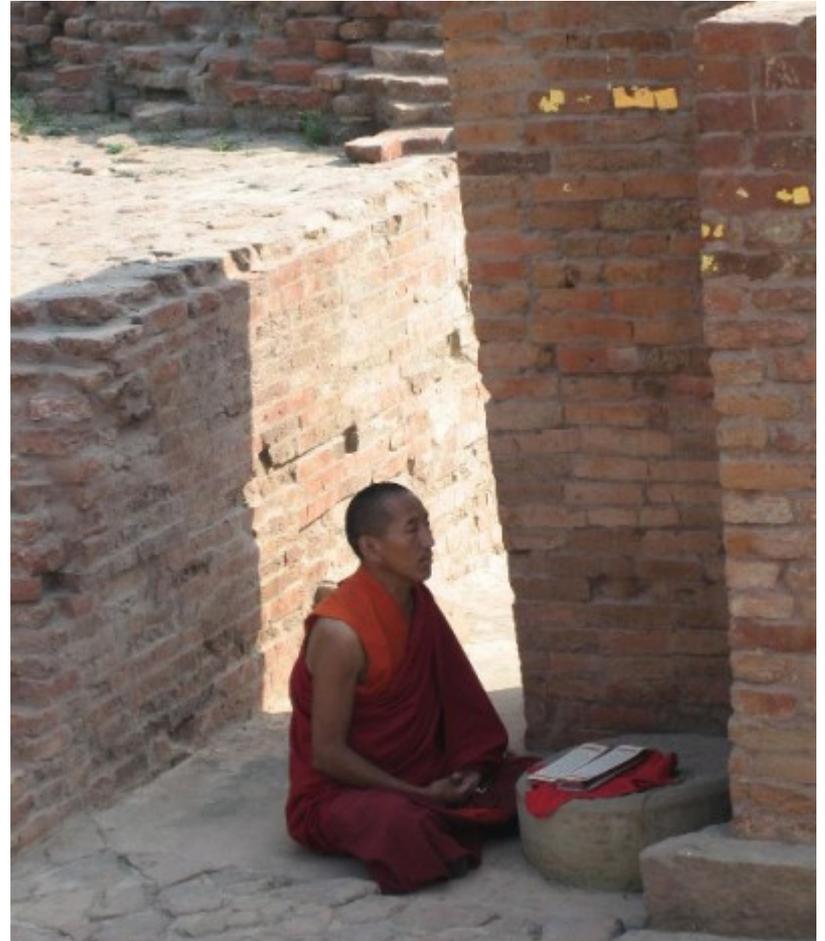
Hinduism



- Originated in the Indus River Valley about 4,500 years ago
- The third-largest of the world's religions (1 billion followers)
- Believe in a divine power that can manifest as different entities mainly —Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva
- The sacred text are the Vedas which contain hymns and rituals
- Dharma is one's duty in the world to perform "right" actions
- Karma is the idea that spiritual ramifications of one's actions are balanced cyclically in this life or a future life through reincarnation

Buddhism

- Buddhism was founded by Siddhartha Gautama around 500 B.C.E. in what is now Nepal
- Buddhism emphasizes meditation



Buddhist Beliefs

Buddha's teachings encourage Buddhists to lead a moral life by accepting the four Noble Truths:

1. life is suffering
2. suffering arises from attachment to desires
3. suffering ceases when attachment to desires ceases, and
4. freedom from suffering is possible by following the "middle way."

The concept of the "middle way" is central to Buddhist thinking, which encourages people to live in the present and to practice acceptance of others

Buddhism tends to deemphasize the role of a godhead, instead stressing the importance of personal responsibility

Confucianism

- Was the official religion of China from 200 B.C.E. until it was officially abolished by the communist leadership in 1949
- Developed by Kung Fu-Tzu (Confucius), who lived in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. as a system of religious morality to improve social order and cohesion in an anarchic time
- Emphasizes self-discipline, respect for authority and tradition, and *jen* (the kind treatment of every person)
- Primary text is the *Analects*
- Some religious scholars consider it a social system not a religion

Taoism (also called Daoism)

- The founder is generally recognized to be Laozi, who lived sometime in the sixth century B.C.E. in China
- The purpose of life is inner peace and harmony
- Tao is usually translated as “way” or “path”
- Taoist beliefs emphasize the virtues of compassion and moderation.
- The central concept of *tao* can be understood to describe a spiritual reality, the order of the universe, or the way of modern life in harmony with the former two
- The yin-yang symbol and the concept of polar forces are central Taoist ideas

Judaism

- Monotheistic
- The Jews' covenant, or promise of a special relationship with God, is an important element of Judaism
- The Hebrew Bible includes the Torah, or five books of Moses
- The Hebrew Bible also includes prophetic and other texts and is not the same as the Christian Old Testament – some of the books are different and they are organized into different narrative arcs
- Talmud refers to a collection of sacred Jewish oral interpretation of the Torah
- Jews emphasize moral behavior and action in this world as opposed to beliefs or personal salvation in the next world

