

Chapter 5 in Cole & Durham (eds.), *Figuring the Future: Children, Youth, and Globalization* (Santa Fe, NM: SAR Press, 2008).



**Chapter 5**  
**Private Anxieties and Public Hopes:**  
**The Perils and Promise of Youth in the Context of Globalization**

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Consider the following excerpts from Richard Sennett's book *The Corrosion of Character* (1998):

Adjustment and change is woven through human history. Natural disasters, wars, economic depressions have upset the status quo and engendered anxieties. But what's peculiar about uncertainty today is that it exists without any looming historical disaster; instead it is woven into the everyday practices of a vigorous capitalism where instability is meant to be normal (1998:31).

A larger sense of community, and a fuller sense of character, is required by the increasing number of people who, in modern capitalism, are doomed to fail (1998:135).

Sennett's observations capture the dilemmas that younger generations face as they imagine futures in the context of globalization. His suggestions that the current moment is both filled with personal anxiety, yet demands a new sense of community frames the two sets of youth narratives that I discuss in this paper. In the first set youth imagine a world where they are on their own to manage lives made precarious by flexible capital. They accept as givens the rules of a neo-liberal order, tie their hopes to the happiness it promises, believe that their commitment to education and hard work will pay off but worry privately about whether the system will deliver. Drawing from Sennett, I argue that there are psychological costs in anxiety and self-doubt for individuals who imagine only private solutions to the uncertainties that global capital and the privatization of risk have normalized. The second part of the paper presents an alternative narrative in which activist youth are making public and political the private anxieties they share, challenging a world organized on market principles, and seeking a fuller sense of character than jobs alone can furnish (see also Cole and Durham, Weiss this volume).

The period of youth offers a unique lens on the future because, more than other times in life, the late adolescent/early adult years are a time in life to take stock, to assess the 'adult' world one is entering and the niche one might carve in it. Some psychologists contend that youth is a period for experimenting, pushing boundaries, and exploring different identities before one settles into social roles (Arnett, 2004). The argument is that even some poor choices made at this time can be illuminating because, unlike older adults, young people have time to change course and, for some, life offers second chances. Other scholars contend that the luxury of a moratorium to explore identity varies by class and that what may appear as a lack of role commitment may really be a lack of opportunity (Côté 2000; Nakkula 2003). Typically youth are less committed than older adults to roles that constrain the futures they envision. They also are more intellectually and psychologically flexible and more socially mobile. Thus, it is easier for them to accommodate as well as contribute to social change. Since they are just at the brink of adulthood, it is also more incumbent on them to do so.

The lens of youth is also a good vantage point for framing what the future portends because it is the collective decisions of younger generations which will constitute the future (Flanagan, Gallay, Gill, Gallay, and Nti 2005; Youniss and Yates 1997). Visions of the future and the possibilities young people imagine frame the personal choices they make today and class and race differences in the paths young people's lives take are in large measure shaped by what they imagine is possible for people "like them" (Flanagan and Campbell 2003).

Figuring the future through the 'youth' lens also amplifies intergenerational disjunctions. For contemporary youth, the rules of the "social contract" in America have shifted considerably since the days when their parents came of age. I use the metaphor of a social contract as an interpretive frame for understanding how young people theorize and try to make sense of their social order: What do they think are the rules by which we live, the ties that bind us together?

And what are the psychological tensions and prospects associated with changes in those principles?

In using the term social contract, I am evoking a long history of moral and political theory which tries to explain the foundations on which individuals join together to form civil societies. Early versions of social contract theory posited that people surrendered certain rights as individuals to a government which in turn guaranteed that their liberties would be secured. Implied in this exchange is a belief that those who live by the rules of a social order (and, as critics of the theory have noted, make the rules of that order) also reap its benefits<sup>1</sup>. In modern welfare states the formulation of this contract meant that governments protected citizens from the volatility of a free market while at the same time supporting the expansion of the market.

But in recent decades a new social contract has been evolving, one which reflects the ascendancy of markets and the decline in government's role in curbing their excesses and protecting citizens against their vagaries. The new deal with which younger generations now grapple as they come of age also reflects a devolution in responsibility for risk from a model where risks were socialized to one in which, increasingly, they are privatized (Hacker 2006). Finally, the facts of life with which younger generations must contend include restructuring of the nature of work that portends more episodic and insecure jobs with fewer lifetime benefits or guarantees. In light of the increasing uncertainties associated with the transition to adulthood, perhaps it is not surprising that the period of youth itself - that elastic period in the late adolescent and emerging adult years — has become protracted (Fussell and Furstenberg 2005; Settersten, Furstenburg, and Rumbaut 2005).

From the early nineteenth century through the 1950s, the transition to adulthood became progressively more standardized and orderly, especially for white men who, by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, could assume that they would complete school, get a job, marry, and start a family in a somewhat orderly sequence (Shanahan 2000). Thus it was clear how developmental tasks, institutional preparations, and social roles were linked. For young people today the job market is less predictable and training is a matter of constant retooling for the market's shifting demands. It is increasingly incumbent on individuals to manage uncertainties (Hacker 2006). As a developmental and social psychologist I am interested in what meaning this new order holds for youth. Toward that end, I have employed the psychological concepts of social representations (Deaux 2006; Moscovici 1988) and lay theories (Levy, Chiu, & Hong, 2006). Both refer to the socially constructed beliefs that are shared by groups (in particular cultures or at particular historical moments) to explain phenomena, reduce uncertainty, and guide decisions. When considering child and youth development it is important to remember that both social representations and lay theories shape the practices of formative institutions such as schools and, in turn, are reinforced by repeated enactments in those settings.

