THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

THE SOCIAL

SCIENCE OF

POVERTY

Edited by

DAVID BRADY

and

LINDA M. BURTON

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
It almost goes without saying that poverty is one of the world's most persistent and unresolved social problems. Poverty's history is mired in paradoxes and puzzles, failures, complex social changes, and unsettling individual and group behaviors. Politicians and policymakers often apply meek partial solutions to address poverty while simultaneously positioning themselves to claim absolution when their solutions fail (Edelman 2013). The stewards of humanitarianism, through their work in non-profit, philanthropic, and religious organizations, stridently seek to meet the needs of the poor but are frequently constrained in what they can accomplish by inhospitable or indifferent political economic contexts. Meanwhile, public sentiments often take form as adversarial dialogues about the deserving and underdeserving poor (Gans 1994). While many publically admonish poverty, they often implicitly engage in a variety of generic social behaviors that reproduce socioeconomic disadvantage among specific populations across space, time, race, and generations (Schwalbe et al. 2000).

Scholars are also not exempt from contributing to unresolved issues regarding poverty. For far too long, the social science of poverty has been fractured and fragmented. There is a rich tradition of research on urban poverty in the United States, however this literature rarely engages with research on rural poverty even within the United States (Burton et al. 2013; Lichter and Schaft this volume). Poverty research on the United States broadly neglects the study of poverty in other rich democracies (Brady 2009). The literature on poverty across rich democracies rarely engages with the study of poverty in developing countries. At the same time, scholars of poverty in developing countries seem to exist as a separate community from scholars studying poverty in the United States or Europe.

The segregation across disciplines is perhaps even more striking. Political scientists and sociologists often complain that economists fail to cite (or even read) their research. There is some basis for this critique as economists studying poverty often operate without connection to other disciplines. However, sociologists often neglect poverty researchers in the fields of social work and anthropology. Psychologists, anthropologists, and social work scholars rarely fully incorporate the structural and institutional
contexts that many sociologists emphasize. Compared to the other social sciences, political scientists simply do not study poverty as much (especially in comparison to their interest in studying inequality more broadly). The entire field of poverty studies has not sufficiently incorporated the insights of historians.

Across disciplines, there are often parallel perspectives and concepts that do not share comparable nomenclature. As a result, poverty research is segmented into academic silos that rarely engage in conversations with each other. Advances in one segment of the poverty literature go unnoticed by other segments. Other times, disciplines take contrasting positions from each other without being aware they are doing so. Worse still, many proceed as if other highly relevant fields have made no contributions to understanding poverty at all. As a result, the field revisits and rehashes debates with insufficient progress from, or even awareness of, prior debates (Katz 1989; O’Connor 2001). Questions are framed as new in one field, even though the same questions have been thoroughly addressed in another field. Provocative arguments are routinely made even though extensive research in other areas contradicts their claims or even premises. Case studies are often not contextualized relative to the meso- or macro-level institutions and structures in which they are embedded. Consequently, scholars do not seem to be reflexive as to what generalizations they can or cannot make. Cross-national comparisons often lack an appreciation of meaning and place, and therefore conclusions reached from these studies feel disconnected from people on the ground. Like many other fields, and with some notable exceptions, qualitative and quantitative researchers often fail to genuinely engage each other.

Progress in methods, data, and theory in one country are not taken up by scholars in other countries. Even if economists ignore sociologists, it is equally problematic that American sociologists often act as if the United States is the only country in the world. Sociologists of poverty routinely fail to acknowledge their research is U.S.-specific and typically do not build on scholarship from other countries. The United States is not a universal case, and lessons from the United States may not apply to other countries (Brady and Burroway 2012). Indeed, as Henrich and colleagues (2010:74) write in their masterful review of ethnocentrism in behavioral science samples, “Americans are, on average, the most individualistic people in the world.” It is equally plausible that poverty scholarship based on rich democracies might not be generalizable to the majority of the world’s population. Henrich and colleagues (2010:61) even conclude that rich democracies provide “among the least representative populations one could find for generalizing about humans.” Partly because of biases from concentrating solely on the United States, U.S. scholars often speak of the “intractability” and “persistence” of poverty. The problem is that they neglect the clear progress other rich democracies have actually made in reducing poverty. Brady and Destro (2014) refer to this bias as the “fallacy of intractability.” The lack of international integration in poverty research is so apparent that Michael Katz (1989:238) wrote in his classic *The Undeserving Poor*, “Indeed, European scholars often find American approaches to poverty, including those of the most respected social scientists, bizarre.”
At the end of the day, the siloing of these various approaches to studying poverty does not make sense. We argue that such fragmentation is counterproductive for understanding poverty. In many ways, and with so much potential human capital invested, it is unfortunate that despite more than a century of rigorous social science research on poverty, there is a demonstrative lack of integration and accumulation.

