# 151 Norming Essays: Assignment 3 – Open Topic

*Living the Life of Poverty*

Poverty afflicts millions across the nation. What is even considered poverty, you may ask? Well, poverty is a pervasive human condition of being unable to obtain or provide a standard level of food, water, or shelter. Poverty is clearly not something that anyone should have to worry about, but is looked at as more of a personal problem for whomever's actions led up to being poor. Our world is developing at a rapid rate in terms of technology, however there are still issues that Americans struggle to deal with. Some of the prevailing challenges that the lower class face in modern America consist of hunger, natural disasters, and pollution. Glenn Rush, a journalist from the *NY Times* shares that “Since 2017, the poverty measure has almost been fourteen percent, that is an improvement from the recent high of sixteen percent recorded in 2013”. The healthy thing about that is the poverty measure is going down slowly over the years which means there is always room for more improvement. The poor are always looking down on themselves for being poor because they feel that they are not as well off as everyone else. There is nothing embarrassing about being poor, as it is much more shameful to be living in a poor economy, have the lack of education and having substance abuse right at your hands.

A weak economy is one of the biggest factors talked about, because of the increase on unemployment. It is a struggle for unemployed people to find jobs since of how competitive it is to get a job in today's day in America. “...where elders, parents, and relatives who were once working class have retired and fallen into poverty.” (Hooks 488) This quote stresses that people that were in working class with a house, a well paying job, and that had at least a family four were finally ready to retire from all those years of working. Just to find out that all that hard work wasn’t paying off like everyone says it does, the working class family was slowly turning into poverty. More than 77 government welfare programs which are spread across america in different federal departments and provide cash, food, housing, and medical care to poor and low-income families. You can only receive welfare if you qualify below a certain income level. Instead of expecting to depend on the government forever, people who received welfare were limited to five years on the welfare rolls so that eventually they will save up enough money to be steady and get off welfare. Most of these kinds of families collect unemployment benefits but only enough from their previous salaries. These changes, since they are so quick lead families into poverty or sometimes even homelessness when they were least expecting it. The lack of education the poor has is a continuous fight for what their future holds. Poverty reduces a child’s readiness for school because it leads to poor physical and mental health, and stops a child’s ability to retain information effectively. The *Child International Fund* stresses that “One of the most severe effects of poverty in the United States is that poor children enter school with this readiness gap, and it grows as they get older.” The readiness gap means that the child has grown up always worrying about what is going to happen next with their family because they see the constant fight their parents go through. Children feel isolated from society and are very insecure about what their socioeconomic status is when going into school because of what other people have that they don’t. As children get older they realize that they need to get more money for their family even though they may not have the mental capability to do so it is a vicious cycle of trying to get an education while trying to find the money to do so. This puts children in a miserable spot they are constantly distracted by the worry of their parents not having money which takes away their focus on doing well in school. Children living in poverty have a high number of dropping out of school than staying due to the lack of money and care the family does not have. Statistics show the reason there are so many dropouts from children between the ages of 16-24 is because they need to also get a full time job to take care of their family and support them with any extra money they can. Going to college is not really an option for teens in poverty because of much more superior expenses that need to be paid before their schooling.

 Lastly, drug and alcohol addiction affects about 20% of the poverty and homeless population. Drugs can become so addictive , that they will ruin a person’s life, and run the money that they don’t have down the drain. Those who live under the poverty line most of the time go right to marijuana because street drugs tend to be a lot cheaper than prescribed drugs. The *NCDA* (National Council on Drug Abuse) stresses that “A person in an impoverished situation may abuse drugs or alcohol as a way to cope.” This quote explains that you can be abusing drugs to try and get your mind off of your constant worries. The biggest worries that the poor go through everyday is worrying about living in a dangerous environment, dealing with financial stress, and emotional/physical abuse but, these are only just a few worries. The poor also have to think about how are they going to stop their addiction? They barely even have enough to buy food and pay for their rent they can’t pay for medical bills too.

