



The inequality of security: Winners and losers in the risk society

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ABSTRACT

Current analyses of the changing nature of risk provide a 'top-down' perspective that fails to consider variation among the individuals that these changes act upon. Drawing on a qualitative study of 89 workers who are members of 50 socioeconomically diverse families in Silicon Valley, California, this article explores the variability among workers by examining how an individual's social class background influences both their level of exposure to risk and their ability to navigate through the 'risk society'. By employing Bourdieu's framework, the study finds that the attributes now expected of the ideal risk society subject are in actuality reflective of economic, social and cultural capitals most commonly held by the highly educated, middle and upper-middle classes. Consequently, in the current political environment where individuals are viewed as enterprising consumers responsible for their own welfare, those who possess the 'right' capitals are advantaged, while those who do not are disadvantaged. This article employs life history case studies of two workers in different structural locations to highlight the different 'capitals' workers have at their disposal, and shows how structural positions and cultural dispositions interact over time influencing future levels of inequality. In doing so, the article illustrates how the removal of public safety nets exacerbates existing disparities and causes the disadvantaged to fall even further behind. These disparities among workers constitute an inequality of security that engenders winners and losers in the risk society.

KEYWORDS cultural capital ■ economic capital ■ increasing inequality ■ new economy ■ risk ■ social capital

I have pointed out to the Congress that we are seeking to find the way once more to well-known, long-established but to some degree forgotten ideals and values. We seek the security of the men, women, and children of the nation. That security involves . . . [using] the agencies of government to assist in the establishment of means to provide sound and adequate protection against the vicissitudes of modern life – in other words, social insurance.

(Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Fireside Chat, 28 June 1934)

Many of our most fundamental systems – the tax code, health coverage, pension plans, worker training – were created for the world of yesterday, not tomorrow. We will transform these systems so that all citizens are equipped, prepared, and thus truly free to make your own choices and pursue your own dream. Another priority for a new term is to build an ownership society, because ownership brings security and dignity and independence. In all these proposals, we seek to provide not just a government program, but a path, a path to greater opportunity, more freedom and more control over your own life.

(George W. Bush, Acceptance Speech, Republican National Convention, 2 September 2004)

Introduction

Unable to find steady work after the drug wholesaler for which he made deliveries closed in 2003, Timothy J. Bowers, a 62-year-old man in Ohio, came up with a plan to get by until he was old enough to receive social security. He went into a bank, handed a teller a stickup note, got \$80, then turned the money over to the bank's security guard and waited for the police to arrive and arrest him. At his trial, Bowers explained to the judge that with only minimum wage jobs available to him, going to jail for three years would 'suit me fine', since upon his release from prison he would be 66 and thus old enough to receive his full social security benefits (Mayhood, 2006). In a *New York Times* article that satirically describes Bowers as 'an honest-to-goodness visionary' in the realm of retirement planning, Bowers's attorney, Jeremy W. Dodgion, sees Bowers's actions as less imaginative and more a sign of the times, stating: 'At his age, it was harder and harder to find a job with benefits, he finally said, to hell with it' (Schwartz, 2007). At his

sentencing, Bowers received what he wanted, a three-year jail term at a minimum security prison.

Bowers's predicament reflects fundamental changes that have occurred in Western countries over the last few decades in both government policy and employment relations: a shift away from shared responsibility for the risks involved in managing lives, taking care of families, and securing futures, and a movement towards more self-provisioning. Underlying this shift in the 'ownership society' and the 'risk society' is a desire to withdraw the social safety nets advocated by Franklin D. Roosevelt, like welfare benefits and retirement pensions, and replace them with policies advocated by George W. Bush, such as personal health savings accounts and the privatization of social security. In this political context, the Welfare State is rolled back and both the economic costs and risks involved in welfare provision are transferred to those who consume it. Accordingly, the spheres of risk individuals are responsible for are growing as workers in the West are increasingly being asked to pay for their own educations, provide their own healthcare and manage their own retirement savings.

Scholars have offered grand theories to explain the intensification of risk in modernity (Beck, 1992, 1999; Giddens, 1990, 1991), have charted the transition away from social insurance and towards the privatization of risk (Dean, 1997; O'Malley, 1996, 2004; Rose, 1996), and have debated whether these changes are good or bad for workers (Hacker, 2006). However, a problem with much of this work is that it puts forth a 'top-down' perspective that fails to consider the variation among the individuals that these changes act upon. This omission is striking, for as the account of Mr Bowers indicates, changes in work and increases in inequality are likely to be intensifying class variation in the lived experience of risk and in the means of coping with it. Some scholarship has begun to examine variations in people's abilities to be the informed risk subject that they are now expected to be (Aldridge, 1998; Anderson et al., 1994, 2000; Baldock & Ungerson, 1996). This article builds on such work by exploring the following questions: are all workers exposed to similar privatized risks in the same way and do all workers possess the skills, resources and cultural capacities to successfully navigate through the risk society? And, if there are differences among workers, then are there winners and losers in the risk society?

Drawing on a qualitative study of 89 workers from 50 socio-economically diverse families in Silicon Valley, California, this article helps advance forward the literature examining the variation among individuals in the risk society by identifying how an individual's social class background influences both their exposure to different types of risk and their ability to navigate through the risk society. By employing Bourdieu's framework, my

study finds that the attributes now expected of the ideal risk subject are in actuality reflective of particular types of economic, social and cultural capital most commonly held by the highly educated, middle and upper-middle classes. Consequently, in an environment where all individuals are viewed as active and enterprising consumers responsible for their own welfare, those who possess the 'right' capitals are advantaged while those who do not are disadvantaged. Thus, different groups of workers have contrasting employment and life experiences wherein they tend to face non-comparable risks and possess divergent abilities to maneuver in the risk society. This disparity among workers engenders a phenomenon I call 'the inequality of security'. These findings provide a more complicated picture of the risk society than those that view it as either universally good or universally bad, and those that tend to assume we are all exposed to the same risks and respond to such risks in the same way. In what follows, I review theoretical approaches to risk and argue that they fail to delineate the variability of experience especially given the rise in income and wealth inequality in the US. I then summarize the literature that has taken an initial step in exploring the variation among individuals in the risk society. Next, I employ life history case studies of two workers in different structural locations to highlight the different 'capitals' workers have at their disposal and to show how structural positions and cultural dispositions interact over time influencing future levels of inequality. In doing so, I illustrate how the removal of the safety net exacerbates existing disparities in economic, social and cultural capitals and causes the disadvantaged to fall even further behind.