In the first part of the paper I draw from the words of high-school students in the United States to illustrate that: a) they understand the rules of flexible capital imply increasing competition between individuals for a shrinking supply of jobs; b) their solutions to the insecure world that flexible capital portends are that individuals should work harder, be more vigilant, and regularly retool; and c) the new social contract exacts a heavier burden on working-class youth because their families are less able than middle-class families to substitute for the state's eroding safety net of programs. The central theme in these interviews is about the self-made individual who works hard, jockeys for position, and rises above hard times. However, if, as Sennett argues, instability is a normal state of affairs, uncertainty is the future. Thus, I maintain that it is futile for individuals to resolve the tensions of flexible capital in private because they will bear the costs in increased anxiety and diminished trust.

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<sup>1</sup> It also should be noted that social contract theory has been criticized for its gendered and racist assumptions (see Fieser and Dowden 2006).

In the second section of the paper, I suggest that new forms of youth political activism offer individuals collective alternatives. Like the young people quoted in the first part of the paper, young political activists are aware that opportunities and resources are becoming scarce and that individuals have to be creative and use their imaginations to resolve problems. However, in contrast to the first group, they do not expect individuals to resolve the tensions alone and they do not accept that a neo-liberal social contract is a given. As the slogan of the World Social Forum suggests, they believe that “another world is possible”.<sup>2</sup>

Historically youth have revitalized political organizations and social movements in part because, compared to adults in those movements, they tend to be more idealistic, adventuresome, and willing to take risks (Halberstam 1998; Watts and Flanagan, in press). The new forms of activism reflect youth’s awareness of the global scope and interconnections of political issues, a sense of shrinking resources, and a blurring of private and public in lifestyle and consumer politics. Young activists are creating political identities that are fluid and flexible and organizational forms that are inclusive and that take advantage of the democratic potential of the Internet. Taken together, these developments suggest that youth’s images of the evolving social contract are a key site through which we can witness the emergence of new political forms. By focusing on the various ways that those who are coming of age in the context of globalization are resolving its tensions, we can imagine possible futures.

### **The Erosion of Safety Nets**

Risk, as Jacob Hacker (2006) points out, is a social condition that creates variety in human experience. To deal with risks, a society can create political and market institutions that pool risks associated with the human condition (health of family members, natural disasters, factory closings, old age). Alternatively, a society can decide that individuals and families alone should manage the uncertainties and bear the burdens of risk. The Great Risk Shift refers to the transfer of responsibility for managing risk that has occurred in the U.S. over the past thirty years from a network of government and employer programs to individuals and their families.

For earlier generations, states socialized the risks associated with unpredictable markets through social insurance programs. Through unemployment compensation and poor relief programs, states insured that contingencies such as industrial downturns, economic depressions, or personal hardships due to aging or disability would not fully determine the life chances of their members. The social welfare system in the United States, established in the Social Security Act of 1935, was based largely on a male ‘breadwinner’ model. Gordon (1996) has referred to the U.S. model as a two-tiered system: The “first class” social insurance programs included Social Security and Unemployment Insurance, and later Workers’ Compensation and Medicare were added. Women, the poor, and many people of color were not in jobs covered by this system and thus were excluded. The second-class system of welfare (Aid to Families with Dependent Children (originally ADC), was reserved for women and children whose livelihoods were not provided by a breadwinner. Compared to other welfare states, the government in the United States provided little insurance against risk. But as Hacker (2006) points out, private workplace benefits such as health care, unemployment compensation, and retirement pensions, were part of the safety net to which many American workers and their families were accustomed.

The transfer of risk management to individuals and families has occurred during roughly the same period that radical restructuring of the economy in the United States also has taken place. In the decades after WW II, unemployment was cyclical – and followed the rhythms of

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<sup>2</sup> There is an asymmetry in the two parts of the paper based on the empirical basis for the claims in each section. The first is based on primary data collection with high-school students. The second section is based on secondary analyses of contributions to a volume on youth activism which I co-edited (Sherrod, Flanagan, Kassimir, and Syvertsen, 2006) supplemented with interviews with student activists.

contraction and expansion in industry. The new unemployment is structural – and thus more permanent.

Analyses of work and earnings trends in the United States since the 1970s show that more of the jobs in the new economy are contingent (part time, of shorter tenure, with fewer benefits). Job instability is especially acute for African-American men (Bluestone & Rose 1997). Compared to the years between 1946 – 1972 when changes in a person's employment typically reflected promotions and raises, changes in employment today are more likely to be associated with demotion, unemployment, or displacement to other careers (Carnavale 1995). Since the 1970's family incomes have become more volatile and access to employer provided health insurance and pensions have fallen for the average worker, making it more difficult for families to plan their futures (Danziger and Gottschalk 2005; Hacker 2006). To fully appreciate the changing context for working families, declines in union membership over the past four decades also should be noted: In 1953, 36% of private sector workers were unionized. That figure is less than 8% today and younger workers are less likely to be organized.

The social contract of the neoliberal state - less reliance on government and more reliance on the self - is reflected in remarks that Margaret Thatcher made in an interview in 1987:

I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand “I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!” or “I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!” “I am homeless, the Government must house me!” and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women, and there are families and no government can do anything except through people, and people look to themselves first (Keay 1987).