Being in poverty in america is a day to day struggle. There is nothing embarrassing about being poor, as it is much more shameful to be living in a poor economy, have the lack of education and having substance abuse right at your hands. By the poor living in a poor economy it gives them a hard time trying to get a job to better themselves and support a family. Welfare families have the opportunity to get the help they need from the government for at least five years to help them get back on their feet. Rather than expecting to depend on the government forever, people who received welfare were limited to five years on the welfare rolls so that eventually they will save up enough money to be steady and get off welfare. These children suffering from a lack of education, or the motivation to due the constant focus on how the bills are going to get paid. The children are constantly distracted from their school work, which is slowing them down in school mentally and physically causing their grades to drop and then later on leading to dropping out. Poverty reduces a child’s readiness for school because it leads to poor physical and mental health, and stops a child’s ability to retain information effectively. Children feel alienated from society and are very insecure about what their socioeconomic status is when going into school because of what other people have that they do not. The drug abuse that comes along with being in poverty is obviously so cost worthy and life threatening. The poor learn to cope from their worries by using drugs or alcohol to an extensive amount. They do not realize that once they are hooked on drugs or alcohol they need to find a way out but, with finding a way out is finding a way to get money to get out. The drug abuse is not just from the adults in poverty it slowly moves to their children because they see their parents doing so and follow in their steps. The biggest worries that the poor go through everyday is worrying about living in a dangerous environment, dealing with financial stress, and emotional/physical abuse but, these are only just a few worries. With all of this being said, poor economies, lack of education, and substance abuse are the 3 biggest causes of poverty in America today and the number of people in poverty are slowly going down.

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Should GMOs Be Banned?

 There are many debates around the world about the use of genetically modified organisms. Many people feel as if they should be banned, yet others believe that they are perfectly safe to consume. GMOs stands for genetically modified organisms. Alan McHughen, in his book called “Pandora’s Picnic Basket”, states, “Genetic modification (GM), also known as genetic engineering ot rDNA technology, is actually a collection of many technologies.” Scientists use technology to alter the DNA of organisms in order to make them stronger. For example, many genetically modified fruits are twice the size of the organic fruit. These GMOs also last much longer than organic foods do. Although many people feel as if it is okay to eat these genetically modified foods, others “refer to GMOs as gene-altered, mutant, or even ‘Frankenstein foods’” (McHughen).

 Growing up in America, a country where the obesity rate is very high, a lot of the foods that we eat are genetically modified. Whether it is fast food, or even fruits and vegetables from the supermarket, these genetically modified organisms are not very good for you, despite the FDA’s approval of them. Many people, including the government, are realizing the negative effects of consuming genetically modified organisms. Jacob Bunge, in his *Wall Street Journal* article states, “Sales of products made without GMOS have increased to $25.5 billion in 2017, from $349 million in 2010, according to the Non-GMO Project.” This data shows how people are starting to educate themselves about the effects of genetically modified organisms. Many people, including the FDA, approve of GMOS and feel that they are safe, while others believe that they should be banned because of all of the negative effects they cause. Genetically modified organisms should be banned because they harm the environment, there is a lack of information about them, and they cause many negative side effects to the humans that consume them.

 To begin with, genetically modified organisms should be banned because they cause harm to the environment. Alan McHughen argues that:

Another legitimate environmental concern comes from the new genetically modified crops under development...If such a GM plant escapes the farmer’s field and seeks refuge in the wild neighbourhood, it might establish itself...with the local plants knocked out or off, the GM plant, now has an advantage and exploits it (163).

 Since these genetically modified plants are getting stronger due to the reconstruction of their DNA, there is a possibility that they will leak out into nature. If they accidentally spread into the wild, they may disrupt the natural growth of organic plants. This is harmful because these genetically modified plants will basically be changing the ecosystem. Also, there is the possibility that during the process of changing the plant’s DNA, they could create an organism that is too mutated and not safe to consume. If this organism spreads into the wild, it could destroy other crops and humans will be left with a contaminated environment.

