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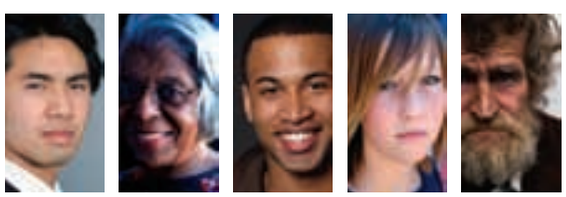
# Education

**EDUCATION, AS WE OFTEN HEAR, IS "THE GREAT EQUALIZER."** By studying hard, staying in school, and applying yourself, you can gain the knowledge and skills you need to get ahead. Education can enable a poor person to get out of poverty, can catapult you into the ranks of the wealthy and powerful. It's the purest form of meritocracy; the smartest cream always rises to the surface. Sometimes, when you hear parents or teachers talk admiringly about education, it sounds as though getting a college degree is like winning the lottery.

Talk to others, and it sounds as if you're in prison. Education is the best predictor of your eventual position in the socioeconomic hierarchy—but the best predictor of your education turns out not to be your motivation or intelligence but your parents' level of education. Education keeps you where you are, keeps the structures of inequality (based on class, race, or gender) in place. In fact, education is what makes that inequality feel like a meritocracy, so you have no one to blame.



So why do it? It depends on whom you ask. Teachers often subscribe to the meritocracy idea and contend that education builds critical reasoning skills and the ability to grapple with issues, weigh evidence, and make informed decisions in a changing society. It is valuable in itself. Students are often more cynical and more interested in learning the skills they will need to get or keep a job.

Does education level the playing field and facilitate mobility, or does it freeze things where they are and maintain the status quo? Should education teach you how to think or how to make a living? Is it the road to the good life, or does it turn us into overintellectualized snobs, corrupting goodness and simple virtues?

**Education is both one of the best ways to enhance your upward mobility and career opportunities and one of the legitimizing institutions that maintain social inequality.**

How do sociologists understand education? It's both. Education is intrinsically interesting, and you can gain useful skills to build your job credentials. It is a path of mobility and one of the central institutions involved in the reproduction of structured social inequality.

# The Sociology of Education

Every day in the United States 72.7 million people gather in auditoriums, classrooms, and laboratories, in the open air and in online chat rooms, to learn things from 4.5 million teachers, teaching assistants, lab assistants, instructors, and professors (*Digest of Educational Statistics,* 2006). They can learn an endless variety of subjects: Babylonian cuneiform and nuclear physics, short-story writing and motorcycle repair, conversational Portuguese and managerial accounting, symphony conducting and cartoon animation, existential philosophy and the gender politics of modern Japan.

Most people spend a quarter of their lives (or even more) becoming *educated*. If you live to be 70, you will devote 19 percent of your life to preschool, elementary school, and high school, and another 6 percent to college (assuming you graduate in four years). A PhD might easily take another eight years. You would then finish your education at age 30, with 43 percent of your life over.

Education doesn't end at high school, college, or graduate school. Many people return to school after they received their degree, for additional degrees, courses, and certificates. Some want to learn a new skill or develop a new interest. And many others depend on education for their livelihood: They become teachers, administrators, and service personnel; they write and publish textbooks; they build residence halls and manufacture three-ring binders; they open restaurants and clothing shops in college towns to draw student business. In the United States, we spend $550 billion a year on elementary and secondary schools and another $200 billion on colleges and universities (Department of Education, 2006).

Why do we do it? How does it work? How does it both enable and restrict our own mobility?

## Education as a Social Institution

Sociologists define **education** as a social institution through which society provides its members with important knowledge—basic facts, job skills, and cultural norms and values. It provides socialization, cultural innovation, and social integration. It is accomplished largely through schooling, formal instruction under the direction of a specially trained teacher (Ballantine, 2001).

Like most social institutions, education has both manifest (clearly apparent) and latent (potential or hidden) functions. The manifest function is the subject matter: reading and writing in grade school, sociology and managerial accounting in college. Latent functions are by-products of the educational process, the norms, values, and goals that accrue because we are immersed in a specific social milieu. Education teaches both a subject and a **hidden curriculum:** individualism and competition, conformity to mainstream norms, obedience to authority, passive consumption of ideas, and acceptance of social inequality (Gilborn, 1992).

**In addition to the formal curriculum in class, students also participate in a "hidden curriculum" in which they learn social lessons about hierarchy, peer pressure, and how to act around the opposite sex.**

In addition to teaching a subject matter and various sorts of hidden norms and values, education establishes relationships and social networks, locating people within social classes. Randall Collins (1979) notes that the United States is a **credential society:** You need diplomas, degrees, and certificates to qualify for jobs; you can open a medical practice only if you have an M.D. degree, regardless of how smart you are; and you have to pass the state bar

exam to practice law, regardless of how much law you know. Diplomas, degrees, certificates, examination scores, college majors, and the college you graduate from say "who you are" as much as family background. They tell employers what manners, attitudes, and even skin colors the applicants are likely to have. They provide gatekeeping functions that restrict important and lucrative jobs to a small segment of the population.

## The History of Education

For most of human history, there were no schools. Your parents taught necessary skills, or they hired you a tutor. Sometimes people with special skills opened academies, where you could pay tuition to study philosophy, music, or art. But there was no formal, structured system of education.

In many cultures, schools developed out of a need to train religious leaders. In ancient Babylonia, priests-in-training went to school so they could learn to read sacred texts and write the necessary rituals. In India, *gurukuls,* connected to temples and monasteries, offered instruction in Hindu scriptures, theology, astrology, and other religious topics. They were tuition free, but still it was primarily wealthy children who could be excused from working alongside their parents long enough to profit from them (Ghosh, 2001). In China, education was propelled by tradition rather than religion. For 2,000 years, beginning with the Han dynasty (206 BCE to 200 CE), Chinese citizens who wanted to become civil servants on any level had to pass a series of "imperial examinations." Examinations were theoretically open to anyone, but only the wealthy could afford to spend the years of preparation necessary for even the lowest exam (Chaffee, 1985; Gernet, 1982).

European schools also developed in connection with monasteries or cathedrals to teach priests and other religious workers necessary subjects, like Latin, theology, and philosophy. We still call the highest academic degree a PhD, or doctor of philosophy. When the Protestant Reformation began to teach that all believers, not just priests, should be able to read and interpret the Bible, many churches began to offer all children instruction in reading and writing. By the sixteenth century, formal schooling for children was available in many European countries, though only the wealthy had enough money and free time to participate (Bowen, 1976; Boyd, 1978).

The United States was among the first countries in the world to set a goal of education for all of its citizens, under the theory that an educated citizenry was necessary for a democratic society to function. A free public education movement began in 1848, and soon there were free, tax-funded elementary schools in every state, with about half of young people (ages 5 to 19) attending (Urban and Wagoner, 2003). They often attended for only a few years or for only a few months of the year, squeezed in between their duties at home, and instruction was very basic—"reading, writing, and arithmetic." By 1918, every state had passed a mandatory education law, requiring that children attend school until they reached the age of 16 or completed the eighth grade, and a variety of new subjects were available, including higher levels of mathematics, science, social studies, foreign languages, art and music, and "practical subjects" like bookkeeping and typing. By the mid-1960s, a majority of American adults were high school graduates. Today about seven out of ten have high school diplomas.

Why did the educational curriculum expand so much, from basic subjects to everything under the sun? As industry expanded in the mid-nineteenth century, occupations became more differentiated, and work skills could no longer be passed down from parents to children. There

### Did *you* know?

Be sure to finish reading this book. It may be your last:

- 80 percent of U.S. families did not buy or read a book in the last year.
- 70 percent of Americans have not been in a bookstore for the past five years.
- 42 percent of college graduates never read another book after graduation. (www.parapublishing.com)

▲ **Educational opportunity and retention are organized by class and race. Lower-income and minority students are far more likely to drop out than middle-class and White students. The highest dropout rate is among lower-income Hispanic girls.**

was a great need for specialized education in the skills necessary for the modern workforce, especially English composition, mathematics, and the sciences. Abstract learning in subjects such as history and Latin did not provide immediate work skills, but they did signify that the student had the cultural background necessary to move into the middle class (Willis et al., 1994). They were not only the key to advancement; they were the key to impressing people.

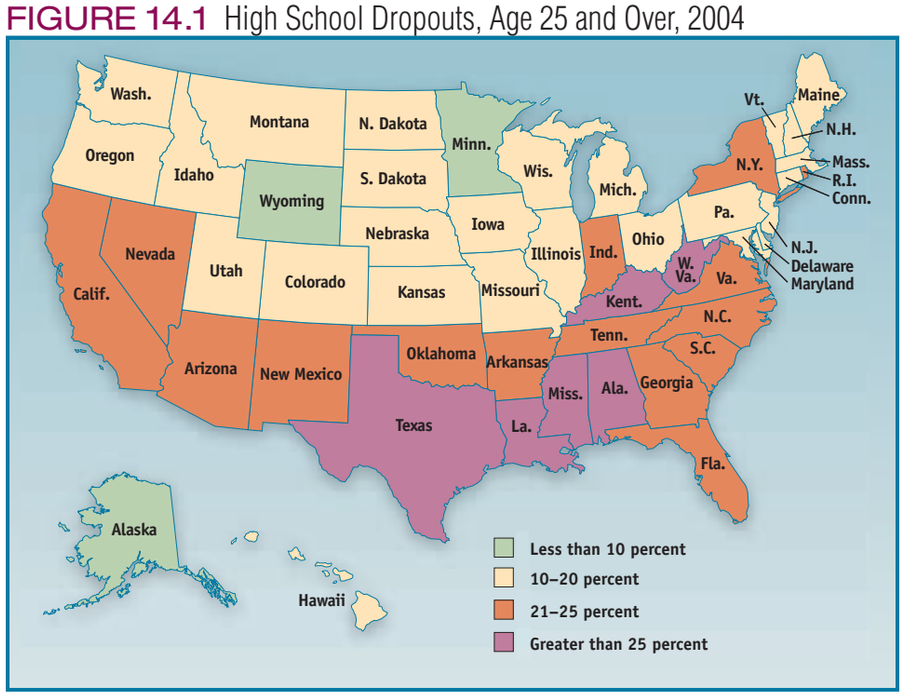
On the college level, the United States is indeed the best-educated country in the world, with the highest graduation rate (one in four adults now has a bachelor's degree) and boasts the majority of the world's best universities (*Economist*, 2005). Yet on the high school level, we have more dropouts and underpreparedness than any other industrialized country. We are falling behind in math, science, and problem-solving skills.

