

Chapter 12 – Education and Religion Courtesy of Stacy Schlepp

(345) An overview of Education and Religion

- Sociology of Education – primarily examines formal education of schooling in industrial societies
- Sociology of Religion which focuses on religious groups and organizations, on the behavior of individuals within those groups, and on ways in which religion is intertwined with other social institutions.

(345 – 356) Sociological Perspectives on Education

- **Education** is the social institution responsible for the systematic transmission of knowledge, skills, and cultural values within a formally organized structure.

Functionalist Perspectives on Education

- Durkheim
 - Education is the “influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life”
 - Asserted that moral values are the foundation of a cohesive social order and that schools have the responsibility of teaching a commitment to the common morality
- Students must be taught to put the group ahead of the individual.
- Etzioni
 - Suggests that shared values should be transmitted by schools from kindergarten through college.

Manifest Functions of Education

- **Manifest Functions** are intended goals or consequences of activities within an organization or institution. There are five major manifest functions in society:
 - **Socialization** Schools teach students the student role, specific academic subjects, and political socialization.
 - **Transmission of culture** Transmit cultural norms and values to each new generation and play an active part in the process of assimilation.
 - **Social Control** Teach values such as discipline, respect, obedience, punctuality, and perseverance. They also teach conformity.
 - **Social Placement** Responsible for identifying the most qualified people to fill available positions in society.
 - **Change and innovation** As student populations change over time, new programs are introduced to meet societal needs (i.e. sex education)

Latent Functions of Education

- **Latent Functions** are the hidden, unstated, and sometimes unintended consequences of activities within an organization or institution. Education serves at least three latent functions”
 - **Restricting some activities** Mandatory education laws require children to attend

school until they reach a specified age or until they complete a minimum level of formal education. The latent law is to keep kids off the streets and out of full-time job market for a number of years.

- **Matchmaking and production of social networks** Young people will often meet future marriage partners and develop social networks that may last for many years.
- **Creation of a Generation Gap** When education conflicts with parental attitudes and beliefs, a generation gap is created if students embrace the newly acquired perspective.

Conflict Perspectives of Education

- Conflict theorists argue that schools perpetuate class, racial-ethnic, and gender inequalities in society as some groups seek to maintain their privileged positions at the expense of others.

Cultural capital and Class Reproduction

- Conflict theorists argue that access to quality education is closely related to social class. Education is a vehicle for reproducing existing class relationships.
- Pierre Bourdieu
 - **Cultural Capital** – social assets that include values, beliefs, attitudes, and competencies in language and culture
 - Middle and upper income parents endow their children with more cultural capital than do working-class and poverty-level parents.
 - Standardize tests that are used for grouping students by ability and for assigning students to classes often measure students’ cultural capital rather than their “natural” intelligence or aptitude.
- **Tracking** is the assignment of students to specific courses and educational programs based on their test scores, previous grades, or both.

The Hidden Curriculum

- **Hidden Curriculum** is the transmission of cultural values and attitudes, such as conformity and obedience to authority, through implied demands found in rules, routines, and regulations of schools.
- **Race and Hidden Curriculum** School traditions and rituals may maintain and perpetuate the belief that it is all right to ridicule individuals or groups from subordinate categories. (i.e. mascots painted to look like “savages”)
- **Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum** When teachers are from a higher class background than their students, they tend to use more structure in the classroom and to have lower expectations for students’ academic achievement.
 - Through the hidden curriculum, schools make working-class and poverty-level students aware that they will be expected to take orders from others, arrive at work on time, follow bureaucratic rules, and experience high levels of boredom without complaining.

- **Credentialism** is a process of social selection in which class advantage and social status are linked to the possession of academic qualifications. Closely related to meritocracy.
- **Gender Bias and the Hidden Curriculum** – through reading materials, classroom activities, and treatment by teachers and peers, female students learn that they are less important than male students.

Unequal funding

- Since most educational funds are derived from local property taxes and state legislative appropriations. The property tax base for central-city schools has continued to erode as industries have located elsewhere, and many middle and upper-income families reside in suburban areas that have a separate property tax base.

