

# EDUCATION

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Introduction to sociology – session 12  
Anne Revillard

# Outline

1. The development of the sociology of education in a context of expansion of schooling
  1. The context: the expansion of schooling and its growing social role
  2. Sociological theories of education
  3. Education and social mobility
2. How does education contribute to social reproduction?
  1. *The inheritors* (1964): taking a close look at Bourdieu and Passeron's seminal theory of social reproduction
  2. Social reproduction and education: empirical and theoretical refinements and critiques
3. Gender and racial/ethnic inequalities in education
  1. Gender inequalities
  2. Ethnic and racial inequalities

# The context: the expansion of schooling and its growing social role

- The expansion of schooling in France throughout the XXth century:
  - Compulsory education until age 13 (1882), 14 (1936), 16 (1967)
  - An example: the changing status of the Baccalauréat (Selz and Vallet, 2006):
    - Among people born between 1920 and 1922, 15% of men and 9% of women reached the « Bac » or beyond (higher education diploma)
    - Among people born between 1974 and 1976, 59% of men and 67% of women reached the « Bac » or beyond
- Growing role of the school:
  - In the socialization of individuals
  - In the definition of social status → hence important focus of the sociology of education on social inequalities

# Education and social mobility: what is at stake in the study of social inequalities in education?

- Distinction between educational and social opportunity
  - Inequality of **educational opportunity** (unequal access to different levels of education depending on one's social origin)
  - Inequality of **social opportunity** (unequal access to different socio-occupational categories depending on one's social origin)

**Boudon, 1974** : Decreasing inequality of educational opportunity does NOT entail decreasing inequality of social opportunity (**Anderson's paradox**: a higher level of education does not necessarily increase social mobility: one may have a higher diploma and lower social position than one's father)

- Why? **aggregation effect** : individuals seek a higher diploma in order to improve their social status, but since all individuals act similarly and more and more people have access to higher diplomas, the value of each diploma in terms of social status decreases

Boudon, Raymond. 1974. *Education, opportunity, and social inequality: changing prospects in Western society*. New York: Wiley.

# Sociological theories of education (Duru-Bellat and Van Zanten, 2012)

- Until the 1970s: focus on the role of schools as agents of socialization and integration → the reproduction of society
    - Focus on the reproduction of « common values »: Durkheim, Parsons
    - Focus on the reproduction of social conflict/social hierarchies : Baudelot, Establet, Bourdieu, Passeron
  - The school as a « space for actors' strategies »
    - Opening the « black box » of the school: how teachers behave and make sense of their work, how class interactions unfold, what goes on at recess, how students experience the school...
    - Stressing the reflexivity of individual actors: family strategies
    - Role of education policies
- « School inequalities are not the necessary and structural product of the functioning of a school which would be meant to this aim, but results from struggles between social groups in order to maintain their advantages » (Duru-Bellat and Van Zanten, 2012, p.254).

## 2, How does the school contribute to social reproduction?

1. *The inheritors* (1964): taking a close look at Bourdieu and Passeron's seminal theory of social reproduction
2. Social reproduction and education: empirical and theoretical refinements and critiques of Bourdieu and Passeron's analysis

# Bourdieu and Passeron, *The inheritors*, 1964

- Focus on higher education
- The facts: probability of access to university according to parents' occupational category

Parents' occupational category	Objective chances (probability of access to university (1961-1962), %)
Farm workers	0,7
Domestic servants	2,4
Industrial workers	1,4
Clerical workers	9,5
Industrial and commercial proprietors	16,4
Lower-rank executives	29,6
Professions and senior executives	58,5

Source: Excerpt from table 1 « Educational opportunity and social origin (1961-1962) », in Bourdieu, Pierre and Jean-Claude Passeron. 1979 [1964]. *The inheritors. French students and their relation to culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.3

# Bourdieu and Passeron, *The inheritors*, 1964

- A process of « **elimination** »: « A senior executive's son is 80 times more likely to enter a university than a farm worker's son » (p.2)
- Presence does not mean equality:  
« [...] even at the level of higher education, one still finds differences in attitude and ability that are significantly related to social origin, although the students whom they differentiate have all undergone fifteen or twenty years of the standardizing influence of schooling, and although the most underprivileged of them have only escaped elimination thanks to their greater adaptability or to a more favorable family environment » (p.8).
- Feeling « at home » or « out of place » in school (p.13)
- Where does this (upper-class) feeling of being « at home » in the university come from?