Some groups have consistently enjoyed more educational success than others. Women received less elementary and secondary education than men through the nineteenth century and were all but excluded from higher education until the early twentieth century. The vast majority of high school dropouts come from low-income families, and the vast majority of college students come from high-income families.

Research confirms the funneling effect of the educational system. The high school graduation rate is significantly lower among minorities: 78 percent of Whites, 56 percent of African Americans, and 52 percent of Hispanic Americans graduate from high school (Greene and Winters, 2005). The states with the highest graduation rates are often the states with the highest White populations: 85 percent in Iowa, North Dakota, and Wisconsin, but only 56 percent in Georgia and 53 percent in South Carolina (Figure 14.1).

MyLab

## FIGURE 14.1 High School Dropouts, Age 25 and Over, 2004




*Source:* Frey, William H., Amy Beth Anspach, & John Paul Dewitt, *The Allyn & Bacon Social Atlas of the United States.* Published by Allyn & Bacon, Boston, MA. Copyright © 2008 by Pearson Education. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

The Hispanic dropout rate is particularly troubling. For third-generation Hispanics, it was 15.9 percent in 2001, almost double the rate of White non-Hispanics (8.2 percent) and even of new Hispanic immigrants (8.6 percent) (Greene and Winters, 2005). There are many causes for this disparity: low incomes, a language barrier, and low-quality schooling that discourages participation.

## Education and Globalization

Around the world, education is closely tied to economic success. In low- and middle-income nations like India, Uganda, and Malawi, boys and girls may spend several years in school, but their learning is limited to the practical knowledge they need to farm or perform other traditional tasks. They don't have time for much else. For instance, India has outlawed child labor, but many Indian families still depend on the factory wages of their children, leaving them little time for school. In Egypt, the constitution guarantees five years of free schooling, but most poor children can't afford to go beyond the bare minimum. In the poorest countries, most children do not go to school at all, whether or not free education is available.

Globally, there is considerable inequity in educational opportunity (Table 14.1). A child in a high-performing country such as Norway can expect 17 years of education, double that of a child in Bangladesh and four times as much as a child in Niger (UNESCO, 2004). Yet progress has been made in the past decade. With the major exception of Africa, most children around the world now receive some primary education, and the chance of a child continuing from primary school into the secondary grades is more than 80 percent in most countries. Beyond that, however, enrollment

### TABLE 14.1

**Percentage Currently Attending School, by Region**

| | WEIGHTED[a] AVERAGES | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | AGES 10–14 | | AGES 15–19 | | AGES 20–24 | |
| REGION | BOYS | GIRLS | BOYS | GIRLS | BOYS | GIRLS |
| Africa | | | | | | |
| Eastern/Southern Africa | 74.1 | 70.6 | 52.2 | 39.4 | 16.4 | 9.1 |
| Western/Middle Africa | 66.1 | 57.6 | 48.1 | 34.3 | 24.2 | 12.2 |
| Asia[b] | | | | | | |
| South-central/Southeastern Asia[c] | 81.0 | 76.0 | 47.1 | 37.3 | 16.9 | 9.8 |
| Former Soviet Asia[d] | 98.4 | 98.9 | 56.1 | 54.4 | 13.2 | 11.7 |
| Latin America and Caribbean | | | | | | |
| Caribbean/Central America | 80.0 | 77.8 | 50.9 | 44.2 | 21.3 | 16.5 |
| South America | 92.9 | 93.1 | 60.5 | 61.7 | 22.0 | 23.8 |
| Middle East | | | | | | |
| Western Asia/Northern Africa | 81.0 | 67.6 | 47.7 | 37.4 | 17.5 | 10.3 |
| TOTAL—All regions | 79.8 | 74.6 | 50.4 | 41.2 | 18.7 | 12.2 |

[a] Weighting is based on United Nations population estimates for year 2000 (World Population Prospects: The 2000 Revision).
[b] Eastern Asia not included; no DHS available.
[c] India's DHS does not include current enrollment data for 18–24-year-olds and has been removed from this table.
[d] Former Soviet Asia includes former Soviet Republics in South-central and Western Asia.
*Source:* From *Growing Up Global: The Changing Transitions to Adulthood in Developing Countries* by Cynthia B. Lloyd. Reprinted with permission from the National Academies Press. Copyright © 2005, National Academy of Sciences.

▲ **Some developing countries have made enormous strides in education. China now boasts very high enrollments in primary grades and almost 96 percent literacy. And yet enrollment drops considerably after ninth grade, especially in poorer regions, and there are large gender gaps.**

percentages drop dramatically in most regions of the world. In China, Malaysia, and Mexico, for example, the 90 percent of students who are enrolled at the lower secondary level drops to under 50 percent in the upper grades (UNESCO, 2004).

Gender also determines educational opportunity. One in three children worldwide lives in a country that does not ensure equal access to education for boys and girls. And in all countries without gender parity, it is girls who are disadvantaged (UNESCO, 2004). Gender disparity is even more widespread at the secondary level; in fact, the magnitude of inequity increases by educational level. Ironically, while disadvantages for girls in secondary education are common in low-income countries, girls tend to outnumber boys in high-income countries, including the United States (UNESCO, 2004).

As a result, the literacy rate is extremely low in poor countries. Among the Arab states, 19.8 percent of men and 41.1 percent of women were not literate as of 2006. Globally, 40 percent of Africans, 30 percent of Asians, and 15 percent of Latin Americans are illiterate (UNESCO, 2006). When most citizens cannot read and write at ordinary levels, they cannot compete in the global marketplace, and their nations remain impoverished (Figure 14.2).

A number of developing nations have begun intensive efforts to improve education, from grade school through university and professional schools. India has the world's youngest population, with 500 million people aged 18 and younger. If they could be educated, they would prove a formidable economic force. Government spending on education has grown rapidly. As a result, almost 90 percent of all Indian children are enrolled in school. The literacy rate is up to 63 percent—from 53 percent in 1995. The number of Indians attending colleges and universities almost doubled in the 1990s. However, there is still a high dropout rate—75 percent of Indian students drop out after eighth grade, and 78 percent of girls and 48 percent of boys fail to graduate from high school (*Economist*, 2005).

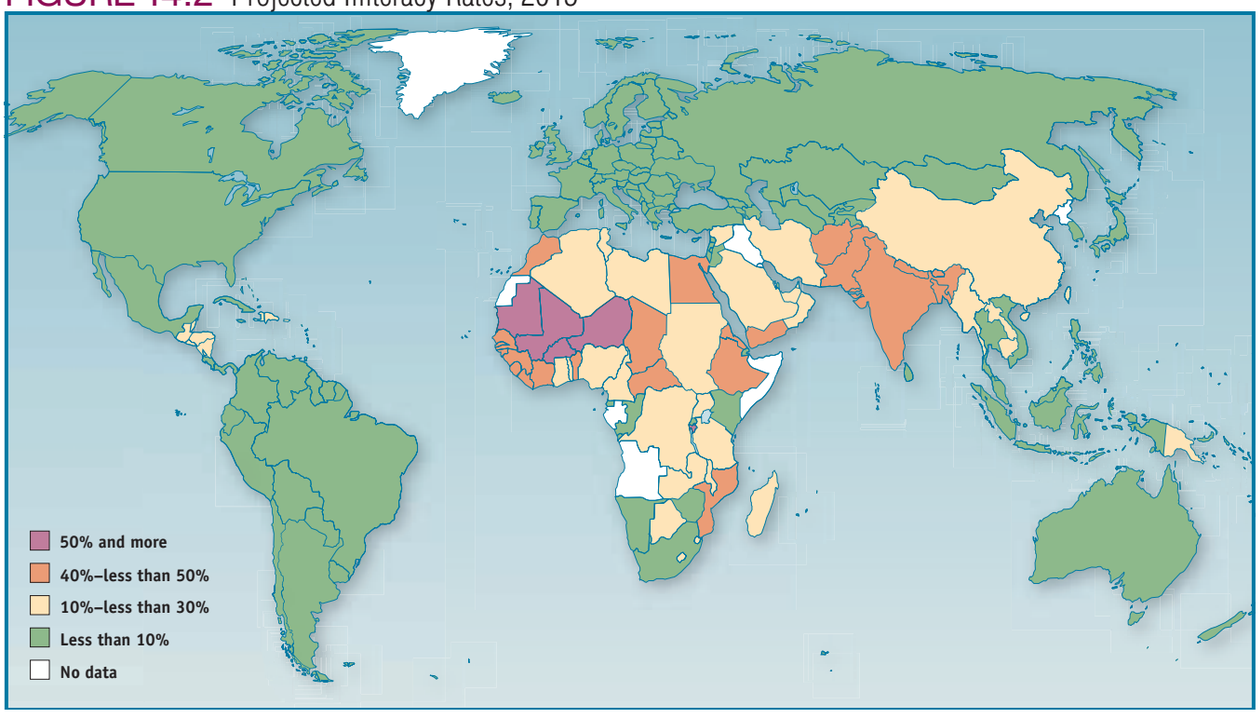
In the 1980s, China also planned for universal education for grades 1 through 9 by 2000. As a result, there was an immense expansion of the educational system. Enrollment is high—at least through grade nine—and the literacy rate among young adults (age 12 to 40) is now 96 percent. There has also been a massive university expansion, especially at the doctoral level: Between 1999 and 2003, nearly 12 times as many doctorates were awarded as in 1982 through 1989 (*Economist,* 2005).