How should young people respond to this neo liberal social contract in which, as Thatcher advises, people should look to themselves first? The answer they have been offered is to get more education. In the vernacular of economists, there are returns to more years of education in better paying jobs. In fact, post secondary education is now considered essential for obtaining jobs that can support families. Yet it may not be enough. Paul Krugman (2005) notes that when the technology bubble of the late 1990's burst, so did the notion that American knowledge workers were invulnerable. Nonetheless, maximizing their competitive edge is clearly on the minds of young people. High-school students hire professionals to coach them through the college application process and pad their resumes with Advanced Placement courses, extracurricular activities, and community service hours. College students hedge their bets by accumulating credentials, juggling double, and in some cases, triple majors. In North America and in Europe the phenomenon of credential inflation or “qualification accumulation” appears to many to be the right strategy to insure one's marketability (Roberts 2001: 129).

At the same time that more years of education, training, and retooling are needed, government is paying less and individuals are incurring more of the costs in tuition, living stipends, or loans. Besides the financial costs of education, individuals also have to deal with an uncertain job market, making their best guess about which sectors will be hiring when they have completed their schooling. The extended period of education and the burden of individual debt associated with it are some of the major contributors to the protracted period that the transition to adulthood has become.

### **The Protracted Period of ‘Youth’**

In late modern societies the period between adolescence and adulthood has lengthened. During the mid-twentieth century, it was a common pattern for white males, to complete their education, start at the bottom of a career ladder, and work their way up (Côté and Levine 2002). There were normative patterns and a predictable sequence and thus some clarity about the connection between choices made in the present and future life trajectories. Compared to that relatively orderly sequence of roles, the trend for today’s youth includes longer periods of schooling, combinations of work and education, delayed marriage, and lower lifetime fertility (Fussell and Furstenberg 2005). Gone is the typical career paradigm characterized by lifetime employment and a pension upon retirement. A growing share of the jobs on which people’s livelihood depends include independent contracting, temporary, on-call, day labor, self-employment and part-time work. Analyses of national trends in 1995, 2001, and 2005 reveal that 32.2%, 29.3%, and 30.6% respectively of the workforce during those years were employed in such “nonstandard” jobs. Compared to full-time jobs, non-standard work is characterized by lower pay, benefits, and job security (Mishel, Bernstein, and Allegretto 2007).

It is noteworthy that colleges and universities have done little to help younger generations deal with these new realities. Although educating younger generations for the labor market is one of the main goals of post-secondary education, the elusive nature of the job market makes it difficult to predict those sectors that will be in demand when an entering freshman class graduates. Increasingly it is incumbent on individual youth to define their path to adulthood, to identify the training and opportunities they will need to achieve their goals, and to pay for them.

The family is the main backup system that scaffolds young people during this period, but there are class differences in the financial resources that families can offer. Furthermore, the experiences that many, particularly working-class parents, had as they entered adulthood, are not a useful guide as their children come of age. Consequently, as in the past, class differences in family resources and social connections contribute to the diverging pathways that youths’ adult lives will take (Kerckhoff 1993, Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, and Ruth, 2005). During their late teens and twenties, 40 percent of American youth now move back to their parents’ home at least once after leaving (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1999). Economists estimate that American parents provide \$2000 annually to their 18-34 year old children (in 2001 dollars), with the households in the top 25% income bracket providing at least 70% more assistance to their 18-34 year old offspring than the 25% with the lowest incomes (Schoeni and Ross 2005). As Beck (1992) argues in his book, *Risk Society*, the gains and risks associated with the transformation from an industrial to a new modernity are unevenly distributed:

Like wealth, risks adhere to the class pattern, only inversely: wealth accumulates at the top, risks at the bottom. To that extent, risks seem to strengthen, not abolish, the class society. Poverty attracts an unfortunate abundance of risks. By contrast, the wealthy (in income, power, or education) can purchase safety and freedom from risk (1992: 35).

How do young people interpret this new social contract? How do they explain the implications of deindustrialization? What, if anything, do they expect the state to do if people lose their jobs? Do they view the loss of jobs in the United States as part of a larger global picture? How much control do they believe individuals have over the changing conditions of the workplace? What do they think individuals should do to maximize their chances for success?

Such questions have been at the heart of my program of research on adolescents’ interpretations of the social contract. In this work I have explored the psychological underpinnings of what political scientists refer to as diffuse support for the system, i.e., the widely shared belief that our system is just. In the United States this means that, in general, people have to believe that the playing field is level, that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed, and that differences in income or status reflect individual differences in performance. In fact, the belief in a level playing field is a commonly held cultural script in the United States

(Crocker, Major, and Steele 1998). The principle of a level playing field is tightly linked to our shared conviction that the American dream of financial success and independence is achieved largely by individual determination and hard work (Hochschild, 1995). This social representation of the American system as a meritocracy is so strong that we tend to legitimate existing social arrangements, even at the expense of personal or group interest.

Jost and his colleagues (Jost, Banaji, and Nosek 2004) have advanced a psychological theory of system justification to explain people's motivation to legitimate the status quo. They contend that both the historical record and a host of psychological studies show that there is more evidence that disadvantaged groups acquiesce to and defend the status quo than rebel against it. In part this is because people have a need to maintain a favorable self image, to feel validated in their actions, and to feel that their behaviors are consistent with their beliefs. Thus disadvantaged youth who apply themselves, studying hard in high school and aspiring to college, have to believe that their efforts will pay off – that the rewards of a meritocratic system will accrue to people “like them” who follow the rules.

The notion that we live in a meritocracy is a lesson that most children in the United States learn as they grow up but I contend that the success of disadvantaged youth depends on their ardent commitment to this belief. For people “like them” with few connections, safety nets, or second chances, there is no other way to succeed except through intense self reliance and hard work. Cultural psychologists argue that we develop our identities and beliefs via the accumulated enactment of 'selfways', i.e., relationships and interactions we have in everyday contexts that form the contours of our lives (Markus, Mullally, and Kitayama 1997). Building on this point, I contend that youths' interpretations of the social contract reflect the particular contexts they and their families have known and the selves they have enacted. Furthermore, their views reflect an intimate understanding of the way the principles of their social order, its opportunities and constraints, apply to people “like them.”

