

In this study done by Barbara Ehrenreich, the ways in which the working class are exploited are vastly portrayed through a variety of sociological theories. Ehrenreich's main goal was to establish a better understanding of the factors and processes that contribute to a low wage workers lifestyle of being exposed to massive levels of corporate exploitation. In her experiment, Ehrenreich travels to three different cities presenting herself as a single woman re-entering the workforce.

In Key West, Florida, Ehrenreich began her experiment by applying for a variety of positions in which she did not receive a call back for an interview or hiring. This emphasizes the true difficulty faced by millions of women across the nation in acquiring a job. Ehrenreich reluctantly applied for a waitressing position at a local restaurant and was working eight hour shifts. One would think that after only a few shifts, Ehrenreich would have a decent sum of cash. However, the author is rewarded with a whopping wage of around two dollars an hour plus tips. The bourgeoisie are living comfortably while the

proletariat are simply working to survive. Supporting Marx's theory of social conflict, there is the wealthy and the poor. The wealthy have control over the masses of society, and introduce new ideas that mainly benefit themselves. Ehrenreich observes the members of the restaurants management sit around while the staff must be doing anything but. The managerial staff often lacked respect towards customers and employees when it came to trying to reach the companies stipulation of capital.

After realizing that she cannot survive off the wage of one job, the author takes another position in hopes of being able to sustain a livable environment. Like Weber's concept of social stratification, specifically through status, Ehrenreich observed this phenomenon in all three states as the low wage workers whom with she worked were subject to a series of demeaning drug tests as well as many slanted surveys. Ehrenreich noted "if they [management] would give their employees a living wage, maybe they wouldn't feel the need to use drugs" (Ehrenreich, 128). These employees were forced into the belief that they were being paid what they were worth and only that. Even the worst employees generally made the restaurant three times more than

what they were paid. Most of the low wage workers whom Ehrenreich encountered fit into the category noted by Marger where majority had "a high school diploma, but an increasing number of working class people have completed some college, and a small, but growing percentage are even college graduates" (Marger, 61).

As the author is exposed to a low wage life, she realizes the huge difference in pretending to be a waitress and being one. "I am now a productive fake member of the working class" (Ehrenreich, 91). In her multiple positions from retail sales to scrubbing floors, Ehrenreich observed that everything is judged based on how it looks. The quality of the job was not the top priority, rather that they are "doing the job" and earning the corporate staff their money. She noted this specifically at Jerry's as well as within the procedures she used while spending her time scrubbing in Maine.

The correlation of low wages to low quality of life is also emphasized greatly throughout her experiment. When the author experiences skin irritation due to the harsh chemicals she is working with, she has her dermatologist rapidly prescribe her an

antihistamine. This is one example of how Ehrenreich broke her set of rules. An actual maid who experienced this rash would have to deal with it for weeks before having the slight chance of getting enough time and money to go and see a doctor.

Ehrenreich notes how low wage workers are basically "hired slaves" that simply return to work each day because they have no other choice. They either make some money in exchange for dramatic deterioration of health or they don't survive much longer. Ironical that in both cases, the low wage worker is still facing inopportune conditions that lead to lower levels of health.

Emile Durkheim's theory of division of labor emphasizes the fact that in a traditional society, majority of the population was homogenous and performed similar tasks, but in a modern society like the one in which Ehrenreich worked, there is a much more complex division of labor. It was noted in 1999 that between fourteen to eighteen percent of all households employed a cleaning service. It is also to be noted that majority of these homes have "low level literature", which highlights how the wealthy generally read material that has no academic content.

More interestingly, some of these residents had books that were high level, but these books more than likely had never been touched. While the resident thinks that the workers make a decent sum of the cost it takes to have a cleaner, the employee's payroll makes up a combined one third. In this case, one third of the cost of the cleaning service was split between all the cleaners that left each with an average of \$6.65 an hour.

Psychologically, these low wage workers want to impress their bosses in hopes of getting a raise or promotion. However, it is with this tactic that corporations around the world keep their employees in the same positions without upward mobility. The employees are performing tasks better for nothing in return except for a little hope. Ehrenreich also highlighted in her travels to my home state of Minnesota that you can "never be too much of a suck up" (Ehrenreich, 124). In the process of interviews, the prospective employee must provide the employer with answers they want to hear. The company wants its employees to conform to its standards and keep their mouths shut. As

Ehrenreich finds a job at Walmart, she finalizes her opinion on corporate time theft and low wage slavery, where she and her co-workers are subject to adjunct policies that only push them to dislike their superiors. It was understood that one could not live off one income alone. "I either need a husband or a second job" (Ehrenreich, 146). After spending time in the Twin Cities, the author reports that nearly forty-six thousand residents were paying 50% of their income on housing expenditures. This goes to show the systemic functionalist view that each group of people has a specific role that they play in society. The wages that these workers earn in all three states, are not enough for them to survive on their own. Once put in this position, it is observed that climbing out of it is nearly impossible. As the rich become more rich, the poor stay poor. "Workers must submit to the rules established by the managers because in the end they have no other choice" (Marger, 30). At Walmart, Ehrenreich notices how the corporate management shape the morals and ideals of their employees. They are effectively turning all their staff into the proletariat zombies that run the working class in American industries. In doing so, these employees feel so

powerless that they simply consent to these slave wages at the expense of their health. As witnessed firsthand by Ehrenreich in Maine, an employee of the cleaning company, Holly, was pregnant and still forced to crawl on her hands and knees and scrub the floors. Corporate doesn't care about the health and future of Holly or her child, rather, how much money they can suck out of her before she is forced to call it quits due to mass deterioration of her emotional and physical health. It seems ironic that at all costs, corporate must keep conditions and wages the same, while expecting increasingly better performances out of its employees. Once an employee steps out of line the slightest, they are replaced. If they are smart enough to run the machines, but too dumb to ask questions, corporate is happy. Ehrenreich also notes how the company management does not want its employees discussing their wages. This would lead to complete chaos, due to the staff member's realization that they are being completely screwed out of their money.

Effectively establishing a division of labor, these companies exploit their employees creating a mass class conflict. An

environment where the poor fight to survive and the wealthy reap the benefits of the deterioration of their staff member's health. The poor are more philanthropist like than any other class in the sense that they neglect their children, take bad housing, and work for a wage not large enough to support life. They endure this corporate predation because they need to survive and make payments. Banks enjoy giving money to the poor in the hopes that they won't be able to pay it off. Our society needs income inequality to run. Some people go to college while others never have the opportunity. Coming from Marx's theory of the divine rule of kings, the workers are unaware of their plight and how much of an impact they can play in the changes or lack thereof of their companies.

Ehrenreich effectively analyzed how living as a single woman in the twenty first century is nearly impossible unless an outside force acts on the situation. The bourgeoisie of society reaps all the benefits of the proletariat while effectively turning their workers into functioning zombies who are too scared to voice their opinion. Therefore, obtaining any sort of upward mobility is so hard for many working-class Americans. The author

used her resources to her advantage, but was still unable to attain monetary success within this experiment. However, the experiment emphasized the clear disparity between the working class and its employers. In no case, did Ehrenreich find that she could live healthy and happily with her position. The working class in America serves the rest of society at the expense of their health and time.