However, enrollment in China is still low, and there is still a large gender gap: Many more boys than girls are being educated. The curriculum depends to a large extent on rote learning and memorization rather than reasoning and problem solving. And authoritarian political control inhibits new scientific research if the government doesn't like it.

## Intelligence(s) and Literacy

One of the primary goals of education is to "make people smarter," or at least to develop their innate intelligence. But is there a single human capacity called intelligence? If so, can it really be modified by education and training, or is it a permanent, unchangeable part of the human brain or spirit?

**FIGURE 14.2** Projected Illiteracy Rates, 2015




*Source:* From UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Reprinted with permission.

Though these questions remain unanswered, the tests we have devised to measure the intelligence quotient (IQ) are highly correlated with success in school. Of course, they were *designed* to predict success in school. Some scholars contend that they are measuring the social, economic, and ethnic differences that correlate with success rather than intelligence itself. In other words, they do not prove that some people are smarter, or even that smarter people are more likely to succeed in school. They prove that our school system is biased.

A few scholars do believe that different levels of success in school among different ethnic groups is not due to bias or inequality after all. They are due to differences in intelligence, which IQ tests measure just fine. Remember the controversy that *The Bell Curve* caused (see Chapter 8)? Richard Hernnstein and Charles Murray (1994) argued that differences in IQ between Blacks and Whites in the United States had a biological basis. However, a team of Berkeley sociologists completely disproved this claim, showing that the differences on IQ tests result from social and cultural differences (Fischer et al., 1996).

Maybe it's time to look at intelligence in another way. In *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (1983), psychologist Howard Gardner argues that intelligence is not a single characteristic. You may get A's in science class and struggle to keep a C in English. You may be a whiz at remembering people's names and faces but unable to drive five blocks without getting lost. Gardner defines intelligence as a set of skills that make it possible for a person to solve problems in life; the potential for finding or creating solutions for problems, which involves gathering new knowledge; and the ability to create an effective product or offer a service that is valued in a culture.

TABLE 14.2

**Gardner's Eight Types of Intelligence**

- **Linguistic**—sensitivity to meaning and order of words
- **Logical-mathematical**—the ability in mathematics and other complex logical systems
- **Spatial**—the ability to "think in pictures," to perceive the visual world accurately, and recreate (or alter) it in the mind or on paper
- **Musical**—the ability to understand and create music
- **Bodily-kinesthetic**—the ability to use one's body in a skilled way, for self-expression or toward a goal
- **Interpersonal**—the ability to perceive and understand other individuals' moods, desires, motivations
- **Intrapersonal**—the understanding of one's own emotions
- **Naturalist**—the ability to recognize and classify plants, minerals, animals

*Source:* Gardner, 1997.

In all, Gardner tabulates seven different kinds of intelligence (he added an eighth in 1997). Everyone has different levels in different combinations—a sort of intelligence "profile" (Table 14.2).

Critics argue that this theory of intelligence is vague and undefined. Aren't dancing and musical ability talents rather than types of intelligence? Is the ability to understand other people's emotions intelligence or sensitivity? Intelligence should be revealed when people must confront an unfamiliar task in an unfamiliar environment, not be strengthened or weakened by culture, as multiple intelligence theory argues.

How would one go about using multiple intelligence theory in the classroom? Doesn't it undercut the value of "core knowledge"—a common collection of "essential facts that every American needs to know"? Certainly, it makes national standards difficult to measure, as well as classifying students' skills and abilities across subjects. And it is impractical—overcrowded classrooms with few resources can barely handle the basic mathematical and verbal aptitudes, let alone bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. Nevertheless, multiple intelligence theory has become the basis of curricula in thousands of schools across the country.

Did *you* know?

"Everybody knows Albert Einstein flunked math." This was offered and repeated constantly when I was a child, to reassure underachievers that our time would someday come. A Google search found more than 500,000 references to it, and it even made it into "Ripley's Believe it or Not!" newspaper column.

Except it isn't true. When showed the column in 1935, he laughed. "I never failed in mathematics," he replied, correctly. "Before I was 15 I had mastered differential and integral calculus." Einstein's mathematical genius was one of his many intelligences—and was pronounced at an early age (Isaacson, 2007).

## Cultural Literacy

Is there a set of information that everyone should know, or is it all a matter of personal preference? Is the person who can discuss Shakespeare's *The Tempest* but has never seen an episode of *Star Trek* really better educated than the person who can argue the merits of Kirk versus Picard but looks for the remote when Shakespeare's play is performed on PBS? More qualified for a white-collar job? Better able to select a candidate on Election Day?

E. D. Hirsch Jr. thinks so. A University of Virginia professor of humanities, Hirsch caused some controversy with his *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (1988). He argued that the modern school curriculum, with its emphasis on diversity, is depriving children of the background that they need to be effective American citizens. They learn trivia, rather than a sound core curriculum.

So what do Americans need to know? Hirsch obliged with his over 600-page *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy* (Hirsch, Kett, and Trefil, 2003). He doesn't reveal much about his criteria for inclusion: He selected items that are not too broad or too narrow, that appear frequently in national periodicals, and that have found "a place in our collective memory." It sounds like an outline of the "hidden curriculum," a reproduction of elite knowledge, and indeed there is little about minorities, very little about non-Western cultures. *Star Trek* is mentioned, as well as Batman and the *Peanuts* comic strip. However, most of the entries have to do with "high culture," elite knowledge. For example, here are some things that every educated person should know:

- "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," a poem by Oscar Wilde.
- Absurdist playwright Samuel Beckett.

- François Rabelais, who wrote the sixteenth-century masterpiece *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.
- Thomas Aquinas, whose *Summa Theologica* is a classic of medieval theology.
- Novelist Sir Walter Scott.
- William Gladstone, prime minister of England during the Victorian era.

OK, tell the truth: How many did you know? How many did your *instructor* know? Why are these more important to know than, let's say, the lyrics to a Bob Dylan song or who Lord Voldemort is?

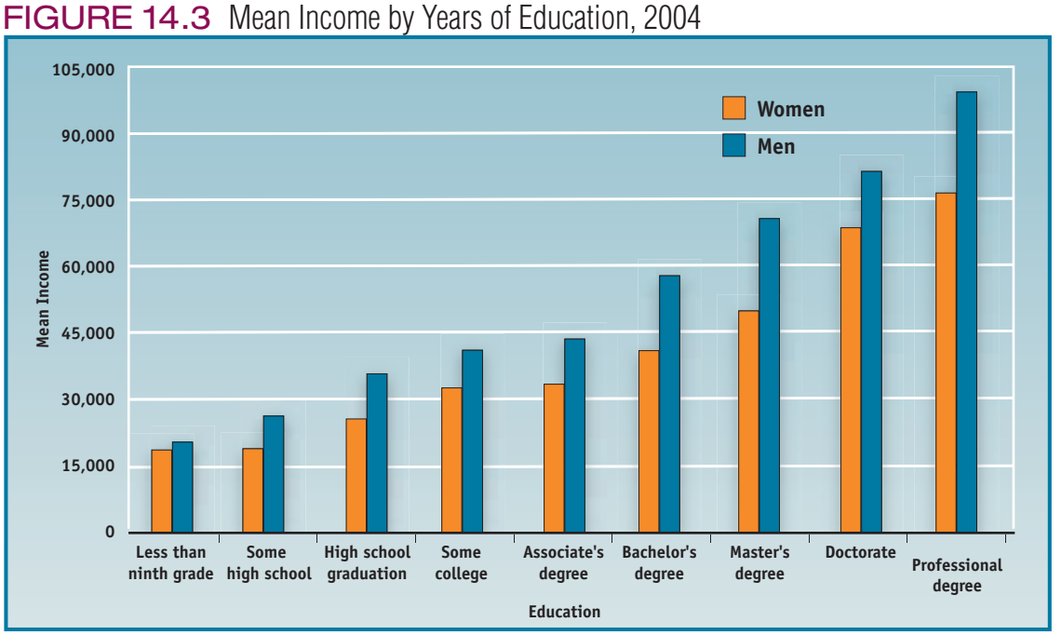
And what about **scientific literacy,** which is, according to the National Academy of Sciences, the "knowledge and understanding of the scientific concepts and processes required for personal decision making, participation in civic and cultural affairs, and economic productivity." Scientific literacy has doubled over the past two decades, but still, only 20 to 25 percent of Americans are scientifically savvy and alert, according to Jon D. Miller, director of the Center for Biomedial Communications at Northwestern University Medical School (Dean, 2005). Low scientific literacy undermines our ability to take part in the democratic process today. One can't be an effective citizen without it, given that we are facing such issues as stem cell research, infectious diseases, nuclear power, and global warming.

## Education and Inequality

If education doesn't make you smarter, at least it makes you richer. The higher your level of education, the higher your income will likely be. Look, for example, at Figure 14.3.

The same holds true in other countries as well. While men at all levels of education earn more than equally educated women, and Whites earn more than

FIGURE 14.3 Mean Income by Years of Education, 2004




*Source:* Digest of Education Statistics, 2005.

racial and ethnic minorities, the relative earnings of all people of greater education are higher than those with lesser educational attainment (OECD, 2006).

But is this because educated people get paid more or because people who are already in the upper classes have enough resources to make sure their children go further in their educations and because upper-class people value education more and therefore push their children?

## Education and Mobility

Most of us believe that education is a ticket to social mobility. Over the course of American history, different groups of immigrants—for example, Jews, Koreans, and Cubans—have successfully used educational advancement as a vehicle for social mobility for the entire ethnic group. But education is also one of the primary vehicles by which society reinforces social inequalities based on race, ethnicity, class, and gender. As long as we believe that education is a strict meritocracy—the best get ahead—we believe that different educational outcomes (some groups do better than others) are based on characteristics of those individuals or those groups: They try harder and do more homework, or their culture rewards educational achievement more than other groups.

