

Family and Kinship: Patrilocality, Matrilocality & Neolocality

The family, as a social institution, is an extremely important subject of study for sociologists. In this lesson, we define family and kinship, and we discuss three different patterns of residency and systems of family lineage.

The Family As Social Institution

How big is your family? Do you have a mom and dad and one or two siblings? Do you have a stepfamily? Children? Cousins? Who did you think of when I first asked you about your family? The family, as a social institution, is a part of all societies. It's even considered the most basic of all social institutions by many sociologists. The family is studied extensively in sociology and is considered so important because it provides for some of the most fundamental human needs, including love and emotional security.

Nuclear Vs. Extended Families

Traditionally, a family can be defined as a group of individuals who are related through common ancestry, marriage, or adoption. This could include parents, grandparents, children, siblings, first cousins, distant cousins, and so on. Of course, the structure and values of families do look different across different societies. For example, in Western societies, we tend to think of a nuclear family, which is a pair of adults and their children, as the epitome of a family. However, an extended family, which is two or more nuclear families who are related, is common in other societies. Sometimes, it's even normal for a large extended family to live under the same roof.

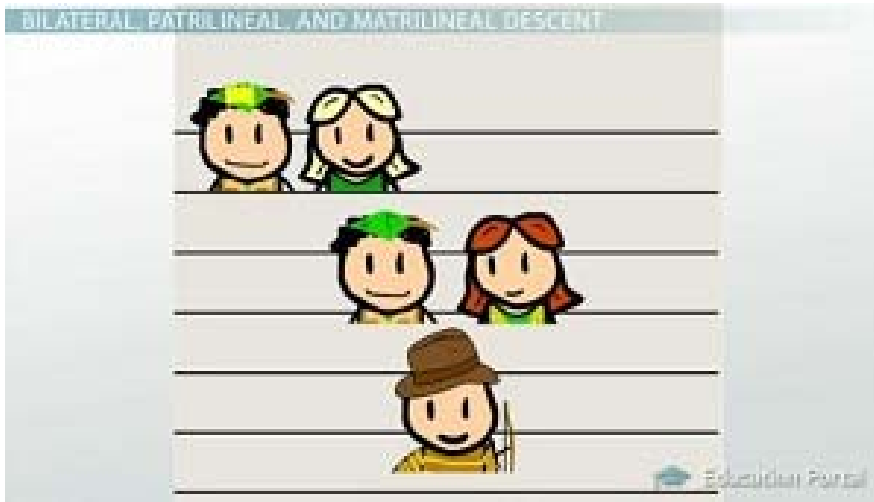
Family Vs. Kin

Another word that some people use for 'family' is 'kin,' but they aren't technically synonyms. You may have heard a phrase similar to, 'she is kin to us.' That's because 'kin' is actually a synonym for 'related.' So, where family is the actual group of people, kinship is the relationship between family members. Mothers and daughters, uncles and nephews, sisters and cousins are all examples of kinships.

Patrilocality, Matrilocality, And Neolocality

Now, imagine that Robin Hood and Maid Marian were married and had two children. We'll name them May and Junior. The four of them together is a family: a nuclear family. Junior is kin to Marian, as he is her son. Now, let's picture where they live. In some societies, a couple lives with or near the male's family after marriage. This is known as patrilocality. In other societies, a couple lives with or near the female's family after marriage. This is known as matrilocality.

Personally, I imagine that Robin Hood and Maid Marian would be a couple that chooses to live on their own after marriage, perhaps in the forest. This is what's known as neolocality because it's neutral and located away from both sides of the family.



Today, in Western societies, neolocality is typically the norm. A newly-married couple usually strikes out on their own, and it is not expected that they will live with or next door to either side's parents. However, some degree of patrilocal and matrilocality do exist. For example, some couples choose to live with or near their parents. This is completely voluntary, though, and is not required by society.