In the mid 1990's I set out to learn more about how young people interpreted the evolving social contract in America. I was particularly interested in their theories about inequality which I investigated by asking students in high-school social studies classes how they would explain to a hypothetical foreign visitor why some people in our country are poor, why some are unemployed, some homeless, and why some people are rich (Flanagan and Tucker 1999). I emphasize that schools were the site where the study was conducted because that is an important part of the story: The views reported here are those of high-school students and not their peers who had dropped out of school.

The high-schools were located in communities in Michigan, part of the rustbelt that for generations had been accustomed to a steady supply of jobs in auto and steel but in the final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century experienced deep cutbacks. As the hub of the American automobile industry, Detroit is a prototype for the old social contract that bound workers and management in a pact where economic risks were socialized. For several generations families in these communities had become accustomed to the legacy of good jobs in auto and auto-related industries. Furthermore, communities in the region benefited economically from the tax base and large number of working families. As Jacob Hacker describes in *The Great Risk Shift*:

The old contract – never enjoyed by all workers and almost always implicit, yet still a powerful private standard whose influence belied its less-than complete reach – said that workers and employers shared the risk of uncertainty in the market as well as the gains of productivity from skills and innovation. ....On the worker side, shared risks meant a certain degree of loyalty to the firm, a certain degree of commitment to the pay and welfare of fellow employees, a certain degree of restraint in demanding benefit and pay increase when times were good so that the fallout would be less painful when times were bad. On the employer side, shared risks meant an emphasis on the development of workers' skills, the

provision of generous workplace benefits like health care and pensions, and the buffering of workers from the risks of fluctuating demand. The bargain held because it worked for both parties – workers received job security, guaranteed benefits, and good pay; employers got loyal, productive workers who invested in skills specific to their jobs and didn't jump ship when times got tough (2006: 65).

The psychological implications of deindustrialization are palpable in communities where the customary rhythms of everyday life were organized around assumptions which no longer fit reality. Restructuring of the auto industry and the massive lay-offs associated with it as well as the roll back of unions were well underway in the 1980's when I conducted a two year study on the spillover of parents' job loss or demotion on family life and children's adjustment at school. These declines in parents' work lives caused increased conflict with adolescent children (Flanagan 1990) and also spilled over into the children's behaviors at school. Over the course of the two years, teachers, who were unaware of which families were impacted by layoffs, reported poorer adjustment for those students whose parents had in fact been affected (Flanagan and Eccles, 1993).

In the context of the economic restructuring that was affecting their communities, I was interested in learning more about the younger generation's theories about economic change. I purposely sampled in schools whose students came from a broad spectrum of class backgrounds. Some youth in this study had parents who were doctors, lawyers, or executives in the auto industry. Others had parents who were on-line workers, domestics, or were unemployed. More than 400 high-school students participated in the study. Fifty-six percent of the participants self-identified as Caucasian, 17% African-American, 13% Arab-American, and the rest with other ethnic minority groups.

Regardless of their age or background, the most common theme young people expressed was the individual's responsibility for his/her fate and the imperative in childhood to work hard in school in order to succeed in adulthood: "The reason why people have good jobs is because they work for 17 – 20 years in school." People who are unemployed "probably didn't think of their future as youngsters but they now should pay back by being unemployed." In contrast, they asserted that people are rich because they "worked hard, got what they wanted, had a good education, wanted to be someone, not a nobody." The meritocratic ethos taken to its logical extreme is captured in this high school student's explanation for poverty: "In every society there are going to be poor people. Darwin's theory holds true – survival of the fittest. The smartest and most motivated earn the most money."

The importance of staying in school, of personal motivation, of applying oneself and delaying gratification in order to obtain a good job later in life was echoed over and over in the teens' statements. But their assertions contain an even bigger comment on the character of those who make it or fail. Those who succeed had a goal – to be "someone, not a nobody" – and they studied and worked hard to achieve that end. No benefit of the doubt is given to those who lose their jobs. Rather, unemployment is considered a just desert, a pay back for failing to "plan ahead" as a child and develop the qualities of character that would lead to success.

Young people also located success and failure in the character of families, rather than in a wider structure of social and economic relations. As one white male high-school student remarked, "Most of these people were born into poverty. Their fate can be blamed on their ancestors" whereas people who are better off "obviously take education, motivation, and intelligence very seriously. Somewhere in the family someone had to work hard to get where they are – a trait that should and is passed down in the family." Although being born into poverty could be perceived as an indication that the playing field is uneven, families (ancestors) are still held accountable: Motivation and hard work are transformed into traits of character passed on as a legacy to future generations. These themes of family responsibility echo those

found in national opinion polls in which the American public holds parents, and especially mothers, responsible for how children turn out (Hochschild 1995).

It was the adolescents from privileged backgrounds who were more likely to critique the system as one of unequal opportunities. For example, they observed that one reason people may be rich is that they “have connections, got the right breaks, exploited them, and made the most out of what they could.” Youth from more privileged backgrounds also were more likely to hold the government accountable: “The government wants to cut help for the needy, won’t increase the minimum wage and our educational system in some places is not that good, so they don’t have the skills to get decent jobs.” They also noted how policy contributes to inequality: “A lot of rich people are successful in what they do, but they also benefit from the U.S. government. There is not enough focus on homeless people and also the government doesn’t make it better for them.”

