"The economic traits which are most characteristic of the culture of poverty include the constant struggle for survival, unemployment and underemployment, low wages, a miscellany of unskilled occupations, child labor, the absence of savings, a chronic shortage of cash, the absence of food reserves in the home, the pattern of frequent buying of small quantities of food many times a day as the need arises, the pawning of personal goods, borrowing from local money lenders at usurious rates of interest, spontaneous informal credit devices (tandas) organized by neighbors, and the use of second-hand clothing and furniture."

Oscar Lewis
Four Horsemen
Chapter Four: Characteristics of Generational Poverty
A Framework for Understanding Poverty

Generational poverty is defined as having been in poverty for at least two generations; however, the characteristics begin to surface much sooner than two generations if the family lives with others who are from generational poverty.

Situational poverty is defined as a lack of resources due to a particular event (i.e., a death, chronic illness, divorce, etc.).

Generational poverty has its own culture, hidden rules, and belief systems. One of the key indicators of whether it is generational or situational poverty is the prevailing attitude. Often the attitude in generational poverty is that society owes one a living. In situational poverty the attitude is often one of pride and a refusal to accept charity. Individuals in situational poverty often bring more resources with them to the situation than those in generational poverty. Of particular importance is the use of formal register.

What, then, makes generational poverty so different from the middle class? How is it that school is such an unsatisfactory experience for many students from poverty? Several of these differences were mentioned in the last chapter on hidden rules. To examine the differences, a case study will be used.
GENERATIONAL POVERTY

One of the reasons it is getting more and more difficult to conduct school as we have in the past is that the students who bring the middle-class culture with them are decreasing in numbers, and the students who bring the poverty culture with them are increasing in numbers. As in any demographic switch, the prevailing rules and policies eventually give way to the group with the largest numbers.

In order to better serve these students, the next several chapters have ideas about ways in which we can work with students and adults. But to do so, we must fundamentally rethink the notions we have traditionally assigned to relationships and achievement.

WHAT DOES THIS INFORMATION MEAN IN THE SCHOOL OR WORK SETTING?

* An education is the key to getting out of, and staying out of, generational poverty. Individuals leave poverty for one of four reasons: a goal or vision of something they want to be or have; a situation that is so painful that anything would be better; someone who “sponsors” them (i.e., an educator or spouse or mentor or role model who shows them a different way or convinces them that they could live differently); or a specific talent or ability that provides an opportunity for them.

* Being in poverty is rarely about a lack of intelligence or ability.

* Many individuals stay in poverty because they don’t know there is a choice – and if they do know that, have no one to teach them hidden rules or provide resources.
Hidden rules are the unspoken cues and habits of a group. Distinct cueing systems exist between and among groups and economic classes. Generally, in America, that notion is recognized for racial and ethnic groups, but not particularly for economic groups. There are many hidden rules to examine. The ones examined here are those that have the most impact on achievement in schools and success in the workplace.

But, first ...
Chapter Three: Hidden Rules Among Classes
A Framework for Understanding Poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSSESSIONS</th>
<th>POVERTY</th>
<th>MIDDLE CLASS</th>
<th>WEALTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MONEY</td>
<td>People.</td>
<td>Things.</td>
<td>To be conserved, invested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERSONALITY</td>
<td>Is for entertainment. Sense of humor is highly valued.</td>
<td>Is for acquisition and stability. Achievement is highly valued.</td>
<td>Is for connections. Financial, political, social connections are highly valued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL EMPHASIS</td>
<td>Social inclusion of people they like.</td>
<td>Emphasis is on self-governance and self-sufficiency.</td>
<td>Emphasis is on social exclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOOD</td>
<td>Key question: Did you have enough? Quantity important.</td>
<td>Key question: Did you like it? Quality important.</td>
<td>Key question: Was it presented well? Presentation important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLOTHING</td>
<td>Clothing valued for individual style and expression of personality.</td>
<td>Clothing valued for its quality and acceptance into norm of middle class. Label important.</td>
<td>Clothing valued for its artistic sense and expression. Designer important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIME</td>
<td>Present most important. Decisions made for moment based on feelings or survival.</td>
<td>Future most important. Decisions made against future ramifications.</td>
<td>Traditions and history most important. Decisions made partially on basis of tradition and decorum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td>Valued and revered as abstract but not as reality.</td>
<td>Crucial for climbing success ladder and making money.</td>
<td>Necessary tradition for making and maintaining connections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LANGUAGE</td>
<td>Casual register. Language is about survival.</td>
<td>Formal register. Language is about negotiation.</td>
<td>Formal register. Language is about networking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAMILY STRUCTURE</td>
<td>Tends to be matriarchal.</td>
<td>Tends to be patriarchal.</td>
<td>Depends on who has money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORLD VIEW</td>
<td>Sees world in terms of local setting.</td>
<td>Sees world in terms of national setting.</td>
<td>Sees world in terms of international view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOVE</td>
<td>Love and acceptance conditional, based upon whether individual is liked.</td>
<td>Love and acceptance conditional and based largely upon achievement.</td>
<td>Love and acceptance conditional and related to social standing and connections.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHECK WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS OF GENERATIONAL POVERTY ARE PRESENT?