This volume intends to counter these prevailing tendencies toward segregation and fragmentation in poverty scholarship. We aim to integrate the social sciences of poverty and to advance genuine interdisciplinary and international dialogue in poverty research. We seek common ground in the study of poverty, and a broader awareness of the distinctive valuable contributions of different types of poverty research. We do so by having collected a diverse set of chapters penned by an even more diverse set of scholars. The chapters provide a state-of-the-art compilation of salient debates across the social sciences of poverty. We incorporate influential theories and concepts regarding poverty worldwide, and summarize and review contemporary social science on many central topics in poverty research. We view this handbook as representing the expertise and knowledge of diverse communities of scholars. Therefore, we aim for the volume to serve as a foundation for a comprehensive social science of poverty.

Henceforth, we summarize the themes of the volume and contents of the chapters. Before doing so, we situate our volume relative to the prior literature. In particular, we discuss precisely how our volume integrates the diverse field of poverty research. We also discuss how the prior literature has not fully accomplished such integration.

The Case for International Interdisciplinarity in the Social Sciences of Poverty

We do not believe there should or ever could be one social science of poverty. We also understand the caution and skepticism against strong programs of unification. There is a possible danger that unifying all the social sciences of poverty will have a homogenizing and dulling effect that constrains and weakens the field. We also agree that the diversity of poverty scholarship is a strength and that the heterogeneity of theory, method, and perspective is a valuable asset. Therefore, we seek to make clear that we do not believe all the social sciences of poverty should look the same.

Instead, this volume was designed following the premise that greater strides could occur if the social sciences of poverty were more integrated in their thinking, more aware of one another, and more engaged in reciprocal dialogue. As editors, our experience of putting this volume together has clearly broadened and deepened our knowledge of poverty through identifying and recruiting diverse authors and by jointly reading and reviewing each chapter. Perhaps, if we had known when we launched this
David Brady and Linda M. Burton project how diverse the poverty literature actually was, we might have never pursued this ambition. Nonetheless, our experience confirms that poverty scholars in different areas can learn a great deal by reading the various strands of knowledge integrated in the chapters in this volume. We now know this to be a truism rather than conjecture: Poverty research can advance considerably if scholars genuinely engage with other disciplines and with scholars in other countries.

Our conviction for interdisciplinary research on poverty is strengthened by the fact that there have been some previous successful efforts of integration in poverty research. For example, in the 1990s, a few rich interdisciplinary literatures on poverty emerged. One genuinely interdisciplinary body of work focused on neighborhood poverty (e.g. Duncan et al. 1997; Jencks and Peterson 1991). Another focused on the consequences of child poverty and included the contributions of psychologists, economists, sociologists, human development scholars, education researchers, and other fields of inquiry (e.g., Duncan and Brooks-Gunn 1997; Huston 1991). Unfortunately, these literatures were predominantly focused on the United States, and these debates tended not to include international research. Nevertheless, simply by being interdisciplinary, considerable intellectual progress resulted.

Another area where poverty research has been fairly international, interdisciplinary, and incorporated rich and poor countries is poverty measurement. This partly reflects the efforts of international organizations, like the World Bank, European Commission, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which have convened scholars and practitioners and put the social sciences to work monitoring poverty. Equally important have been the data infrastructure efforts of international organizations like the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) (Rainwater and Smeeding 2004). Perhaps as much as any other organization in the world, the LIS has advanced the internationalization of poverty research. To be sure, much of poverty measurement, especially in the United States, lags behind European scholarship in this area and uses provincial or problematic measures (see chapter by Smeeding in this volume; Brady 2009). Nonetheless, serious scholars of poverty measurement have moved in the right direction. As one example, the Spring 2010 issue of the Journal of Policy Analysis and Management was a special issue on international poverty measurement (Couch and Pirog 2010). Included were chapters on the distributional impact of in-kind public benefits in Europe; asset-based measures with the cross-national Luxembourg Wealth Study (by our volume author Smeeding); social exclusion in global context; material deprivation in Europe (by our volume authors Nolan and Whelan); the regressive consequences of indirect taxes in Europe; and poverty dynamics in India and other countries (by our volume author Krishna). This special issue is an encouraging signal of what can be accomplished if poverty scholars cross national and disciplinary boundaries.

Indeed, the value of diversity in the social science of poverty is exemplified by the outstanding collection of authors featured in this volume. Our authors include a wide variety of disciplines: African American studies, anthropology, child development, demography, development studies, education, economics, global health, history,
international development, management and labor relations, medicine, political science, psychology, public policy, social policy, social work, sociology, statistics, and women's studies. Though there are a considerable number of sociologists in the volume, and both editors are sociologists, nonsociologists are present in more than half the chapters. Economists are also present in nearly half the chapters. What is more, we were able to enlist authors working in or originating from a large number of different countries, including Australia, Chile, China, Finland, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Mexico, the Netherlands, the Philippines, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, and the United States. About half the chapters have at least one author from outside the United States, and about one-third include an expert on developing countries. Of course, we do not cover every possible salient question or theory on poverty, nor do we have representatives from every country in the world. Nevertheless, we have had the good fortune of including a truly heterogeneous group of scholars from many different countries and representing the remarkable diversity of the social sciences of poverty.

