

Now What?

An Ethnography of Anxiety in Graduating Students

– Alexandra Karabatsos –

4 points · 7 months ago
 I have two degrees and work in a grocery store. Most of my coworkers also have degrees. We're a very overqualified grocery store.

Research Question

How are the changes in the labour market affecting graduating students' anxieties about their future?

Argument

The increase in precarious work has led students to feel more insecure about their future while greater pressures to find the perfect job and the good life burden students with additional anxieties.

Historical Background

- Beginning in the 1970s: Offshoring, technological change, automation, company mergers and neoliberal policies that removed restrictions on the flow of capital led to the neoliberal economy²
- An increase in number of precarious workers who face various forms of work-related insecurity³
- Workers today:
 - Market themselves as a package of measurable skills to employers⁴
 - Work multiple jobs throughout their career⁵
 - Should supposedly feel driven by passion for work rather than loyalty to one company⁶
 - Experience work bleeding into their leisure time⁷
- Attending post-secondary schooling is increasingly thought of as an investment in a better job⁸



Methodology

- Attended two job fairs
- Attended a job fair preparation workshop
- Observed an online forum
- Interviewed a career counsellor
- Interviewed three recently graduated students

You Need to Find Something

"I got to a stage where I was applying for any job any sort of wages as long as it was a job – just to get a bit of experience on the field or just to get started somewhere."¹⁰

- The pressure to enter a field of study that is likely to result in stable work
- The need to "lower your expectations"
- The horror stories of those who do not succeed in finding stable work
- The concern of insecurity at work:
 - Will I be fired?
 - Will my job be automated?
- The need to find any work to build your CV – the self as Business¹¹

Matches and Mismatches

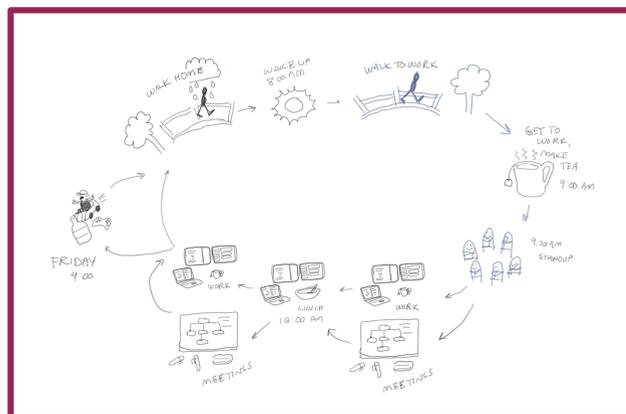
"There's no bad job or bad program. There's bad fits."¹⁰

- The notion that a job may be a poor fit due to the type of work, work culture, etc.
- The feeling of being lost and uninspired when the dream job is a mismatch
- What is a match?
 - Should your job reflect on your true self?
 - Should you love your work?
- The ability to seek out a match as something that is privileged
 - The pressure that comes with the sociocultural ability to find the match

The Good Life

"I kind of don't want to bother with school anymore. But I don't want to work for the next 50 years either."¹⁰

- What is success? Is success synonymous with the Good Life?
 - The Good Life is having a good work-life balance
 - The Good Life is working on what I love
 - The Good Life is a moving target
- Passion Trap: where the work that workers love is also exploitative¹²
- Self Exploitation: the phenomenon where individuals exploit themselves¹³



i appreciate the sad clouds on the way home ☹️

its my daily "and that day is why ill have no job in a week" time

Interview subject's depiction of their "big feeling about work"

"By the time the actual official graduation came, I'd actually just lost my job like a week before...there was relief but also [I felt] a bit lost. I'm graduating now and I don't have work so what do I have anymore?"

"I'm giving myself 10 years until I basically have no job prospects in the field that I like. And then I'll be doing cabinet-making. People always need cabinets."

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