**BACKGROUND "NOISE":** Almost always the TV is on, no matter what the circumstance. Conversation is participatory, often with more than one person talking at a time.

**IMPORTANCE OF PERSONALITY:** Individual personality is what one brings to the setting – because money is not brought. The ability to entertain, tell stories, and have a sense of humor is highly valued.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF ENTERTAINMENT:** When one can merely survive, then the respite from the survival is important. In fact, entertainment brings respite.

**IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS:** One only has people upon which to rely, and those relationships are important to survival. One often has favorites.

**Matriarchal Structure:** The mother has the most powerful position in the society if she functions as a caretaker.

**Oral Language Tradition:** Casual register is used for everything.

**Survival Orientation:** Discussion of academic topics is generally not prized. There is little room for the abstract. Discussions center around people and relationships. A job is about making enough money to survive. A job is not about a career (e.g., "I was looking for a job when I found this one").

**Identity Tied to Lover/Fighter Role for Men:** The key issue for males is to be a "man." The rules are rigid and a man is expected to work hard physically, and be a lover and a fighter.
IDENTITY TIED TO RESCUE/MARTYR ROLE FOR WOMEN: A "good" woman is expected to take care of and rescue her man and her children as needed.

IMPORTANCE OF NON-VERBAL/KINESTHETIC COMMUNICATION: Touch is used to communicate, as are space and non-verbal emotional information.

OWNERSHIP OF PEOPLE: People are possessions. There is a great deal of fear and comment about leaving the culture and "getting above your raisings."

NEGATIVE ORIENTATION: Failure at anything is the source of stories and numerous belittling comments.

DISCIPLINE: Punishment is about penance and forgiveness, not change.

BELIEF IN FATE: Destiny and fate are the major tenets of the belief system. Choice is seldom considered.

POLARIZED THINKING: Options are hardly ever examined. Everything is polarized; it is one way or the other. These kinds of statements are common: "I quit" and "I can't do it."

MATING DANCE: The mating dance is about using the body in a sexual way and verbally and subverbally complimenting body parts. If you have few financial resources, the way you sexually attract someone is with your body.

TIME: Time occurs only in the present. The future does not exist except as a word. Time is flexible and not measured. Time is often assigned on the basis of the emotional significance and not the actual measured time.

SENSE OF HUMOR: A sense of humor is highly valued, as entertainment is one of the key aspects of poverty. Humor is almost
always about people – either situations that people encounter or things people do to other people.

**LACK OF ORDER/ORGANIZATION:** Many of the homes/apartments of people in poverty are unkempt and cluttered. Devices for organization (files, planners, etc.) don’t exist.

**LIVES IN THE MOMENT – DOES NOT CONSIDER FUTURE RAMIFICATIONS:** Being proactive, setting goals, and planning ahead are not a part of generational poverty. Most of what occurs is reactive and in the moment. Future implications of present actions are seldom considered.

> “Even in telling me some of those stories that involve a great deal of humiliation at the hands of hospital or welfare personnel, she usually manages to find something that’s funny in the madness of it all and keeps on saying things that make both of us laugh” (in describing Mrs. Washington).