Changes in risk

Several strands of literature address the changing nature of risk, albeit in different ways, particularly regarding the origin of changes in risk and in how people respond to such changes. The seminal works of the risk society theorists Beck (1992, 1999) and Giddens (1990, 1991) argue that risk has changed because of modernization.¹ They argue that the rise of global and apocalyptic risks, like the collapse of the global economy or nuclear war, introduces a scale of risk previously unknown. For them, risk has also increased in modernity because of the unraveling of traditional forces such as marriage and lifetime employment. As a result, people now face great uncertainty. In response to increased risks and the weakening of collective structures, people no longer have traditional life paths to rely on and instead must produce their own biographies 'self-reflexively'. For Beck and Giddens, the upside of this trend toward 'individualization', is that people have greater

freedom of choice but the downside is that it also increases the burden to make the right life choices since individuals must make their own personal decisions, rely on their own resources and do their own life planning to determine their destinies. Furthermore, for Beck the rise of a global economy means that no one is immune to market fluctuations and 'you can run into anyone down at the unemployment office' (Beck, 1998: 55).

The belief that risk has become something individuals are expected to avoid and manage on their own is echoed by governmentality scholars who link this transformation not to modernization but to the rise of neoliberal ideology and policy that valorizes the role of risk (Dean, 1997; McCluskey, 2002; O'Malley, 1996, 2004; Quadagno, 1999; Rose, 1996). Governmentality scholars' critical account of the normalization of risk illustrates how in the neoliberal form of government and employment the individual worker, as enterprising entrepreneur, is the bearer of risk who makes 'choices' within the market as to which risks he/she will manage, to what degree, and by what provision, and who must live with the consequences of the mistakes they make. In this paradigm individuals are encouraged to take risks, since risk is believed to be the source of self-reliance. Thus, this neoliberal viewpoint holds that risk is most effectively managed, not by the coddling bureaucracy of government, but by the exigencies of the individual – exigencies unleashed when he/she must fend for themselves. Instead of relying on social services, the prudent individual should protect themselves and the more enterprising they are, the better the safety net they construct. Like the risk society theorists then, neoliberals see the rise of unregulated and open markets as providing opportunities for greater freedom. Yet, whereas risk society theorists see space for miscalculation or bad outcomes and space for governmental intervention, neoliberals see no downside in the intensification of risk, only upside, and see no benefit to governmental involvement.

Like governmentality scholars, US scholars critical of increasing privatization in a range of spheres from retirement to health care, place responsibility squarely on the ascendance of neoliberalism, not modernity (Hacker, 2006; Klein, 2006; Marmor & Mashaw, 2006; Shuey & O'Rand, 2004). Hacker (2006) provides an extensive indictment of neoliberal politics, linking the rise in insecurity among Americans to what he calls 'the personal responsibility crusade', a neoliberal political movement. Hacker argues that this movement, by transferring risk from the government and employers onto workers, evident in the shift in retirement provisioning from pensions to 401(k) plans, has eroded protections and exacerbated the economic tumult created by the new economy.² Hence, the situation of most Americans, already insecure because of dynamics in the service economy, like stagnating wages (Sullivan et al., 2000), is made dramatically worse by neoliberal

changes thought to give workers greater freedom through enhanced personal responsibility and control. According to these scholars, nothing is gained in the unregulated market – not freedoms; not the power to choose one's life course; not self-reliance. Instead, they argue, almost everything is lost. Though some anti-neoliberal scholars note the differences among workers within this privatized paradigm (Myles & Quadagno, 2000; Quadagno, 1999; Shuey & O'Rand, 2004), it remains at the margins of most analyses.

Given the above accounts, a contradictory picture emerges about how people deal with the intensification of risk. For the risk society theorists, their conception of 'reflexivity' and 'life planning' infers that workers, unhinged from traditional forces, are rational and calculating actors who exercise reasoned judgment as they select from various expert knowledge systems when deciding how to live their lives amid greater uncertainty. Governmentality scholars show us that neoliberal ideology constitutes individuals much like the risk society theorists do – as prudent, rational, desiring to be responsible for themselves, and capable of becoming knowledgeable in all realms of risk from finances to health. Hacker offers a different view. For him, the shift of risk onto workers because of the erosion of the welfare state and of what he calls the 'old work contract' (long-term employment, high wages, good benefits) means that no one can manage their own risk. Unhinged from traditional forces, workers do not reflexively plan; they become paralyzed. Reading Hacker, one gets the sense that everyone is a pink slip, an illness or a bad financial decision away from disaster. In this way, though, Hacker is similar to Beck, conveying the notion that insecurity is distributed among workers evenly.

Inequality and risk

In a world of great inequality however, these 'top-down' accounts are problematic. For instance, one argument against Beck and Giddens's model is that their universal risk subject appears representative of a particular type of person (Alexander & Smith, 1996; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Lupton, 1999a, 1999b; Mythen, 2004, 2005; Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). Lupton (1999a: 114) argues this point stating that the

self-reflexive individual, as presented by Beck and Giddens, is a socially and economically privileged person who has the cultural and material resources to engage in self-inspection. But many people, however, simply lack the resources and techniques with which to engage in the project of self-reflexivity.

Lash (1994: 120) highlights the need to examine the

structural conditions of reflexivity [by asking] just how ‘reflexive’ is it possible for a single mother in an urban ghetto to be? . . . just how much freedom from the ‘necessity’ of ‘structure’ and structural poverty does this ghetto mother have to self-construct her own ‘life narratives’?

By linking subjectivity with structural location, Lash raises another criticism leveled at Beck regarding the distribution of risk (Culpitt, 1999; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997; Mythen, 2004, 2005; Scott, 2000). These scholars argue contra Beck that the distribution of employment risk is unequal, with the most risk and harshest consequences reserved for the least well off. Thus, critics argue that Beck and Giddens are guilty of minimizing how social inequalities shape capacities for reflexive thought, condition the kind of ‘choices’ available to individuals, and unevenly affect patterns of risk distribution in order to advance their grand theories. These same critiques can also be made of both neoliberal ideology and Hacker’s arguments, since both gloss over variability among workers.

Indeed, while President Bush may believe we are all on an equal footing in the ‘ownership society’: ‘I think every citizen – every citizen – has got the capacity to manage his or her own money’ (cited in Lawrence, 2005), research suggests otherwise. Studies show that Americans lack basic financial literacy (Bernheim, 1994, 1995, 1998; Ng, 1992), that those with the least financial knowledge are more likely to be low income, uneducated and minorities (Hilgert et al., 2003; Zhan et al., 2006) and that financial literacy rises among those with more education (Bernheim & Scholz, 1993; Lusardi & Mitchell, 2007). And though Hacker makes the case that all workers are worse off because of risk privatization, the fact that younger and less educated workers have higher rates of job displacement and lower income workers have experienced the largest drop in medical coverage and the least growth in retirement benefits (Fligstein & Shin, 2004) means that some workers are more worse off than others.