If a family uses patrilineal descent, they trace descent only through male ancestors

Bilateral, Patrilineal, And Matrilineal Descent

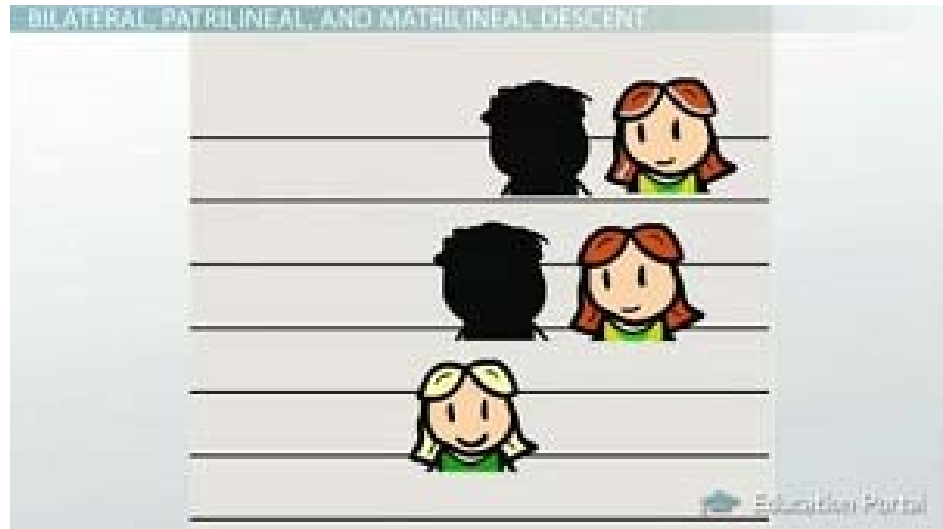
Imagine Robin Hood and Maid Marian's family, again. Junior has just arrived home from school and shows his mother the family tree assignment he was given in history class. Marian helps him list out his grandparents and great-grandparents and tells him stories about ancestors from both sides. She does this because most families in modern societies trace lineage based on bilateral descent. Bilateral descent is a system of family lineage in which descent is traced through both the maternal and paternal sides of the family.

Bilateral descent is not used in all societies, however. Patrilineal descent is a system of family lineage in which descent is traced through only the paternal side of the family. Using patrilineal descent, family trees are traced through the males only. People are related only if they trace descent through males to the same male ancestor. For example, Junior's patrilineal line would include his father's father's father and so on.

For example, the lines of descent for main personalities in the Bible are almost exclusively through males. The book of Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus that goes up through each father beginning with Joseph, the husband of Mary.

On the opposite side is matrilineal descent, which is a system of family lineage in which descent is traced through only the maternal side of the family. Using matrilineal descent, family trees are traced through the females only. People are related only if they can trace descent through females to the same female ancestor. For example, Junior's matrilineal line would include his mother's mother's mother and so on.

Matrilineal descent is much less common than patrilineal, even in ancient societies. However, one example is in Greek mythology. The Amazons were said to be a nation of all-female warriors who certainly only valued matrilineal descent. In some stories, in order to sustain their all-female society, they mated with male strangers in order to become pregnant and then only kept the female babies.



The Amazons valued matrilineal descent and lived in an all-female society

Lesson Summary

The family, as a social institution, is an important topic of study for sociologists. Traditionally, a family can be defined as a group of individuals who are related through common ancestry, marriage, or adoption. The people who are considered part of the family can be different based on culture. In the U.S., a nuclear family, which is a pair of adults and their children, is considered the epitome of a family. However, an extended family, which is two or more nuclear families who are related, is common in other societies.

