

Gender and Poverty in the United States
Spring 2010
Boston Area Graduate Consortium in Women's Studies

Faculty

Randy Albelda, Economics Department at UMass Boston
randy.albelda@umb.edu 617-287-6963
Deborah Belle, Department of Psychology at Boston University
debbelle@bu.edu 617-353-5455
Lisa Dodson, Sociology Department at Boston College
lisa.dodson@bc.edu 617-552-6864

Office hours

Once the class meets, we will arrange formal office hours.

Course Description

The course provides multi-disciplinary social science approaches to understanding the intersection of gender, poverty and inequality primarily in the United States. The course will be an advanced reading seminar that explores various (but especially feminist) approaches to theorizing, measuring, experiencing and researching poverty. The course will also examine models, policies, and strategies to reduce poverty and inequality. The course will weave discussions throughout about how these approaches relate to students' training in various graduate programs. Additionally, the class will explore particular research approaches and common dilemmas when inquiring into low-income America.

Course Goals:

We have three underlying goals for the course:

- To provide basic background reading and issue exploration in the broad topic of gender, poverty and U.S. anti-poverty policies within the context of several disciplines.
- To present various perspectives (including those of low-income and poor women) and research methodologies used in thinking about and studying poverty and gender.
- To allow each student a chance to pursue her/his research topic (or possible topic) in a more substantial way, benefiting from discussion and feedback from others in the class.

Course Design:

The class will be run as a seminar and will depend on the active participation of each student. Students are expected to come to class having read the assigned readings for the day thoughtfully and with regard to the theme and questions for the week. Professors Albelda, Belle and Dodson will provide reading assignments for and, using students' weekly discussion questions, facilitate discussions for the first 10 weeks of the course. The remaining three weeks of class will be led by student groups in consultation with one of the three professors, as detailed below.

Course Assignments:

There are three primary ways in which you will be evaluated in this course: weekly class participation (oral and written); preparing and conducting a class discussion with other students; and a final research paper. Full descriptions are at the end of the syllabus.

Books and Readings:

We have ordered two books that are available at the MIT Bookstore. They are:

Lisa Dodson, *The Moral Underground: How Ordinary Americans Subvert an Unfair Economy*. New Press, 2010.

Joel F. Handler and Yeheskel Hasenfeld, *Blame Welfare, Ignore Poverty and Inequality*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Recommended books:

There are a few “classics” that are worth reading cover-to-cover. We have not ordered them, but you can buy them used very cheaply on the web or in local used bookstores. These include:

Carol Stack. 1997. (originally published 1974) *All Our Kin*. Basic Books.

Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein. 1997. *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work*, Russell Sage Foundation.

Alice O'Connor. 2001. *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History*, Princeton University Press.

Alejandra Marchevsky and Jeanne Theoharis. 2006. *Not Working: Latina Immigrants, Low-Wage Jobs, and the Failure of Welfare Reform*, NYU Press.

All assigned readings (outside of those in ordered books) are available on-line through MIT's Stellar web-interface or at URL indicated.

Weekly schedule with assigned readings:

February 2

Class 1: Introduction

In this class we introduce the course topic; introduce ourselves to each other and our professional and personal connections to the topic; review the syllabus, readings and course expectations; and discuss student-group topics and potential research topics. We may show a film.

February 9

Class 2: Introducing Poverty: Who's Poor, Reasons Why and Anti-Poverty Programs

What is the “poverty landscape” in the United States? This week we look at who is poor, trends in poverty over time, the range of anti-poverty programs and a range of approaches to understanding poverty. We will pay particular attention to gender, race/ethnicity, and nativity status differences in poverty rates and trends over time, programs directed toward the poor, and ways in which gender, race/ethnicity, and nativity status matter (or do not) in explaining poverty.

Overview of Poverty Rates, Trends and Anti-Poverty Programs in the US [Skim]

Handler, Joel and Yeheskel Hasenfeld, 2007. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Chapter 2 (“The State of Poverty” pp. 17-69.) and Chapter 3 (The Response to Poverty and Inequality pp 70-148).

Understanding Poverty [carefully read 3 of the following 5]:

Jennings, James (1999) Persistent Poverty in the United States: A review of theories and explanations in *A New Introduction to Poverty: The role of race, power, and politics*, edited by Louis Kushnick and James Jennings, NYU Press: 13-38.

O'Connor, Alice. 2001. *Poverty Knowledge: Social science, social policy, and the poor in twentieth century U.S. history*. Princeton University Press. Chapter 9 ("The Poverty Research Industry"): 213-241.