The fact that these main approaches to risk downplay the variation among workers is ironic, given the rise of income and wealth inequality in the UK and the US. In the US specifically, inequality has been driven by deunionization (Card, 2001), immigration (Borjas, 1999), the decline of durable manufacturing (Herzenberg et al., 1998) and by the bipolar growth of low-wage/low-skill and high-wage/high-skill jobs in the service economy (Castells, 1996; Sassen, 1991; Wright & Dwyer, 2003). Inequality has increased for the last several decades (Danziger & Gottschalk, 1995; Fligstein & Shin, 2004) and has recently reached levels not seen since before the Great Depression (Piketty & Saez, 2003).³

Undoubtedly, risk has increased for workers in the new economy as a consequence of risk privatization. Yet, the inequity that accompanies risk privatization should have implications for workers since the differences in resources, skill sets, and educational credentials must play themselves out in a world where workers are increasingly 'on their own'. In a privatized world, what individuals privately have, both materially and culturally, should matter a lot. Despite being a fruitful area of inquiry, little empirical work explores the different ways in which individuals manage privatized risk.

British scholarship has made initial inroads by looking at people's abilities to be the type of active, informed consumer they are now expected to be. Baldock and Ungerson (1996) found that disabled stroke victims did not adapt well to the Community Care Act's privatization of services. Rather than being 'utility-maximizing' consumers, the majority of stroke victims, accustomed to social care entitlements, were confused by the private contracting-out of services and found it difficult to arrange care for themselves. Only slowly did they learn that primary assistance had to come from family and private sources, and that the state would only supplement this help. These findings generated the argument that the obstacle to a consumerist approach to care was not as much economic as cultural. Interestingly, not all research subjects had 'cultural and psychological blocks' (p. 27) to this marketization of care, since three 'well-informed' (p. 21) households, described as 'educated, articulate' (p. 31) were able to successfully and easily organize care.

Aldridge (1998) furthers the notion that variation in the types of cultural sensibilities that different people have complicates the base assumption in marketization that we are all skilled, reflexive consumers. Using case studies in personal finance, Aldridge contends that while mass-market financial products like index funds have become more available, they remain, for the average consumer, opaque and complex. This imbalance creates opportunities for people to participate in their own exploitation. One such example is the mis-selling of personal pension schemes to British public sector workers like teachers and miners, who should have been advised against withdrawing from their superior occupational pension plans. Aldridge argues that while these workers lacked the cultural capital (knowledge; financial proficiency) to see through the bogus marketing claims, academics, who had access to different cultural capital (better informed, better advised and skeptical), remained in the occupational pensions. Peggs's (2000) finding that the majority in her study felt that they lacked adequate knowledge and received inadequate information about their pensions reinforces Aldridge's point about the incompatibility between some people's cultural capital and the ideal of the informed consumer.

An additional literature that examines social differences in a privatized world focuses on life and retirement planning (Anderson et al., 1994, 2000, 2002; Denton et al., 2004; Hershey & Mowen, 2000). This literature finds that planning for later life is most common among those who have a future-time perspective, feel in control of their lives and are a part of a couple. Moreover, they find that those who plan more for retirement are more prone to engage in general life planning across many spheres and throughout their life, and that planning is linked to socioeconomic factors. Specifically, those with the fewest resources, are frequently unemployed, have children, and whose plans have failed them in the past, are the least likely to plan, especially in the long term, and are more concerned with the day-to-day.

In short, what the above critiques and studies tell us is that the calculative and informed risk subject outlined by Beck and Giddens, and enshrined in neoliberal policy is actually reflective of a specific type of person – a middle to upper-class, highly educated one. But, because success in such a paradigm is considered to be connected to being a particular kind of enterprising ‘self’, or personality, the classed dimensions of this agentic self are obscured (Gillies, 2005). However, by drawing on Bourdieu’s (1977, 1990) work as Aldridge (1998), Gillies (2005) and Peggs (2000) have done, we can recapture the classed nature of the skills, resources and dispositions that the ideal risk subject supposedly possesses.

Bourdieu’s helpfulness is derived from his dynamic conceptualization of the relationship between structure and agency. Bourdieu’s model rests on the idea that people in different social locations are socialized differently. This early socialization process that occurs in the family and at school supplies children and then adults with specific types of ‘habitus’, an internalized, pre-conscious set of cognitive and affective dispositions shaped by a person’s social location that provides them with a sense of what is normal, comfortable and natural. These experiences also influence the types of resources – what Bourdieu calls economic, social, and cultural capital – people have to draw upon as they engage with different institutions (fields) in society. Economic capital refers to financial assets. Social capital refers to benefits derived through social connections. Cultural capital refers to types of knowledge and skills that provide advantages, such as those passed from parents to children that promote success within the education system. For Bourdieu, differences in habitus give people varying cultural skills, social connections and educational backgrounds that are transferable into different forms of ‘capital’ in the social world.

By borrowing from Bourdieu’s framework and analyzing the lives of a socioeconomically diverse group of workers, my study’s findings show the impact that class has on ways of navigating privatized risk as clear

relationships existing between these 'ways' and the dispositions (*habitus*) and resources (*capitals*) held by different workers. These findings build on previous work cited earlier by pointing to a cultural match between highly educated, middle and upper-class workers (i.e. academics, the well informed) and the commandments of the risk society, and a cultural mismatch between lesser educated, lower income workers and the cultural, financial and educational prerequisites increasingly required in a go-it-alone world. While previous studies have focused their analyses on circumscribed spheres such as health care or pensions, the strength of this study lies in my collection of the life histories of workers, which enables analysis to flow across a multiplicity of spheres, offering a more holistic view of people's lives. By taking life histories I can carefully trace this cultural matching and mismatching across many areas – from early socialization, to education, to life, career and financial planning – all of which greatly influence where people end up. This wider angle provides a more robust view of the way *habitus* and *capitals* confer advantage and disadvantage. Furthermore, it also allows us to see how structural position and cultural disposition interact over time and how this interaction relates to the withdrawal of the public safety net and to inequality more generally.

Method

The data for this article are derived from a larger study wherein I examined how, in the context of risk privatization and growing inequality, people from various economic backgrounds in Silicon Valley, California, encounter and manage security. I conducted the study in Silicon Valley because its economy, labor market and social demography contain many of the issues scholars point to for the rise in inequality – postindustrial economy, flexibility, contingent labor, high demand for technical skills and immigration. These factors have hit workers at the middle and below quite hard. A recent report found that the middle class in Silicon Valley is shrinking, whereas the share of both poorer and richer families is growing (Auerhahn et al., 2007). The study reports that between 2000 and 2005, the proportion of families earning between \$50,000 and \$99,999 fell by 5.4 percent, while the proportion of families earning below \$50,000 grew by 38.1 percent and of families earning above \$200,000 grew by 19.7 percent.