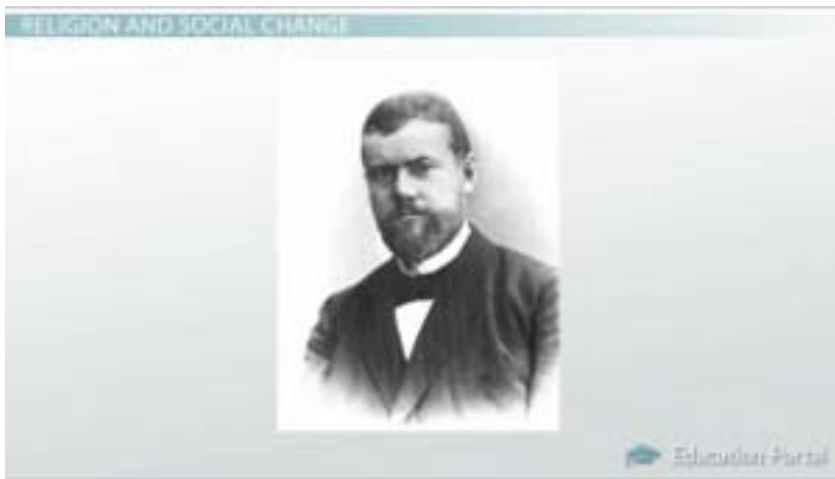
The location a married couple is expected to live also differs between cultures. Patrilocality is when a couple lives with or near the male's family after marriage. Matrilocality is when a couple lives with or near the female's family after marriage. Neolocality is when a couple chooses to live on their own after marriage.

Similarly, some cultures value kinship on both sides of a family tree, while others only value kinship from one side. Bilateral descent is a system of family lineage in which descent is traced through both the maternal and paternal sides of the family and is the most common. Patrilineal descent is a system of family lineage in which descent is traced through only the paternal side of the family. Matrilineal descent is a system of family lineage in which descent is traced through only the maternal side of the family.

Religion and Social Change in Protestantism and Liberation Theology

Religion can, at times, be a powerful agent for social change. In this lesson, we discuss two examples of the dichotomy between religion and the secular world, including Max Weber's book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, as well as the concept of liberation theology.

Religion And Social Change



Max Weber wrote about the connection between religious ideals and social change

We tend to think of religion as a relatively conservative force that has the most impact on its own followers. However, religion is not a social institution that is completely separate from the rest of our society. In fact, at some points in history, religion has promoted dramatic social change. There are many examples of the interplay between religion and the secular world. Two examples that are relevant to Introductory Sociology are Max Weber's theory of the Protestant work ethic and liberation theology.

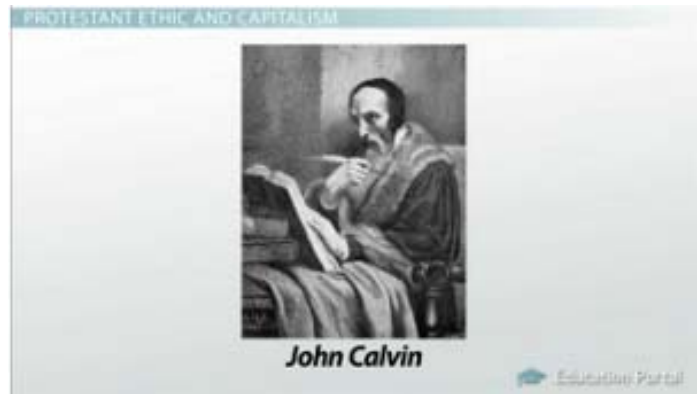
Protestant Ethic And Capitalism

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism is a book written by Max Weber about the role of Protestantism in social change. He argued that certain religious ideas set into motion a chain of events that brought about the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe. He saw a strong relationship between the work ethics of Protestants and the emergence of the spirit of modern capitalism.

Weber focused on one particular branch of Protestantism known as Calvinism. John Calvin was a leader in the Protestant Reformation who preached that God had selected some people for salvation but condemned most to eternal damnation before they were even born. Calvinists came to see prosperity as a sign of God's favor and a promise for salvation, so they worked all the time to achieve success. This became known as the 'Protestant ethic.' Although they made great profit, they were also frugal in order to stockpile their earnings and amass great wealth. As part of that frugality, they drove up the demand for cheaper, mass-produced goods that came out of the new factories.