Murray, Charles (1982). *Losing Ground*, Basic Books.1982. Chapters 12, 13, & 14 (pp. 154-191).

Wilson, William Julius (2009). *More Than Just Race- Being black and poor in the inner city*. Chapters 3 and 4 (" The Economic Plight of Inner-City Black Males" and "The Fragmentation of the Poor Black Family" pp. 62-132).

Sassen, Saskia (2000). *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, Princeton University Press. Chapters 7 and 8 (pp. 137-172).

**Optional (though recommended to at least skim): Cynthia Miller, Aletha C. Huston, Greg J. Duncan, Vonnie C. McLoyd, Thomas S. Weisner. 2008 *New Hope for the Working Poor: Effects after eight years for families and children*. MDRC, available at <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/488/full.pdf>. [This is an example of the type of poverty research Alice O'Connor describes as emblematic of think tanks and academic poverty researchers.]

February 16

Class 3: Rationalizing Poverty

How do poor and non-poor people make sense of poverty and economic inequality? What frameworks do we use for understanding poverty, and how do our perspectives differ, depending on where we stand in the socioeconomic hierarchy?

Hunt, M.O. (1996). The individual, society, or both? A comparison of Black, Latino, and White beliefs about the causes of poverty. *Social Forces*, 75, 293-322.

Limbert, W.M. & Bullock, H.E. (2009). Framing U.S. redistributive policies: Tough love for poor women and tax cuts for seniors. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 9, 57-83.

Jost, J.T. & Hunyady, O. (2005). Antecedents and consequences of system-justifying ideologies. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 14, 260-265.

Secombe, K., James, D., & Walters, K.B. (1998). "They think you ain't much of nothing"; The social construction of the Welfare mother. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60,849-865.

Belle, D. (2006). Contested interpretations of economic inequality following Hurricane Katrina. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 6, 143-158.

February 23

Class 4: Ideologies of dependency: Mothering, race, and welfare myths

In this class we will untangle and critically analyze attitudes about race/gender and meanings of dependency. How is it that poor mothers, who need support for children's care, are "dependent" while others (who receive help from spousal income, inheritance, or Social Security) or not?

Fraser, Nancy & Linda Gordon (1994). Genealogy of dependency. *Signs* 19(2): 309-335.

Dodson, Lisa (1999). *Don't Call Us Out of Name*, Chapters 3 and 4 (Pages 83-146)

Roberts, Dorothy (1999). "Welfare's Ban on Poor Motherhood" in *Whose Welfare?* edited by Gwendolyn Mink: 152-167.

Burton, Linda (2007) Child adultification in economically disadvantaged families. *Family Relations* 56: 329-345.

Bray, Rosemary L. (1992) "So how did I get here?" *New York Times Magazine*, November 8: 34-42.

March 2 Note: One paragraph description of student-led classes due today

Class 5: Psychological consequences of poverty.

How do poverty and economic inequality "get under the skin," affecting a person's emotional and physical health and her relationships with others?

Olson, T. (1956:1989). I stand here ironing. In B. H. Solomon (Eds.). *American families: 28 short stories*, (pp. 69-78), New York: Mentor.

Shively, C.A., Laber-Laird, K. & Anton, R.F. (1997). Behavior and physiology of social stress and depression in female cynomolgus monkeys. *Biological Psychiatry*, 41, 871-882.

Adler N, Epel E, Castellazzo G, Ickovics J. (2000). Relationship of subjective and objective social status with psychological and physiological functioning: Preliminary data in healthy, White women. *Health Psychology*, 19(6):586-592.

Evans, G.W. & Kim, P. (2007). Childhood poverty and health: Cumulative risk exposure and stress dysregulation. *Psychological Science*, 18, 11, 953-957.

Belle, D. & Doucet, J. 2003. Poverty, inequality, and discrimination as sources of depression among U.S. women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 27, 101-113.

Gupta, A.E. & Huston, A.C. (2009). Depressive symptoms and economic outcomes of low-income women: A review of the social causation, social selection, and interactionist hypotheses. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 3, 103-140.

March 9

Class 6: Working it out? Gender, race, ethnicity and employment.

How realistic is it for poor people and families to work their way out of poverty? Changes to the main anti-poverty program directed toward poor mothers (AFDC) in the late 1980s and 1990s promoted employment as the key mechanism for alleviating poverty, fueled by racial stereotypes and welfare myths. Despite requiring paid work, little was done to transform the nature of the low-wage labor market that most women would be forced to enter. This section explores the uneasy relationship of employment, welfare and poverty.