There is also an issue with genetically modified organisms cross-pollinating with organic crops. McHughen states, “Pollen flow is only one mechanism of genetic escape...A piece of the plant might snap off, blow away, and take root in a new location, starting a new population” (165). This shows that these genetically modified plants are cross-pollinating with organic plants, creating totally new species. These species not only are no longer organic, but they could be very harmful to humans if consumed. Genetically modified crops are created with a ton of scientific research, and if they are spreading naturally, there is no research to show that they are safe. They are changing the natural and organic crops of the Earth and some genetically modified organisms are wiping out natural species.

Although genetically modified organisms can cause harm to the environment, many farmers believe that they are actually benefiting the environment. Jennie Schmidt is a farmer and had a college degree in international agriculture. She has been farming her entire life and believes that GMOs are actually better for the environment. She states, “We’ve been farming with GMOs for seventeen years and have seen a real benefit. A real reduction in the volume of pesticides. We’re using softer chemicals and using less of them” (Jenkins 727). This shows that since she uses GMOs, she does not have to pollute the environment as much by using less pesticides and chemicals. Schmidt and many other farmers believe that genetically modified organisms have made farming more convenient and safe for the environment.

In addition to harming the environment, genetically modified organisms should be banned because there is a huge lack of information about them. Due to the lack of knowledge that is shared about GMOs, it impairs people to make educated decisions on what they decide to consume. Gerald C. Nelson, the author of “Genetically Modified Organisms in Agriculture: Economics and Politics, states:

The questions over the uncertainty of agricultural biotechnology will be with us into the foreseeable future. As worldwide opposition grows to the use of genetically modified crops, and as American consumers begin asking many of the same questions that have been asked by consumers in Europe and Asia, the demand for GMOS will likely diminish. (162)

This shows that many people in America are uncertain about what exactly goes into their food. As an American, I know that most of us do not check the food labels when we grocery shop. We walk down the aisles of the grocery store and place the cheapest fruits and vegetables in our shopping cart. Whenever we see a package that has the words “NO GMOS”, we completely ignore it and never question what it means. This is a huge problem because humans do not question the food that they are putting into their body. They do not question the technological modifications that the extra large apple that they are buying has received. People in other parts of the world, including Europe and Asia question genetically modified organisms, which is why they are more educated about the negative effects of them. It is very harmful for Americans to lack knowledge about the genetically modified crops that they are being sold, and it is unfair that the government is not informing them about it.

Lastly, GMOS should be banned because they cause many negative side effects when consumed by humans. In her book, *The Intersection of International Law, Agricultural Biotechnology, and Disease*, author and lawyer Meredith Mariani writes about the harmful effects that genetically modified organisms have on human health. She writes:

Risks attached to GM foods and feed relate specifically to food toxicity and allergenicity triggered by the presence of new proteins, nutritional alterations, and unexpected changes in food composition resulting from genetic modification coupled with consumer concerns about the impact of these risks on human health. (Mariani 12)

When crops are genetically modified, there is a chance that they can inject an allergy into it that people do not normally have. For example, a scientist could inject a substance that is equivalent to a peanut allergy into a strawberry. When a person who is allergic to peanuts eats the strawberry, they could have an allergic reaction. By genetically modifying organic crops, scientists could change the entire makeup of the crop’s DNA. When eating genetically modified organisms, humans are putting chemicals into their body, which is ultimately harming them.

Although genetically modified organisms do have negative effects on human’s health, many believe that GMOs are actually better for humans. Jennie Schmidt, a nutritionist and farmer, has started planting a new genetically modified soybean that will be processed for its oil. She states:

High oleic soy can help reduce lots of health problems, because if you don’t have high oleic oil, what you need to do is hydrogenate the oil to be suitable for frying and other cooking, and when you hydrogenate oils you end up with something that’s conducive to cardiovascular disease. High oleic doesn’t have the instability that requires hydrogenation. It’s very beneficial. (Jenkins 726)

This shows that many people believe that there are ways to make foods healthier by genetically modifying them. Many scientists are trying to find alternatives to the unhealthy foods that people eat. In reality, all they really need to do is go outside and get their nutrients from the organic crops that the Earth gives them.