In time, the religious fervor that motivated Calvinists faded, leaving a more rational motivation for economic gain that spread through even non-religious groups. Weber believed that this new attitude broke down the traditional economic system and paved the way for modern capitalism.

This theory has been debated since Weber first proposed it over eighty years ago. Critics have argued that religious reform followed capitalist development rather than paving the way for it. Nevertheless, this theory is a good example of the interchange between religion and secular change.



John Calvin was a Protestant Reformation leader

Liberation Theology

Many people believe that oppression runs counter to Christian morality and that Christians must promote greater social equality. Liberation theology is a combination of Christian principles with political activism. It is a political movement based on the idea that Christians should promote liberation from unjust economic, political, or social conditions. There are many stories in the Bible about the liberation of people who are struggling for freedom and economic justice. Today, Christian activists continue to help people in poor nations liberate themselves from poverty.

Liberation theology began in the 1950s as a Catholic movement in Latin America and was used to fight the extreme poverty and social injustice in that area. In the last decade or so, many people have come to associate liberation theology with radical movements and violent overthrows in the name of religion. There are several high-profile religious figures who condemn liberation theology for distorting traditional church doctrine with left-wing politics. For example, Pope John Paul II worked hard to stop a form of liberation theology prevalent in the 1980s. He maintained that although the church should certainly help the poor and needy, it should not do so through politics.

Nevertheless, the liberation theology movement has gained strength in several of the poorest countries of the world where many people's Christian faith drives them to improve conditions for the poor and oppressed.



Liberation theology began in Latin America in the 1950s

Lesson Summary

Although we tend to think of religion as a social institution that is, for the most part, separate from the rest of society, that is not always the case. Sometimes, religion can promote dramatic social change. One example of this is Max Weber's theory of the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism. In his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, he argued that Calvinism paved the way for modern capitalism by spreading a new attitude about the value of personal prosperity.

A second example of the interplay between religion and the secular world is seen in liberation theology, which is a combination of Christian principles with political activism. It's based on the idea that Christians should promote liberation from unjust economic, political, or social conditions. Although it has led many people to improve conditions for the poor and oppressed, most people now associate liberation theology with radical movements and violent overthrows in the name of religion.

Religiosity, Secularization & Civil Religion: Applications on Individuals & Cultures

In this lesson, we define religiosity, secularization, and civil religion. We'll also discuss these concepts both on an individual and cultural scale.

Religion Today

Religion can be a hot topic in our society. There are so many diverse views on God, Heaven, Hell, and hundreds of other religious aspects that they seem to be constantly debated. The U.S. is one of the most diverse, religious, high-income nations of the world. That being said, another topic of debate - and of study for sociologists - is exactly how religious we are. The three topics most discussed in this debate are religiosity, secularization, and civil religion.

Religiosity

Religiosity is the importance of religion in one's life. It certainly varies from person to person but also among religions and even multiple denominations of one religion. Older people tend to be more religious than younger people, and women more religious than men.

But, what difference does it make? Sociologists study religiosity on an individual level as well as in society as a whole. On the individual level, high levels of religiosity appear to have a strong relationship with an increase in physical and mental health as well as longevity. On the cultural level, sociologists have linked a number of social patterns to high levels of religiosity, including low rates of delinquency among young people and low rates of divorce among adults.

However, even though religiosity appears to have a number of benefits, it also appears to be declining in our society. In 2005, 73% of Americans identified themselves as 'religious.' In 2012, that number dropped to 60%. This may be evidence that the U.S. is continuing to experience a rise in secularization instead.

Secularization

Secularization can be defined as the historical decline in the importance of the supernatural and the sacred. It includes religion as well as a general belief in the supernatural, such as entities like spirits or forces like karma.