Marchevsky, Alejandra and Jeanne Theoharis (2006). *Not Working: Latina Immigrants, Low-Wage Jobs, and the Failure of Welfare Reform*, NYU Press, 2006. Chapter 3 (pp 111- 139) .

Boo, K. 2001. After welfare. *The New Yorker*, April 9, 93-107.

Mink, Gwendolyn 1998. Welfare's End. Ithaca, NNY: Cornell University Press. Chapter 4 "Why should poor single mothers have to work outside the home?" pp. 103-132.

Thornton Dill, Bonnie, Maxine Baca Zinn and Sandra Patton. 1999. "Race, Family Values and Welfare Reform" in *A New Introduction to Poverty: The Role of Race, Power, and Politics*, edited by Louis Kushnick and James Jennings, NYU Press: pp. 263-286.

Handler, Joel and Yeheskel Hasenfeld, 2007. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Chapter 6 ("Work and the Low-Wage Labor Market" pp. 238-281.)

Albelda, Randy. Forthcoming. "Time Binds: US anti-poverty policies, poverty and single mother's wellbeing" *Feminist Economics*.

March 16

Class 7: Investigating what poor women know about America

In this class students explore practical, ethical, and interpretive dilemmas that arise when investigating the lives of people who experience deep inequality. The readings address methodological and ethical concerns and challenge students to go beyond the traditional approach to the protection of human subjects.

Fine, Michelle L. Weis , S. Weseen, and L. Wong (2000). For Whom? Qualitative research, representations, and social responsibilities in *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Second Edition) edited by Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln. Sage Publications: 107-132.

Dodson, Lisa and Leah Schmalzbauer (2005). Poor Women and Habits of Hiding: Participatory methods in poverty research. *Journal of Marriage and Family: Special Issue on Theory and Methodology* 67: 949-959.

Liamputtong, Pranee (2007). *Researching the Vulnerable*. Chapter 7 ("Innovative and Alternative Research Methods in Consideration" pp. 140-163).

Maguire, Patricia (2001). Uneven Ground: Feminisms and action research in *Action Research* edited by Peter Reason and Hillary Bradbury: 59-70.

Maxwell, Joseph (2010). "Validity: How might you be wrong?" in *Qualitative Educational Research* edited by Wendy Luttrell. Routledge: 279-297.

Activity with Case Study: A transcript from research for discussion and analysis in class. Students will break into groups of 3-4 and read through one or more interviews for discussion.

March 23: NO CLASS

March 30

Class 8: Feminist research models, policies and strategies for change.

We continue our focus on a range of feminist social science research methodologies for exploring poverty, anti-poverty programs and the construction of policies and strategies for change.

Edin, Kathryn & Laura Lein (1997) *Making Ends Meet: How single mothers survive welfare and low-wage work*. Russell Sage Foundation. Chapter 1 (“Single Mothers, Welfare and Low-Wage Work” pp. 1-19).

Marchevsky, Alejandra and Jeanne Theoharis (2006). *Not Working: Latina Immigrants, Low-Wage Jobs, and the Failure of Welfare Reform*, NYU Press, 2006. Introduction (pp. 1-30).

Albelda, Randy and Heather Boushey (2007). *Bridging the gap: A Picture of How Work Supports Work in Ten States*, Center for Economic and Research Policy and the Center for Social Policy. <http://www.bridgingthegaps.org/publications/nationalreport.pdf>

Christopher, Karen (2004). Welfare as we [don't] know It: A review and feminist critique of welfare reform research. *Feminist Economics* 10(2): 142-171.

Soss, Joe, Sanford F. Schram, Thomas P. Vartanian, and Erin O'Brien (2001). Setting the terms of relief: Explaining state policy choices in the devolution. *American Journal of Political Science*, 45(2): 378-395.

Optional: Feminist policies:

Handler, Joel F. and Yeheskel Hasenfeld (2007) *Blame Welfare, Ignore Poverty and Inequality*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 8 (“Addressing Poverty and Inequality”, pp. 316-348) .

Himmelweit, Susan et al. 2004. “Lone mothers: What is to be done?” *Feminist Economics* 10(2): 237-264. [four feminist views]

April 6

Class 9: Poor women's social networks and supports

Relationships with kin, friends, neighbors, helping professionals, etc. can provide critical support resources but can also stress individuals through overwhelming demands for assistance. What makes a network useful for survival may actually preclude upward mobility. Nor are networks always available to help.