Islam

- Monotheistic
- Follows the teaching of the prophet Muhammad, born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in 570
- Muslims serve Allah (God)
- Islam means “peace” and “submission”
- The sacred text for Muslims is the Qur’an (or Koran)
- Many of the Qur’an stories are shared with the Jewish faith
- Divisions exist within Islam

Five Pillars of Islam

All Muslims are guided by five beliefs or practices, often called “pillars”:

1. Allah is the only god, and Muhammad is his prophet
2. Daily prayer
3. Helping those in poverty
4. Fasting as a spiritual practice
5. Pilgrimage to the holy center of Mecca



Christianity

- Today the largest religion in the world, Christianity began 2,000 years ago in Palestine, with Jesus of Nazareth
- Although monotheistic, Christians often describe their god through three manifestations that they call the Holy Trinity: the father (God), the son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit
- The sacred text for Christians is the Bible (typically the Old and New Testaments) but different groups have variations in which books they include in the Bible
- Christians believe that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God and that he will return

Religion and Social Change

- Religion has historically been an impetus to social change
- Disagreements between religious groups and instances of religious persecution have led to wars and genocides
- Religion was central to the abolitionist and Civil Rights Movements in the U.S.

Liberation Theology

- Began as a movement within the Roman Catholic Church in the 1950s and 1960s in Latin America
- Today liberation theology is an international movement that encompasses many churches and denominations
- Liberation theologians discuss theology from the point of view of the poor and the oppressed and interpret the scriptures as a call to action against poverty and injustice
- In Europe and North America, feminist theology is a movement to bring social justice to women

Megachurches

- A **megachurch** is a Christian church that has a very large congregation averaging more than 2,000 people who attend regular weekly services
- Church buildings often resemble a sport or concert arena
- Worship services feature contemporary music with drums and electric guitars
- Typically, a single, highly charismatic male pastor leads the megachurch

Traits of Megachurches

- Conservative theology
- Evangelism
- Use of technology and social networking
- Few financial struggles
- Multiple sites
- Predominantly white membership
- List their main focuses as youth activities, community service, and study of the Scripture

Are they too big?

- Critics of megachurches believe they are too large to promote close relationships among fellow church members or the pastor, as could occur in smaller houses of worship
- Supporters note that, congregations generally meet in small groups, and some megachurches have informal events throughout the week to allow for community-building

Secularization

- Compared to other democratic, industrialized countries, the United States is generally perceived to be a fairly religious nation
- While some scholars see the United States becoming increasingly secular others observe a rise in fundamentalism

Practice Question: What trends do you see in this data?

Generational Replacement Helping Drive Growth of Unaffiliated, Decline of Mainline Protestantism and Catholicism

| | Silent generation (born 1928-1945) | Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) | Generation X (born 1965-1980) | Older Millennials (born 1981- 1989) | Younger Millennials (born 1990- 1996) |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|--|
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| Christian | 85 | 78 | 70 | 57 | 56 |
| Protestant | 57 | 52 | 45 | 38 | 36 |
| <i>Evangelical</i> | 30 | 28 | 25 | 22 | 19 |
| <i>Mainline</i> | 22 | 17 | 13 | 10 | 11 |
| <i>Historically black</i> | 5 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 6 |
| Catholic | 24 | 23 | 21 | 16 | 16 |
| Other Christian groups | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 3 |
| Other faiths | 4 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 8 |
| Unaffiliated | 11 | 17 | 23 | 34 | 36 |
| Don't know/refused | <u>1</u> | <u>1</u> | <u>1</u> | <u>1</u> | <u>1</u> |
| | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014. Figures may not add to 100%, and nested figures may not add to subtotals indicated, due to rounding.

The "other Christian groups" category includes Mormons, Orthodox Christians, Jehovah's Witnesses and a number of smaller Christian groups.

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Education

Education is a social institution through which a society's children are taught basic academic knowledge, learning skills, and cultural norms:

- **formal education** is the learning of academic facts and concepts
- **informal education** is education that involves learning about cultural values, norms, and expected behaviors through participation in a society
- **cultural transmission** is the way people come to learn the values, beliefs, and social norms of their culture



Comparing U.S. Schools to those in other Wealthy Countries

- Many people fear the United States' educational system may be on a descending path that could detrimentally affect the country's economy and its social landscape.
- Students in the United States had fallen from fifteenth to twenty-fifth in the rankings for science and math.
- Top nations had well-established standards for education with clear goals for all students and recruited teachers from the top 5 to 10 percent of university graduates each year.
- Part of the United States' low rankings is due to disparities in educational resources such as money and the best teachers between schools that serve rich and poor children.