In conclusion, the debate about whether or not genetically modified organisms should be banned will continue to go on until scientists do further research. Although they are deemed safe by the FDA, there is much research stating the negative effects that they have on not only the environment, but on the health of humans who consume them. Many people continue to believe that they are safe to eat, while others do not even acknowledge them. The lack of information that humans have about the foods they eat and the genetic modifications that are made to these foods show how little people are informed. Genetically modified organisms should be banned because over time, the healthy organic fruits that the Earth has will become extinct.

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Chewed Up and Spit Out by Multimedia

In the modern age, multimedia is more influential than ever. Through TV advertisements, movies, and social media platforms we are constantly bombarded with negative and often false depictions of minorities in our society. Not only are these negative connotations harming the self-esteem of marginalized people, making it harder to pull themselves out of these cycles, but as talked about in “Framing the Poor” they also affect the support provided by the government to people in need. Multimedia chews up these groups of people, and spits them back out covered in labels like “Objectify Me”, “I am Worthless”, and “My Dangerous Living Situation Is A Joke”. The changes in attitude we can make collectively, as human beings, begin on such a small scale that there is no excuse as to why we are still reinforcing these negative connotations to further push minorities down. Multimedia negatively affects the way marginalized people are treated by encouraging violence against women, degrading the poor, and promoting stereotypes.

Women have been sexualized in the media for years, considering women have been sexualized long before multimedia was so prominent. Social media platforms both consciously and subconsciously promote violence and the sexualization of women through advertising. Ads for products such as perfume, makeup, alcohol, and even clothes have encouraged violence against women, as addressed by Jean Kilbourne, doctor of education and award-winning author in her media study focusing on the ways violence and women are portrayed in advertisements. Kilbourne mentions that many of the poses of women in advertising are borrowed from pornography and argues that “sex in advertising is pornographic because it dehumanizes and objectifies people, especially women” (556). The dehumanization of women in advertising feeds into and encourages the violence women face in everyday life and in personal relationships. Kilbourne also includes many pictures of advertisements in this article displaying the “inadvertent” and “non-threatening” sexualization and objectification of women. Some examples of this include an ad for shaving cream. How can someone possibly create an ad for shaving cream that encourages the objectification of women? Across the top of the advertisement reads “Two Ways A Woman Can Get Hurt.” and features a picture of an attractive man with the caption (Heartbreaker) and a picture of a razor on a bar of soap with the caption (Soap and water shave). At first read this might seem like a playful joke about men breaking hearts, but it holds a deeper underlying message about the roles of masculinity and femininity advertisements encourage. This ad is pushing the idea that desirable men are “hostile and indifferent” (558). Women will get their hearts broken and accept that they deserve to be treated this way because they have been subliminally taught this their entire life. “Desirable men are painful – heartbreakers at best” (557) is what these advertisements teach both men and women.

Alcohol advertisements are much more blatant when it comes to taking advantage of women. An example of this featured in Kilbourne’s essay is an advertisement for a cocktail that reads, “If your date won’t listen to reason, try a velvet hammer.” This specific ad felt like a punch in the gut. If this doesn’t scream “rape women” what does? Not all advertisements are this obvious, but they convey the same message: “Women are always available as the targets of aggression and violence, women are inferior to men and thus deserve to be dominated, and women exist to fulfill the needs of men (573). This objectification of women in the media encourages a silent acceptance of abuse, dehumanizing the female race altogether.

The roles portrayed in these advertisements (that men have the right to dominate women and women deserve such treatment) encourage rape, violence, and the objectification of women. This behavior leads to rape cases being dismissed because a woman was intoxicated, emotional and physical abuse in relationships, and some women abusing substances because they don’t fit this role. Some women turn to substance abuse because they feel powerful, but are forced to show dependence. The power of violence against women in the media is so substantially larger than what most people assume. Kilbourne refers to Claudia Bepko’s theory on how these images feed addiction: “Being socialized in an erroneous belief system leads to addiction because incongruity may arise between wat one believes and how one actually feels” (573). Both women and men tend to turn their anger inwards and resort to drugs in an attempt to smooth the contradictions between their true identities and the gender roles shoved down their throats everywhere in the media. These gender roles encourage rape and violence and dehumanization, yet they are still displayed. Violence against women has become desensitized to us as a direct effect of multimedia, “just as we become numb to the daily litany in the news of women being raped, battered, and killed” (Kilbourne).