NOTE: If you are not already familiar with Carol Stack's *All our kin: Strategies for survival in a black community* (1974) (New York: Harper & Row), you should read this as well.

Riley, D. & Eckenrode, J. (1986). Social ties: Subgroup differences in costs and benefits. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 770-778.

Brewster, K.L. & Padavic, I. (2002). No more kin care? Change in Black mothers' reliance on relatives for child care, 1977-94. *Gender & Society*, 16, 546-563.

Menjivar, C. (2002). The ties that heal: Guatemalan immigrant women's networks and medical treatment. *International Migration Review*, 36, 2, 437-466.

Dominguez, S. & Watkins, C. (2003). Creating networks for survival and mobility: Examining social capital among low-income African-American and Latin-American mothers. *Social Problems*, 50, 111-135.

April 13

Class 10: Low-income work & family and cross-class alliances

In this class we look at how low-wages have been institutionalized into the labor market and circumscribe the lives of one third of families in the US. Particularly, we look at the phenomenon of “care poverty” that is a central concern among low-income women and children and has rippling effects in the larger society. Focusing on middle & working class crossroads, we will examine the idea of moral economy and collective responsibility for economic justice.

Chaudry, Ajay (2004). *Putting Children First*, Chapter 4 (“Child Care Concerns: ‘It’s the worst system ever’”) 119-155.

Dodson, Lisa (2010). *The Moral Underground: How Ordinary Americans Subvert an Unfair Economy*. The New Press.

Activity with Case Study

April 20 NO CLASS

April 27, May 4, & May 11: Student-Led Preparation and Discussion

Final papers due May 11

Grading and course expectations

Students will be graded on their preparation for and participation in class, including prepared questions and seven brief response papers; one student-group led discussion; one paper.

Weekly Class Preparation and Participation:

There are two elements to class preparation (20% of course grade) and engaged participation (20%). First, students will be expected to read all assignments and come prepared to discuss the material. In this vein, it is the responsibility of students to prepare questions for class discussions and/or select a meaningful passage for deeper examination. Note that these questions/passages should be included in weekly reaction papers. Specifically, for seven of thirteen classes students should write brief reaction papers/memos to the readings, including those prepared by students during the last three weeks of the course. Comments should be about 300-500 words. The paper/memos should not be summaries of the week’s readings. Instead, they should be your reactions and analyses of the theses or arguments of the authors. This may include comparing and contrasting perspectives, methods, findings, and implications of different articles. It may also include questions authors raise but do not answer. Students can consider class readings with ideas encountered in other social science classes, relate personal experiences to the issues raised by the readings, explore new avenues of thought suggested by the readings, and analyze one’s own emotional and intellectual reactions to the readings.

Preparation for classes, development of reaction papers with discussions questions and/or selection of passages for analyses in class, and in-class participation is 40% of the course grade.

Student-group led classes

Students – in small groups of 2-4 people -- will take responsibility for preparing and leading one class discussion (anticipated to be about one hour) during the last three weeks of the course. On the first day of class professors will have a list of possible topics for these student-led classes. Based on each professor's area of expertise, at least one member of the faculty will meet before or after class to advise the students in preparation for their class. (Note: this topic may be the basis for individual student papers as well).

Student groups will develop a list of readings (3-5) and discussion questions for their class. These student-led classes should go beyond representing the readings and seek to draw out varying perspectives and contending views. Key to this assignment is developing a class that draws everyone into the topic. The student groups may use different kinds of materials (AV, public testimony, etc.). Two of the readings should be made available to the class for their active participation and handed out or electronically circulated two weeks in advance of the class. In preparation for these classes, a month into the course (March 2nd) students will be required to submit a one-paragraph description about how they will handle their group discussion. This early start will allow course faculty to respond to proposed approaches. (In consultation with faculty, students can change their topics later in the semester.) **The student group class will account for 20% of the course grade.**

Research Paper

Each student is required to write a 15-20 page research paper critically reviewing the research literature on a particular topic in an area of research relevant to the course and, as noted, may build upon the topic chosen for the student-led discussion. However, recognizing that students may be at different points in their academic careers with different and varying research needs, students are encouraged to produce papers that diverge from traditional research paper approach. For example, students may want to produce a study proposal raising a research question in an area of relevance to the course and propose a new study to answer this question. Others may want to integrate work in this class with current work on a master's or doctoral thesis. Professors Albelda, Belle or Dodson will be available to consult with students to determine what type of research paper works best. **Final research papers/proposals will be due on the last day of class. The paper will account for 40% of the course grade.**