*Jonathan Kozol*  
*Amazing Grace*
Chapter Four: Characteristics of Generational Poverty
A Framework for Understanding Poverty

HOW THESE CHARACTERISTICS SURFACE AT SCHOOL

Place a check mark in front of the items that describe students with whom you regularly interact. They ...

_____ are very disorganized, frequently lose papers, don’t have signatures, etc.

_____ bring many reasons why something is missing, or the paper is gone, etc.

_____ don’t do homework.

_____ are physically aggressive.

_____ like to entertain.

_____ only see part of what is on the page.

_____ only do part of the assignment.

_____ can’t seem to get started (no procedural self-talk).

_____ cannot monitor their own behavior.

_____ laugh when they are disciplined.

_____ decide whether or not they will work in your class, based on whether or not they like you.

_____ tell stories in the casual-register structure.

_____ don’t know or use middle-class courtesies.

_____ dislike authority.

_____ talk back and are extremely participatory.
HOW THESE CHARACTERISTICS SURFACE WITH ADULTS AND STUDENTS FROM POVERTY

Place a check mark in front of the items that describe students or adults with whom you regularly interact. They ...

____ get mad and quit their job/work. If they don’t like the boss/teacher, they will quit. The emphasis is on the current feeling, not the long-term ramifications.

____ will work hard if they like you.

____ do not use conflict-resolution skills, preferring to settle issues in verbal or physical assaults.

____ use survival language, tending to operate out of casual register.

____ are not emotionally reserved when angry, usually saying exactly what is on their mind.

____ have an extreme freedom of speech, enjoy a sense of humor, use the personality to entertain, have a love of stories about people.

____ are very independent. They won’t take kindly to the “parent” voice. If their full cooperation is sought, the boss/employer needs to use the “adult” voice.

____ periodically need time off or late arrival due to family emergencies.

____ need emotional warmth from colleagues/boss/teacher(s) in order to feel comfortable.

____ require a level of integrity from management, actively distrusting organizations and the people who represent the organizations. They see organizations as basically dishonest.
Chapter Four: Characteristics of Generational Poverty
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____ exhibit a possessiveness about the people they really like.

____ need a greater amount of “space” to allow for the uniqueness of their personalities.

____ show favoritism for certain people and give them preferential treatment.

ALSO ...

* Men socialize with men and women with women. Men tend to have two social outlets: bars and work. Women with children tend to stay at home and have only other female relatives as friends, unless they work outside the home. Men tend to be loners in any other social setting and avoid those social settings. When a man and a woman are together, it is usually about a private relationship.

* A real man is ruggedly good-looking, is a lover, can physically fight, works hard, takes no crap.

* A real woman takes care of her man by feeding him and downplaying his shortcomings.

TO NOTE:

In generational poverty, the primary role of a real man is to physically work hard, to be a fighter, and to be a lover. In middle class, a real man is a provider. If one follows the implications of a male identity as one who is a fighter and a lover, then one can understand why the male who takes this identity (of fighter and lover as his own) cannot have a stable life. Of the three responses to life — to flee, flow, or fight — he can only fight or flee. So when the stress gets high, he fights, then flees from the law and the people closest to him, leaving his home. Either way he is gone. When the heat dies down, he returns — to an initial welcome, then more fights. The cycle begins again.
A LITTLE QUIZ

COULD YOU SURVIVE IN POVERTY? Put a check by each item you know how to do.

1. I know which churches and sections of town have the best rummage sales.
2. I know which rummage sales have "bag sales" and when.
3. I know which grocery stores' garbage bins can be accessed for thrown-away food.
4. I know how to get someone out of jail.
5. I know how to physically fight and defend myself physically.
6. I know how to get a gun, even if I have a police record.
7. I know how to keep my clothes from being stolen at the Laundromat.
8. I know what problems to look for in a used car.
9. I know how to live without a checking account.
10. I know how to live without electricity and a phone.
11. I know how to use a knife as scissors.
12. I can entertain a group of friends with my personality and my stories.
13. I know what to do when I don't have money to pay the bills.
14. I know how to move in half a day.
15. I know how to get and use food stamps or an electronic card for benefits.
16. I know where the free medical clinics are.
17. I am very good at trading and bartering.
18. I can get by without a car.
Poverty in America: A problem hidden 'In Plain Sight'

By Barbara Raab, Senior Producer, NBC News

Welcome to the home of "In Plain Sight," a special initiative by NBC News to report on poverty in America, especially as it appears in forms and in places that many people overlook or choose to ignore.