We charged this set of authors with three common criteria. We required every chapter to (1) be interdisciplinary, (2) be international, and (3) integrate scholarship on rich countries and countries in the developing world. Admittedly, not every single chapter perfectly fulfills all criteria. Some chapters do focus disproportionately on the United States, and some chapters do lean toward one discipline. Every chapter, however, accomplishes these three criteria on some level. Moreover, the majority of the chapters do come quite close to genuinely addressing and balancing all three criteria. In addition, the volume holistically integrates the social science of poverty by covering many different topics and areas. Thus, while a given chapter might concentrate most on developing countries, other chapters devote greater attention to rich democracies. While some chapters use economics as a baseline, others are motivated by fields quite distinct from economics. Therefore, the volume is designed to achieve these three criteria through the cumulative and interacting contributions of all chapters. We expect the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts.

Returning to the issue of fragmentation raised at the outset of this chapter, we stress that international and interdisciplinary integration has not yet been fully realized in the poverty literature. To the best of our knowledge, no volume integrates the international social sciences of poverty in the way we do. By that, we mean that there are very few handbooks of poverty research with a truly interdisciplinary and international approach, and with attention to both rich and developing countries. Therefore, this handbook addresses a noteworthy lacuna in the field.

To demonstrate this point, consider several of the most influential recent edited volumes on poverty. Among the volumes that seek to study poverty comprehensively, Jefferson’s (2012) *The Oxford Handbook of the Economics of Poverty* assembles an impressive group of scholars. This volume, however, focuses mostly on the United States and does not address the international literature systematically. As is clear from its title, it concentrates only on the discipline of economics, and the vast majority of authors are economists. Crane and Heaton’s (2008) *Handbook of Families and Poverty* is interdisciplinary and analyzes poverty in diverse populations. However,
the predominant approach used is family demography, and the focus is on contemporary U.S. families. Bannerjee and colleagues (2006) produced a rich and important volume, which is quite international and has some similar goals to our volume (also Bebbington et al. 2008). Nonetheless, their volume concentrates on poverty in developing countries, and all the authors appear to be economists. Some recent and more focused volumes also deserve mention. For example, Grusky and Kanbur’s (2006) *Poverty and Inequality* includes state-of-the-art literature reviews and is international. However, the volume achieves interdisciplinarity by contrasting the perspectives solely of economists and sociologists. Similarly, Devine and Waters’ (2004) *Social Inequalities in Comparative Perspective* collects essays and empirical pieces on social inequality in different countries, but each chapter focuses on one country rather than on broader themes across countries. Although both volumes include eminent scholars discussing central themes in poverty research, these anthologies do not have the scope of our volume.

Perhaps most visible are a series of volumes linked to the Institute of Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin. The volumes represent a collection of state-of-the-art science on poverty. The most recent example is *Changing Poverty, Changing Policies*, edited by Cancian and Danziger (2009). This series is consistently rigorous and provides an excellent set of scholarly resources. Yet, these volumes focus almost exclusively on the contemporary United States, neglect other rich democracies, and have no discussion of developing countries. For example, Danziger and colleagues’ (1994) collection contains no chapters explicitly focused on or comparing non-U.S. countries. Only 1 of 15 chapters in Danziger and Haveman (2001) places U.S. poverty in comparative perspective. In that chapter, Smeeding (one of our volume authors) and his colleagues (2001) stress that U.S. poverty research “rests on an inherently parochial foundation, for it is based on the experiences of only one nation” (p. 162). In Cancian and Danziger (2009), only 2 of 14 chapters devote any attention to non-U.S. countries. One chapter by our volume author Markus Jäntti (2009) compares U.S. mobility patterns to other rich democracies. Another chapter, by Meyer and Wallace (2009) analyzes trends in U.S. poverty and spends about 15 percent of its space comparing those trends to other countries. In addition, these volumes include only a marginal presence of disciplines besides economics and public policy. At most, one psychologist or social work scholar is included, but all the remaining contributors are from economics and public policy.4

If there is one volume that has previously accomplished most of the goals we set out to achieve, it may be McFate and colleagues’ 1995 volume *Poverty, Inequality, and the Future of Social Policy*. Their volume is interdisciplinary, including economists, sociologists, political scientists, demographers, and ethnographers, among others. The volume also incorporates many countries, and almost every chapter is international and comparative. The chapters that are not comparative predominantly focus on countries outside the United States. The volume, however, does not incorporate less developed countries and only examines the “Western” countries of North America and Europe. In addition, even though the volume was a major contribution,
it has been 20 years since it was published and about 25 since many of the chapters were written.