Degradation of the poor has rapidly become more of a trend over the past 40 years. This issue is described by Max Rose, program associate at MDC and Frank Baumgartner, distinguished professor of political science in “Framing the poor”. This essay covers the changes in representation of the poor from 1960-2008. The writers explain that in early 1960’s, “the poor were seen as victims of an economic system that had no place for them” (22). This idea quickly began to change in the late 60’s and in turn, “Ronald Reagan tapped into a widespread feeling that the poor were not deserving of such government generosity” (23). It seems as though Regan began to take the public’s view of the poor and further degrade them to his advantage. This only accelerated, and “in the 1970s, public discussion of the poor began to focus on the poor as cheaters, as lazy or unwilling to work, and on the dysfunctions of government efforts to help them” (23). These assumptions of one generalized group of people continuously feed the vicious cycle of poverty they are already trapped in.

bell hooks’ writing “Seeing and Making Culture: Representing the Poor” speaks of her personal experiences and transitions into the deep-rooted issues in our society that degrade the poor. She writes about situations in which lower-class teenagers kill for material items, and how they don’t do these things simply to have new sneakers or jackets, but “they also hope to escape the stigma of their class by appearing to have the trappings of more privileged classes” (490). This stigma, stereotyping, and degradation of the poor is reinforced through the media and popular culture in the United States. hooks argues that “the poor are portrayed through negative stereotypes. When they are lazy and dishonest, they are consumed with longing to be rich, a longing so intense that it renders them dysfunctional” (489). In multimedia, worth is displayed through material success, and the poor are shown committing dehumanizing acts to gain material items with the hope to feel successful. This negative image of the poor through multimedia platforms strengthens the public’s negative view of them, further impeding any chance to escape the cycle of poverty.

Multimedia is not only a platform for promoting violence against women and degrading poor people, but it is also used to reinforce negative racial stereotypes. Kathy Dobson, PhD candidate and Media Lab researcher at Carleton University and Irena Knezevic, Assistant Professor at Carleton University wrote "Ain't Nobody Got Time for That!": Framing and Stereotyping in Legacy and Social Media”, an article on racist stereotypes that focuses specifically on one news story that covered a fire that took place in the middle of the night in a poor apartment complex. This coverage includes an interview with Kimberly Wilkins, a resident of the apartment complex who told the reporters that she got up in the middle of the night and ran out with no shoes, and then explained that she has bronchitis and coined her soon to be infamous line, “Aint nobody got time for that!”. This article describes in detail the ways this short interview not only made Wilkins, or more commonly known as “Sweet Brown”, famous overnight but also explains the ways in which she quickly became a meme that reinforced the negative stereotypes so many people hold against people of color, and more specifically poor people of color.

Once this video went viral, it turned into parodies, memes, and jokes. Wilkins was on tv shows and recognized by popstars such as Beyoncé, and seemed to love the fame. The authors touch on the way Sweet Brown acted as she was expected to: “She repeatedly uses her catchphrases from the original interview and acts dazzled by her fame. Given that after the original interview she is never asked any serious questions, she offers no serious insights in legacy media appearances” (389). Wilkins was never asked how she recovered from the fire, if her friends and neighbors were okay, or any other serious questions but instead was only so popular for her funny interview. The way these images of Wilkins were passed around the media and through television and news broadcasting strengthened the idea that she is a representation of others living similarly to herself. This is explained further with a quote from the article on the effects of how information is deliberately framed in the media: “Through the selection of certain issues and events, and by framing these issues and events in a strategic and determined perspective, news and social media can legitimize and reinforce stereotypical portrayals of race and class” (392). Sweet Brown embraced her fame and continued to feed into the image thousands of people were laughing at, probably because she was a black woman suddenly being recognized everywhere in the media, unknowingly supporting the idea that all poor black people are living in poverty and encourage being laughed at for fame.