In contrast, rather than criticize inferior schools or government negligence it was more common for less privileged youth to hold individuals accountable. One young man whose father was a steel worker said, “I would say that the unemployed didn’t get an education and they don’t want to work because anyone can get a minimum wage job.” He explained that people are homeless because “they are lazy and don’t want to get a job. They just want people to feel sorry for them.” Similarly, a female from a poor urban area, whose vocational goal was to go to “hair school” said that “people are unemployed because they are lazy and think jobs should come to them.” Another female from this same community explained that, “poverty is something that has been going on for years, .... If you choose to be poor then that is a decision that you have to either change or deal with.” She also explained that people are rich because “sometimes people have dreams and set goals and that is what happens.” The picture these youth portray is one in which inequality is a natural state of affairs and the sorting process by which people succeed or fail is a matter of personal motivation.

Why would those who are disadvantaged by a system embrace its tenets and legitimate it? As system justification theory predicts, legitimizing the system restores a sense of confidence and control, especially for those who are confronted by and do not have other ways to manage uncertainty (Jost and Hunyady 2005). In the case of the young people in my study, justifying the system provides some consistency between their actions and beliefs. Their decision to stay in school, despite high levels of drop out in their school districts, is consistent with their belief that individuals are responsible for their fates. Conversely, if the system is the problem, ultimately they will be its victims. Furthermore, contesting the status quo would exact a heavier burden on their futures than on the futures of those who are privileged by the system.

Several studies of ethnic minority youth are relevant in this regard. Although most Americans espouse the promise of the American dream, African-American youth are more likely to harbor doubts that its specific tenets apply to members of their group (Hochschild 1995; Mickelson 1990). At the same time, young people make different choices and those decisions tend to be consistent with their beliefs: Whereas disadvantaged African-American youth who give up on their education are more likely to blame “the system” for the job ceilings African-Americans face, those who are committed to getting an education are more likely to internalize beliefs consistent with the economic and sociopolitical systems that schools promote (Ogbu and Fordham 1986). However, the choices are rather bleak: Lacking an alternative, those who are marginalized by the current system can choose to criticize and suffer the consequences, dropping out of school and making the best of minimum wage jobs, or buy into the values of the system and criticize others for their motivational failures.

Based on the reports of the young people in my study, their parents’ advice was quite clear. When asked what their parents told them about making it in America, the African-American students were more likely than their European-American peers to say they were told they should work twice as hard as others if they wanted to get a good job, they should not expect people to hand them opportunities, and if they didn’t succeed in

life, they'd have only themselves to blame. In addition, although White and Black youth were equally likely to hear that it was wrong to judge others, the parents of Black youth also warned them that there would be times in their lives when they would be the objects of prejudice. In summary, young people's lay theories about the social contract are informed by the everyday realities of how its tenets play out for people "like them".

We can compare the views of the less privileged youth quoted in an earlier passage with the sophisticated and critical but detached perspective of one white female whose father teaches college. She explained that unemployment exists "because it is a capitalist economy and is healthiest (for everybody else) if at least a certain number of people are unemployed. In a rich country, our wealth is not evenly divided." When asked about her plans after high school, she responded, "go to college, see how I like it. Maybe transfer colleges, spend a year abroad as a student. Graduate school? Depends on what I want to do."

The thought of dismissing a college education would be anathema to a young person from a less privileged background. However, there are more safety nets and second chances for the children of privilege. Their schools are not the inferior ones. If they decide to take time off from school, their families can afford to support them while they explore various interests and identities. But the theories of the poor reflect the realities of lives without safety nets, i.e., an intense belief that people's fortunes turn on their own efforts. Their views of the social contract are reinforced by their families who tell them to work twice as hard as others if they want to get a job and that they should not depend on the system or other people to bail them out (Flanagan and Tucker 1999; Flanagan, Ingram, Galloway, and Galloway 1997).

Whereas the personal fates of privileged youth are disconnected from poverty, economic hardship is a concrete possibility, not an abstraction, for youth living in low income communities. These class differences in beliefs about individual success and failure have been found in other contemporary studies. For example, Dalbert (2001) found that youth with lower levels of education were more likely to feel that the system was fair, that individuals just had to work hard, and that those who did not, deserved what they got. He reasoned that their commitment to meritocratic principles reflected the fact that they had to cope with the "randomness and unfairness encountered in the world" (2001: 62). Crosby and Mistry (2004) report similar results from their interviews with elementary school age children. Those whose families had lower incomes and those who attended a predominantly low-income school were more likely than their middle-class peers to say that individuals bore the blame for economic failures because they were unwilling to work hard or could not manage money well.

Notably, these class differences in theories about economic inequality contrast with those reported by Robert Leahy in the 1970's. In that earlier period of relative prosperity and lower inequality, Leahy (1983) reported that, regardless of their social class background, older children were more likely than younger ones to believe that individuals were responsible for their fate in life. He explained that, as they matured, all children would learn to endorse the meritocratic principles on which the American economy was based. In contrast, I maintain that with changing economic conditions, children's views of the social contract vary by social class, specifically that they vary according to how that contract plays out for people "like them".

The 1960's through the early 1970's were a period when economic growth lifted all boats. In fact, in the twenty-five years after WW II the American economy experienced sustained economic growth, rising real wages, and low unemployment that benefited most Americans. In the 1960's President Johnson even declared a federal war to end poverty. However, since that time there have been significant changes in the economy and in policies toward the poor. Compared to other industrialized nations, the United States has never spent as much of its Gross Domestic Product on social programs to reduce poverty (Smeeding, Rainwater, and Burtless 2001). However, in the 1990's our pecuniary tradition took a more egregious turn as welfare policy was reformulated in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. The sanctions and time limits in that legislation sent clear messages that government support

to needy families was not an entitlement, that personal responsibility was the rule, and that there were no long term guarantees. The message was, much as Margaret Thatcher had suggested, people could not rely on the government and would have to look to themselves.