Sociologists believe secularization occurs for several reasons. One is that modernization has involved the creation and growth of science, which endorses reason and systematic observation in making sense of the world. As people have turned to science for answers instead of stories and tradition, the capacity for faith in the supernatural may have gradually declined.

Although secularization has been occurring for quite some time, most sociologists don't believe our society would ever reach a point where religion would become extinct. For one, the vast majority of people in the U.S. still say they believe in God, and more people claim to pray each day than vote in national elections. And, although individual and cultural religiosity may continue to decrease, religion has lasting effects outside of individuals.

Civil Religion

For example, one expression of secularization is what sociologists call civil religion, a pseudo-religious loyalty binding individuals in a basically secular society. In other words, although we've seen a rise in secularization and further separation of church and state, sociologists have noticed that religion appears to have influenced numerous non-religious aspects of society.

For example, think about American customs, like singing the national anthem at sporting events or reciting the pledge of allegiance in school. These customs are similar to religious rituals. They are traditional and performed mainly for symbolic value. Likewise, the American flag acts much like a religious totem - it's a sacred symbol of our national identity, and we expect people to treat it with respect. Many individuals even find religious qualities in political movements, whether liberal or conservative.

Lesson Summary

One topic of debate and study for sociologists is how religious our society is. The three topics most discussed in this debate are religiosity, secularization, and civil religion.

Religiosity is the importance of religion in one's life. A high level of religiosity has several benefits. However, it appears to be declining in our society.

Secularization can be defined as the historical decline in the importance of the supernatural and the sacred. This includes religion in addition to belief in mystic forces. Sociologists believe secularization occurs for several reasons, one of which is the increase of scientific study. Although secularization has been occurring for quite some time, most sociologists don't believe our society would ever reach a point where religion would become extinct. One reason for this is the observation of how religion is affecting secular parts of society.

Civil religion, which is a pseudo-religious loyalty binding individuals in a basically secular society, is a good example. Civil religion can be seen in American customs that are treated like religious rituals and totems.

Schooling: Cultural Differences in Schooling Theory

The value of education and access to it is different across cultures. In this lesson, we discuss some of the differences in schooling between lower-income and higher-income nations. We also discuss the education system and cultural values of several countries.

Cultural Differences In Education & Schooling

Think about the number of years that we, as Americans, spend in school. Young adults who have graduated high school have typically attended for at least twelve years, plus kindergarten and even preschool, for some. Going to college adds an average of 2-5 years, and graduate school involves an additional 2-6 years. Although this isn't news to anyone in our society today, our education system has changed as our culture has changed and our economy has developed. A century ago, only a small, elite group in the U.S. had the privilege of formal schooling. Most young people were taught important knowledge and skills by their families, instead.

Even today, in preindustrial societies, children are educated through the course of daily activities. Girls watch women garden, cook, and care for children. Boys watch men farm, hunt, and make tools. Through these informal observations, children learn the skills they will need when they grow up.

Education and schooling vary widely between cultures due to both the culture's economy and cultural values. For example, the traditional gender roles I just described act as a huge barrier for girls in many countries. Education is seen by some as a waste of time for girls, who cannot contribute income to the family.

Schooling In Lower-Income Countries

In general, poorer countries tend to have much less schooling. For example, although their constitution requires that a public education be available for free, Haiti has been unable to fulfill this obligation due to poor economic conditions. The majority of schools in Haiti are under-equipped and/or do not have adequate facilities. There is also an extreme shortage of qualified teachers. As a result, Haiti has a literacy rate of about 45% as of two years ago.

In the poorest nations, few children attend school at all; as of 2007, only half of all children world-wide ever get to the secondary grades. Formal learning that is not directly connected to survival is available mainly to wealthy people who do not need to work. As a result, about one-third of the world's population cannot read or write.

Although India is considered a middle-income country, not even half of Indian children reached the secondary grades in the last decade. The Indian government emphasizes primary education and has banned child labor. However, many children continue to work in factories up to 60 hours per week, which greatly limits their chances for schooling.