It is this “stereotyping across media platforms [that] transformed Sweet Brown into a visual synonym for poverty and other stereotypes, and ultimately framed her as a person that everyone is allowed to ridicule” (390). The way Wilkins accepted and encouraged the jokes and memes made about her creates the idea that it is okay to do the same to others who look, speak, or live like she does. The humor of Sweet Brown’s excitable personality “obscures the class conditions that created the situation that launched her to fame in the first place” (391). The media focused on laughing at, and with, Wilkins and completely disregarded the fact that she was living in poverty because she was hilarious and now famous, and if the anyone acknowledged her economic class then she would be portrayed as lazy, worthless, and less of a human being.

Tying in both representations of women and race in marketing, Ann Ducille’s essay “Multicultural Barbie and the Merchandising of Difference” highlights the impact barbie dolls have on young girls. Ducille writes about Mattel’s release of multicultural barbies beginning in the fall of 1990 when Mattel, Inc. decided to “go ethnic” by launching black and Hispanic versions of the barbie doll (Ducille). But Ducille argues that even though different colored barbies were now available, the ideals that the doll created for the developing girl were still unrealistic: “Regardless of what color dyes the dolls are dipped in or what costumes they are adorned with, the image they present is of the same mythically thin, long-legged, luxuriously-haired, buxom beauty” (785). These ethnic dolls were not in any shape or form different from the original white barbie doll except for their hair and clothes. Ducille states that “these dolls are at once a symbol and a symptom of what multiculturalism has become at the hands of contemporary commodity culture: an easy and immensely profitable way off the hook of Eurocentrism that gives us the face of cultural diversity without the particulars of racial difference” (787). Bringing ethnic barbie dolls into the mix may have engaged young girls of all colors and backgrounds in the form of “quick-and-dirty ethnographies” (788), but the dolls continued to instill the idea of physical beauty dominating every other personality aspect.

Some may argue that multimedia does not have a substantial effect on the treatment of marginalized people, but evidence from Srividya Ramasubramanian of Texas A&M University and Mary Beth Oliver of Penn State University’s study “Activating and Suppressing Hostile and Benevolent Racism: Evidence for Comparative Media Stereotyping” proves otherwise. Quoted from within this writing is a description of the way multimedia burns stereotypes into our minds: “Through continual habitual exposure across genres and media types, media stereotypes become part of symbolic dominant ideologies (Gerbner, 1998; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002)” (625). The repeated appearances of stereotypes, violent images objectifying women, degrading memes, and even the way in which news stories are shown all have a significant effect on the thinking process of viewers.

In the media, racial stereotyping usually doesn’t come across as harmful because it is presented in a playful manner. “It is this oversimplification of social issues that has fueled continued stereotyping on social media” (Dobson K, Knezevic I. 383). Not only the way these negative images are presented, but the specific wording has a significantly different effect on particular audiences as explained with a political example from “Framing and Stereotyping in Legacy and Social Media”, “By strategically and persistently using “tax relief” instead of “tax break” or “tax cut,” the Republican Party effectively framed tax cuts as heroic acts: “For there to be relief there must be an affliction, an afflicted party, and a reliever who removes the affliction and is therefore a hero. And if people try to stop the hero, those people are villains for trying to prevent relief. The use of “relief” is neither blatantly deceitful nor factually incorrect, but how the audiences understand the issue of taxes as a result of this framing has far-reaching consequences” (384). Here the authors explain how simply changing one word has a drastic effect on the meaning of the message, directly refuting the claim that multimedia does not have a substantial effect on the treatment of marginalized people.

 The negative effects of multimedia on the way marginalized people are treated is vast and detrimental. By encouraging violence against women, degrading the poor, and promoting negative and false stereotypes, social media has become a platform for harming innocent people who fall into the category of a minority. Steadily increasing, social networking cannot and should not limit free speech, but consumers need to be aware of the destructive behavior their actions may be causing. The influences of TV advertisements, for example, have been proven to encourage violence, domination, and in some even rape. Though these ads will not blatantly read “Take advantage of your date”, and memes won’t say “All poor black people are less than human”, media has taken the issue of stereotyping, degradation, and violence against minorities to a higher and more dangerous level by oversimplifying these issues.

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