# Bourdieu and Passeron, *The inheritors*, 1964

- Feeling « at home » in school as a result of cultural privilege:

« Not only do the most privileged students derive from their background of origin habits, skills and attitudes which serve them directly in their scholastic tasks, but they also inherit from it knowledge and **know-how, tastes, and a « good taste »** whose scholastic profitability is no less certain for being indirect. « **Extra-curricular » culture**, (*la culture « libre »*), the implicit condition for academic success in certain disciplines, is very unequally distributed among students from different backgrounds, and **inequality of income does not suffice** to explain the disparities which we find. **Cultural privilege** is manifest when it is a matter of familiarity with works which only regular visits to theaters, galleries and concerts can give (visits which the school does not organize, or only sporadically). It is still more manifest in the case of those works, generally the more modern ones, which are the least « scholastic » » (p.17).

→ How do members of the upper class acquire this cultural privilege?

## Bourdieu and Passeron, *The inheritors*, 1964

- The **discrete** transmission of cultural privilege in the higher classes:

« Privilege is only noticed, most of the time, in its crudest forms of operation – recommendations or connections, help with schoolwork or extra teaching, information about education and employment. But, in fact, **the essential part of a cultural heritage is passed on more discretely and more indirectly**, and even **in the absence of any methodological effort or overt action**. It is perhaps in the most « cultivated » backgrounds that there is least need to preach devotion to culture or deliberately to undertake initiation into cultural practices. In contrast to the petit-bourgeois milieu, where most of the time the parents can only transmit cultural **good intentions**, the cultivated classes contrive **diffuse incitements** that are much more likely to induce espousal of culture through a sort of **hidden persuasion** » (p.20).

## Bourdieu and Passeron, *The inheritors*, 1964

- The lower classes rely on the school as purveyor of culture, when schools themselves denigrate school culture and value a form of culture produced in the homes of the upper classes.

« For individuals from the most deprived backgrounds, the school remains the one and only path to culture, at every level of education. As such, **it would be the royal road to the democratization of culture if it did not consecrate the initial cultural inequalities by ignoring them** and if it did not – for example, by denigrating a piece of academic work as too « academic » - often devalue the culture it transmits, in favor of the inherited culture which does not bear the vulgar mark of effort and so has every appearance of ease and grace.

[...] All teaching, and more especially the teaching of culture (even scientific culture), implicitly presupposes a body of knowledge, skills, and above all, modes of expression which constitute the heritage of the cultivated classes » (p.21).

# Bourdieu and Passeron, *The inheritors*, 1964

- Hard work (petite-bourgeoisie) vs ease (elite)

« The **reversal of the scale of values** which, by inverting the signs, transforms seriousness into the « spirit of seriousness » and the **valuing of work into a trivial, laborious pedantry** suspected of making up for a lack of talent, takes place as soon as **the petit-bourgeois ethos** is judged from the standpoint of **the ethos of the « elite »**, that is, measured against the dilettantism of the cultivated, well-born gentleman who knows without having struggled to acquire his knowledge and who, **secure about his present and future, can afford detachment and risk virtuosity**. But the culture of the elite is so close to the culture taught in school that a child from a petit-bourgeois background (and *a fortiori* from a peasant or working-class background) can only laboriously acquire that which is given to a child from the cultivated class – style, taste, sensibility, in short, the *savoir-faire* and art of living that are natural to a class because they are the culture of that class. For some, the learning of elite culture is a **conquest paid for in effort**, for others, it is a **heritage**, which implies both facility and the temptations of facility » (p.24).

## Bourdieu and Passeron, *The inheritors*, 1964

- « **gifts** » and **merit** are in fact cultural habits → by valuing gift and merit, the school system in fact ensures the perpetuation of social privilege and inequalities

« [...] the abilities measured by scholastic criteria stem not so much from natural « gifts » [...] but from the greater or lesser affinity between class cultural habits and the demands of the educational system or the criteria which define success within it » (p.22).