While this is partly true, sociologists also study a different dynamic, a hidden curriculum, through which education not only creates social inequalities but makes them seem natural, normal, and inevitable (Bowles, 1976; Lynch, 1989; Margolis, 2001). Of course, some teachers and administrators are racist, sexist, heterosexist, or classist and deliberately introduce stereotypes, marginalization, and exclusion into their lesson plans. But the problem goes much deeper than that. Educators need not *try* to reproduce social inequalities. They are reproduced in textbooks, in test questions, and in classroom discussions.

However, the most important lessons of the hidden curriculum take place outside the classroom, on the playground, in the cafeteria, in the many informal interactions that take place during every school day, from kindergarten through college. Students learn which of their peers are "supposed" to dominate and which are "supposed" to be bullied, beaten, laughed at, or ignored. They learn about gender hierarchies (call a boy a "girl" to humiliate him, or "gay" to humiliate him even more). They learn about racial hierarchies. They learn about social status. The lessons they learn will influence their future decisions, whether they are in the boardroom or the courtroom, whether they are applying for a job or doing the hiring, regardless of how often the formal curriculum includes units on diversity.

## Inequality and the Structure of Education

The types of schools and the uneven distribution of resources for schools result in often dramatic differences in student achievement.

**Private versus Public Schools.** Today one in nine American children (about 6 million) attend private schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). White students are twice as likely to attend private schools as Black students, and their numbers are increasing: Only 60 percent of White students were enrolled in public school in 2001–2002, 7 percentage points less than a decade before (Figure 14.4).

Nearly three-fourths of the 27,000 private schools in the United States are run by religious bodies. The Roman Catholic Church runs the most (8,000), and interdenominational fundamentalist Protestants come in a close second, but there are also

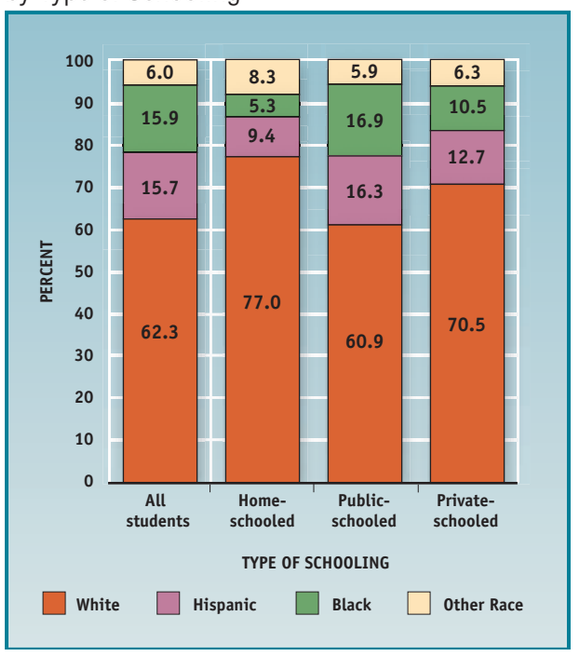
schools affiliated with Presbyterians, Mormons, Lutherans, Orthodox Jews, and many others. There are usually no restrictions about the religious background of the students, but religious instruction is required, along with chapel and other religious services.

Most of the 6,000 secular private schools are prestigious (expensive), modeled after British boarding schools, with many advantages in educational quality and school-based social networks. They draw an elite group of students, and their graduates go on to equally prestigious and expensive private universities.

Many people believe that a private school provides better education and send their children if they can afford it. Forty-seven percent of U.S. members of Congress and 51 percent of U.S. senators with school-age children sent them to private schools. In Florida, nearly 40 percent of lawmakers, nearly four times the state average, send their school-aged children to private schools—and when the lawmakers are on education committees, the percentage rises to 60 percent (*St. Petersburg Times*, 2005). Even public school teachers believe that private schools are superior—nationwide, more than one in five public school teachers choose private schools for their own children, almost twice the national average (Council for American Private Education, 2005).

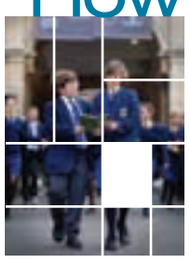
**Wealthy versus Poor School Districts.** Parents say they switch to private schools—or want to—because of the crumbling buildings, overcrowded classrooms, bare-bones curriculum,

**FIGURE 14.4** Race/Ethnicity of Students by Type of Schooling




*Source:* Frey, William H., Amy Beth Anspach, & John Paul Dewitt, *The Allyn & Bacon Social Atlas of the United States*. Published by Allyn & Bacon, Boston, MA. Copyright © 2008 by Pearson Education. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

## How do we know what we know?



### Does Private School Make a Difference?

Studies of students attending public and private schools do find some greater performance. But was it because of the type of school they attended? Christopher and Sarah Lubienski (2006) analyzed data from 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress, which looked at achievement rates for 166,736 fourth grade students at 6,664 schools and 131,497 eighth grade students attending 5,377 schools. This included students at both public and private schools and included secular private schools and Christian schools.

They found that the rather modest differences in achievement between students in public and private schools were actually explained by demographic variables, such as parents' education, income, and other factors. When they controlled for these factors, the differences between public and private schools disappeared, meaning that there were no appreciable differences as a result of the type of school you went to. In fact, the relationship reversed when comparing public and Christian schools: When demographic variables were controlled, students at public schools had significantly higher achievement than students at Christian schools.

Similar results have been found in other countries. In a 2002 study of public and private schools in ten countries in Latin America (Somers, McEwan, and Willins, 2004), raw test scores favored private schools. But when socioeconomic status was taken into account, the advantage shrank (just as the Lubienskis found). When the "peer effect"—the influence of other students and school environment—was factored in, the overall difference was zero: Public and private schoolchildren performed equally well.

and poor instruction in many public schools today. Unfortunately, those parents most able to afford private schools probably live in districts where the public schools are actually pretty good. Because education is funded largely by local property taxes, wealthier neighborhoods and communities have more money to spend on schools than poorer ones. Public schools in wealthy neighborhoods can afford state-of-the-art labs and libraries, small classes, and highly paid teachers. It is the poor neighborhoods that have the crumbling buildings, overcrowded classrooms, and overworked, underpaid teachers. The pattern holds up in every city and every state, reproducing the same class privileges that we find in the public/private school divide (Oakes, 1990).

**Racial Segregation.** The Supreme Court's *Brown* v. *Board of Education* decision (1954) outlawed the practice of **segregation**—requiring White and non-White students living in the same district to attend separate schools. In 1954, nearly 100 percent of Black students were attending intensely segregated (predominantly minority) schools. Busing programs began to decrease segregation in favor of **integration,** in which the school's ethnic distribution is more balanced.

Integration in U.S. classrooms peaked in 1988, then began to reverse when the 1991 Supreme Court ruling allowed the return of neighborhood schools. In 1998, more than 70 percent of Black students attended intensely segregated schools. The most dramatic (and largely ignored) trend affects Hispanic Americans. In 1968, a little more than 20 percent of Hispanic students were enrolled in intensely segregated schools. In 1998, more than a third were. Hispanics face serious levels of segregation by race and also poverty, with particularly large increases in segregation in the West, the nation's first predominantly minority area in terms of public school enrollment (Orfield, 2004).

Segregation is strongly associated with poverty for all groups: Nearly 90 percent of intensely segregated Black and Latino schools have student bodies with concentrated poverty (Orfield, 2004). Concentrated poverty means students with worse health care, lower nutrition, less-educated parents, more frequent moves, weaker preschool skills, and often limited English skills. They have two strikes against them in their quest for educational excellence already, and then they must contend with outdated textbooks, inadequate facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and, often, inexperienced, uncredentialed teachers.

## Bilingual Education

Up to the 1960s, public education in the United States was always conducted in English (except for classes designed to teach foreign languages). Children were not allowed to use another language in the classroom, and often they were punished for speaking another language in the hallways or in the schoolyard. Immigrants, Native Americans, and others who came to school with poor or no English were lost.

In 1968, Congress passed the Bilingual Education Act, asserting that these children were being denied equal access to education and that school districts should "take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency." These steps included courses in ESL (English as a second language) and often classroom instruction in the student's native language on the primary level.

In recent years, critics of bilingual education have argued that the programs are costly and inefficient; that there simply aren't enough qualified teachers fluent in Navajo, Somali, and Thai to go around; and that students tend to do poorly in tests of both English and their native language. But often the question boils down to melting pot versus multiculturalism. Should everyone be learning English as quickly as

possible, or is there room for Navajo, Somali, and Thai in our schools and in our society?

Many researchers have concluded that bilingual education helps students to learn English. A long-awaited, federally commissioned report was supposed to summarize existing data to determine whether bilingual education helps students who speak other languages to read English, but its release has been cancelled by the government. It is known that the researchers involved conclude that it helps ("Tongue-Tied on Bilingual Education," 2005).

▲ **Grades reflect both students' achievement and teachers' expectations. In one study, girls and Asian Americans received better grades than other students—even when their test scores were the same. The researchers concluded that this was because they conformed to teachers' perceptions of how good students behave.**

## Tracking

**Tracking,** or grouping students according to their ability, is common in American schools. Some schools do not have formal tracking, but virtually all have mechanisms for sorting students into groups that seem to be alike in ability and achievement (Oakes, 1985).

Whether the tracking is formal or informal, strong labeling develops. Individuals in the low-achievement, non–college-preparatory, or manual track come to be labeled "dummies" and are treated as if they are stupid or incompetent, thus affecting their self-image and ultimately affecting their achievement in a self-fulfilling prophecy. The negative impact of tracking mostly affects minority students (Oakes, 1990).

The term **self-fulfilling prophecy** was coined by Merton ([1949] 1970) for a curious phenomenon: When you expect something to happen, it usually does. We've seen this before with racial stereotypes (Chapter 8). Farkas and colleagues found that girls and Asian Americans got better grades than boys, Blacks, and Latinos, even when they all had the same test scores (Farkas, 1996; Farkas et al., 1990a; Farkas, Sheehan, and Grobe, 1990b). They concluded that girls and Asian Americans signaled that they were "good" students—they were eager to cooperate, quickly agreed with what the teacher said, and demonstrated they were trying hard. These characteristics, coveted by teachers, were rewarded with better grades.