In sum, the prior literature has not fully realized our goal of a volume that genuinely integrates the international social sciences of poverty. Though fine volumes have been edited by others, most are confined to one discipline, and most focus either on the United States or developing countries. There is a tangible absence of integration across national boundaries, between rich and poor countries, and across the social sciences. This volume aims to address that need.

**Themes of the Volume**

Our volume is organized into six sections: (1) concepts, theories, and orienting questions; (2) classic debates; (3) place and context; (4) causes and the reproduction of poverty; (5) consequences; and, (6) policies, solutions, and responses. The first section focuses on the big picture questions, leading explanations and definitions of poverty, and how people, including the poor, understand poverty. The second comprises chapters about the enduring concerns, recurring paradoxes, and long-standing discussions that have oriented the field. The third analyzes how geography, spatial context, and location shape the nature, causes, and consequences of poverty. The fourth considers the social forces generating poverty and how those forces are often themselves reciprocally reinforced by poverty. The fifth examines how poverty shapes, harms, and constrains people’s lives and life chances. And, the sixth section reviews how poverty has been addressed, and what has worked and could work to alleviate poverty and its consequences. Every chapter includes a state-of-the-art review of the literature. In addition, chapters narrate the evolution of the field and point readers toward where the field is headed. Each chapter raises questions, identifies problems and gaps in the literature, and evaluates what has been learned and what needs to be learned.

**Summary of Chapters**

**Section I: Concepts, Theories, and Orienting Questions**

In Chapter 2, Smeeding discusses the measurement of poverty. Smeeding convincingly demonstrates that measurement is an essential first step in the study of poverty. He defines poverty as having too few resources to participate fully in society. He discusses the origins and contemporary practices of poverty measurement across different countries and disciplines. Smeeding considers measures based on various economic resources (e.g., income or wealth) and assesses absolute, relative, and anchored measures. He
then displays patterns and trends in poverty with different measures across a variety of countries. Smeeding provides a definitive guide for how different poverty measures perform and informs social scientists for how best to measure poverty.

Rylko-Bauer and Farmer present the theory of structural violence in Chapter 3. This theory emerges from the fields of anthropology and medicine and has been highly influential in the international social sciences. Structural violence entails the consequences of unequal and unjust social structures that work in combination to marginalize and undermine the disadvantaged. In contrast to individualistic accounts, they emphasize structures that “violently” lead to death, harm, and suffering for groups experiencing common forms of oppression. Tracing structural violence's history and application in different disciplines, they place importance on history and context and the interdependence of structural factors.

Hick and Burchardt's Chapter 4 focuses on the concept of capability deprivation. This approach was initially developed by Amartya Sen as a way to conceptualize and measure poverty. Critiquing income-centric understandings of poverty, capability deprivation focuses not just be on what people have but also on what they can do and be. The authors present and assess the key concepts that comprise the capability approach—functionings and capabilities—and discuss what the approach means for concepts of well-being. They also review empirical applications inspired by the capability approach and assess the central questions for employing the capability approach.

In Chapter 5, Hunt and Bullock examine what people believe about the causes of poverty. Their analysis revisits and builds on Kluegel and Smith's classic essay on ideology and beliefs about social stratification. Like Kluegel and Smith, they focus on four topics: (1) what people believe about poverty, (2) selected social psychological processes governing the intrapersonal organization of poverty beliefs, (3) various factors shaping patterns of belief, and (4) selected consequences that beliefs about poverty hold for the person and for politics.

Chapter 6, by Brady, Blome, and Kleider, presents the political and institutional sources of poverty. They argue that poverty is fundamentally shaped by the combination of power resources (mobilized class-based collective political actors) and institutions (formal rules, regulations, and arrangements). Within each of power resources and institutions, they explain core arguments and key concepts, and review recent empirical research. They contend state policy plays a key mediating role between politics/institutions and poverty, and catalog a set of six generic mechanisms for how state policies matter to poverty. They also diagnose the challenges facing power resources and institutional explanations, and outline broader methodological issues for research on the political and institutional sources of poverty.

Human development and the life course are the topics of McLoyd, Jocson and Williams's Chapter 7. Building on the research agenda evolving from the United States in the 1980s, scholars have studied the effects of the duration, timing, and context of childhood poverty, and documented the mediating processes of these effects. This literature coalesced around three perspectives—social causation, social selection, and an interactionist perspective implicating both causation and selection. Although studies
on child poverty in developing countries have given less attention to mediating processes, that literature shares several common themes with the U.S.-based literature. The authors explain how leading models may be applicable in a variety of national contexts, and how those models could be improved by incorporating context-specific variables.