For the larger project, I conducted open-ended, semi-structured interviews with 103 individuals who were members of 50 racially, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse families who range from the top to the bottom of the social structure in Silicon Valley.⁴ I also conducted in-depth ethnographic

research with five of these families. The research for this specific article is based on interviews with 89 adult members of the 50 families. The vast majority worked full-time or part-time, however three were retired, and eight women were currently stay-at-home mothers.⁵ Research participants were recruited in several ways. An initial group of 12 families was obtained by sampling out parents whose 9- to 12-year-old sons were involved in little league baseball tournaments that took place in the summer of 2005. These tournaments included teams from many cities in Silicon Valley and I was able to use a team's particular city as a proxy for the likely income and wealth level of the participating families. I obtained three families by passing out flyers at a socioeconomically diverse high school. I used snowball techniques through participating families and my own social networks to recruit the remaining families. I attempted to interview two people per family in the 42 families with two parents,⁶ and one person per family in the eight single-parent households.⁷ Most often, I separately interviewed both the mother and father in two-parent households, the mother in single-parent households, and one or more children, if either type of family had a child over the age of 13.⁸ Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data were collected over a two-year period from the summer of 2005 to the summer of 2007. The sample in this study is not intended to be a representative one. Rather, it was selected to provide a diverse range of viewpoints and subjective understandings.

In a qualitative data sample this diverse, selected for conceptual not statistical purposes, it is difficult to put the individual participants in discrete boxes by income, education, type of employment, etc. With incomes ranging from \$21,000 to several million, there is great variability. As Table 1 illustrates important educational and income groupings were obtained.⁹ In the 16 families in this study in which both parents had at least a college

Table 1 Annual income distribution by family education level

<i>Group</i>	<i>Upper</i>	<i>Middle</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Single mother</i>
<i>N</i>	16	18	8	8
<i>Education</i>	Both parents have at least undergraduate degrees	One parent has at least some college education or vocational training	Neither parent has any college education or vocational training	Varied
<i>Median income</i>	\$250,000	\$119,500	\$72,500	\$45,500
<i>Minimum income</i>	\$177,000	\$70,000	\$35,000	\$21,000
<i>Maximum income</i>	\$11,000,000	\$180,000	\$92,000	\$65,000

degree the median annual income was \$250,000. This group is highly educated with 23 of the 32 parents holding graduate degrees. In the 18 families in which at least one parent has a college degree, some college, or other vocational training, the median family income is \$119,500. In the eight families in which neither parent has any college or training, the median family income is \$72,500. In the eight single-mother families, the median income is \$45,500, with one of these mothers possessing a college degree and another having some college experience.

The cost of living in Silicon Valley is high. A recent report calculated that the income needed to meet basic living expenses in the area for a single parent with two children is \$65,864 per year, and for a two-working-parents family with two children it is \$77,069, just to pay for housing, food, child care and other essentials, excluding income set aside for savings (California Budget Project, 2007).

The ideal risk society subject

Workers are now expected to build their own lives and manage their own risks. This expectation assumes and demands certain things of all workers. It assumes that all workers have a similar array of options available to them, actively think about these alternatives, understand the educational and skill requirements of each option, and face similar obstacles equipped with similar resources. It demands that all workers look to the future and plan out their life trajectories, are knowledgeable about finances, can practice risk minimization, and are in control of their lives. Drawing from Bourdieu's framework then, the ideal risk subject is assumed and expected to have specific kinds of economic, social and cultural capital. Yet, Bourdieu highlights the way social class differentially shapes the dispositions, skills and resources people have. Hence, his work calls into question the implicit view underlying the ideal of the universal, empowered consumer that everyone, more or less, has the same habitus and the same capitals.

My study found that while all workers navigate a more privatized risk society, workers in different social positions face different obstacles, with different means, and possess different cultural practices. Specifically, I found that the following capitals expected of the risk subject were more likely to be held among the highly educated, high earning individuals in my sample: educational credentials that provide access to 'good jobs', with high pay and good benefits that provide sufficient resources to build a safety net; social connections that facilitate access to 'good jobs'; a calculative and anticipatory approach to lives and careers; a tendency to think about the future;

an intense valuing of educational credentials and a familiarity with educational institutions; and a dexterity with financial management. These resources and dispositions associated with the risk subject were more common at the top, and became less common and/or less emphasized across as many areas of life as you move down my sample by income and education. Thus, at the bottom, research participants had low levels of education, which led to jobs with low pay and minimal security and few social connections that would provide access to a 'good job'. This insecurity and weak safety net required them to react to events as they occurred as opposed to charting their path in life. Their need to focus on pressing issues of survival made it difficult to think about the future regularly. They valued education but lacked familiarity with the institution, which made success more difficult and they were less clear about the advantages educational credentials conferred. They also lacked financial literacy. This is not to say that those with less income or less education never plan, save or think critically about their lives, because they do. In fact, everyone in my study was self-reflexive, thought about the future, and had at some point planned, etc. However, the differences I discovered were a matter of degree and breadth, in which the upper-income, highly educated group had much more of the economic and social capital needed to mitigate against risk in the new economy, and exhibited more of the cultural characteristics of the ideal risk subject with greater emphasis, over their entire life, and in numerous realms of their lives from career planning to retirement planning.

Though analytically distinct, a person's structural location, their habitus and their capitals overlap in real life, especially since one form of capital can be converted into another (i.e. economic capital can purchase elite education that can, in turn, provide cultural capital). Given these inter-laced issues, the best way to illustrate the greater or lesser degree to which workers possess the attributes of the ideal risk subject is to use life history case studies of two workers in different structural locations so that these interwoven dynamics can be fleshed out.¹⁰ The conceptual purpose of the following accounts is to illustrate how early socialization and educational experience shape the dispositions each worker had about education, the future, decision making, and about financial matters. The life histories also show how socialization impacted the types of economic, social, and cultural capital available to each worker, and how these capitals interact with structural position and continue to shape the trajectory of their lives, especially in the wake of the withdrawal of the public safety net. Where illusory, I bring in the voices of other interviewees to further elaborate upon and substantiate empirical findings.