« The educational system can, in fact, ensure the perpetuation of privilege by the mere operation of its own internal logic. [...] the university system [**consecrates**] **inequalities by transforming social privilege into individual gifts or merit** » (p.27).

# Bourdieu, Passeron... and their critiques

- Later empirical works confirm and specify the role of education in the reproduction of social inequalities:
  - Ex. : social inequalities in schooling trajectories following entry into junior high school (6<sup>ème</sup>)
  - *The inheritors* put into historical perspective: How is the link between social origin and diploma evolving?
- Main criticisms levelled at Bourdieu and Passeron's theory of social reproduction through schooling by later works:
  - Questioning the role of cultural heritage (high-brow culture)
  - Stressing people's reflexivity:
    - The active role of parents' mobilization around school-related issues
    - Questioning the assumption of a generalized belief in meritocracy
  - Stressing the relative autonomy of the school system: how schools contribute to the production of « ease »

# Social inequalities in schooling trajectories following entry into junior high school (6<sup>ème</sup>)

Situation, in 2001, of students who have entered junior high school (6<sup>ème</sup>) in 1995 (%)

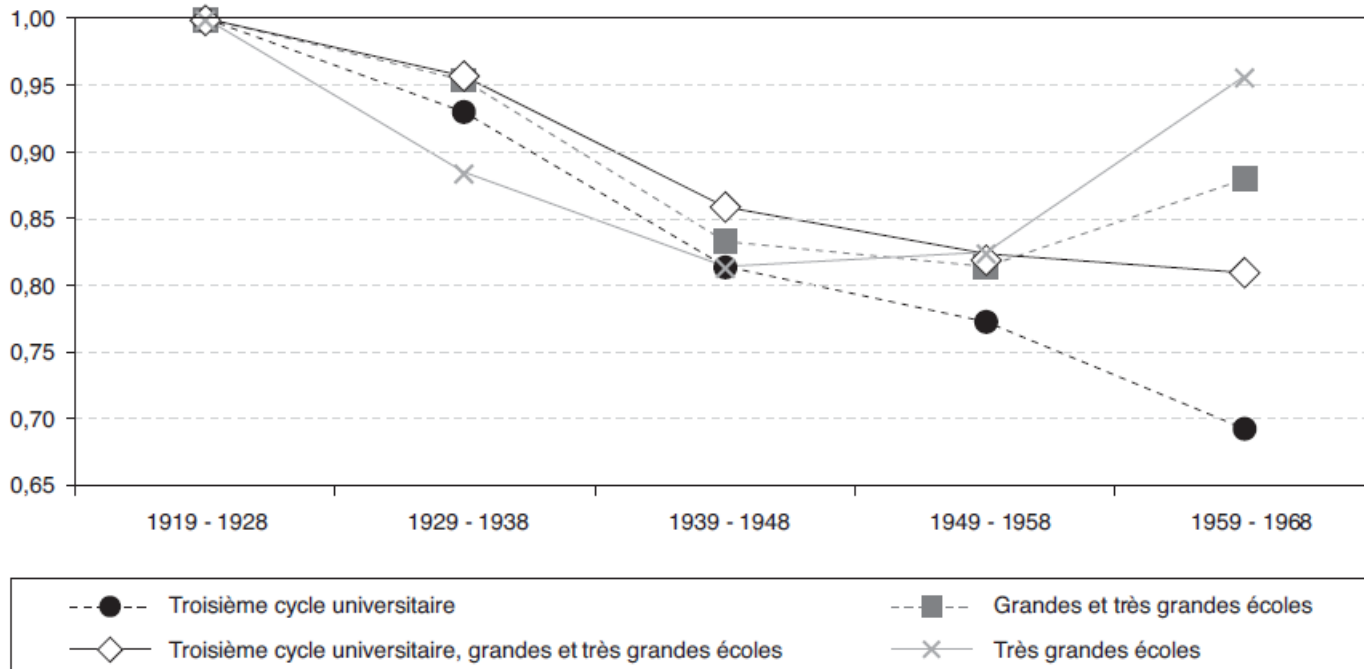
	Executives and intellectual occupations	Intermediary occupations	Crafts, small traders and business owners	Farmers	Employees	Industry workers
General training (2 <sup>ème</sup> cycle général ou techno.)	90	72	64	61	53	43
Vocational training (2 <sup>ème</sup> cycle professionnel)	8	24	29	34	36	44
Drop-out	2	5	8	5	11	14

Source : Duru-Bellat, Marie and Agnès Van Zanten. 2012. *Sociologie de l'école*. Paris: U-Armand Colin, tableau 1, p.48 (based on MEN data).