The correlation between high educational achievement and race is not lost on the students. In a speech before the Democratic National Convention in 2004, Barack Obama denounced, "the slander that a Black child with a book is 'acting White.'" He was paraphrasing research by Berkeley anthropologist John Ogbu, which demonstrates that even people who suffer from stereotyped images often believe them. Minority children, especially boys, believe that good school performance is a challenge to their ethnic identity or a betrayal. They *are supposed to* perform poorly (A. Ferguson, 2002; Fordham, 1991; Ogbu and Fordham, 1986).

## Schooling for Gender Identity—and Inequality

Among the first words ever spoken by the first talking Barbie were "Math class is tough!" Education not only reproduces racial inequality, it reproduces gender stereotypes. In the hidden curriculum, teachers, administrators, and peers require us to conform to narrow definitions of what it means to be a "boy" or a "girl," and they punish deviance, subtly or not. However, education also allows us to move beyond stereotyping: The classroom is perhaps the only place where a boy can be praised for being quiet and studious and a girl can be praised for knowing the answer.

# How do we know what we know?

## The Racial Achievement Gap

In *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning* (2003), Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom argue that African American educational underachievement stems from a variety of factors:

- Low birth weight, which can impair intellectual development.
- High number of single-parent families led by young mothers unprepared to give children good educational guidance.
- Inadequate funding.
- Difficulty recruiting good teachers to work in schools attended primarily by Blacks.

By contrast, Ronald Ferguson (2001) studied middle- and upper-middle-class students in Ann Arbor, Michigan, a wealthy, well-educated community, the site of the University of Michigan. Students in the city's three high schools had an average SAT score in 2004 of 1165, over 100 points higher than the national average. In 2003, they had 44 National Merit finalists. Eighty-five percent of high school seniors go on to four-year colleges and universities. Quite an elite bunch!

Even in middle-class college-bound high schools, African American students typically had a C average, White students a B. African Americans typically scored 100 points below White students on the SAT. Why?

Some of the reasons Ferguson found were environmental: Even in the same community and the same schools, the African American students were less affluent: 21 percent were upper middle class or upper class, compared to 73 percent of the White students. But there was more. The parents of African American students lacked access to the networks White parents had to trade information about the best teachers, classes, and strategies for success. They felt less entitled, less able to be demanding and advocate for their children.

Teachers often misread signals from the Black students. In high-stress, high-achievement schools, students who are trying hard and not doing well perceive themselves as failures. It's better to act as though you are simply uninterested in doing well than to acknowledge that you are struggling. Teachers see laziness and indifference, lower their expectations, and give students less support—which Ferguson found matters a great deal to minority students. They then try harder to pretend that they are uninterested, resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In their book, *Failing at Fairness* (1994), David and Myra Sadker documented some of the subtle ways teachers reinforce both gender difference and gender inequality. They named it the "chilly classroom climate" for girls, describing that class materials used often reflect stereotyped differences between women and men, boys and girls. Because of such disparities, there has been an effort to increase the number of active girls in schoolbooks and also in children's media.

There have also been dramatic changes outside the classroom. Title IX legislation forbids discrimination against girls and women in all aspects of school life. As a result, many elementary and secondary schools have increased funding for girls' sports, allowing more girls the opportunity to participate. And, contrary to some expectations, girls have shown they love sports.

Still, one of the chief lessons taught in school is what it means to be a man or a woman. Gender conformity—adhering to normative expectations about masculinity or femininity—is carefully scrutinized. We get messages everywhere we look—in the content of the texts we read, the rules we are all supposed to follow, and the behaviors of teachers and administrators as role models. But it is most significantly taught by peers, who act as a sort of "gender police," enforcing the rules. Often we learn it by a sort of negative reinforcement: Step out of line, even the tiniest bit, and your friends and other students will let you know, clearly and unequivocally, that you have transgressed. Do it again, and they may begin to doubt

you as a potential friend. Do it consistently, and you will be marginalized as a weirdo, a deviant, or, most importantly, as gay.

Every American teenager knows that the most constant put-down in our high schools and middle schools these days is "that's so gay." Ordinarily this gay-baiting—calling people or something they do "gay" as a way of ridiculing them or putting them down—has little to do with sexual orientation: Calling someone's shirt or hairstyle or musical preference "gay" doesn't typically mean that you suspect he might actually be homosexual. It means that you don't think he is acting sufficiently masculine. "Dude, you're a fag," is the way one kid put it (Pascoe, 2005).

The constant teasing and bullying that occur in middle schools and high schools have become national problems (Barry, 2008; Jovenen, Graham, and Schuster, 2003; Olweus, 1993). Bullying is not one single thing but a continuum stretching from hurtful language through shoving and hitting to criminal assault and school shootings. Harmful teasing and bullying happen to more than 1 million schoolchildren, both boys and girls, a year. The evidence of bullying's ubiquity alone is quite convincing. In one study of middle and high schools students in midwestern towns, 88 percent reported having observed bullying, and 77 percent reported being a victim of bullying at some point during their school years. In another, 70 percent had been sexually harassed by their peers; 40 percent had experienced physical dating violence, 66 percent had been victimized by emotional abuse in a dating relationship, and 54 percent had been bullied.

**▲ Bullying has become an increasingly important problem in schools. More than 1 million schoolchildren a year are bullied. More than just a problem of individual bullies and victims, sociologists point to bullying as a social experience that can compromise educational goals. Challenging bullying must involve changing school culture.**

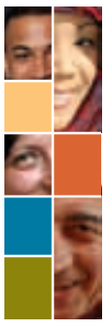
Another national survey of 15,686 students in grades 6 through 10 published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) found that 29.9 percent reported frequent involvement with bullying—13 percent as bully, 10.9 percent as victim, and 6 percent as both (Nansel et al., 2001). One-quarter of kids in primary school, grades 4 through 6, admitted to bullying another student with some regularity in the three months before the survey (Limber et al., 1997). And yet another found that during one two-week period at two Los Angeles middle schools, nearly half the 192 kids interviewed reported being bullied at least once. More than that said they had seen others targeted (Juvonen, Graham, and Schuster, 2003).

Many middle and high school students are afraid to go to school; they fear locker rooms, hallways, bathrooms, lunchrooms, and playgrounds, and some even fear their classrooms.

## School Reform and Privatization

How can schools be more responsive to the people they are intended to serve? One of the most popular types of school reform during the last few decades has been privatization, allowing some degree of private control over public education. There are two types of privatization, vouchers and charter schools.

The **voucher system** uses taxpayer funds to pay for students' tuition at private schools. The idea has been floating around for decades. It was first proposed by economist Milton Friedman in 1955, based on the idea of the free market: If there is competition for a product or service, quality will increase. However, it is controversial:



# Sociology and our World

## Random School Shootings

Bullying and homophobic harassment were two of several precipitating factors in the tragic cases of random school shootings that have taken place in American schools. Since 1992, there have been 29 cases of such shootings in which a boy (or boys) opens fire on his classmates. In my research project on these shootings, I've discovered several startling facts. First, all 29 shootings were committed by boys. All but one took place in a rural or suburban school—not an inner-city school. All but one of the shooters were White.

And they all had a similar story of being bullied and harassed every day, until school became a kind of torture. Why? It was *not* because they were gay, but because they were *different* from the other boys—shy, bookish, honor students, artistic, musical, theatrical, nonathletic, "geekish," or weird. It was because they were not athletic, overweight or underweight, or because they wore glasses.

Faced with such incessant torment, some boys withdraw, some self-medicate, some attempt suicide. Many try valiantly, and often vainly, to fit in, to conform to these impossible standards that others set for them. And a few explode. Like Luke Woodham, a bookish, overweight 16-year-old in Pearl, Mississippi. An honor student, he was teased constantly for being overweight and a nerd. On October 1, 1997, Woodham opened fire in the school's common area, killing two students and wounding seven others. In a psychiatric interview, he said, "I am not insane. I am angry. I killed because people like me are mistreated every day. I am malicious because I am miserable."

Fourteen-year-old Michael Carneal was a shy freshman at Heath High School in Paducah, Kentucky, barely 5 feet tall, weighing 110 pounds. He wore thick glasses and played in the high school band. He felt alienated, pushed around, picked on. Over Thanksgiving, 1997, he stole two shotguns, two semiautomatic rifles, a pistol, and 700 rounds of ammunition and brought them to school hoping that they would bring him instant recognition. "I just wanted the guys to think I was cool," he said. When the cool guys ignored him, he opened fire on a morning prayer circle, killing three classmates and wounding five others. Now serving a life sentence in prison, Carneal told psychiatrists weighing his sanity that "people respect me now" (Blank, 1998).

And then there was Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. The very word *Columbine* has become a symbol; kids today often talk about someone "pulling a Columbine." The connection between being socially marginalized, picked on, and bullied every day propelled Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold deeper into their video-game-inspired fantasies of a vengeful bloodbath. On April 20, 1999, Harris and Klebold brought a variety of weapons to their high school and proceeded to walk through the school, shooting whomever they could find. Twenty-three students and faculty were injured and 15 died, including one teacher and the perpetrators.

On April 16, 2007, Seung Hui Cho, a 23-year-old student at Virginia Tech, murdered two students in a dorm, waited about an hour, and then calmly walked to an academic building, chained the entrance, and started shooting methodically. In the end, he killed 30 students and faculty before shooting himself—the deadliest shooting by an individual in our nation's history. While obviously mentally ill, he had managed never to be ill "enough" to attract serious attention. In the time between the shootings, he recorded a video in which he fumed about all the taunting, teasing, and being ignored he had endured and how this final conflagration would even the score. In February, 2008, a 27-year-old former student at Northern Illinois University, Stephen Kazmierczak, opened fire on a crowded lecture hall at Northern Illinois University, killing four students before turning the gun on himself. Cho, Kazmierczak, and the two boys at Columbine add a new dimension to rampage school shootings: suicide.