Section II: Classic Debates

In Chapter 8, O’Connor reviews the historical origins and evolution of poverty research from its roots in Progressive Era social investigation through the post–World War II emergence of the multidisciplinary field, to the present increasingly globalized field of inquiry. After tracing the rise of the field of poverty research, O’Connor demonstrates how poverty knowledge was shaped by various transformations associated with the rise of neoliberalism. She also shows how that framework remains dominant today. In the process, her essay provides a crucial historical context for many developments in policies, scholarship, and debates about poverty.

Watkins-Hayes and Kovalsky’s Chapter 9 reviews the concept and discourse of deservingness. They show that many countries deploy this concept to frame debates about poverty and argue this frame emphasizes the behavior of the poor and deemphasizes the role of structural causes. They link the frame of deservingness to race, gender, class, and other categories of difference. They narrate the history of deservingness with special attention to cash assistance and health care in the United States. Further, they show how deservingness has been used to justify regulation, stratification, moral judgment, and the withholding of resources.

Chapter 10, by Gornick and Boeri, assesses the link between gender and poverty. The authors highlight the role of gender in various theoretical perspectives informing poverty research and discuss the often-cited and controversial concept of the feminization of poverty. They review the empirical literature on poverty and gender, focusing on interdisciplinary studies that define poverty via economic resources. The authors then present select results from a group of 26 high- and middle-income countries based on data from the LIS Database. These figures illustrate some of the key factors regarding gendered poverty. The authors also discuss the challenges of assessing the link between gender and poverty.

Streib, Verma, Welsh, and Burton’s Chapter 11 examines the rise, fall, and seeming resurrection of cultural explanations of poverty. They devote particular and critical attention to one recurring and prominent cultural explanation: the culture of poverty thesis. They argue that four routine scholarly practices inadvertently prop up the culture of poverty thesis: (1) missing and false comparison groups; (2) the selection of one-sided research agendas; (3) biased interpretations of research findings; and (4) limited theoretical alternatives. They ultimately explain how culture-based scholarship on poverty can avoid these trappings and make valuable contributions to the field.

In Chapter 12, Bhattacharyya explores the causal relationships between historical factors (e.g., geography, disease, colonial history, and technology) and poverty in
developing countries. The author unifies existing theories into a novel framework for explaining historical and contemporary patterns of development and global inequality. The essay applies this framework to the question of why Africa, Latin America, and Russia fell behind. The central argument is that Western Europe benefited from favorable geography, which led to highly productive agriculture, food surpluses, and institutions conducive to development. In contrast, Africa continues to suffer from unfavorable geography and disease. Also, institutional weaknesses in Latin America and Russia explain their relatively weak long-term economic performance.

Krishna’s Chapter 13 examines the essentially dynamic nature of poverty. The author points out that many diverse studies show that there is tremendous variation in the inter- and intragenerational mobility and reproduction of poverty. The essay explains how there are different causes of descents into and escapes from poverty, and how this inhibits uniform policies to reduce poverty. The author frames this as a “cycle of poverty” that leads to simultaneous growth and reduction in poverty. Further, he argues that combining “preventative” (curbing descents) and “promotional” (enhancing escapes) policies is the best strategy. The essay explains that longer periods in poverty undermine capacities to escape and health care is a paramount social policy to prevent poverty.

Section III: Place and Context

The third section begins with Chapter 14 authored by Lichter and Schafft. The chapter explains how rural contexts and rurality shape poverty. The authors discuss the inherent difficulties of measuring poverty and deprivation among rural people and places. They highlight six key features of contemporary rural poverty that distinguish it from inner city poverty. These dimensions of rural poverty also are evaluated within a broader comparative assessment of theory, measurement, and rural policy in the United States, the European Union, and developing countries. An overarching goal of the chapter is to highlight the unique issues faced by rural people and places and to call greater attention to disadvantaged rural populations.

In Chapter 15, Patillo and Robinson stress the spatial manifestations of poverty at the neighborhood level. The authors push the literature forward in at least two ways. First, they argue for a broader metropolitan-level perspective on neighborhood poverty. Second, they argue that research on neighborhood poverty must integrate the political economy of place, the economic causes of concentrated poverty, and household mobility patterns. The essay then discusses the lived reality in poor neighborhoods by reviewing qualitative literature that emphasizes the disadvantages of, assets and resilience within, and heterogeneity of poor neighborhoods. They also discuss the effects of poor neighborhoods on residents and what this means for policy debates.

In Chapter 16, Massey focuses on residential segregation. He traces the emergence of segregation to the formation of cities and shows that it was limited until the rise of industrialization. Industrial cities segregated groups on the basis of economic and
occupational status through market mechanisms, but nonmarket mechanisms of systematic exclusion and discrimination were also invoked against out-groups. In the United States, residential segregation has been identified as the “linchpin” of racial stratification, as it was similarly in South Africa under apartheid. With mass immigration in the late twentieth century, racial-ethnic segregation has become a component of stratification in developed nations throughout the world.