Jay Casper

Jay Casper is a 46-year-old white man who lives with his wife, Kate, and their three children, two boys and one girl, ages 14, 12 and 7. The Caspers reside in an upscale neighborhood in a home worth approximately three million dollars. Both Jay and Kate have master's degrees in business administration from top programs, and work in the technology industry. Jay is vice president of engineering at a start-up company and Kate is a consultant. They each earn around \$200,000 a year for a combined annual income of \$400,000. Through Jay's life-history we are able to see the way his early socialization supplied him with key capitals that have enabled him to thrive in the risk society.

Like other interviewees in Jay's social position, he comes from an upper-middle-class background and was raised in a family that placed great value on higher education. His own parents both obtained college degrees and his dad later earned a doctorate in engineering. His parents' educational achievements provided Jay with a very clear expectation that he go to college as well as a model for pursuing an advanced degree. To instill this message, Jay's father orchestrated a summer work experience to illustrate what life would be like without a college degree. Jay explains,

This was when college was on the horizon. So I was an hourly worker doing piece work in a machine shop with this weird collection of people who had either been in trouble with the law, or on the edge of drug addiction, or lifetime machine shop people. And it was one of these eye opening experiences that are like, 'Okay if you don't go to college this is really what life is about'.

Jay got the message and after being encouraged to go to the best school he could, he went to the University of Pennsylvania and majored in electrical engineering. Neil Curtis, a high-tech executive, further illustrates how middle to upper-class habitus makes higher education something that is naturally expected saying that, '[College] was pretty much a given. I mean . . . I wasn't coerced. We were just raised that way. Naturally we would do that. Everybody I knew was going to college.'

Like other interviewees at the top, Jay had a clear sense that additional educational degrees would give him an edge in his career and so after working for a few years post college he returned to graduate school:

At the time, I knew that I wanted to go back to graduate school for business because that kind of combination, an undergrad degree in engineering and an MBA, was supposedly very potent in the business world, so I wanted to do it at the best schools I could.

Tellingly, Jay recognized and anticipated the different ‘capitals’ more education would provide him with stating, ‘My take on business school was you go for the content, for the credentials, and for the contacts’.

Not only does Jay’s return to graduate school reveal his familiarity with educational institutions, and the types of skills and social contacts it takes to get ahead, but his account also shows the calculative nature of his thinking, his informed decision-making, and his seemingly constant focus on the future. Jay explains that his decision to return to school was thoroughly strategic. He weighed and assessed his options, and gave special consideration to long-term consequences his decision would have on his earning power and career trajectory:

I knew that I didn’t really enjoy the design part of engineering. And so management seemed like this longer-term track to take. Because when you look at the salary curves of engineers, they are pretty steep early in their career but they plateau after 10 or 15 years. And that was in essence the very technical track that my father had taken. When I was in high school, I remember my dad moving over to management and he was a director of engineering and that was the highest career status that he attained and I was like, ‘Well I’ll be damned if that’s what I’m gonna do! [Laughs] I’m paying close attention. I’m taking notes’ . . . When you look at the overall management curve . . . it may take a little bit longer to get going but the salaries that you can earn are higher and that was a longer-term kind of perspective. So that got me back to business school.

After reflecting upon his options, and thinking about his future, Jay decided upon a particular career and life trajectory and obtained an MBA degree from a top program. This tendency to strategize and plan futures was common among the highly educated in my study. As Ditra Chopra, a business consultant acknowledged,

I tend to be a fairly focused person. I spend a certain amount of time every year looking at what I want to accomplish in the next 12 months, three years, or five years and what I think I need to do along the way to make that happen.

Like Jay expected, in the 20 years since graduate school he has relied on the social networks cultivated through business school colleagues and those with whom he previously worked to identify different opportunities. For example, when explaining his move from one company to the other he said, ‘That job switch was definitely some close colleagues who I had worked

with previously saying, “okay, this is an interesting place. You should come and you’d be a good fit for this specific thing”.’ Over his career, Jay has worked for five different companies, steadily rising through different managerial roles. He has never been laid off or had difficulty finding work.

Jay’s calculative and long-term thinking is also evident in the realm of finances, where his ability to save reveals his high level of economic capital and his financial acumen. The Caspers’ strategy for asset accumulation focuses on real estate and investing in stocks and their ‘emphasis has been on just overall asset growth’. After living in California for a few years, Jay came to the realization:

Over time, what seems to have been true in the real estate game in California and particularly in Silicon Valley is that you stretch to the maximum extent possible and get leverage from the bank . . . because houses were appreciating at somewhere between 6 and 10 percent a year . . . So the larger your house value, the more money you were going to make on that appreciation. And you didn’t really make it until you had a transaction on the house. But once I figured that out I was like, ‘Okay in a rising market this makes a lot of sense to have a lot of debt’.

Over the years, the Caspers have bought and sold four homes, with a couple of the houses earning as much in equity per year as Jay earned in salary.

The Caspers also think ahead and save for retirement by making the maximum contribution possible to Jay’s 401(k) and Kate’s IRA.¹¹ His approach to managing this money is to ‘make some good decisions, try to get the assets allocated in reasonable places, either good mutual funds or a reasonable set of stocks’. Recently, they met with a financial planner who ‘confirmed that we were doing reasonable things with it. We weren’t being silly in our asset allocation.’ According to the financial planner, if they are ‘careful about the way we invest money’ and work for another eight to ten years, their assets in retirement will be ‘north of \$5 million’, more if they sell their house. Due to their ‘liquid assets’, Jay feels he could be out of work for six to 12 months and they would be able to manage. Moreover, because Jay recently took an executive position with a startup company and has a large number of stock options he feels that, ‘if the company does well, this whole thing (saving for retirement) will be moot’. Phillip Cartwright, the CEO of a biotech start up, underscores the high levels of financial literacy at the top saying,

I talked to different financial advisors. But I went to business school, I worked in finance for five years. So I went to meet with some [advisors] and I thought ‘Maybe these people know something?’ I couldn’t find anybody who knew a lot more than I did.

The economic capital among the 16 families comprising the highly educated, upper income group in my study is substantial since they all have savings that could sustain them for at least six months if something were to go wrong. They also have high levels of social capital which facilitate finding other high-paying jobs with comprehensive benefits. Together this economic and social capital protects them from risk, such as going without health insurance, and enables them to build a safety net.

Summary

The capitals and dispositions Jay Casper has are both structurally and culturally harmonious with the demands made of workers in the risk society. His educational degrees furnish him with a highly valuable skill-set that commands high wages and comprehensive benefits. Such economic capital allows him to build a robust safety net and save for his children's educations, for his own retirement, and for the unexpected. Such extensive benefits diminish his exposure to risk because in a pinch he can access supplemental resources. His social connection can provide him with another 'good' job. Furthermore, his cultural capital supplies him with skills and practices needed in a context in which workers are on their own. Raised with high educational expectations, Jay knew from an early age what his goals were and where and how to achieve them. Along the way, he has weighed his options, collected relevant information, compared salary curves, reflected on his future in multiple time frames (five years out, 15 years out), and has calculated most decisions. He has drawn upon his financial knowledge to amass assets and create financial security, and has been anticipatory in gauging what the workplace will demand of him. In these ways, Jay Casper exhibits the characteristics of the ideal risk subject. However, as my next case study will illustrate, not all workers have these resources available to them, and rarely at so early an age.