# How is the link between social origin and diploma evolving?

Evolution of the intensity of the link between social origin and diploma from one generation to the other (cohorts born 1919-1928 to 1959-1968)

Graphique II  
Évolution de l'intensité du lien entre origine sociale et obtention d'un diplôme au fil des générations



Albouy, Valérie and Thomas Wanecq. 2003. "Les inégalités sociales d'accès aux grandes écoles." *Economie et statistique*, p.41



# Bourdieu, Passeron... and their critiques

Main criticisms levelled at Bourdieu and Passeron's theory of social reproduction through schooling by later works:

- Questioning the role of cultural heritage (high-brow culture)
- Stressing people's reflexivity:
  - The active role of parents' mobilization around school-related issues
  - Questioning the assumption of a generalized belief in meritocracy
- The relative autonomy of the school system: how schools contribute to the production of « ease »

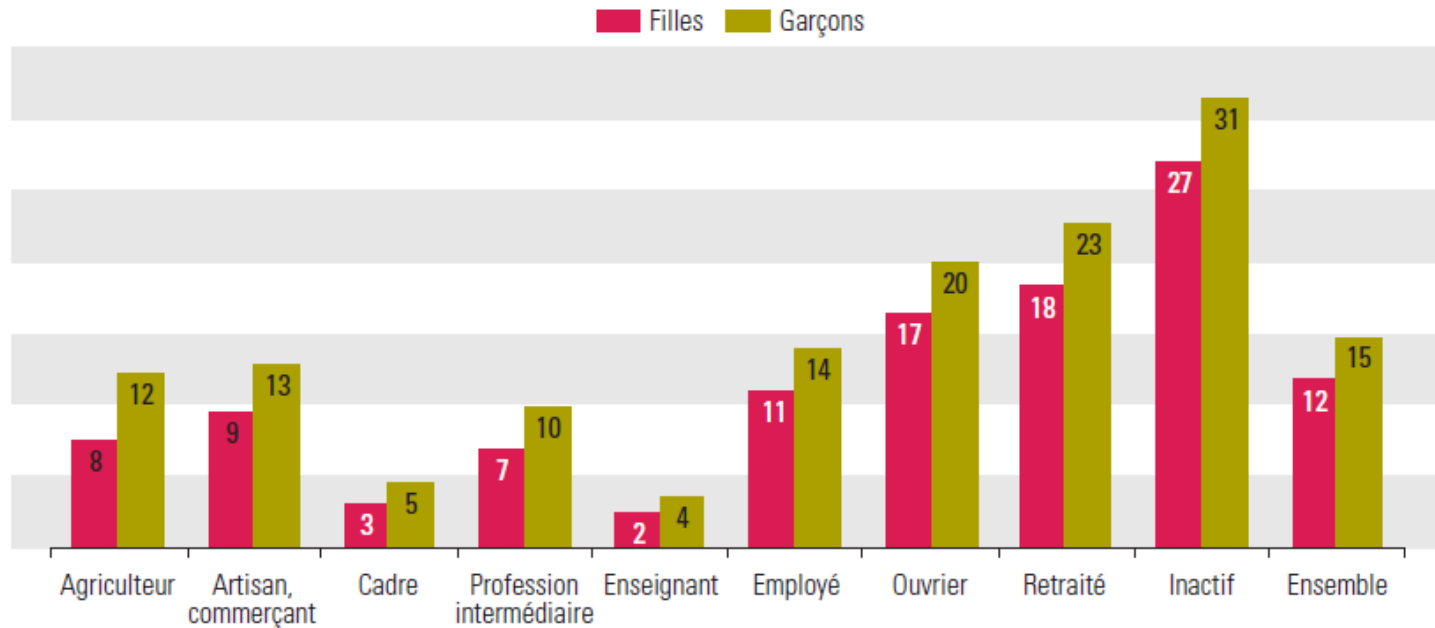
## Questioning the role of cultural heritage in the reproduction of social inequalities through schooling

What is at stake in « cultural capital »?