In summary, economic restructuring and changes in welfare policies have increased economic disparities and radically changed the social contract for younger generations. A major contradiction of the new global economy is that, while many businesses, stockholders, and members of the upper middle classes prosper, the healthy economy does not lift all boats, as an older wisdom had it. The new social contract means more uncertainty and fewer safety nets for individuals and exacts a greater burden on the least privileged.

### **The Theme Of Scarcity In Youths' Narratives**

While the class position of youth in my study shaped how they thought about personal responsibility and social inequality, youth from all classes referred to job scarcity and increased competition for a shrinking supply of work, revealing their perception that contemporary capitalism had, as Sennett contends, normalized uncertainty.

- “There are a lot more people in this country than there are jobs. The unemployed are unable to compete in the modern day workforce”
- “There are so many people here and so little jobs. Everyone is in competition and there are not enough jobs to go around. Those with less education and training get shut out and are unemployed.”
- “Not many people are qualified for the jobs in our country. The job market is very strict and it helps to have connections. There is a lot of competition out there and not many places to fill.”

This is how one female whose mother is a cosmetologist said she would explain unemployment to a foreigner visiting the United States: “I would tell them for unemployment that some people didn’t graduate high school. Therefore it is hard to get a job and jobs here are becoming scarce.” A high school student from an upper middle class community explained: “It is difficult to find jobs in this country that are lucrative. Jobs created since 1970 are mostly poverty level wages which cannot secure a person’s welfare.” Note that, while both students refer to a shrinking pool of job opportunities, the more privileged youth’s analysis is more abstract, historical, and institutional. In contrast, the daughter of the cosmetologist talks about jobs “here” becoming scarce and, in the same breath, talks about the implications for those who drop out of high school. As Bettie (2003) points out in her ethnographic study of an American high-school, students tracked into vocational classes are less likely than those in college preparatory classes to learn about and analyze economic, social, and political institutions. Nonetheless, their lay theories reflect a more intimate interpretation of how these systems play out in people’s lives.

Job scarcity and the global threat to “American” jobs were common themes among youth from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds alike. Some perceived a world where the competitive edge of the American worker is jeopardized by flexible capital. Unemployment is “the fallout of the new global economy,” one youth claimed. People are out of work because, “their companies move to different states or countries,” said another. A third explained that competition and profit as a bottom line were the reasons that loyal workers had become redundant: “In a place where every one is trying to get ahead of every one else people will let a hard longtime worker go in order to hire some one for less pay.” But more commonly youth

blamed immigrants and foreigners for undercutting “American” jobs: “There are too many foreigners who are taking our American jobs for less money.”

These youth share concerns about the new global contract that Sennett described, i.e., that the ‘no long term’ rules of flexible capital loosen bonds of trust and commitment, making both skills and people disposable. In their minds the new economy not only means fewer good jobs but fewer jobs altogether and an oversupply of workers competing for a shrinking piece of the pie. Loyalty and hard work are outdated virtues, replaced by company greed and threats from “foreigners” who undercut the American standard of living by working for less pay. For those who cannot find a way to be needed, anxiety gives way to self doubt and a loss of private hopes.

### **What Can Be Done?**

The competitive, contingent, and elusive nature of the job market and the mismatch between the human capital/supply side and demand side of the economy were echoed over and over again in the youths’ statements. They said that success depends on finding the right match between what one is trained to do and the jobs that need to be filled *at a particular time*, “That some people work really hard or are in the correct job that is in need.” People who are poor “have not found the way they can be needed for a job and they don’t have the education because of bad decisions.” An African-American female, whose father had a temporary job packing auto parts, explained that people are homeless because “they took for granted that what they had was secure. Some invested all their possessions into something that failed.” Another adolescent who empathized with the unemployed reflected, “Some people fall on hard times and they lose their job and it is really hard for them to get another job. So they quit looking. They have given up hope in themselves.” Those who were more optimistic believed that individuals who fall on hard times can turn their fate around, that they can make a comeback by dint of hard work. “Due to rough economic times, they were laid off but in time, if they are persistent, they will find another job.” “They might have had a bad break in life. Maybe they lost their job and couldn’t get back up on their feet. But homeless people still need to work hard and come back.”

Whether the outcome they pictured was that people would lose hope in themselves or find a way to get back on their feet, images of insecurity and apprehension about an unpredictable future were an integral part of their narratives. As Sennett suggests, instability is meant to be normal. And the only advice for how to deal with it was to persist in the face of adversity. They recommended that individuals should deal with job loss or even homelessness by working harder and being persistent. In fact, their advice is embodied in the new industry of career coaching in which the unemployed are told to become more aware of their identity capital (Côté and Levine 2002; Ehrenreich 2005), i.e., their talents and resources, and to deploy them strategically by networking, reframing, and selling themselves. The demands of the ever changing workplace mean that individuals must be prepared to retrain and retool and to be “proactive in reframing their very identities” (Giddens 2000: 65).

Personalities, values, and belief systems evolve as people negotiate the rules of their social contract at particular historical moments. In an era when industries were located in and identified with particular communities, loyalty to the company was a virtue, symbolized by the gold watch at retirement. Today, the image of a career ladder is gone and loyalty to the company serves neither managers nor entry level workers well. In their recent study of low-wage workers, economists Andersson, Holzer, and Lane (2005) find that “moving on” to different employers is a more remunerative strategy than is staying with the same company and gradually, in small increments, “moving up.” In this regard, we can see the way in which the tenets of neoliberal capital shape every level of the system. Flexibility and reinventing oneself have replaced loyalty and authenticity as virtues to cultivate and networking has replaced a self anchored in stable long term relationships with co-workers.

