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American Studies

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Interview Reflection Essay

On March 20, 2010, my project partner, Kayce, and I ventured over to Great Clips hair salon on South Main Street in Blacksburg to interview one of their employees, Jane Smith. I had no idea what to expect from Jane, given that I knew little about the backgrounds of any hairdressers I have encountered. I was pleasantly surprised at not only the flow and conduction of the interview, but the responses that we were given. I think that after interviewing Jane, I learned not only a great deal about this stranger, but I learned a lot about myself, and what I want out of life.

As previously mentioned, the interview went extremely well. I began by asking Jane to briefly explain her job and family background. She comes from divorced parents and lives alone in Salem, Virginia. Each day, she commutes about thirty minutes to and from work to the Great Clips franchise in Blacksburg. This does not bother Jane because she is earning an hourly rate, and not solely working off commission like independent hairdressers. This way, Jane does not risk spending the gas money on what could end up being a slow day at work.

When Jane began to describe a typical day at the salon, I found myself feeling relieved that I was earning a college degree. It all sounded very basic and repetitive. Open the doors, sweep the floors, set up your station and take care of the laundry and

then have a cigarette while waiting for a customer to come in to the shop. Appointments are not necessary. While the ladies at the shop seem to enjoy chatting amongst one another and try to make their workday fun, they all have their own stories to be told. That is what I loved most about this assignment. I would look around at the different women, some young like my interviewee, and some in their mid to late forties, and I just wondered how they all got there, what their family situation was like, if they were making enough money to sustain their lives? It made me feel a sense of guilt while interview Jane. I was guilty for using her as the subject of my last project for my last required class before graduating college. I was careful with my words and questions, for I did not want to offend Jane in any way. Nor did I want her to feel bad for not having gone to college. I do not think she thought of these things but at the time, I felt very privileged and driven towards my own successful future.

It may be that I am not giving Jane enough credit. She has goals of her own and there are many exceptions of successful people who did not need a college degree to earn it. Right now, Jane is making about \$7.75 per hour with no added benefits. This adds up to an average annual salary of \$24,000. Fortunately, Jane is a single adult with no children, yet her commute from Salem and other expenses still take a toll on her living wage. According to the Living Wage Calculator on Penn State's website (<http://www.livingwage.geog.psu.edu/counties/51121>), a person in Jane's situation needs to be making about \$7.64 per hour to support herself. The average minimum wage is listed as \$7.35 per hour and the poverty wage is \$5.04 per hour. Jane is glad to be earning an hourly rate, as opposed to commission like most hair salons offer, that way she is always guaranteed a decent paycheck, regardless if business is slow. However, she

realizes that taxes play a large part when working under a franchise and she figures she would be earning an extra \$200 to \$300 a week if she was working off each haircut alone. While she depends on Virginia Tech students to be in town for business, Jane says that the summer times are very slow and realizes that the living wage is more realistic in Montgomery County than that of most places.

Jane describes the other employees like family. They are all very close and that was obvious from the first moment I walked in the door. When you're a hairdresser, or when you're a cosmetologist, you have to love what you do," said Jane. They are all very relaxed at the shop, which makes for a good day at work. They are very client oriented. Jane feels awful when she does not satisfy a customer, and great when she does. Remaining positive is important to Jane in order to have a successful day.

One thing I noticed more than anything else was the poor grammar and vulgar language of the employees. It showed not only a lack of education, but a lack of professionalism. I think Jane only cursed or spoke inappropriately with me because she felt comfortable. I doubt she would speak like that in front of most customers. Though I would never talk that way, I let her continue because it shows a difference between Jane the interviewee, and myself the interviewer. It adds a lot to the concept of this project and supports Jane's background and demographic.

I thoroughly enjoyed conducting this interview and Jane was a really sweet woman to speak to. She was fun and her stories were interesting. I think it is important to learn about others and their situations so that I can take a step back and be thankful for the life my parents have provided me, as well as the drive and passion I have always

possessed to achieve a successful career. I hope that my hard work and determination will eventually pay off, so that I may pass down what my parents taught and provided me, to my own children.