With more than 46 million Americans living below the poverty line, including 16 million children, our goal is to put a human face on a problem that often can seem overwhelming.

We also plan to cover efforts to ease or even eradicate poverty. This includes heroic individuals who have devoted their lives to working among the poor and the debate over the proper role of government in fighting the problem.

What, exactly, is "poverty"? According to the U.S. Census Bureau, it's less than $11,945 per year for a single person, and $23,283 for a family of four.

Nearly a quarter of people in poverty have jobs, but their pay is so low that they still don't have enough money to meet basic needs like food, shelter, clothing and health care. It's also worth noting that women are more likely to be poor than men, and African-Americans, Latinos and Native-Americans are more likely to be poor than whites.

An evolving conversation
This nation has been talking about poverty and how to solve it for a long time now.

President Johnson declared a "war on poverty" in his 1964 State of the Union speech. At that time, the poverty rate was 19 percent and the poverty threshold was $1,558 for individuals.

From LBJ's declaration came the American safety net -- programs like Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps and cash assistance. Over the next decade, poverty rates in the U.S. dropped to their lowest level -- 11.1 percent -- since the government began keeping a comprehensive count.

In 1996, President Bill Clinton and House Speaker Newt Gingrich made a deal on what is often called "welfare reform," with a new emphasis on work and self-sufficiency.

Some hail the overhaul of the welfare system and the subsequent drop in the number of people receiving cash assistance as a huge success. Critics say the safety net has become frayed, with too few getting too little help.

In the lead-up to President Obama's State of the Union address last month, some of those who believe there's a lot more work to be done to eradicate poverty in America took to Twitter using the hashtag #TalkPoverty, imploring the president to address the issue and propose solutions. He did not disappoint.

So while the conversation about poverty in America has been going on for decades, it seems to be taking on a new urgency, for women and children struggling to survive (more than half of poor families are headed by single moms), for formerly middle-class families and individuals who have slipped down the ladder, for young people starting out under the weight of crushing student debt.

Share your thoughts
We will explore those and other themes here and on NBC News broadcasts. And we'd like to know your thoughts: What should we be covering, what examples of poverty are you seeing in plain sight? Email us at InPlainSight@nbuni.com and tweet using the hashtag #inplainsight.

A quick word about me: I am a longtime NBC Nightly News writer and producer, with a background in American history and law, on leave from my position at Nightly to lead this project. I am @bbabbo1 on Twitter.
And a final word about support for this project: The Ford Foundation has made a grant to NBC News to facilitate our reporting on poverty in America, and we welcome their support.

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Poverty Stalks The Suburbs

Posted: 04/23/2013 12:40 pm EDT | Updated: 04/23/2013 2:40 pm EDT

FREDERICKSBURG, Va. -- There's nothing Deirdre Duffy would rather do than host a backyard barbecue for a few friends.

"I don't want anything fancy," Duffy, 53, said in an interview next to her black Weber grill. "Give me some charcoal and I'm going to shoot those flames about six feet high, and when they come down -- it's my favorite thing."

Not long ago, she imagined she'd be watching from the hammock with a hefty full of grilled food as the sun set over her new back fence, and then in the darkness she'd keep warm by the fire pit with classic rock from the den waiting through the screen door.

But now Duffy's broke, thanks to insufficient work. She is one of the 7.6 million Americans involuntarily working part-time.

Plans to put up the fence are on indefinite hold, and she sold the fire pit and the hammock and other belongings on eBay to keep the lights on inside the two-story home where she lives with her 17-year-old son. She feels she's as likely to lose the home to foreclosure as she is to host her dream barbecue.

"This has been the biggest nightmare of my life," she said.

Duffy skirts the precipice of poverty with annual income from part-time jobs as a cashier and bartender, along with child support, keeping her just a few grand above the federal poverty for a family of two. This year, that's $15,510.