Angela Barbiari

Angela Barbiari is a 44-year-old white woman who lives with her husband, Latu, and their three boys ages 17, 12, and 11, in a three-bedroom apartment located in a subsidized housing complex. By managing this complex, and one that houses disabled residents, Angela earns about \$42,000 a year. But \$12,000 a year is deducted from her pay to cover their below-market rent of \$1100 a month. Her husband, Latu, of Samoan descent, is a house painter. Latu can earn up to \$1000 a week. He cannot work when it rains though so his yearly pay is roughly \$35,000. Latu works hard but he goes

through bouts of feeling underappreciated at work and will 'flake off' and have a poor attitude, resulting in him quitting or getting fired. Consequently, about every five years he is in between jobs. Together, Angela and Latu earn about \$77,000 a year. After high school, Angela took some classes at a community college, but then stopped her schooling at that point. Latu did not graduate from high school. Through Angela's life history we are able to see the way her early socialization and more limited educational experience supplied her with capitals different from those assumed of the ideal risk society subject which has made it much more difficult for her to navigate through the risk society.

Like other interviewees in Angela's social position she was raised in a working-class family. However, in contrast to many others who described their childhoods as difficult, Angela has fond memories of her childhood: 'I had a picture-perfect life. My parents gave me everything I needed.' After graduating from high school Angela took some college classes but then 'decided that money was more important' and went to work full-time in a drug store. At the age of 18, she moved out of her parent's house: 'I thought I wanted to do it all by myself. I didn't realize how good I had it at home.' Reflecting back on her decision to quit school, Angela now feels that she was shortsighted, that she didn't quite think things through:

I thought money – that was it. I was moved out. I thought that my life was easy you know. And my life was good, but what I didn't realize was that \$8.00 an hour in 1980 was not going to be . . . [I didn't realize] I was going to be making the same when I was 44. I make a little bit more than that now but I mean you know. And so yeah I do have a lot of regrets.

Instead, Angela now wishes that she had gone to college, a path that was available to her:

I could have gone to a four year college. And my mom gave me a choice, but she didn't know . . . and [my mom] said that she wished that she would have pushed it. Cause I would have gone. I had the grades for it . . . [but] at 18 . . . your brain isn't fully developed enough to say, 'Yes I need to go to college'.

Like Angela, most of the participants in my study who did not make it to or through college said that their parents did not push them towards higher education. Mary Delaney, an X-ray technician, explains how she was not steered in that direction:

When I got out of high school, I went to a junior college for a year, and college wasn't like a big, big decision, it's not like my parent pushed me to go to college, like 'what do you want to be?' blah, blah, blah, . . . growing up, my parents did not encourage college.

For many, this lack of encouragement was compounded by economic obstacles since neither they nor their family had the resources to pay for schooling. Thus, like Angela, many expressed regret about not attending college because they feel it has limited their employment options and many expressed a desire for their own children to attend college so they will have more opportunities.

Like many other interviewees who did not go to college, the lack of a degree has shaped Angela's career trajectory, typified by lower paying jobs with fewer benefits. After working at the drug store for seven years, she decided to change course. Through a friend, she was referred to an auto parts supplier and got a bookkeeping position. After five years her job was eliminated when the company went through a merger. At that point, she became a stay-at-home mother for several years. In 1998, during the dot.com boom, Angela got a 'really killer job' at an Internet company after a friend referred her for a position in the shipping department. Angela found the work interesting and her pay increased quickly, with her hourly wage going from \$11 to \$26 by the end of four years. She also received stock options. However, in 2002, she lost her job when the company merged with another one and at that point the stock was worth nothing. Not sure what she wanted to do next, Angela went to a temp agency, and the first job she was sent to was the job she currently holds. At this point, Angela and her family were living in a mobile home. With only two bedrooms and steadily increasing rent, Angela saw this temp job at the subsidized housing complex as an opportunity to move her family into a bigger and more affordable place, so she settled for less pay and took the job.

Due to lower wages and the high cost of living, workers at the bottom end of the labor market have very limited economic capital and almost no ability to amass assets. Indeed, for Angela and her family it has always been a struggle financially: 'We're barely making it on the money we make. It's sad because we make decent money.' However, because costs are high Angela feels like, 'unless you've gone to college, you're not making what you need to make to live here'. Indeed, Latu has not 'received a dime raise in eight years' and his inconsistent, weather-permitting work sets them back:

We do really well from April through August and then in September we start to get nervous 'cause in October it starts to rain . . . in

December he doesn't work and in January he doesn't work. It kills us. That's what keeps putting us behind.

They are also burdened by credit card debt, mostly racked up when Angela was in between jobs. They have lowered their debt from about \$8000 to \$5000, but she feels like it has 'crunched' them for years now. Angela would love to have an extra few thousand dollars in the bank all the time, but just when they think, 'we're getting ahead', something bad happens. Latu has been cited for drunk driving twice, which 'sucks \$2000 to \$3000 right out of our pocket' and the lawyer they hired when their son was arrested after an altercation cost \$1500. For Angela, 'it seems like it's always something' standing in their way. Besieged and bogged down, Angela at times retreats from reality: 'There's been times when I haven't opened the mail for like three months because I just know it's nothing good.' From Angela's standpoint, the only calculation she does is to figure out how not to fall further behind.

This economic instability has led to the selling off of assets. When their eldest son was young they bought some saving bonds to put towards the costs of his college education. But they were forced to sell them when they were between jobs. 'It sucked,' Angela said, describing how she felt about selling the bonds. 'It sucked again,' she said, 'when I had to do that with my retirement. Every time I left a job I had to spend it to live on.'

Like other workers in Angela's position, the lack of emphasis placed on charting out one's future along with the more limited opportunities available has meant that Angela has not approached her life in a very planful way: 'I guess I probably didn't ever do any planning.' At one point she did have a plan to return to school, explaining,

I was gonna go back when my older son was six but then I had two more kids, [snaps] like that. So that kinda pushed that back . . . It's just like the old people say, you know, how time flies and you'll never get there. It's true [laughs].