Universal Access

Universal access is the equal ability of all people to participate in an education system

- On a world level, access remains difficult for certain groups based on race, class, or gender
- The U.S. still struggles to provide equal educational opportunity to all student
- The modern idea of universal access arose in the United States as a concern for people with disabilities
- Advocates won the right to a free and appropriate public education for all students



Functionalist View of Education

| | |
|---|---|
| Manifest Functions: Openly stated functions with intended goals | Latent Functions: Hidden, unstated functions with sometimes unintended consequences |
| Socialization | Courtship |
| Transmission of culture | Social networks |
| Social control | Group work |
| Social placement | Creation of generation gap |
| Cultural innovation | Political and social integration |

Key Vocabulary for Conflict Theory of Education



- **cultural capital**: cultural knowledge that serves (metaphorically) as currency to help one navigate a culture
- **hidden curriculum**: the type of nonacademic knowledge that people learn through informal learning and cultural transmission
- **sorting**: classifying students based on academic merit or potential
- **tracking**: a formalized sorting system that places students on “tracks” (advanced, low achievers) that perpetuate inequalities

Conflict Theory on Education

- The educational system reinforces and perpetuates social inequalities that arise from differences in class, gender, race, and ethnicity
- Educational systems preserve the status quo and push people of lower status into obedience
- School systems do this through tracking, hidden curriculums, disparities of resources available to students in richer and poorer neighborhoods, and through testing
- Education systems can be viewed as legitimating inequality since rich children come to see themselves as most deserving based on their own merit

Feminist Theory of Education



Feminist theory aims to understand the mechanisms and roots of gender inequality in education, as well as their societal repercussions

- Educational systems are characterized by unequal treatment and opportunity for women
- Almost two-thirds of the world's 862 million illiterate people are women, and the illiteracy rate among women is expected to increase in many regions, especially in several African and Asian countries

Symbolic-Interactionist Views of Education

- When teachers label students, they can create a self-fulfilling prophecy
- Credentialism is the emphasis on certificates or degrees that symbolize what a person has achieved, and allows the labeling of that individual
- Powerful social groups of peers label students in ways that can have serious consequences

Contemporary Issues in Education

- De facto segregation based on residential segregation
- Resource disparities because schools are largely funded by local taxes
- Bilingual education
- "Teaching to the Test"
- Common Core
- How should we address gaps in educational outcomes based on class and race? (Head Start is one such program)



More Contemporary Issues in Education

- Should children be passed to the next grade if they have not met the standards for that grade?
- How can we improve teacher quality?



Contemporary Issues in Higher Education

- Affirmative action
- Rising student loan debt

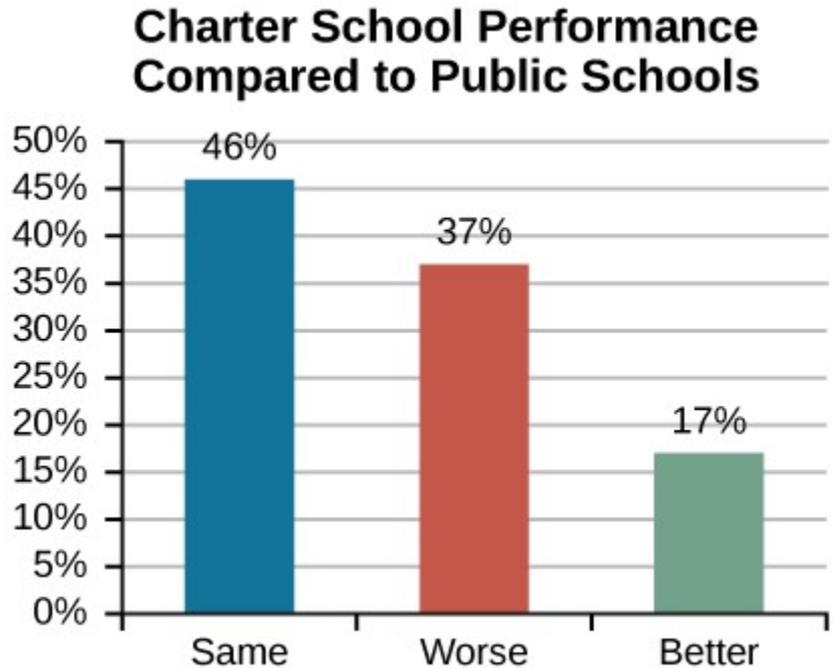


Charter Schools

- Charter schools are self-governing public schools that have signed agreements with state governments to improve student performance on tests
- While such schools receive public money, they are not subject to the same rules that apply to regular public schools
- Charter schools are free to attend and select students by lottery

How Effective are Charter Schools?

The debate over the performance of charter schools vs. public schools is a charged one. This data comes from Stanford University's CREDO study comparing public and charter schools



Homeschooling

Homeschooling refers to children being educated in their own homes, typically by a parent, instead of in a traditional public or private school system

- Proponents of this type of education argue that it provides an outstanding opportunity for student-centered learning while circumventing problems that plague today's education system
- Opponents counter that homeschooled children miss out on the opportunity for social development that occurs in standard classroom environments and school settings
- Half of homeschoolers believe they can better educate their child
- 40 percent choose homeschooling for "religious reasons"
- To date, researchers have not found consensus in studies evaluating the success, or lack thereof, of homeschooling

Quick Review

- How do major sociological perspectives view religion?
- What are the basic tenets of major world religions?
- What are some religious trends in the United States?
- What are some educational differences around the world?
- How do the major theoretical perspectives view education?
- What are historical and contemporary issues in education?