If Duffy should drop below that line, she'll probably have company in her tree-lined subdivision. For the past half-century, poverty has been associated with inner cities. But the poor population is increasingly suburban, with 16.4 million of the nation's 45.5 million poor living in suburbs as of 2011, according to the Brookings Institution. The previous decade saw poverty rise 28.7 percent in U.S. cities and 33.6 percent in suburbs.

Duffy has seen the change firsthand. "When I first moved here in 2000, everyone owned their home," she said. "That was the big boom. And then now there's Section 8, there's a lot of renters. Last year there were so many empty houses on the block. Just like the rest of the country."

Poverty's lurch toward the "burbs reflects the dispersion of jobs and affordable housing, and potentially strains suburban municipalities not equipped to handle the need, according to Elizabeth Kneebone, a Brookings fellow and co-author of a forthcoming book about suburban poverty. The Great Recession has accelerated the trend as missing middle-wage jobs are being replaced by the kind of low-wage work done in strip malls along suburban thoroughfares.

"The jobs that are growing fastest are jobs that don't pay very high wages," Kneebone said. "Lower-wage jobs are among the most suburbanized."

Duffy has tried to break into the world of higher wages, pursuing a criminal justice degree from Virginia Commonwealth University. She had hopes of landing a job as a forensic science technician, or at least something in an office. But she had the misfortune of graduating in December 2007 -- the official start date for the Great Recession. As she searched for a new job, her income from tips gradually dwindled. Then her shifts did, too.

"Four nights a week reduced to one night a week. I'm the slowest to realize what's going on," she said. What was going on, Duffy now thinks, wasn't just slack business conditions -- she figures management thought younger help would be better for business.

Basic expenses went on credit cards, and Duffy suspects bad credit prevented her from getting a better job. A Demos survey of middle- and low-income Americans revealed nearly 10 percent said they'd been denied jobs due to bad credit last year. Duffy's certain that's happened to her on at least a few occasions. As evidence, she points to a letter she got from Capital One responding to her application for a call center job she'd held there more than 10 years earlier.

"Unfortunately based on information we have received you are not currently eligible for rehire," the letter said. Duffy hasn't got a criminal record, just a trail of debt and missed payments that help HR managers sift through surplus applicants in a slack economy.

"When all this started, all I could think was, 'Please, God, do not let me end up working in a grocery store,'" she said. "I just didn't want to. I just got my degree -- that had to be something."

Sure enough, during one of her last shifts at the bar midway through 2011, a regular told her about an opening at the nearby Wegman's grocery store, and that's where she works now for 24 hours a week, earning $10.80 an hour. Wegman's provides health benefits and is well-known for having happy employees, and Duffy says she loves her job and hopes she can eventually land a full-time position.

"It's like bartending without having the drunks," she said. "Everybody pays their tab, nobody throws up. It really turned out to be one of the best things that happened to me in two years: I'm a part-time cashier in a grocery store."
Nevertheless, she's still hurting for money. It's not unusual for people to remain poor even though they have jobs. More than 10 million Americans fell below the poverty line even though they were working in 2011, according to the U.S. Labor Department. People who work in service jobs, like Duffy does, represent one-third of the working poor, and 13 percent of all people in the service industry counted as poor in 2011.

Duffy fell behind on her mortgage that year, and efforts to set up a repayment plan proved futile. She applied for bankruptcy protection last June to stop the bank from taking her home, but she's missed a few mortgage payments since then and has continued to receive foreclosure notices. She said her bankruptcy payments went up, and a series of 40-cent raises at work disqualified her for food stamps, which she'd received the previous two years.

Being almost-poor in Fredericksburg, at least in Duffy's case, doesn't mean destitution. It means having $20 a week for food and no air conditioning and no phone until the bill gets paid after the first of the month. It means no money for home improvement: a half-finished paint job inside and a backyard in disarray with overgrown weeds and loose bricks submerged in standing water, apparently the result of some neighbor's drainage problem. No barbecue, and perhaps before too long no more house.

Duffy's son has been a trooper about it all, she said, and she hopes it might serve as a valuable lesson. She reassured him that things change.

"Nothing is going to suck forever. Everything comes full circle," she said. "The people you're seeing now, life is good, they have these different things and they go these different places -- you never stay in one spot. We're just at the bottom of the coaster here."