Segregated and Resegregated schools

- Efforts to bring about integration have failed in many districts throughout the country.
- Even though some schools have engaged in busing students, changing school boundaries, and introducing magnet schools, segregated housing and residential patterns have contributed to a high rate of school segregation for Blacks and Latinos.
- Because of past racial discrimination and current socioeconomic inequalities, lower-level courses and special classes disproportionately enroll children of color, especially Blacks and Latinos.
 - This causes high drop out rates.

Class, Race, and Social Reproduction in Higher Education

- The ability to pay for a college education reproduces the class system. The disproportionately low number of people of color enrolled in colleges is reflected in the educational achievement of people, age twenty-five and over.

Symbolic Interactionist Perspectives on Education

Education and the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

- Robert Merton
 - Self-fulfilling prophecy is an unsubstantiated belief or prediction resulting in behavior that makes the originally false belief come true. (I.e. if a teacher believes that some students of color are less capable of learning, that teacher may treat them as if they were incapable of learning.
- The IQ test can become a self-fulfilling prophecy; teachers did not expect them to do as well as children from WASP family background and did not encourage them or give them opportunities to overcome educational obstacles.
- In the book “The bell Curve” Herrnstein and Murray argue that intelligence is in a person's nature, and no amount of nurturing can change that.

Education and Labeling

- **Learned Disabled** are social constructions that lead to stigmatization and may be incorporated into the everyday interactions of teachers, students, and parents.
- A self-fulfilling prophecy can also result from labeling students as gifted. When some students are labeled

higher than other they may achieve at a higher level because of the label.

- Some analysts suggest that girls receive subtle cues from adults that lead them to attribute success to effort whereas boys learn to attribute success to their intelligence and ability.
- **Anti-intellectualism** is hostility or opposition toward persons assumed to have great mental ability or toward subject matter believed to necessitate significant intellectual ability or knowledge for its comprehension.

(356 - 358) Religion in Historical Perspective

- **Religion** is a system of beliefs, symbols, and rituals, based on some sacred or supernatural realm that guides human behavior, gives meaning to life, and unites believers into a community.

Religion and the Meaning of Life

- Religion seeks to answer important questions such as why we exist, why people suffer and die, and what happens when we die.
- Science and medicine typically rely on existing scientific evidence to respond to these questions.
- Durkheim
 - **Sacred** refers to those aspects of life that are extraordinary or supernatural – in other words, those things that are set apart as holy.
- **Profane** is the everyday, secular or “worldly” aspects of life. They are those things that people do not set apart as sacred.
- Geertz
 - Religion is a set of cultural symbols that establishes powerful and pervasive moods and motivations to help people interpret the meaning of life and establish a direction for their behavior.
- **Rituals** are symbolic actions that represent religious meanings. They range from song and prayers to offerings and sacrifices.

Categories of Religion

- Anthropologists have concluded that all known groups over the past 100,000 years have had some form of religion. There are four categories
 - **Simple Supernaturalism** – the belief that supernatural forces affect people's lives either positively or negatively. (preindustrial societies)
 - **Animism** is the belief that plants, animals, or other elements of the natural world are endowed with spirits or life forces having an impact on events in society. (Early hunting and gathering societies)
 - **Theism** is a belief in a god or gods.
 - **Monotheism** is the belief in a single supreme being who is responsible for significant events such as the creation of the world.
 - Christianity
 - Judaism
 - Islam

- Polytheism is the belief in more than one god
 - Found in tribes in Africa
- Transcendent idealism is nontheistic because it does not focus on worship of a god or gods. Transcendent idealism is a belief in sacred principle of thought and conduct. Principles such as truth, justice, affirmation of life, and tolerance for others are central tenets of transcendent idealists, who seek an elevated state of consciousness in which they can fulfill their true potential.

Religion and Scientific Explanations

- During the Industrial Revolution, scientific explanations began to compete with religious views of life. Many scholars believed that knowledge would result in secularization.
- **Secularization** is the process by which religious beliefs, practices, and institutions lose their significance in sectors of society and culture.
 - Involves a decline of religion in everyday life and a corresponding increase in organizations that are highly bureaucratized, fragmented, and impersonal.

(359 - 363) Sociological Perspectives

- Meredith McGuire
 - Religion as a social institution is a powerful, deeply felt, and influential force in human society.