- Studies shows that social inequalities impact scholarly outcomes at a very *early stage* of education (in learning the basis of reading, writing and calculus) → cf delays in entering junior high school (entrée en 6<sup>ème</sup>), next slide
- What matters most is not so much a proximity to high-brow culture than reading and speech habits and educational practices at home → fostering linguistic and cognitive capacities (De Graaf, 2000; Sullivan, 2001; Duru-Bellat and Fournier, 2007)

# Social inequalities impact scholarly outcomes at an early stage: ex. delays in junior high school entry

Proportion d'élèves en retard à l'entrée en sixième selon l'origine sociale (%)



Lecture – En 2010, 17 % des filles et 20 % des garçons appartenant à une famille de catégorie socioprofessionnelle « ouvrier » sont entrés en sixième avec au moins un an de retard.

Champ : France métropolitaine, enseignement public et privé, MENJVA

Source : MENJVA-MESR DEPP

Source : Ministère de l'éducation nationale et Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche (2012), *Filles et garçons sur le chemin de l'égalité de l'école à l'enseignement supérieur*.

[http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/2012/66/0/DEPP-filles-garcons-2012\\_209660.pdf](http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/2012/66/0/DEPP-filles-garcons-2012_209660.pdf)

## Questioning the role of cultural heritage in the reproduction of social inequalities through schooling

Stressing people's reflexivity:

- The role of outcome anticipation in schooling choices: dropping-out as a rational choice for the lower classes? (Boudon, 1973)

The more active role of parents' mobilization around school-related issues (Van Zanten, 2001, 2009, Oberti, 2007)

- Choice of the school / school flight → interactions between urban segregation and school segregation
- Guidance in the choice of the course of study

## Meritocracy: do people actually believe in it? (Duru-Bellat and Tenret, 2009)

- Role of meritocracy in legitimating the reproduction of social inequalities = key aspect of Bourdieu and Passeron's argument: 2 assumptions:
  - People recognize the school's primary role in identifying and recognizing individual merit
  - People believe that individual scholarly achievements are solely based on merit/natural gifts, and have nothing to do with class (a naturalization of social hierarchies that involves symbolic violence for the lower classes, and reinforces the legitimacy of social inequalities)
- Empirical investigation on people's perceptions of meritocracy show that:
  - Merit is deeply interiorized as a principle, but not necessarily linked to school merit
    - Students believe diploma is important, but not the only determinant in individual job outcomes; 45% of them believe it plays too important a role
    - 60% agree that higher education should be rewarded by higher pay (→ not a universal belief)
    - Skepticism regarding school's capacity to reward merit: 55% of students believe school rewards individual capacities
  - People generally acknowledge the role of social class: 72% of students believe that parents' social environment influences scholarly outcomes
    - Schooling also favors critical thinking about meritocracy

## The relative autonomy of the school system: how schools contribute to the production of « ease »

S.R. Khan, 2011, *Privilege. The making of an adolescent elite at St. Paul's school*

- Corporal ease as a mark of social privilege
- *Learning* ease during the high school years  
« Rather than be forced to learn formal rules of etiquette, students learn to be comfortable around such elite tastes and sensibilities and, more often than not, even be indifferent to them. The students at seated meals are not uncomfortable in their formal attire, nor are they anxious about eating dinner with faculty members. In fact, the event is a non-event to them. They could care less. And this ease – which, it turns out, is far more valuable than merely revering and producing expertise – is what students at St. Paul's learn at seated meal and everywhere else » (p.80).