Continuing with this theme later she said, 'I mean I have a lot of dreams and wants but . . . I guess I don't know how to plan it, or I don't know how to get there maybe.' Patrick Lloyd, a retired construction worker, feels like he hasn't planned very much either, 'I think it's just hard work. That's the only plan I had.'

Through Angela's current job however, she is learning about retirement planning, something she knew nothing about and 'didn't think about 20 years ago'. By managing the apartment complex, she sees the bank accounts of the disabled residents and has learned about how assets grow. She has witnessed people her own age starting out with 'just a few pennies' 20 years

ago, who now have accounts worth about \$150,000. Angela sees how because 'someone taught them right', they have investments. This has been a profound learning experience for her:

Because people tell you, you hear about it, but to actually see the statements and see what they've done. It's been a blessing for me to see that your money does grow if you leave it there [laughs], and what kind of funds they are putting them into. That was something I'd never been educated on. And the same with my parents. They weren't educated on how to do that so I never learned any of those skills at a young age.

Angela has started thinking about retirement and has saved \$3000 in her 401(k) plan.

The lack of financial literacy that Angela describes was a common finding among workers with lower levels of education. For example, Caleb Bristow, an auto mechanic, illustrates his more limited knowledge when discussing his 401(k) account:

I don't even know anything about stocks. I don't even follow it. I just let it sit there. I just put [money] in and just don't even think about it. I don't look at the statements . . . I wouldn't know what the hell I was looking at anyway.

Though Angela has not felt like she's had a lot of control in her life, she's beginning to feel like life is a little more in her grasp:

I'm learning over the years that . . . I have control, it's just how to use it. I think that's just my own personality. I'm capable of so many more things than I do, put it that way. And I let things take me back. As you get older you get wiser I guess. So I'd like to have more control, but I have to learn that I guess . . . I used to think it was everybody else's fault or it just seemed like I got a bad wrap all the time or I'm a day late and a dollar short thing . . . So I'm just learning to move on and try to do things different when things like that happen . . . there's been a lot of ups and downs [in my life] but I've learned a lot over the years, things that people can't tell you before I think.

Summary

In comparison to Jay Casper, the capitals at Angela Barbiari's disposal are not as harmonious with a society moving away from collective structures and towards a model of self-provisioning. Her lack of educational degrees means

that her skill-set is less valuable and so she receives lower wages and often 'crappy benefits'. Such low wages make Angela unable to save for her children's education, for her retirement or for emergencies, despite her best intentions. Such sporadic and at times minimal benefits increase her exposure to risk. In trouble, she has only credit cards to rely on. In need of a job, her friends or temp agencies can provide a helping hand, but rarely do these leads offer a leg up; in fact, more often than not, they provide more of the same. Furthermore, while her cultural capital provides her with resilience and fortitude to get through difficult times it does not provide her with many of the dispositions required in the risk society. Raised in a family unaware of the link between educational credentials and earning capacities in a changing economy, Angela was not encouraged to go to college. Unaccustomed to taking the long view, she did not at an early age think about the future, gather data, and create a 20-year plan. Unfamiliar with different options, unsure of what information to collect, not fully aware of the implications of her choices, she has made decisions she now regrets. She is financially insecure because of limited economic capital compounded by limited financial knowledge. Angela has, through her new job, recently learned financial skills that supply her with better tools. In totality, however, Angela Barbiari's cultural sensibilities and resources seem mismatched with the risk society.

By employing Bourdieu to analyze the life histories of Jay Casper and Angela Barbiari and in particular highlighting the impact of early socialization and educational experience on the dispositions and resources available to each of them, it is evident that from a very early age that Jay possessed the knowledge and skills that Angela has only begun to assemble much later in her life. For example, Jay began weighing options and making strategic choices as a young man while Angela didn't consider how her options in life would change by dropping out of school. What was pre-conscious, obvious and normal to Jay (planning his future, attending college and graduate school and managing his financial portfolio) were more foreign to Angela; to her they are the 'things people can't tell you [about] before[hand]'. The different economic, social and cultural capitals Jay and Angela have access to, particularly their orientations towards planning and the assessing of costs and benefits have been extremely influential in getting them to their current life situation and in shaping where they will be far into the future.

With respect to the rest of my sample, Jay and Angela's stories lie at either end of a continuum reflecting, in gradient form, the degree to which workers possessed the attributes of the ideal risk subject. While those at the top end are more likely to have all the attributes, access to and possession of these capitals drops slowly and then precipitously as you move from the

top of my sample to the bottom. Despite this finding, it is inaccurate to infer that the upper-income, highly educated workers in my study have always charted master plans, have always looked before they leapt, or are incapable of making financial miscalculations. It would be just as inaccurate to infer that the workers with the lowest levels of education and fewest resources in my study never plan or calculate. My conclusions should instead be interpreted to mean that there are numerous configurations of security and insecurity in the risk society, with certain configurations more prominent at one end of the spectrum and some kinds more prominent at the other. Along the spectrum, you can find workers who think about the future but lack resources to set aside for retirement, or workers with extra resources who are more focused on the here and now. Even though the combinations of economic, social, and cultural capitals are numerous, in broad form, the above high-level patterns reflect a profound security division that exists based on social class distinction in the new economy.

Discussion

Not only do Jay and Angela's life histories bring to life the real world workings of habitus and capitals but they also provide a lens to observe how differences in structural position and cultural disposition interact over time and intensify their effect later in life, particularly in the absence of a public safety net. To be sure, their different resources and cultural sensibilities have influenced their current structural status (education, occupation, income, etc.). And it is Jay and Angela's current structural status that influences whether exposure to an unexpected upheaval will be a minor problem or a major devastation in their lives. Jay could be out of work for some time without seriously altering his family's fortune or trajectory. In the meantime, his focus is on building assets. In contrast, Angela and her husband's intermittent unemployment have been devastating. The urgent needs for survival have left them in significant debt and have left Angela emotionally drained, unable to act on her own impulses to save for her family's future. In fact, the economic stress and lack of a safety net left Angela so depressed and emotionally paralyzed that she was unable to make other decisions – refusing to open her mail which created additional financial problems because of late payments. Thus, while Jay moves ahead, Angela falls further behind – despite 'knowing better' and having 'done better' by saving for retirement and her son's education. Indeed, in the low-skill/low-pay/low-security employment sector, losing your job sometimes means losing the ability to turn 'knowing better' into 'doing better'. Without a safety net then, individuals can fall even further behind.