Wilson’s Chapter 17 provides an overview of the relationship between urban poverty, race, and space. The author concentrates on the emergence and persistence of concentrated African American poverty in inner cities, while drawing comparisons to other countries. As causes of concentrated black poverty, the author stresses the combined roles of: (1) both explicitly racial political forces and ostensibly nonracial political forces; (2) impersonal economic forces; and (3) two types of cultural forces (racial beliefs systems and cultural traits). The chapter also includes an examination of the recent rise, and surprising positive impacts, of immigration on areas of concentrated urban poverty. The author concludes with a multipronged policy agenda.

Section IV: Causes and the Reproduction of Poverty

Gibson-Davis focuses on the role of marriage and nonmarital fertility for poverty in Chapter 18. Nonmarital families, which are families that consist of children who reside with a single mother or with cohabiting parents, have increased in prevalence worldwide and reflect the growing separation between marriage and childbearing. Despite being associated with poverty at the individual level, nonmarital family structures account for relatively little of the cross-national variation in poverty. Nevertheless, children growing up in poor households are disproportionately likely to be poor as adults, and this has contributed to economic inequality. At the same time, strategies to promote marriage have not been effective in addressing poverty. A far more effective strategy for poverty among nonmarital families is private and public transfers.

In Chapter 19, Smith investigates how social ties and networks shape job-finding among the poor. The author addresses the pertinent questions and reviews theories of network and organizational embeddedness, network theories of social capital, and theories of social capital activation and mobilization. While some have recently critiqued the prevailing view that social ties have causal effects on the job-matching process, she contends that such critiques are premature. The essay contends that social ties do matter, in complex and nuanced ways, to poverty and job-finding among the poor.

Hannum and Xie’s Chapter 20 provides an overview of research across the social sciences on the links between poverty and education. They begin by discussing conceptual definitions of poverty and education and the ways these concepts have been operationalized in the literature. They then review literatures related to two broad themes: how poverty shapes educational outcomes, and how education affects chances of living in poverty. Within each theme, the authors draw on a remarkably cross-national base of
evidence, while also devoting considerable attention to the United States and China. They also stress the value of studying education and poverty at the national, subnational, household, and individual levels.

Chapter 21 authored by Gautié and Ponthieux examines employment and the working poor. The authors demonstrate that the bulk of the working poor reside in developing countries. Surprisingly, however, it is only in rich countries that working poverty has truly been framed as a significant social issue. This reflects that, in rich countries, working poverty is considered as a paradox: those who work (enough) should be able to avoid poverty. The authors explain that while employment certainly reduces the odds of poverty, overwhelming evidence reveals that work is not sufficient to avoid poverty. They also explore the conceptual and measurement challenges in measuring working poverty. Additionally, they consider the level of analysis of the study of working poverty and the role of public policy.

In Chapter 22, Wade analyzes how the world economy has performed in improving human well-being. In the process, he examines economic development and inequality on a global scale. He describes the key patterns and trends in global poverty and income inequality, economic development, and economic growth. Based on these trends, he critically examines neoliberal economic theory, which has been prominent in global public policy since the 1980s. The author concludes that he is not very confident in the good news and finds much of the bad news credible. The author argues accumulating evidence undermines the neoliberal paradigm.

In Chapter 23, Fox, Waldfogel, and Torche review the theoretical and methodological approaches to measuring intergenerational mobility. Drawing on research in economics and sociology, the chapter evaluates the evidence on the degree of intergenerational mobility overall and among the poor. The authors also assess the arguments and evidence for possible underlying mechanisms. The chapter concludes with an international comparison of mobility in wealthy and developing countries, as well as directions for future research.

Chapter 24, by Brady and Jäntti, reviews the literature on how economic performance and the business cycle influence poverty in rich countries. They concentrate on the effects of economic growth, unemployment rates, economic development, and labor market structure. Considerable attention is devoted to the statistical models used in this literature and the particular challenges and (often strong) assumptions of such models. They review studies on economic performance’s effects on poverty, while also incorporating literature on income inequality and the welfare state. They also distinguish between studies analyzing variation within countries versus studies comparing between countries.

Section V: Consequences

The fifth section begins with Kus, Whelan, and Nolan’s Chapter 25 on material deprivation and consumption. The authors point out that much research on poverty in rich countries relies on income data. They explain the limitations of income as the sole
means of measuring poverty and advocate for a multidimensional approach. While acknowledging the obstacles to this approach, they review research on material deprivation, poverty, and social exclusion. The essay displays data on material deprivation in the European Union, which suggests some mismatch between income poverty and deprivation. They then focus on recently developed multidimensional poverty measures than can be decomposed by dimension.