### 3. Gender and racial/ethnic inequalities in education

1. Gender inequalities
2. Ethnic and racial inequalities

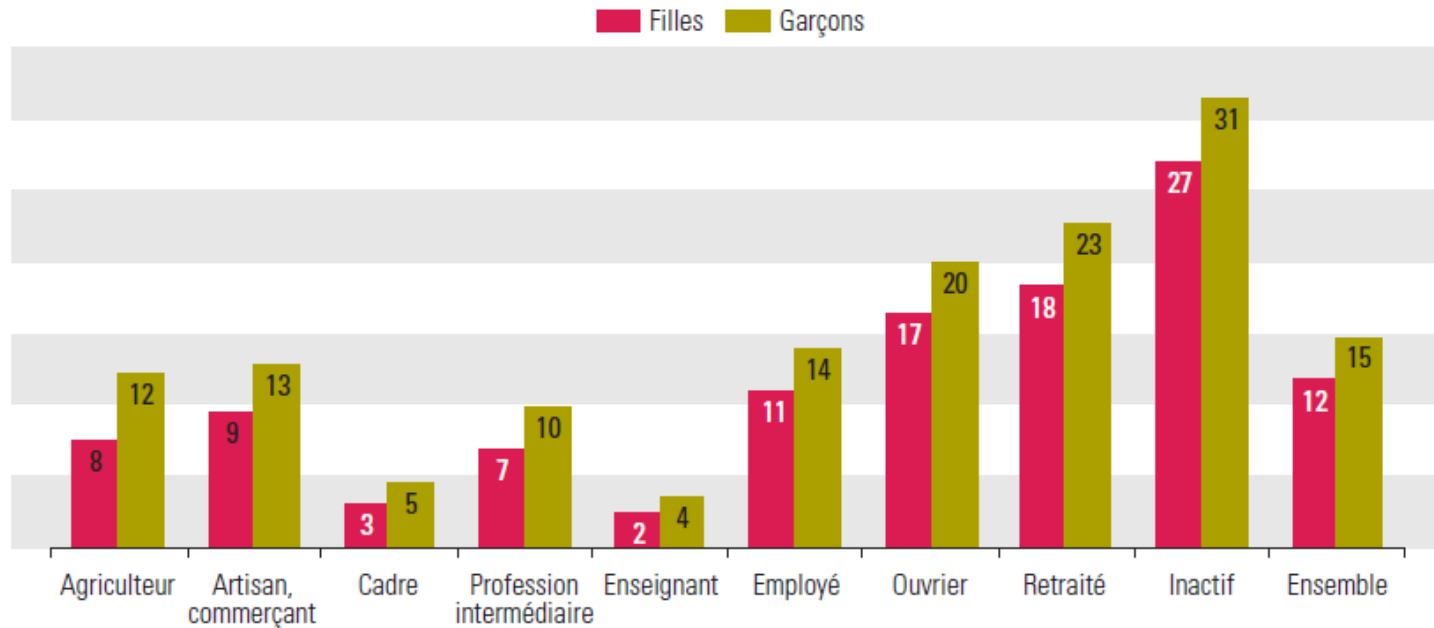
# Gender inequalities in education

- Stability in social inequalities vs gender inequalities are transforming: girls catching up and surpassing boys...
  - Among people born between 1920 and 1922, 15% of men and 9% of women reached the « Bac » or beyond (higher education diploma)
  - Among people born between 1974 and 1976, 59% of men and 67% of women reached the « Bac » or beyond (Selz and Vallet, 2006)
- Yet girls continue to opt in favor of less promising options (Duru-Bellat et al., 2003)



# Gender and class inequalities in education

Proportion d'élèves en retard à l'entrée en sixième selon l'origine sociale (%)



Lecture – En 2010, 17 % des filles et 20 % des garçons appartenant à une famille de catégorie socioprofessionnelle « ouvrier » sont entrés en sixième avec au moins un an de retard.

Champ : France métropolitaine, enseignement public et privé, MENJVA

Source : MENJVA-MESR DEPP

Source : Ministère de l'éducation nationale et Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche (2012), *Filles et garçons sur le chemin de l'égalité de l'école à l'enseignement supérieur*.

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# Gender segregation in higher education

## Pourcentage de filles dans l'enseignement supérieur



(1) Principalement : IEP Paris, École nationale des Chartes, EPHE, EHESS, INALCO, Institut de physique du globe, Paris XI, INP Grenoble, ...