The following quotes from two high-school students capture a shared perception that capitalism affords individuals both opportunities and risks and that a true American takes the gamble.

The U.S. is a capitalistic society. While we try to avoid unemployment, it is inevitable. It is true of any nation. Due to new technology and global competition, some unemployment is inevitable. Our society is built so you can make your own life; the way a democracy was formed is to make your own life.”

\* \* \*

No country has no unemployment. America is no exception. America is a capitalistic country. There are the poor and there are the rich. There are also those people in the middle. But the poor do not have to stay poor, and if they work hard enough, there are many avenues to success that can be taken by many. That is part of the American dream

But when asked, “When you hear on the news about a company or a plant closing down, what is your reaction?” this same youth replies, “I feel more tense about the reality of the increase in unemployed workers. I also feel worried about the effects on the economy and perhaps my own employment in my future if it was a company or a plant I was interested in. I also would feel the shock of reality in a capitalistic society.”

Political views are the languages of explanation we employ to account for problems in society. In the past several decades psychologists have engaged in a popular discourse which categorizes youth or at least certain youth as “at risk.”<sup>3</sup> The term refers to those young people presumed to be destined for failure either because of their social background, disabilities, or imprudent choices. Disproportionately, those classified as “youth at risk” come from families who are poor, female-headed, or ethnic minorities. By pathologizing individuals and transferring risk onto their shoulders, the “youth at risk” paradigm fits well the terms of the new social contract of neoliberalism. Rather than critique a system that has individualized problems generated by social and global forces, this paradigm frames the problem in individual terms. The discourse lacks a sociological imagination that appreciates that “personal troubles are very often also problems shared by others, and more importantly, not capable of solution by any one individual but only by modifications of the structure of groups ... and sometimes the structure of the entire society” (Mills 1959: 186).

Anxiety, self-doubt, and distrust are personal troubles for individuals who can imagine only private solutions to the public problems engendered by flexible capital. The modern day workplace, as the adolescent quoted earlier described it, is ever changing and everyone is in competition for a shrinking pool of jobs. No amount of personal retooling will resolve this dilemma and, in a context of the roll back of trade unions, collective identity and actions around work have been deligitimized. But what alternatives are there? As Sennett poses the current dilemma, how are we to organize our life histories in a capitalism which disposes us to drift?

### **Engaging Hope: Collective Futures**

In the second part of the paper I focus on another narrative of the future imagined by youth who are engaged in various forms of political activism. Here I draw from the distinction

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<sup>3</sup> A keyword search of the PsychInfo data base revealed that, while there were no articles using the term in the 1970's, there was a steady climb from 1% in the early 1980's to more than 9% of the youth articles in the data base in 2005 referring to “at risk” youth.

that C. Douglas Lummis (1996) makes between private and public hope. By private hope he means an individual's belief that his/her own life will go well, that s/he will earn a good living and achieve personal success, even if others do not. Public hope, in contrast, reflects a belief that, if people pull together, they can effect change that will benefit them all. To have public hope one has to invest one's time and energy in building a larger sense of community.

The current generation of young Americans grew up in the years when public goods and services were eroding. Currently, public schools in many states are threatened by government supported voucher programs that enable families to buy private schooling. Since the enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, social welfare is now considered a personal rather than a public responsibility. And deregulation of media, airlines, and the health care industry has undermined the government's role as guardian of the public welfare. Despite this erosion of a public consciousness in government policies, many members of the younger generation are investing in public hope by engaging in collective actions that benefit society, not just themselves. I discuss several characteristics of these new social movements, noting, at the outset, that some reflect forms of privilege, including access to the Internet, money and time to travel, and infrastructures that institutions such as universities provide.

Based on conventional political indicators (voting in elections, keeping informed by reading newspapers, joining trade unions or professional organizations) the younger generation appears to be politically disengaged. In part, this is because they consider the electoral arena ineffectual (Galston 2001) and/or perceive that elites are the only voices in mainstream political discourse. In addition, political issues increasingly transcend the borders of states. The transnational reach of institutions such as the WTO or World Bank or of multi-national corporations means that they are less likely to be held accountable by the classic mechanisms of representative governments in nation-states. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of organizations and public protests that target transnational rather than national or local political entities (Imig and Tarrow 2000; Smith 2004) and, compared to their elders, youth are more likely to engage in such movements (Norris 1999).

The political narratives of younger generations involved in transnational activism turn a spotlight on the gap between the power these institutions hold over people's lives and the lack of accountability to the very people affected by their policies (see also Weiss, this volume). Transnational activists are contesting the inequalities and lack of accountability inherent in the new world order by, to borrow from C. Wright Mills, insisting that "all power to make decisions be publicly legitimated and that the makers of such decisions be held accountable" (Mills 1959: 188). They challenge multinational corporations and governance and focus on three justice themes: fairness in labor, in environmental, and in procedural practices (Juris 2006).

Contemporary political movements also combine utopian sentiments with pragmatism. They believe, as the slogan of the World Social Forum, suggests that "Another World is Possible" (Ponniiah 2004). At the same time, there is a pragmatic attitude of getting things done that manifests in a willingness to build coalitions across groups who share some common goals but may differ radically in their ultimate political agendas. For example, if environmental preservation is the goal, animal welfare activists have to partner with hunters to preserve open spaces, even sometimes with developers to preserve the dwindling supply of green spaces. The politics of younger generations also reflect an awareness of scarcity. Words like stewardship and sustainability figure prominently in the discourse and there is a recognition that natural resources are limited, that there is an unequal distribution of access to and utilization of those resources, and that profligate actions can squander them. In this regard, activists may differ from the modal youth of their generation. National trends in high-school seniors' attitudes over the past three decades point to precipitous declines in beliefs that resources are scarce and in behaviors to conserve resources and simultaneous increases in materialist values, consumerism, and beliefs that science and technology will solve problems of scarcity (Wray and Flanagan, 2006).