In a national survey of teenagers' attitudes, nearly nine of ten teenagers (86 percent) said that they believed that the school shootings were motivated by a desire "to get back at those who have hurt them" and that "other kids picking on them, making fun of them, or bullying them" were the immediate causes. Other potential causes, such as violence on television, movies, computer games or videos, mental problems, and access to guns, were significantly lower on the adolescents' ratings (Gaughan, Cerio, and Myers, 2001).

A school district in Wisconsin instituted the first voucher program in 1990, and 15 years later only two more states (Ohio and Florida) and the District of Columbia have followed suit, with a total of only about 36,000 students. Voters have defeated proposed voucher programs in many states, including California, Michigan, Texas, South Carolina, and Indiana.

TABLE 14.3

**Charter School Scores: Percent of Fourth Graders at or above Basic Level**

| | MATH | | READING | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | CHARTER SCHOOLS | OTHER PUBLIC | CHARTER SCHOOLS | OTHER PUBLIC |
| **RACE** | | | | |
| White | 84 | **87** | 71 | **74** |
| Black | 50 | **54** | 37 | **40** |
| Hispanic | 58 | **62** | **45** | 43 |
| **INCOME** | | | | |
| Eligible for public lunch | 53 | **62** | 38 | **45** |
| Not eligible | 80 | **88** | 70 | **76** |
| **LOCATION** | | | | |
| Central city | 58 | **68** | 50 | **52** |
| Urban fringe/large town | 78 | **80** | 64 | **66** |
| Rural/small town | **84** | 80 | 64 | **67** |

*Source:* From "Charter Schools Trail in Results, U.S. Data Reveals" by Diana Jean Schemo, *The New York Times,* August 17, 2004. Reprinted by permission.

**Charter schools** are publicly funded elementary or secondary schools that set forth in their founding document (charter) goals they intend to meet in terms of student achievement. In return, these schools are privately administered and exempt from certain laws regarding education. They encompass a wide range of curricula and style, from no-nonsense, "back-to-basics" reading, writing, and mathematics to technology-rich science and math schools to intimate academies modeled on the more elite private schools. The first charter school was authorized in Minnesota in 1991, and they have been proliferating ever since. Now there are 3,400 charter schools in 40 states, with about 1 million students (Center for Education Reform, 2007).

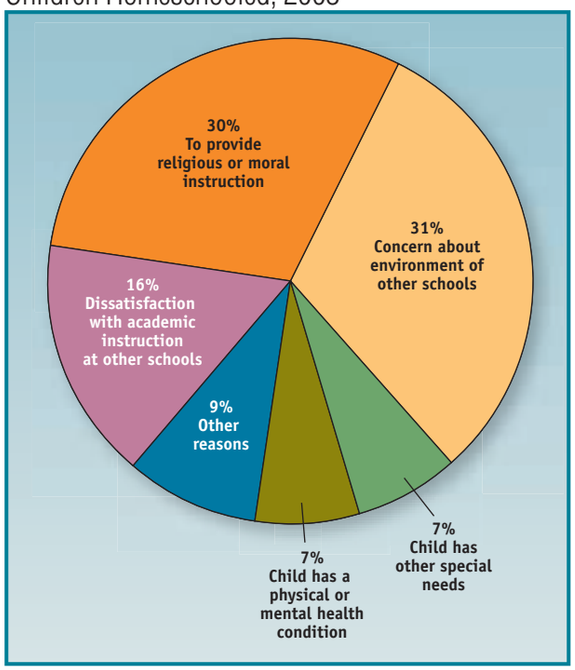
But do charter schools work? In the first national study, fourth graders attending charter schools performed worse than their peers in traditional public schools in almost every racial, economic, and geographic group (Table 14.3). Charter schools are also more segregated than public schools, especially for African American students (Orfield, 2004). Obviously this may be due not to the intent or desires of academic leaders but to flaws in state policies, enforcement, and the method of approving schools for charters.

**Homeschooling.** About 1.1 million students ages 5 through 17 were being homeschooled in the United States in spring 2003, an increase of almost a quarter million since 1999 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). They are homeschooled in all grades, from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Why do parents homeschool their children? The most important reason cited was concern about the environment of traditional schools (31 percent). Almost as many said that they wanted to provide the religious or moral instruction missing in traditional schools (30 percent). Only 16 percent said that they were dissatisfied with the academic instruction at the other schools (Figure 14.5).

Thus, homeschooling is a phenomenon largely of the political far left and the far right. Liberals might complain about classroom conduct, watered-down academics,

**FIGURE 14.5** Parental Reasons for Having Children Homeschooled, 2003




*Source:* Frey, William H., Amy Beth Anspach, & John Paul Dewitt, *The Allyn & Bacon Social Atlas of the United States.* Published by Allyn & Bacon, Boston, MA. Copyright © 2008 by Pearson Education. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

and the lack of attention to individual learning styles; conservatives and religious homeschoolers complain about having a required multicultural curriculum, with no school prayer, and teaching evolution.

## No Child Left Behind

In January 2002, President George W. Bush signed Public Law 107-110, the Elementary and Secondary School Act, better known as "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB). The 670-page law outlines a top-down approach to school performance, with a number of sweeping, even revolutionary, provisions:

- Students in elementary school (grades 3 through 8) must take annual tests to ensure that they have met minimal standards of competency in reading and math.
- Students in schools that are falling behind can transfer to better schools on the government's tab.
- Every child should learn to read and write English by the end of the third grade.

The cost of enforcing this law is immense: The Department of Education budget increased from $14 billion to $22.4 billion to handle it. And the goals, though broadly defined, become difficult to enforce. Teachers complain that they must spend an excessive amount of class time preparing students for the reading and math tests, while ignoring other essential subjects like history and science. They complain that the program doesn't target the students who need the most help and even forces them to dumb down accountability measures that were already in place.

School districts complain that the law tends to reproduce the same inequalities that it is intended to combat. It treats every school district alike, ignoring special challenges faced by districts with many impoverished or non-English-speaking students or students with learning disabilities.

The administration says that the programs are successful, pointing to a (small) rise in math and reading test scores. But 40 states have requested exemptions from part of the NCLB, and 20 states are debating whether to drop out and forego the federal funding. Others are setting absurdly low standards to make targets easy to meet or are passing laws giving priority to their existing school accountability programs.

# The Sociology of Higher Education

In 1949, there were 2.4 million college students in the United States. Fifty years later, there were 16 million. The population of the country had doubled during that period, but the proportion of the population going to college increased by 800 percent.

What do you think?

MyLab

### Confidence in Education

How much confidence do you have in our educational system? There are those who think that the U.S. educational system is in a state of crisis. These individuals worry that our students will not be able to compete with those of other countries in the global economy. Other individuals and agencies are more optimistic, and are working hard to develop strategies to improve the system. So, what do you think?

**As far as the people running the education system are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?**

- ❍ A great deal
- ❍ Only some
- ❍ Hardly any

*Source:* General Social Survey, 2004.

About one in four Americans now has a college degree. And it is not merely a matter of intellectual interest: Today people need bachelor's degrees, and sometimes master's degrees, to get jobs that would have required a high school diploma or less 50 years ago. What happened?

In 1949, college degrees were simply unnecessary. A high school diploma qualified you for almost every job, and if you needed additional training, you could apply directly to a law or medical school. The wealthy went to college to "become educated," learn the social skills, and build the social networks necessary for an upper-class life (Altbach, 1998; Lucas, 1996; Rudolph, 1990).

After World War II, GI loans brought many of the returning soldiers to college for the first time. Most were the first in their families to attend college, and they weren't quite sure what to expect. Some studied "liberal arts" such as English, history, and philosophy, but most wanted courses directly related to the jobs they would get afterward. Colleges filled the need with job-oriented majors and courses. Employers, faced with a glut of applicants more qualified than usual, began to require more advanced degrees for entry-level jobs: Why hire someone with just a high school diploma for the typist job, when there were a dozen applicants with college degrees? Majors and career paths became more specialized: Why hire someone with an English degree for the advertising job, when there were a dozen applicants who majored in advertising? Today most students still major in one of the liberal arts, but job-oriented majors are very popular.

## Preparing for College

Although college is rapidly becoming a necessity for middle-class and even working-class lives, the quality of American higher education is in question. Student readiness and achievement are both low.

Among industrialized countries, American 15-year-olds rank 24 out of 29 in math literacy and problem-solving ability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

TABLE 14.4

**Average SAT Scores of High School Seniors in the United States, 1976–2004**

| | VERBAL | MATH |
|---|---|---|
| 1976 | 511 | 520 |
| 1980 | 506 | 515 |
| 1984 | 511 | 518 |
| 1988 | 512 | 521 |
| 1992 | 504 | 521 |
| 1996 | 507 | 527 |
| 2000 | 507 | 533 |
| 2004 | 512 | 537 |

*Source:* College Entrance Examination Board, 2005.

They fall behind all Scandinavian countries, Korea, Japan, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, in fact all of Western Europe except Portugal and Italy. Just over one-third of American high school graduates have college-ready skills. More than half (53 percent) of all college students are required to take remedial English or math (American Diploma Project, 2004).

Because they are unprepared for college, it is understandable that they are not prepared to graduate within the traditional four years. Smaller college endowments (which mean less scholarship money) and a widening gap between federal grant stipends and tuition costs mean that most students must work, part-time or full-time, and classes and studying compete with their work schedules. Only a little over 50 percent of all college freshmen actually receive a bachelor's degree within six years of enrolling (Greene and Winters, 2005). The six-year rate varies from a high of 66 percent in Massachusetts and 64 percent in Maryland to a low of 39 percent in New Mexico, 37 percent in Louisiana, and 20 percent in Alaska. At historically Black colleges, the six-year graduation rate is 42 percent (*Journal of Blacks in Higher Education,* 2007a, b).