Functionalist Perspectives on Religion

- Emile Durkheim
 - One of the first to emphasize that religion is essential to the maintenance of society.
 - Suggested that religion was a cultural universal found in all societies because it met basic human needs and served important societal functions.
 - The central feature of all religions is the presence of sacred beliefs and rituals that bind people together in a collectivity.
 - Collective representations are group held meanings that express something important about the group itself.
- 3 important functions of religion
 - Meaning and purpose – Offer meaning for the human experience. (i.e. loss on an individual and group basis, and inequality)
 - Social cohesion and a sense of belonging – All religions have some form of shared experiences that rekindle the group's consciousness of its own unity.
 - Social control and support for the government – Sacred symbols and beliefs establish powerful, pervasive, long-lasting motivations based on the concept of a general order of existence.
- **Civil religion** is the set of beliefs, rituals, and symbols that makes sacred the values of the society and places

the nation in the context of the ultimate system of meaning. (i.e. memorial day)

Conflict Perspectives of Religion

Karl Marx on Religion

- Ideologies systematic vies of the way the world ought to be are embodied in religious doctrines and political values.
- Retards social change and justifies the status quo.
- The capitalist class uses religious ideology as a tool of domination to mislead the workers about their true interests.
- “Opiate of the masses”

Max Weber on Religion

- For Weber, religion could be a catalyst to produce social change. Weber asserts that the religious teachings of John Calvin were directly related to the rise of capitalism
 - Predestination is the belief that even before they are born, all people are divided into two groups, the saved and the damned, and only God knows who will go to heaven or hell.
 - According to the Protestant ethic, those who have faith, perform good works, and achieve economic success are more likely to be among the chosen of God. As a result, people work hard, save their money, and do not spend it on worldly frivolity; instead, they reinvest it in their land, equipment, and labor.
 - The spirit of capitalism grew in the fertile soil of the Protestant ethic.

- Like Marx, Weber was acutely aware the religion could reinforce existing social arrangements, and especially the stratification system. The wealth can use religion to justify their power and privilege.
- According to conflict theorists, conflict may be between religious groups, within religious groups, or between a religious group and the larger society.

Symbolic Interactionist Perspectives on Religion

- Focus their attention on a micro level analysis that examines the meanings that people give to religion in their everyday life.

Religion as a Reference Group

- Religion serves as a reference group to help people define themselves.
- It has been said that the symbolism of religion is so very powerful because it “expresses the essential facts of our human existence”

Her Religion and His Religion

- Charlotte Gimán
 - Believed that men's religion taught people to submit and obey rather than to think and realistically confront situations. The monopolization of religious thoughts and doctrines by men contributed to intolerance and subordination of women.

- Women and men may belong to the same religious group, but their individual religion will not necessarily be a carbon copy of the group's entire system of beliefs.
- Religious symbolism may depict the higher deities as male and the lower deities as female.
- Protestants constitute the largest religious body in the US.
- Secular Humanism is a belief in the perfectibility of human beings through their own efforts rather than through a belief in God and a religious conversion.

(363 - 365) Types of Religious Organization

Ecclesia

- **Ecclesia** is a religious organization that is so integrated into the dominant culture that it claims as its membership all members of a society.
- Very strong link between church and state.
 - Occurs as a result of being born into the society, rather than by any conscious decision on the part of individual members.
 - No true ecclesia exists in the contemporary world, the Anglican Church (the official Church of England) come pretty close.

The Church-Sect Typology

- Troeltsch and Weber
 - **Church** is a large, bureaucratically organized religious organization that tends to seek accommodation with the larger society in order to maintain some degree of control over it.
 - Membership is largely based on birth
 - **Denomination** is a large organized religion characterized by accommodation to society but frequently lacking in the ability or intention to dominate society.
 - Less likely to expel or excommunicate members than churches.
 - Religious Pluralism is a situation in which many religious groups exist because they have a special appeal to specific segments of the population.
 - The US has the most denominations.
 - **Sect** is a relatively small religious group that has broken away from another religious organization to renew what it views as the original version of the faith.
 - Offers members a more personal religion and an intimate relationship with a supreme being.
 - Sects have informal prayers unlike churches.

Cults

- **Cult** is a religious group with practices and teachings outside the dominant cultural and religious traditions of a society.
 - Although cults have a negative stigma, some major religions (Christianity) started as cults.

Trends in Religion in the US

- Pluralism and religious freedom are among the cultural values most widely espoused, and no state church or single denomination predominates.