Chapter 26 authored by Barrett and Lentz examines hunger and food security. The authors explain how the relationship between poverty and food insecurity is complex and bidirectional and that there are multiple causes of food insecurity (including some unrelated to household poverty). Food insecurity results from a complex combination of availability, access, and/or utilization failures. Multiple measures of food insecurity exist, each with strengths and weaknesses, and some of which are inconsistent with one another. The authors conclude that domestic private food production and distribution systems matter more to food security than do national public food-assistance policies and programs, which in turn matter more than international food aid.

Crime is the topic in Chapter 27, authored by Sharkey, Besbris, and Friedson. The authors explain how the literature has shown a consistent association between poverty and crime at both the individual- and community-level. However, they emphasize that it is less clear whether this association is causal, spurious, or mediated by other factors. The authors argue for moving beyond the assumption that more poor people translates directly into more crime. They adopt a situational perspective, focusing on what makes an incident of crime more or less likely. This entails a shift from “who is likely to commit a crime” toward a focus on “when, where, and why crime is likely to occur.”

In Chapter 28, Bonnet and Venkatesh investigate informal economic activity. The authors critically examine different definitions and conceptual frameworks about informal economies, including the dualist or development perspective, the legalist or neoliberal perspective, and the structuralist or neo-Marxist perspective. They also discuss different types of mediation, dispute resolution, and regulation that emerge out of informal economic transactions. The authors argue that informal economic activities reward specific skills that are not valued in the formal labor market. Finally, the essay considers methodological challenges involved in studying informal economies.

In Chapter 29, Angel documents the health consequences of poverty. He details how health is very unequally distributed, within and between countries. This inequality in health reflects differential access to health care, as well as other social, political, and economic factors, all of which are equally as important as purely biological factors. He considers the challenges in identifying the mechanisms between poverty and health. The chapter utilizes the concepts “social capital” and “the new morbidity” to provide insight into the sources of differential health vulnerabilities. Angel demonstrates how poverty is clearly bad for one’s health, and how poverty interacts with race to worsen health inequalities.
Section VI: Policies, Solutions, and Responses

Feeny and McGillivray begin the final section of the handbook by discussing foreign aid in Chapter 30. They acknowledge that the effect of aid on poverty is a highly controversial topic. Proponents see it as a beneficial transfer that pulls many out of poverty. Opponents assert poverty would be lower in the absence of aid and the problems that come with it. Investigating the impact of aid on poverty reduction, the authors conclude that income poverty would most likely be higher in the absence of aid. They concede that it remains unclear exactly how much aid reduces poverty.

In Chapter 31, Lee and Koo review how the welfare state shapes poverty in developed and developing countries. The authors first discuss how well typologies of welfare and production regimes account for variations in poverty in rich democracies. Then, they review several central debates about the welfare state and poverty: the ineffectiveness of targeting; the impact of growing aging populations; the unexpectedly worsening poverty in universal welfare states; and the increasing poverty gap between labor market insiders and outsiders. The authors conclude the essay with a focus on the roles of democracy, partisan politics, and social policies in increasing or decreasing poverty in developing societies.

Lein, Danziger, Shaefer, and Tillotson’s Chapter 32 focuses on social policies, transfers, programs, and assistance. The authors categorize and classify the major transfers and services that governments provide. They contrast U.S. programs with other developed and developing countries, highlighting differing national approaches in the context of the turn toward neoliberalism and the Great Recession. The authors stress the complexity of various benefits, noting the salience of national and state differences in factors like eligibility, conditionality, rules, and implementation.

Piven and Minnite discuss poor people’s politics in Chapter 33. The essay argues that in the context of electoral and institutional instability, political action by poor people critically influences public policy. The essay critiques prevailing theories of the welfare state for neglecting the political agency of the poor. The authors review the “dissensus politics” perspective that stresses the significance of what they call the “interdependent” power of poor people. The authors compare and contrast the rise of the U.S. welfare state against other rich democracies and emerging democracies of the developing world. The authors conclude by discussing how globalization and neoliberalism are producing divergent trends for poverty in rich and developing countries.

In Chapter 34 Trejo analyzes collective action—especially peaceful protest, armed insurgency, and civil war—among rural peasants in the developing world. He examines the causes that drive peasants to seek to overcome their conditions of destitution by means of direct political action. He explores both microlevel motivations for action and organizational vehicles that have facilitated mobilization. He explains that religious networks have been a powerful vehicle for the mobilization of the rural poor and emphasizes how state repression/reform are decisive for whether rural resistance is peaceful or violent. Finally, he discusses the long-term impact of rural collective action.
Rosenfeld and Laird focus on labor unions in Chapter 35. They emphasize that labor unions clearly curtail poverty even though union members are unlikely to be poor. They review the evidence on the antipoverty effectiveness of unions and consider what institutional arrangements facilitate this effectiveness. The authors note the relative lack of literature on unions and poverty in the developing world. They distinguish between indirect or direct linkages between organized labor and poverty. They also explain the need for a better understanding of mechanisms and demonstrate how historical research is useful in that regard.