On the other hand, there is also evidence that we are no less prepared than we used to be. For example, the average Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores are about the same today as they were in 1976. As you can see in Table 14.4, contrary to popular opinion, scores on the SAT test, taken by most high school students who intend to go to college, have not been in a downward spiral. During the past 30 years, the mean score on the verbal section has stayed about the same, and the mean score on the math section has actually increased.

Could it be that American students are doing about the same as they have been for decades—but that the rest of the world is catching up?

## Higher Education and Inequality

High school graduation is only the rim of the funnel of educational privilege. Of those minorities and lower- and working-class persons who graduate from high school, few go on to college. Of those who do attend college, few graduate from college. And so on. By the time they turn 26, 59 percent of people from affluent families but just 7 percent of people from low-income households have a bachelor's degree (Education Trust, 2006).

The class barrier to higher education is actually increasing. The proportion of students from upper-income families attending the most elite colleges declined dramatically after World War II, but it is growing again. Only 3 percent come from the bottom quartile of the income, and only 10 percent come from the bottom half.

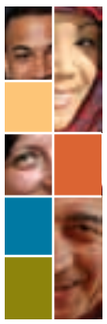
But it is not just elite colleges. Across the spectrum, colleges are drawing more members from upper-income households and fewer from average or below-average income households. Because the income gap between the college educated and the noncollege educated was 66 percent in 1997 (up from 31 percent in 1979) (Lexington, 2005), it seems that the universities are reproducing social advantage instead of serving as an engine of mobility.

The poorer students are priced out of the market for higher education by soaring tuition increases (which means that financial aid is extending farther up the income ladder than it used to). We might think,

### Did *you* know?

When you receive a four-year college degree, you typically become a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science. But bachelor is also a term for an adult, unmarried man. What's the connection? In the Middle Ages, were unmarried men all supposed to have advanced degrees?

Actually, there is no connection. In the original Vulgar Latin (Latin spoken by the common people), *baccalaris* meant a poor unmarried "farmhand" and *baccalaureus* meant "advanced student" (from *bacca laureus*, the laurel branch used to honor degree holders). Both words entered the English language in the late fourteenth century, but because they sounded almost the same, they both became *bachelor*.



# Sociology and our World

## The Chosen

Sociologist Jerome Karabel graduated from Harvard University and now teaches at the University of California at Berkeley (and served on the admissions committee), so he may be the ideal person to write *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton* (2005). He examined a century of admissions decisions at these three Ivy League schools to determine who gets in—and how.

Prior to the 1920s, all applicants who met high academic standards were accepted. The administration of these schools became concerned about the increasing numbers of well-qualified Jewish applicants (20 percent of the Harvard freshman class of 1918): How could they maintain a Protestant majority if they admitted everyone with a rash of A's? Instead, they established admissions committees and limited the "super bright" to about 10 percent of available spots. For the rest, grades were less important than "character": manliness, congeniality, leadership potential, and other qualities that they believed lacking in Jewish men.

Other universities followed the example of the Big Three, and for the rest of the century, admissions committees from the top to the bottom tier of universities regularly rejected applicants whom they believed belonged to an "undesirable" race, ethnic background, religion, or socioeconomic status. "Character" was further delineated by looking at applicants' extracurricular activities and soliciting letters of recommendation. That system is still in place today. Though no admissions committee would dare ask about an applicant's race or religion today, they still weed out applicants with the wrong "character," and that rarely means the children of wealthy alumni.

"Oh, there are always scholarships for the smart ones," but being smart is not a replacement for having money. Seventy-eight percent of the top achievers from low-income families go to college. But 77 percent of the *bottom* achievers from high-income families also manage to get in ("Dreams Only Money Can Buy," 2003).

## Student Life

Sociologists do not simply look at educational institutions and the ways in which they reinforce existing relationships based on class, race, ethnicity, or gender. Schools also offer several different cultures, all competing and colliding with each other. For example, there is the culture of professionalism among teachers and professors, by which the standards for academic success at the nation's elite universities have been raised consistently. Professors at major universities are rarely rewarded for excellence in teaching but more often for publication in specialized scholarly journals that only other specialists can read and understand.

Students also develop a subculture that their professors (and their parents!) often find foreign and even a bit disconcerting. According to this stereotype, student life revolves around drinking, partying, playing video games and online poker, watching pornography on the Internet, sports, and sleeping. At many colleges, it appears that academic life—studying, homework, reading in the library, doing research—is almost an incidental afterthought, the least important part of a student's day. And occasionally, a professor goes "underground" and lives in a dorm or fraternity or sorority house for a semester and writes an exposé of campus life, designed to shock adults into paying attention to student culture (see Moffatt, 1989; Nathan, 2005).

Occasionally, anthropologist's get the idea to study the "foreign" culture that is living right under their noses. In the late 1980s, anthropologist Michael Moffatt moved into the dorms at Rutgers and wrote a scathing exposé of campus life (Moffatt, 1989)—a world of indiscriminate drunken sex, copious drinking, no studying but lots

▲ **On many college campuses, classroom education takes a backseat to social life. Studying, going to the library for research, and even attending classes are often lower priorities than achieving social (and athletic) goals.**

of sleeping, and a lack of serious intellectual engagement. College, he wrote, is really about the pursuit of "fun."

Moffatt's description seemed a bit over the top to Northern Arizona University anthropologist Cathy Small. She wanted to understand why students didn't come to her office hours, didn't seem to do the readings for her classes, and fell asleep and ate during class time. In the fall of 2002, she enrolled in her own university, and spent a year in the dorms as an incoming first-year student. She told virtually no one that she was a professor. And she published the results under a pseudonym to try to conceal her identity, but journalists figured it out within a week of the book's publication (Nathan, 2005).

Small found students to be amazingly busy: Most work at part-time jobs for at least 15 hours a week, juggle five courses, and try to join campus activities to pad their college résumés to gain a competitive advantage in the job market. Sure, they drink and sleep, hook up and party down. And they expect their colleges to both "educate and entertain" them.

Small found that the biggest differences between campus life today and when she was a student in the 1970s were the virtual lack of any free time in the lives of her students, the absence of a sense of campus "community," and the absence of any impact by faculty on the lives of students. Students today are so overscheduled that they cut corners—as she did when confronted with massive work demands. She interprets plagiarism and cheating to be simple time-saving maneuvers by students with impossible demands. Students also never discussed intellectual, political, or philosophical issues outside of class and rarely, if ever, discussed anything that happened in class with their friends.

As a result of her ethnographic fieldwork, Small has reduced the amount of homework she assigns and spends more time discussing issues that students find relevant. She says today she has far more empathy for their efforts to juggle so many different demands. "A lot of the assumptions that professors and administrators make about student life," she says, "are just wrong" (in Farrell and Hoover, 2005, p. 36).

Recent surveys support Small's observations, consistently finding that students are working harder and longer today than they ever did (Table 14.5). Students study

## TABLE 14.5

**Student Life by the Numbers**

In 2005, the National Survey of Student Engagement, administered by the Center for Postsecondary Education and Indiana University, surveyed more than 48,000 college seniors. Here's how they spend their time (the numbers indicate percentages of students)

| ACTIVITY | 0 HOURS/WEEK | 1–5 | 6–10 | 11 OR MORE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Studying and preparing for class | 0 | 20 | 25 | 55 |
| Working for pay | 56 | 6 | 9 | 29 |
| Activities outside of class (organizations, publications, student government, sports) | 43 | 30 | 12 | 15 |
| Relaxing and socializing | 2 | 33 | 29 | 35 |

*Source:* National Survey of Student Engagement, 2006.

harder, and nearly half have paid jobs outside of school. Students also have far less sex and drink far less than observers—and students themselves—imagine (Perkins, 2003). As with most sociology, it isn't the case that students are complete party-going alcohol-sodden, sex-addicted sports fans or serious academic nerds who live to study. They're both—although preferably not at the same time.

# Education, Inc.

One of the dominant recent educational trends, in primary and secondary education as well as in higher education, has been the spread of the marketplace. For centuries, colleges and universities were a sort of refuge from the market, a place where the pursuit of dollars didn't interfere with the pursuit of knowledge. Not anymore.

## For-Profit Universities

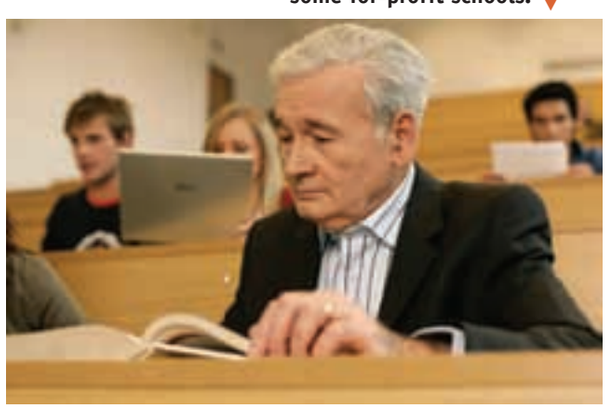
Traditional universities are not-for-profit organizations. However, an increasing number of proprietary or **for-profit universities** have arisen in recent years. They have some advantages over traditional universities: The cost is comparatively low, the university rather than the professors owns the curriculum, and students can graduate relatively quickly. They omit or severely curtail the traditional social activities of a college; their facilities are usually very limited; and their degrees lack the prestige of a degree from a traditional university. However, most students today are far more interested in developing practical, job-related skills than in a "total college experience," and they have found proprietary schools a viable alternative. Each school has developed its own practical market niche:

- Strayer concentrates on telecommunications and business administration.
- Cardean University offers online business education, including MBAs.
- Concord Law School, owned by Kaplan (in turn owned by the *Washington Post*) has one of largest law school enrollments in the United States.

The University of Phoenix, the largest for-profit university in the United States, is also the largest university in the United States, period. It has 280,000 students on 239 campuses and various satellite campuses around the world, including some in China and India, and enrollment is growing at 25 percent per year.

