Poverty definitions

✓ Absolute poverty: inability to afford the minimal requirements for sustaining healthy existence (p. 355)
✓ Relative poverty: individual’s economic position compared to the living standards of the majority in society (p. 355)
✓ Poverty line: amount of yearly income a family requires to meet its basic needs, according to the federal government (p. 355)
✓ Poverty rate: percentage of people whose income falls below the poverty line (p. 357)

The poverty line (1960-2006)

Homelessness

✓ Who is homeless?
  - Estimates of homelessness range from 750,000 to 2 million (2000)
  - 1995 survey of homelessness: 46% homeless men, 13% single women, 36.5% families with children, 3.5% children on own
✓ Individualistic explanations of homelessness
  - Substance abuse
  - Mental illness (Snow et al. found only 15% were mentally ill)
✓ Structural explanations
  - Residential dislocation (lack of low-income housing, housing inflation)
  - Economic dislocation (unemployment, low-paying jobs)
✓ Best explanations connect structural to biographical

Pathways to the street

✓ Snow and Anderson’s Down on Their Luck (1993)
✓ Method: participant observation and analysis of shelter and government documents in Austin, Texas
✓ Connects structural factors and individual-level factors
✓ Structural factors: residential dislocation & economic dislocation
✓ Biographical determinants of homelessness
  - Voluntarism (homeless as lifestyle choice): not supported by evidence; only 6.3% of homeless gave this explanation
  - Disabilities and pathologies: also not supported; Snow & Anderson view individual pathologies as adaptations to homeless, not cause of it
  - Lack of family support: most commonly mentioned biographical factor (96.8%); S & A claim it’s also the most important biographical factor
  - Bad luck: may result in homelessness among the economically marginal
### Homeless job experience (Texas, 1980s)

- **Last job**
  - General laborer (construction, warehouse loading, oil field): 30.7%
  - Service (dishwashing; janitorial; nursing home): 21.5%
  - Factory work and vehicle operation: 20.6%
  - Craft/skilled work (building trades; mechanics): 19.3%
  - Sales and clerical: 5.7%
  - Military: 2.2%

- **Median hourly wage:** $4.90
- **Median duration of job:** 6.5 months
- **Reason for job termination**
  - Laid off/job ended: 44.3%
  - Fired: 9.1%
  - Quit: 21.0%
  - Other: 25.6%