



**COURSE: The Psychology of Poverty (1994) - Bernice Lott**

**Course Objectives:** The primary focus of this course is the experience of poor people in the United States. We will consider the circumstances of poverty, and the consequences of poverty for behavior, aspirations, family functioning, relationships, and mental health. Using a social psychological perspective, we will examine and discuss the influence of situational variables on behavior, and the interactions between status and role. Special attention will be paid to the status categories of gender and ethnicity. The personal, social, and cultural correlates of poverty will be examined in both urban and rural settings.

A major objective of the course is to reduce the psychological distance between US and THEM, since poor people are typically perceived by those in the middle-class as being far removed, both physically and psychologically, from the majority culture. To this end, the readings focus on life among this country's poor in first-hand accounts or careful second-hand observations.

**Required Books:**

- Chute            The Beans of Egypt, Maine
- Crow Dog       Lakota Woman
- Donaldson      The Ville
- Ehrenreich      Fear of Falling
- Freedman       From Cradle to Grave
- Kotlowitz       There are No Children Here

**Outline of Topics and Readings:**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Readings</u>
Sept. 8	I. Introduction	
Sept. 13, 15, 20, 22	II. Definitions, theories, and general issues (omit Ch. 2; pp. 144-182, 213-243)	Ehrenreich
Sept. 27, 29 Oct. 4, 6, 11	III. Urban Poverty welfare homelessness health education crime begging/panhandling neighborhoods women children	Kotlowitz
Oct. 13, 18, 20, 25		Donaldson
Oct. 27	PAPERS ON KOTLOWITZ & DONALDSON	

Oct. 27, Nov.	IV. Rural poverty farming communities mining communities Native Americans	Chute 1, 3, 8
Nov. 10, 15, 17, 22		Crow Dog
Nov. 29	PAPERS ON CHUTE AND CROW DOG	
Nov. 29, Dec. 1, 3	V. Solutions: personal and structural	Freedman
Dec. 6, 8, 13	ORAL REPORTS	
	FINAL EXAMINATION	

#### GUIDELINES FOR OBSERVATION-BASED TERM PROJECTS

1. Some observational projects involve introducing yourself to the administrators of the site you choose (e.g., teacher, principal, director of shelter, etc.) and getting permission to enter the facility by explaining your objectives for the project.
2. Some observational projects may be carried out without prior introduction or permission such as watching children play in a public space (e.g., streets or playground) or spending time in a big-city train station or public park or observing the scene (physical and social) in a public area of a low-income housing project.
3. You may want to talk directly with a sample of poor people by attending meetings of organized social action groups. A good contact for this is (name and contact information for a community organizer).
4. Regardless of whether you observe with permission, or more informally, adhere strictly to the following rules:
  - always be respectful and polite;
  - be as unobtrusive as possible – you are not a participant observer but a visitor to the school, neighborhood, shelter, or meeting;
  - do not get into arguments or discussions – you are there to listen, look, and learn;
  - this does not mean to “keep your distance” in a negative sense but to remember that you are a visitor;
  - do not ask probing questions of the children or adults you are observing (unless it is appropriate to do so, as in a meeting); if in a shelter, let the clients initiate conversations although it is alright to politely inquire about the circumstances that brought them to the shelter, if they seem willing to talk to you;
  - always identify yourself truthfully as a college student working on a term project; never pretend to be what you aren’t.
5. As with the other types of reports, prepare a 5 minute oral presentation in addition to the 10 page written paper.
6. Media aids are definitely acceptable – e.g., audio and/or video tapes; overhead transparencies for charts or tables; etc.

## GUIDELINES FOR NON-OBSERVATION BASED PROJECTS

7. See items 5. and 6. above.
8. Give a clear description of your objectives, your methodology, your sources or material, your findings, your conclusions and their implications; label portions of your report accordingly.