It is the brainchild of John Sperling, a Cambridge University–educated economist turned entrepreneur. While teaching at a state university, he noticed that the curriculum was designed for "traditional" 18- to 22-year-old students and ignored adult learners. But in the new economy, people 10 or 20 years past high school often decide that they need college, and those with degrees often return to update their skills or retool their résumés. He decided to found a new university catering to working adults, with convenient class schedules, many centers in conveniently located areas instead of one giant central campus (beginning in the 1990s, entire degrees could be taken online), and an emphasis on practical subjects that will help them build careers.

Nontraditional students now account for 95 percent of the Phoenix student body. They are over 25 years old, hoping to enhance their job possibilities rather than



**College is no longer the sole domain of traditional-age students. Adult learners over 23 years old now make up about 10 percent of all college students—and more than 90 percent at some for-profit schools.** ▼

broaden their intellectual interests, and not particularly interested in immersing themselves in the traditional college environment. In some ways, the University of Phoenix has proved more successful than traditional colleges in meeting the needs of nontraditional students.

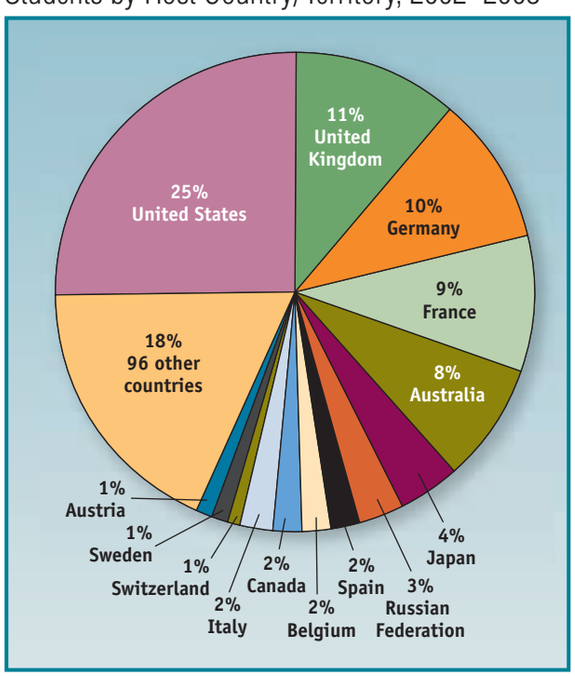
However, as institutions for higher learning, for-profits strip the university of its other functions. There are no science labs, and no faculty members do research, nor are professors protected by tenure or any forms of academic freedom. Faculty members are paid only to teach, and they are paid hourly wages that don't approach the salaries of professors at most colleges and universities. In a sense, these private universities separate the different dimensions of higher education and concentrate on some while ignoring others.

## The Marketization of Higher Education

The marketing success of for-profit universities has led to a trend to "marketization" in traditional universities. Public universities have shifted from state institutions to state-supported institutions to state-assisted institutions. For example, at the University of Virginia, the state's share of the operating budget decreased from 28 percent in 1985 to 8 percent in 2004. Higher education becomes a business, "the education industry," with the same goals statements and five-year plans of any other business. Students become "clients" and their grades "product."

As universities transform themselves into competitive commercial operations, they increasingly must ask the "clients" to pay "fees," particularly when they are out-of-state and foreign students. In the United States, international students contribute some $13 billion a year to the education industry (*Economist,* 2005). In this respect, the United States has been the market leader for the past 50 years. However, the Institute for International Education reports that the foreign student population declined in 2003–2004 for the first time in 30 years. Applications from foreign students to American grad schools fell by 28 percent in 2004, and actual enrollment dropped 6 percent (*Economist,* 2005).

FIGURE 14.6 Distribution of Foreign Students by Host Country/Territory, 2002–2003




*Source:* From UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Reprinted with permission.

The biggest reason for the decline in lucrative student enrollment is foreign competition. The number of foreign students is up by 21 percent in Britain, 23 percent in Germany, and 28 percent in France (Figure 14.6). Both Australia and New Zealand are actively trying to turn their educational systems into an export industry (*Economist,* 2005).

## McSchool

Marketization is spreading to elementary and secondary schools as well. There has been significant publicity concerning the food industry's takeover of school lunch programs—selling high-fat, low-nutrition fast foods—and the dominance of sodas, snacks, and candy in school vending machines across the country. Some, including the U.S. Surgeon General, have linked this marketing strategy to an obesity epidemic among American kids.

But that's just one aspect of larger incursion of the profit motive into public education. To keep strapped school districts

functioning amid increasing enrollments and widening budget deficits, to pay for unfunded government mandates, to subsidize sports and other enrichment programs that might otherwise have to shrink or be cancelled, elementary and high schools are opening their doors to hundreds of thousands of dollars in corporate money annually.

In 2004, a New Jersey elementary school became the first school in the country to sell naming rights to a corporate sponsor, when it allowed a $100,000 illuminated corporate advertisement to be affixed to its gym. Three high schools in Texas have sold the naming rights to their football stadiums for more than a million dollars (the sponsors are a bank, a communications company, and a health care provider). In Massachusetts, lawmakers recently authorized the placement of ads on school buses to the tune of $600,000 a year (*Economist,* 2005).

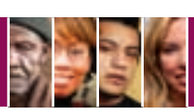
Across the United States, corporate sponsors' logos appear on sports fields, gyms, libraries, playgrounds, and classrooms. School events are paid for by corporations and carry their names. Corporations advertise on book covers, in hallways, on school websites, and on teaching materials. There are brand-name menus in school cafeterias. Coupons for brand-name sodas, chips, burgers, and pizza are given as rewards for reading. Some school districts have even hired full-time marketing directors whose job it is to raise money for the schools by selling ads.

## Education in the 21st Century

Americans have always had the optimistic faith that education leads to a secure future, to happiness, to success. Chances are that you have this faith. That's why you are here, enrolled in a college class, reading this book.

But the first country in the world to institute mass education for all of its citizens may be the first to sell it out; literally, to corporate interests, but also to those millions who were denied education or found that it did not lead to a secure future at all.

Like every social institution, education is always going to be both a tool of liberation and a tool of oppression. Some members of underprivileged groups will acquire the skills necessary to move up in the social hierarchy of our society. Most will not. Some members of majority groups will acquire the skills necessary to combat injustice. Most will not. Inequality will certainly be criticized in uncounted thousands of lesson plans and essay-exam questions. But it will also be made to appear natural and inevitable.



## Chapter Review

1. ***How does sociology view education?*** Sociologists view education as both a path to mobility and a central institution with regard to reproducing social structure. The manifest function of education is to teach the subject matter, and the latent functions of education are to teach norms and values and to establish relationships and social networks.

2. ***How does globalization affect education?*** Education is related to economic success. Inequality in educational opportunities mirrors inequality between countries. One's family background is the best predictor of educational attainment, but other factors play a role. For example, worldwide, girls are more poorly educated and more likely to be illiterate than boys. This is compounded in poor countries which have low literacy rates.

3. ***How does education reproduce inequality?*** Higher levels of education are correlated with higher income. Most people believe that education leads to mobility,

but sociologists see education as being a primary vehicle for reproducing race, ethnic, class, and gender inequalities despite a widespread belief in meritocracy. Sociologists are also interested in the hidden curriculum, which creates inequality and makes it seem natural. Inequality is reproduced in books, tests, class, and discussions; and much of it takes place outside the classroom with peers. Types of schools and district resources equal dramatic differences in achievement. Whites are more likely than Blacks to attend private schools, which provide prestige, are safer, and focus on an environment of learning. Wealthier public school districts reproduce class privilege through better schools.

4. ***How does inequality manifest in education?*** Segregation is illegal but still widespread and is associated with poverty. Although research shows that bilingual education helps students learn English, it is not widespread or widely supported. Tracking also leads to inequality and is common. Tracking leads to labeling, unequal treatment, and self-fulfilling prophecies. Education also reproduces gender stereotypes through treatment, expectations, and class materials.
5. ***How do sociologists view higher education?*** One in four Americans has a college degree. However, preparation for college is inadequate in many ways. Most students also have to work at least part-time, which affects educational achievement and graduation rates. In addition, fewer minority and poor individuals go to college. Family income is the best predictor of college enrollment and success. Schools offer a variety of cultural experiences. For example, the culture of the professors and administration focuses on education, and the culture of student life focuses on social activities.
6. ***How is education affected by the market?*** Traditional universities are nonprofit, but an increasing number of for-profit institutions are developing. For-profit universities have advantages: The cost is low, the university owns the curriculum, and students can graduate quickly. On the downside, professors are paid less and have less security and prestige, social lives of students suffer, and the degree holds less prestige. For-profit colleges have spurred marketing of traditional universities, which also spills over into elementary and secondary schools that have corporate sponsors.

## Key Terms

**Charter schools** (p. 455)
**Credential society** (p. 440)
**Education** (p. 440)
**For-profit university** (p. 461)
**Hidden curriculum** (p. 440)
**Integration** (p. 450)
**Scientific literacy** (p. 447)
**Segregation** (p. 450)
**Self-fulfilling prophecy** (p. 451)
**Tracking** (p. 451)
**Voucher system** (p. 454)

## What does America think?

### Confidence in Education

These are actual survey data from the General Social Survey, 2004.

**As far as the people running the education system are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?** Data from 2004 show that over half of all respondents have only some confidence in the education system. Slightly more than 30 percent have a great deal of confidence, and 13 percent have hardly any. Differences by race were significant and interesting. Black respondents were far more likely than White respondents to have confidence in the education system. These differences have remained steady since the 1970s.

## CRITICAL THINKING | DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The differences in survey response by race were striking. Why do you think that Black respondents were dramatically more likely to have a great deal of confidence in the education system than were White respondents, particularly because Black students have generally and historically been underserved by the educational system?
2. Conversely, why do you think White respondents were so pessimistic about the educational system?

▶ Go to this website to look further at the data. You can run your own statistics and crosstabs here: **http://sda.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/hsda?harcsda+gss04**

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