Schooling In Higher-Income Countries

On the other hand, in the U.S. and in other higher-income countries, compulsory education laws, or laws requiring all children to attend school, were enacted following the Industrial Revolution and are now very significant to the culture. In the U.S., the specifics of the laws are up to each state, but the average age range is 6-16. The schooling requirements for children of this age can generally be satisfied through public schools, state-certified private schools, or an approved home school program.

Students who complete high school have the option to attend a variety of higher education institutions. According to U.S. News, America has the largest percentage - 21% - of the highest-ranked colleges and universities in the world. This is largely due to the importance of education in our society.

Likewise, schooling in Japan - another higher-income country- is of equal, if not more, importance. In 2007, about 96% of men and women graduated from high school in Japan, compared to 85% in the U.S. Japan's educational system is widely praised for producing some of the world's highest achievers. Part of their educational requirements is a series of extremely difficult exams that Japanese students (and their parents) take very seriously. These highly competitive exams allow just half of Japanese high school graduates to enter college.

Higher education is considered so important in higher-income nations today that creeping credentialism - the steady rise in credential requirements in the job market - is quite common. In poor nations, just attending primary and secondary school is considered a privilege, and college is practically unheard of. In higher-income nations, like ours, however, attending college is considered a must by many. The formal credentials conferred by educational institutions are used as a principal means to determine the qualifications of individuals to perform occupational tasks. Creeping credentialism refers to the ever rising overemphasis on the importance of academic qualifications. It can be a part of a vicious cycle for many.

Lesson Summary

In summary, education and schooling vary widely between cultures, due to both the economy and cultural values. In countries that emphasize the male gender, education can be seen as a waste of time for girls, who cannot contribute income to the family. In general, poorer countries tend to have much less schooling, and young people are taught skills by their families, instead. Children living in these countries may attend primary school but very few ever get to the secondary grades. Because of poor economic conditions, they either don't have access to school or they work to help support their families.

In contrast, in higher-income countries, compulsory education laws, or laws requiring all children to attend school, were enacted following the Industrial Revolution and are now very significant to the culture. The vast majority of adults in these countries graduate high school, and many go on to attend college. Higher education is considered so important in higher-income nations today that creeping credentialism, the steady rise in credential requirements in the job market, is quite common.

Functions of School: Socialization, Cultural Innovation, Integration & Latent Functions

Schools serve a number of functions in our society beyond just transmitting academic knowledge and skills. In this lesson, we differentiate between manifest and latent functions of schools and discuss examples of each.

Functions Of School

If I were to ask you 'What did you learn in school?' what would you say? Would you tell me about the subject knowledge you gained and the classes you attended? Would you talk about the time you spent with friends and your participation in extracurricular activities? Schools certainly act as a transmitter of knowledge and academic skills like reading, writing, and arithmetic. But they also serve other functions in our society as well, and these can be categorized as manifest or latent functions.

A manifest function of school is a function that people believe is the obvious purpose of school and education. Manifest functions of education are those that are intended and that most people think about. For example, in elementary school, parents expect their children to learn new information but also how to 'get along' with other children and begin to understand how society works. So, two of the most significant manifest functions of schools beyond teaching subject knowledge are socialization and the transmission of cultural norms and values.

Manifest Function: Socialization

Socialization refers to a process by which individuals acquire a personal identity and learn the knowledge, language, and social skills required to interact with others. Again, students don't only learn from the academic curriculum prepared by teachers and school administrators. They also learn social rules and expectations from interactions with others. Students in America receive rewards for following schedules and directions, meeting deadlines, and obeying authority. They learn how to avoid punishment by reducing undesirable behaviors like offensive language. They also figure out that to be successful socially, they must learn to be quiet, to wait, to act interested even when they're not, and to please their teachers without alienating their peers.

