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Mrs. Whitley

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The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream Response

The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream details how Barbara Ehrenreich went undercover and attempted to be hired at a white-collar job. She did this in order to support her claim that, “Many such tales of hardship were coming from people who were once members in good standing of the middle class-college graduates and former occupants of mid-level white-collar positions” (260). Much like many blue-collar jobs, workers are viewed as just cogs in a machine, that are easily replaced.

In the story Ehrenreich describes how many executive job workers believe that they could be fired at any moment for no reason at all. She supports her claim by providing survey results, which state that, “A 2004 survey of executives found 95 percent expected to move on, voluntary or otherwise, from their current jobs, and 68 percent concerned about unexpected firings and layoffs” (263). With all the evidence given in her story I believe that a individual working a white-collar job is just as likely to live in poverty as a blue-collar worker.

Another claim she makes is that white-collar workers work as hard, if not harder than most blue-collar workers. She backs this idea by stating:

“Economist Juliet Schor, who wrote *The Overworked American*, and business journalist Jill Andresky Fraser, author of *White Collar Workshop*, describe

stressed-out white-collar employees who put in ten to twelve-hour-long days at the office, continue to work on their laptops in the evening at home, and remain tethered to the office by cell phone even on vacations and holidays.” (263)

Blue-collar workers may work extremely long hours in order to support themselves, and their family, but the same could be said about white-collar workers. Executives must pour all their time and effort into their job, otherwise they will be fired immediately. Both groups deal with work being their life, and must push their family as their top priority.

I disagree however, with the idea that white-collar workers have just as difficult chance of finding a new job. Ehrenreich points out that being middle-aged limits your chances of being hired at a pristine establishment, but the same could be said about any job. For example, at a construction company, they are more likely to hire the applicant who is 25 than someone who is 45.

The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream is a story that I mostly agree with, and helps shed light on the struggles of the upper middle-class. White-collar workers are viewed as evil corporate monsters, but this novel humanizes them, and displays all the struggles they have as well. They are just as expendable as blue-collar workers, and should be viewed as hard workers as well