

## BOOK REVIEW

**Mary Gatta (2014). *All I want is a job! Unemployed women navigating the public workforce system*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press (150 pages)**

Naomi Naghi

Mary Gatta is an Associate Professor of Sociology at City University of New York. Dr. Gatta has a PhD and M.A. in Sociology from Rutgers University and a B.A. in Social Science from Providence College.

This book is about what happens when a woman is looking for a job. The author wanted to understand what it means to go through the process of looking for a job in the present economy. It all started from a focus group that was held with women who lost their jobs. The best way to understand the whole process was to go “undercover” and be the woman in search for a job. This way, it would be easier to understand what women go through when they are unemployed in search of a job. The ground rule that the researcher had was that at no time was she going to take the spot of a woman, there was supposed to be no mentioning of names, what was important was the process and services that were offered. The research is supposed to explain the processes of the system, the problems that exist, practices and different point of views from both unemployed women and people working in the system. This study is an ethnographic sociological analysis.

The book presents the 6 months journey of the author who went undercover to better understand a subject she was really interested on. It begins with the experiences of the workers and clients, together with observations of the author. After that she puts everything into historical context. After all of this she talks about where things are at this point and what course should be changed.

The book starts with an introduction that allows the reader to better understand the reasons for starting this research.

One Stop Career Center was the first thing unemployed people would reach on their way back to being employed. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) mandates One Stops to offer employment and training services (Wagner-Peyser Act, vocational rehabilitation and assistance for veteran’s affairs). The OSCC appeared as a response to economic recession. There are 1757 per country and 988 affiliate centers in USA. The evaluation of WIA is via quantitative performance.

The goal of the study is to “explore and critically evaluate the lived experiences of the individuals, and in particular women, who are served by and working in the

One Stop Career Centers, in order to challenge mainstream understandings of workforce development policy. “ (Gatta, 2014, p. 3)

There are four chapters in the book:

Chapter 1 is Navigating the Workforce System – the author talks about the experiences of other clients as she presents the One Stop Career Center system. It talks about the moment a woman enters to apply for unemployment insurance to attending classes and seminars to help with education and training. Also, the interaction there is with the staff at the One Stop Career Center. Two groups of women who come to the Center are both low-skilled and high-skilled. These women go through different problems when looking for a job. The author focuses on these two types and especially is oriented on the low-skilled workers who tend to remain stuck in low-wage work. Also, the author talks about the fact that educated workers have to go through a system that is more focused on entry-level employment. The chapter talks about key challenges the workers face.

Chapter 2 - On the Front Line during a Recession – is about the counselors and caseworkers from the One Step system. The author talks about how the people who work in OSCC see their job. What is difficult for these front-line workers is that they experience firsthand the rollercoaster emotions the unemployed go through. This leaves the front-line workers feeling bad because they can't help, they can't find a job for them. The conclusion is that they understand the challenges of the economy and social structures, but they say that clients need to be realistic about their options and take personal responsibility. This chapter also focuses on the emotional labor of the front-line workers, often ignored by the bureaucratic system.

Understanding the Backstory of Workforce and Welfare Policy is chapter 3, which gathers the stories of front-line staff and unemployed workers. One crucial part of history is the adequate funding which is extremely important for a successful workforce system. Lack of funds is immediately felt in the system. The author looks into the workforce policy and its gendered and racialized history. This chapter helps with understanding the impact of racism and sexism and the existing formulations of public policy.

The last chapter - Charting a Course Forward - is the conclusion of the study. Some problems appear from the policy culture. A change that is important to be done is offering adequate information through the seminars and courses they offer for the unemployed. Another one is to be connected to the market and see which jobs and what specialties are searched for so the unemployed can be prepared. Networking is also an important part when in search for a job. What can be learned from these experiences is to be able to improve the system, to help people who lost their jobs find good-paying ones. The author also mentions the limitation at a local level, but she also says that there are changes that have to be done at a macro-level. In her opinion only then would the “workforce system truly meet the needs of clients, front-line workers and employers.” (Gatta, 2014, p.33)

---

This book helps the reader understand the process, from the perspective of a woman looking for a job, but also from the worker's perspective, who is trying to find a job for this unemployed person. The conclusion is that when someone is looking for a job they need clear information, but also psychological support because being unemployed brings a lot of stress. The system is most of the times rigid and needs to change and be flexible. The workforce has to be flexible as well. The reality and being connected to reality helps the system stay connected to day to day problems. The way to make change is to start from the local level and then apply it nationwide. What is interesting is that many of the problems that appear in the American system can be found in a similar way in the European system, as a process. Change can be done if collaboration exists.