A robust public safety net could have altered the chain of events in Angela's life. For example, after the Second World War the GI Bill provided funds not only for tuition expenses for higher education but also provided funds to take care of the dependants while veterans went to college. If today the State supplied greater assistance in paying college expenses, and specifically for Angela, if aid was available to help with daycare expenses and cost of living expenses, she likely would have returned to college. And if unemployment benefits were more substantial and affordable housing more available Angela would not have had to sell her assets to survive. The take away point is that the privatization of risk exacerbates existing inequalities while collective structures mitigate inequalities among workers. For example, in my study tradesmen in unions who had less familiarity with investment strategies for retirement were able to sidestep financial pitfalls since their union automatically took money from their paychecks and had it professionally invested by financial advisors. Additionally, a couple of workers got a college degree with the help of employers that encouraged and paid for their workers to pursue higher education. Getting the degree drastically increased these workers' 'capitals'. Collective structures like public safety nets help workers because they minimize the impact of not having certain skills or resources, they help workers acquire additional skills and resources, and they provide sufficient security so all workers can translate 'knowing better' into 'doing better'.

However, in our current society where high inequality intersects with the rolling up of safety nets workers make choices within different constellations of resources, possibilities, and options, and draw upon situated knowledges in making decisions. These inequalities in options, information and income mean that we are not all living in the same risk society equipped with the same resources. Rather, individuals live in different types of risk societies in which they are more or less vulnerable and more or less on their own. While at the top, risk society winners appear to be the self-reliant consumers valorized in neoliberal ideology, in reality they are the least vulnerable and the least on their own. Those at the top continue to receive employer provided protections like health insurance and severance packages that shield them from the vicissitudes of life and ensure they never go it alone. Moreover, it is easier to be reflexive when you have more options, it is easier to plan if your life is more predictable, and it is easier to look down the road if you already possess a psychic template of your future. Armed with the 'right' capitals, exposed to the least risk, risk society winners are ironically the best equipped and best positioned to handle risk privatization; an advantage that is obscured behind the rhetoric of individual responsibility.

In contrast to risk society winners, risk society losers are more vulnerable and more on their own. In fact, those in my study at the middle and bottom of the employment structure experienced more layoffs, more reductions in pay and received far fewer benefits, particularly in regard to health care. These findings contradict the neoliberal notion that an individual's talents are unleashed when they have to fend for themselves. Instead what my study reveals is that when individuals are truly 'on their own', their progress is thwarted by economic vulnerability, often followed by emotional paralysis. To be sure, the story of Timothy Bowers, who preferred the security of jail over the insecurity of minimum wage jobs, illustrates the dire straits of those at the bottom, those who are really on their own. That Mr. Bowers thought about how to meet his present and future needs and concluded that prison was the best option available to him is alarming. More alarming still is the fact that Bowers's attorney received calls from other people hoping to get the same deal. Such accounts underscore the division between the winners and losers in the risk society, and provide sad commentary on the fact that for the losers, jail may be the last collective structure left, the only place to turn. Cut off from the 'right' capitals, exposed to the most risk, risk society losers are often the least equipped to grapple with risk privatization. Yet, this disadvantage is masked by political rhetoric that lays blame on the individual for exhibiting poor self-management.

Implications and conclusion

Over the last few decades, in both government policy and employment relations there has been a shift in Western countries away from collective forms of insurance for managing risks and a movement towards greater self-provisioning. Such shifts place more responsibility on individuals to manage their own lives, protect their own families and prepare their own futures. These changes in risk are heralded by neoliberals who think that risks are best governed by individuals and markets and decried by critics who think that risks are best managed by governments and collectivities. My study of 103 individuals in 50 socioeconomically diverse families in Silicon Valley found that such universal pronouncements obscure important differences among workers. Both the defenders and critics of risk privatization gloss over the ways social class unevenly influences a worker's level of exposure to risk and their access to the 'capitals' needed to thrive in a risk society. Undoubtedly, structural and cultural inequalities like these have always existed among workers. Yet, in a time of massive disparity, when workers are

supposed to amass security on their own, these inequalities among them are more magnified and more profound.

The quotations from Presidents Roosevelt and Bush, which open this article, reveal that these ideological, political and economic shifts regarding risk mark a historical transformation in the relationship between the individual and the society, the citizen and the state, and the worker and the employer. Debates regarding the costs and benefits of these changing relationships will be topics of discussion for some time to come since they strike at the heart of societies. For what is at stake in these discussions about privatization are the meaning and definition of security, or the meaning and definition of society. Is security a personal endeavor where we are only responsible for ourselves? Or, is security a collective endeavor where we are responsible for each other? Are workers empowered by the freedom to choose their own forms of provision? Or, are workers disempowered by the choices and resources available to them? The way governments and employers answer these questions will have real consequences in the lives of workers, for these answers will shape the contours of the inequality of security in the 21st century.

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Notes

- 1 Beck and Giddens's respective theories about risk in the late modern era are extensive, and a thorough discussion of them is beyond the scope of this article. For a complete analysis of their theories see Lupton (1999a, 1999b) and Mythen (2004).
- 2 The 401(k) plan is a type of employer sponsored retirement plan in which workers are allowed to make tax deferred contributions to their account up to a maximum contribution of \$15,500 annually. Sometimes companies will offer to match employee's contributions to their accounts up to a certain percentage, usually about three percent. Employees are responsible for managing these accounts such as the types of investment vehicles they allocate their money into. Due to a change in the tax code, the 401(k) plan went into effect in 1980 and has rapidly replaced traditional pension plans because they are much cheaper for employers to maintain than pensions. As opposed to traditional pension plans that provide a guaranteed income, the level of income a worker receives from their 401(k) depends on their financial skill and the growth of the stock market. Thus, the risk is carried by the individual worker and not the employer.
- 3 There is a great debate among scholars as to why, exactly, income and wealth inequality has grown. For a review article see Fligstein and Shin (2004).

- 4 Except for one couple who I interviewed at the same time, all other interviews were done in a one-on-one fashion.
- 5 Seven of the eight stay-at-home mothers were among the families that had the highest earnings in this study. One stay-at-home mother was in the middle-class.
- 6 Most of the two-parent families consisted of married partners. However, one family consisted of divorced parents that lived in apartment buildings next door to each other, one family were common law husband and wife, and one married couple was separated. Since the interviews were conducted, two other married couples have separated, that I know of.
- 7 In two single-mother families, I did additional interviews with extended kin.
- 8 In five two-parent families I was only able to do a single interview either due to a lack of English fluency among other family members or because other family members were uninterested in participating.
- 9 These income and educational levels are derived from self-reported data given by the research subjects.
- 10 All names and identifying characteristics of the research participants have been changed to ensure confidentiality.
- 11 An IRA is a private, individual retirement account that is either employer provided or self-provided. On an annual basis individuals can make contributions up to a maximum amount which in 2007 was \$4000 for each person. Like 401(k) plans, it is left up to the individual as to how they will manage the funds in their IRA accounts.

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