Manifest Function: Culturization

Besides socialization, another significant manifest function of school is the transmission of cultural norms and values to new generations, which is known as culturization. Schools help to mold a diverse population into one society with a shared national identity and prepare future generations for their citizenship roles. Students are taught about laws and our political way of life through civic lessons, and they're taught patriotism through rituals such as saluting the flag. Students must also learn the Pledge of Allegiance and the stories of the nation's heroes and exploits. Because America is a capitalist nation, students also quickly learn the importance of both teamwork and competition through learning games in the classroom as well as activities and athletics outside the classroom.

Latent Functions Of Schools

In addition to manifest functions like socialization and culturization, schools also serve latent functions in society. A latent function is a function that people are not aware of or doesn't come to mind straightaway and usually is not intended. For examples, schools often play a matchmaker function: they put together individuals of similar ages and backgrounds, and this results in many of us finding romantic partners and mates in primary, secondary, or post-secondary school.

Latent functions may sometimes contradict manifest functions. For example, another manifest function of school is to serve as a sorting mechanism that selects students for higher or lower social positions based on their academic performance. Optimistically, schools prepare students for their future social positions by identifying and developing each student's talents and abilities regardless of

the student's current social position. Teachers encourage the 'best and the brightest' to pursue the most challenging and advanced studies while guiding the ordinary students into educational programs suited to their talents. However, some sociologists believe that this social placement system is a latent function of school that perpetuates inequality. They believe students' future social positions are determined by their current positions in society, which the schools try to preserve. For example, wealthier parents send their kids to better schools, which provide more opportunities for higher future social positions.

Hidden Curriculum

Additionally, social attitudes and habits are taught (usually unintentionally) that produce people who 'fit' into the social, political, and economic statuses that are common in society. These lessons that prepare individuals to accept the requirements and expectations of adult life are what sociologists call the hidden curriculum. For example, in addition to teamwork and competition, American students quickly learn that society seeks out and reveres the best individual, whether that person has the best score on a test or the best performance at a spelling bee. Even collaborative activities focus on a leader, and team sports single out the one most valuable player of the year. So the hidden curriculum in this case involves the promotion of individualism. This carries them to adult life in our individualistic society, where they must be independent and may make decisions based on self-interest.

Lesson Summary

In summary, schools serve functions in our society beyond transmitting knowledge and academic skills. These other functions can be categorized as manifest or latent. Manifest functions are functions that people believe are the obvious purposes of school. They include the academic curriculum plus functions like socialization and the transmission of cultural norms and values to new generations. Latent functions are functions that people are not aware of or don't think of straightaway. They include the hidden curriculum that prepares students for adult life plus functions like matchmaking.

School Controversies: Self-Fulfilling Prophecies and Tracking

In this lesson, we define self-fulfilling prophecies and tracking, two controversial elements of education today. We will also discuss the educational advantages and disadvantages of each element.

School Controversies

Education is a social institution that has a huge impact on our society. As such, there are several hot topics when it comes to education and schools. Banned books, sex education, standardized tests, and prayer are just a few examples. The phenomenon of a self-fulfilling prophecy and the common system known as tracking are two controversial educational topics that are relevant to sociology and are the topic of this lesson.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

A self-fulfilling prophecy is a prediction that directly or indirectly causes itself to come true due to the simple fact that it is expected to be true. For example, think about your time in middle school and high school. Did you have a label? Were you considered a 'troublemaker' or a 'class clown?' It's common for teachers to apply labels to students and then expect those students to act accordingly. As a result, teachers often encourage these very behaviors, usually unconsciously.

For example, by the time a child is categorized as a clown, teachers and fellow students have formed expectations of how that child will behave in school. Clowns, as the name suggests, are not expected to do well academically - they spend most of their time goofing off and trying to get attention by making others laugh. The clowns are encouraged to behave in this way, as others expect. When students are called clowns and are viewed by others as being 'just funny,' they may eventually accept this label and stop trying to do well academically, thus fulfilling the prophecy of poor academic performance.