(2) Ensemble des écoles et formations d'ingénieurs (universitaires ou non), y compris les NFI.

Lecture – En 2010, les filles représentent 74 % des inscrits en écoles vétérinaires. En 2000, leur proportion s'élevait à 60 %.

Champ : France métropolitaine + DOM

Source : MESR-DGESIP-DGRI SIES

Source : Ministère de l'éducation nationale et Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche (2012), *Filles et garçons sur le chemin de l'égalité de l'école à l'enseignement supérieur*.

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# Gender inequalities in education

Main explanations:

- Influence of gender socialization (Baudelot and Establet 1992)
- Girls' choices, taking into account the job opportunities open to them and their future roles of wives and mothers (Duru-Bellat, 1990)
- Gender stereotypes in school pedagogy (Mosconi, 1989)

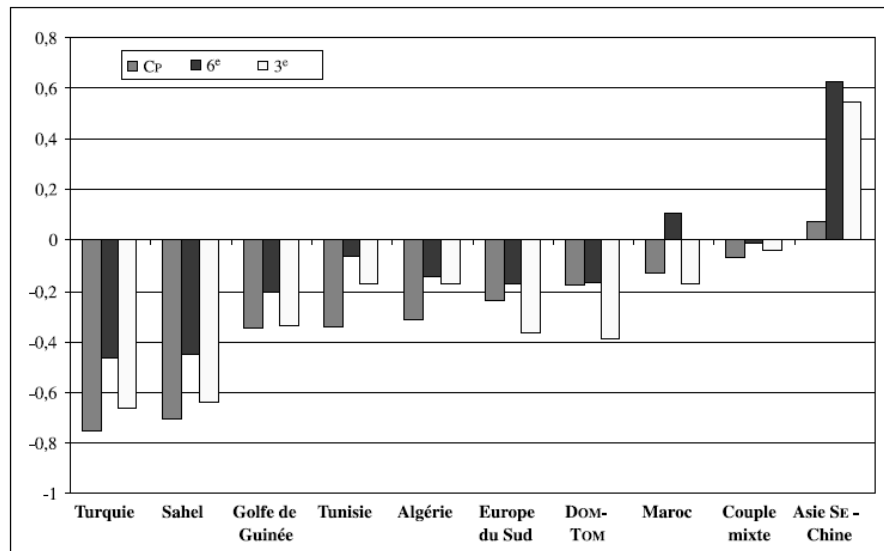
## Ethnic and racial inequalities in education (Safi, 2013)

- In the US: differences in Blacks and Whites' scholarly outcomes decreased in the 1960s and 1970s, and increased again in the 1990s
- In France: more and more studies of differences of scholarly outcomes between children of migrants and children of « natives »
- Socio-economic factors explain most of these inequalities (socio-occupational category, level of diploma of the parents, number of siblings, etc.)
- Yet some « net » inequalities remain: ex. Ichou, 2013 (next slide)

## Inequalities between children of migrants and children of « natives » in education in France (Ichou, 2013)

« Net » differences in scholarly outcomes in the first year of elementary school (CP) and in the first (6<sup>ème</sup>) and last (3<sup>ème</sup>) years of junior high school, between children of migrants and children of natives (reference group)

GRAPHIQUE 4. - Différences « nettes » de résultats scolaires en CP, 6<sup>e</sup> et 3<sup>e</sup> entre les groupes d'enfants d'immigrés et les enfants de natifs (groupe de référence)



Ichou, Mathieu. 2013. "Différences d'origine et origine des différences : les résultats scolaires des enfants d'émigrés/immigrés en France du début de l'école primaire à la fin du collège." *Revue française de sociologie* 54-1, p.26

# Ethnic and racial inequalities in education (Safi, 2013)

2 main trends of explanation for the inequalities that persist even after « controlling for » other socio-economic characteristics (Safi, 2013):

- Cultural mechanisms
  - Cultural deprivation
  - Oppositional culture (ex. African-American kids with good grades who get accused of « acting white » by their peers)
  - Effect of the experience of racism → interiorization of stereotypes
- School context and « invisible discriminations »
  - Teachers' attitudes and expectations
  - Segmentation of academic fields and courses of study
  - Interactions between school segregation and urban segregation

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