Chapter 36 written by Kemp examines housing programs. Although studies of income poverty often lack scrutiny of housing expenditures and programs, housing is one of the most expensive necessities. The author examines how “housing problems” have been conceived and contested, and the implications of this for how programs are designed and how programs influence inequality. The essay explains that housing programs for the poor are often politicized or portrayed in negative ways and how this differs from more universal welfare programs. Nevertheless, both types of programs have made very substantial contributions to improving the housing and lives of the poor.

In Chapter 37, Mader examines microfinance, which is currently considered one of the most important tools for international development and poverty alleviation. Mader critically assesses the actual effectiveness of microfinance for poverty and various other relevant outcomes. He identifies the historical precursors to microfinance and traces its rise and evolution. The chapter also discusses the problems induced by microfinance, including a series of crises and strong critiques levied against it.

In the conclusion, Rank draws on the volume’s chapters to articulate a new paradigm for understanding poverty. His proposed paradigm represents a break with traditional ways of viewing poverty. Within his paradigm are the following claims: the recognition that poverty is largely the result of structural failings; the understanding of poverty as a conditional state that individuals move in and out of; the acknowledgment of poverty as deprivation; the recognition that the moral ground on which to view poverty is one of social injustice; and a realization that poverty affects us all. Rank asks us to view poverty within a wider context of an interconnected environment rather than our traditional individualistic way of viewing poverty.

Taken together, the chapters in this volume cover: (1) concepts, theories, and orienting questions; (2) classic debates; (3) place and context; (4) causes and the reproduction of poverty; (5) consequences; and, (6) policies, solutions, and responses. As we explained earlier, this edited collection aims to fuel interdisciplinary integration in the social science of poverty. Moreover, the volume builds bridges across the international field of poverty research, including among rich democracies, and between rich and poor countries. The collective contributions of the authors’ chapters have the potential to substantially advance the social science of poverty. Our hope is that ongoing and future research on poverty will be enhanced by the dialogue and cross-fertilization that this volume initiates. Each of the social sciences has much to learn from other fields,
just as the United States can learn from the experiences of other countries and their scholars. This volume is one small step toward advancing a genuinely international and interdisciplinary social science of poverty.

It is the appropriate time for a comprehensive volume on the international social sciences of poverty. Poverty is the subject of lively debate in nearly every polity and across many academic disciplines. Economics, sociology, political science, history, anthropology, psychology, and several other disciplines contribute theoretical and empirical knowledge on the meaning, causes, and consequences of poverty. Despite remarkable economic advances in many societies during the latter half of the twentieth century, poverty remains an enduring social concern. There are vast cross-national and historical differences in poverty. Yet, every society in the world continues to have some segment of its population that is poor. Poverty remains a prominent part of the wealthiest countries in the world while dominating the landscape of many less developed countries. Poverty shapes a remarkable variety of aspects of life including identity and behavior, health and life chances, social relations, and collectivities ranging from families to social movements. Indeed, it is not an overstatement to say that understanding the forces, processes, and outcomes of poverty is critical for interpreting variations in many aspects of the social world.

Notes

1. This can be attributed to a story the political scientist and sociologist John Stephens tells about conversations he has had with at least one relatively famous American poverty scholar.

2. Katz (1989:238) also quotes the eminent Swedish sociologist and political scientist Walter Korpi at length in a passage worth reproducing: “In American controversies about social policy, notes Swedish social scientist Walter Korpi, ‘the European observer finds lively debates on issues that he or she has previously met only in the more or less dusty pages of historical accounts of the development of social policy at home.’ In his comparison of national American and European poverty research, Korpi points out how American poverty researchers, he adds, neglect both unemployment and politics. American poverty research lacks theories that accord economic resources and political power a central role or that explain inequality as the outcome of ‘conflicts over distribution.’ To Korpi, this silence about politics remains ‘striking,’ given the ‘high degree of conflict in American society.’” This summarizes Korpi’s (1980) underappreciated essay.

3. It is important to acknowledge that we are not the only scholars calling for international and interdisciplinary integration. Hulme and Toye (2007), for example, make a convincing case for cross-disciplinary social science research on poverty, inequality, and well-being in the development literature.

4. It is worth noting that the concentration of economists in these Institute of Research on Poverty volumes was not historically preordained (Katz 1989; O’Connor 2001). Earlier volumes with similar goals were more interdisciplinary, and these volumes could have followed the precedent set by such earlier volumes. For example, a predecessor and likely influence on these volumes was Moynihan’s (1968) On Understanding Poverty.
Moynihan’s volume included sociologists like Duncan, Gans, S. M. Miller, Moynihan, Rainwater, an anthropologist in Lewis, and a historian in Thernstrom, alongside economists like Rosenthal and then director of the Institute Research on Poverty Watts.

References