You can think of this self-fulfilling prophecy as a circular pattern. Our actions toward others impact their beliefs about us, which dictates their actions toward us, which then reinforces our beliefs about ourselves. This, in turn, influences our actions toward others, which brings us back to the beginning of the cycle. This pattern can be negative, like the class clown example, but it can also be positive.

Tracking

Similarly, another topic of controversy is the fact that the majority of schools in the U.S. use standardized tests for tracking, which is a system in which students are grouped in school according to their perceived abilities. The use of tracking has been debated for decades. The most common reason that some schools no longer use it is because it can reinforce social inequalities.



Standardized tests are used to place students into learning groups.

Depending on test scores, previous grades and/or teacher opinions, students are assigned to different types of educational programs. Most students from privileged backgrounds do well on standardized tests because of previous opportunities, so they are channeled into higher-status and higher-quality courses, where they receive the best the school can offer. They usually study higher math and sciences and receive special preparation for college. Therefore, they have even more opportunity to excel and continue being privileged.

On the other hand, many low-income students from disadvantaged backgrounds typically do less well on these tests and so end up in lower tracks, where teachers stress memorization and typically put little focus on stimulating approaches to teaching. These students are usually guided into acquiring vocational skills, such as welding or cosmetology, where they will typically continue to receive lower income.

Tracking: Benefits

So why do so many schools still use tracking? Tracking systems can help teachers meet students' individual needs and abilities. By teaching a more homogeneous group of students, they can design lesson plans based on a specific learning level versus general lesson plans that try to appeal to a variety of learning levels.

Students also benefit from the homogenous environment because their work is only compared to that of similar-ability peers. This prevents low self-esteem that could result from comparisons with the work of higher-ability students, and it also prevents inflating the egos of the high-ability students. And, beyond self-esteem, studies have shown that students perform much better in groups of students at their same level.

There are some additional benefits, just as there are certain additional disadvantages. Again, the use of tracking has been a source for debate for decades. Because of this, even schools that do use tracking are cautious about making concrete tracking assignments, typically giving students the chance to move from one track to another.

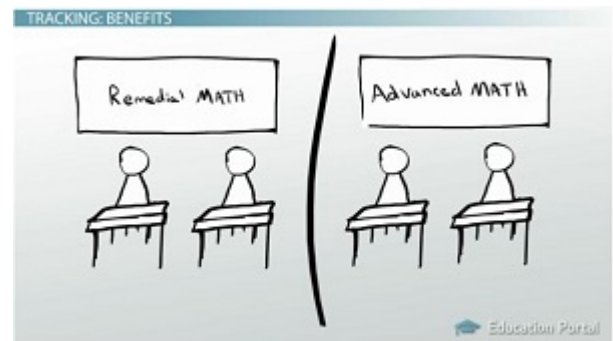
Lesson Summary

In summary, a self-fulfilling prophecy is a prediction that directly or indirectly causes itself to come true due to the simple fact that it is expected to be true.

The self-fulfilling prophecy is a circular pattern. In school, students' actions toward others impact teachers' beliefs about them, which dictates the teachers' actions toward the students, which then reinforces the students' beliefs about themselves. This, in turn, influences the students' actions towards others, which brings us back to the beginning of the cycle.

This pattern can be negative because it can reinforce a negative stereotype. However, it can also be positive. The Pygmalion effect is a positive self-fulfilling prophecy. An example of the Pygmalion effect is when teachers believe that certain students will perform well, so they unconsciously favor those students, who perform well as a result.

Tracking is a system in which students are grouped in school according to their perceived abilities. The use of tracking has been debated for decades. The most common reason that some schools no longer use it is because it can reinforce social inequalities. However, it does have a number of benefits, including helping teachers meet each student's individual needs and abilities.



Tracking can be beneficial in creating customized lesson plans.