Not surprisingly youth also are cognizant of the political implications of their personal decisions, especially in consumption (Bennett, 1998; Stolle and Micheletti 2006). The so called “lifestyle” politics of younger generations reflects an awareness that individual choices - of what to eat or wear or what modes of transportation to use – have moral implications for the environment, for public resources, for the health of the oceans and animals, and the health and safety of labor throughout the world. According to surveys in the United States, consumer politics is a method used by about half of 15-25 year olds (as well as about one-third of their elders) to voice their political views. They boycott companies whose policies they do not support and buycott or support with their consumption those they do (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, and Jenkins 2003 available on CIRCLE website, [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)). Similar trends have been found among youth in Canada and Europe (Stolle and Micheletti 2006). Consumer politics may also reflect youth’s sense that their actions can have a greater impact on the market than on national politics. As noted, globalization has weakened the ability of nations to hold corporations accountable. Political consumerism is a way that individuals can act locally in a global marketplace and more “glocal” organizations (Wellman 2001) are helping people understand such connections.

The United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) is a good example. On university campuses across the United States students have contested the labor practices of multi-national corporations operating in the developing world where their university’s logo wear is produced. Students press the administration of their universities to contract only with sites where proper monitoring of labor practices is enforced. USAS members educate fellow students by appealing to the identity of the alma mater and the affront that sweatshop conditions are to their values and reputation (Ballinger 2006). USAS has expanded its efforts to fair labor practices at home in their campaign challenging Wal Mart and educating consumers about the working conditions and wages of its employees.

Another example of political activism that exposes inauthentic corporate appeals to consumers is the work of the truth<sup>®</sup> campaign, the youth-engagement arm of the American Legacy Foundation, an independent public-health organization. With innovative technology and in-your-face, hard-hitting ads, the truth<sup>®</sup> campaign exposes corporate tobacco’s targeted appeals to young people and urges youth to take a stand against them. Apparently the truth matters: The campaign has been acknowledged by Monitoring the Future which tracks teen trends in alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use as one of the reasons that teen tobacco use has declined in recent years (Scheve and Syvertsen 2006).

Culture jamming/adbusting is one of the tools used by anti-corporate, animal rights, and anti-sweatshop activists to educate consumers about corporate duplicity. Culture jamming utilizes a company’s marketing strategy to satirize the company’s values by revealing the truth behind their practices. The prototypical culture jam was the political use of Nike’s invitation for customers to personalize/customize shoes by ordering a unique logo on them. Then MIT graduate student Jonah Peretti ordered a pair with the word “sweatshop” on them. The new youth politics also takes advantage of cultural forms like hip hop that thrive on morphing and of technologies that enable the autonomous reconstruction of meaning. The structure of these forms means that more voices and perspectives can be included in the political process. For the past decade an Independent Media Movement (IndyMedia) has been active in using alternative avenues to mainstream media to insure that other voices are heard. And the increasing reliance of mainstream media on ‘citizen journalists’ using their cell phones to record historic moments points to the fact that the borders between alternative and mainstream can be porous.

With respect to organizational style, young activists tend to encourage direct democracy and take full advantage of the democratic potential of the Internet to share information, to network, and organize (Ponniiah 2004). Many have been inspired by the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN). Rooted in the struggles of indigenous peoples in Chiapas, Mexico, the Zapatistas use 21<sup>st</sup> century technology (fax, cell phones, computers) to draw attention to the

impacts of free trade on indigenous people (Constantino 2006). The egalitarian structure and gender conscious practices of this movement also herald a new organizational form that transnational activists try to emulate.

Transnational activists have educated the public about new multi-national entities such as the G-8 or World Trade Organization by timing public protests to coincide with their meetings and by using highly visible street theatre to gain attention from the mainstream media. Their new style of politics encourages autonomy, creativity, and entrepreneurship, traits that flexible capital itself celebrates. In contrast to the centralized and hierarchical organizational structures of political parties or trade unions, transnational activists choose to work in loose networks with flexible memberships. They are united by values and world views rather than by organizational membership or rules.

Leadership is dispersed rather than centralized and decision making horizontal rather than vertical. One organization, the Movement for Global Resistance (MGR) once referred to itself as a movement without members (Juris 2006). In fact, the episodic and spontaneous character of many of the new political forms may be one of the attractive features of this style of activism. Individuals can move in and out of groups rather freely and one is mainly accountable to oneself. Creative use of the Internet means that more organizing can be virtual rather than face to face. Although some committed core group has to plan large events, with instant messaging and the Internet massive numbers can be rallied for demonstrations or events with relatively short notice. At the same time, it is too early to tell whether a movement can be sustained with virtual connections, flexible memberships, and accountability to oneself. Email may make it easier to inform and organize large numbers in a short time but there may be costs of the Internet anonymity for organizational recruitment and commitment. Yet, social activism typically depends on a core group of committed and the Internet may broaden the space for fellow travelers. It also is worth noting that media are most effective when intrinsic motivation for particular actions are high. For example, when Penn State's 2007 spring break meant that students would be gone from town for the annual St. Patrick's Day drinking celebrations, Facebook provided the means for rallying thousands to celebrate an early alternative version of the holiday.

The themes of public accountability, of scarcity and the erosion of public goods and services also are evident in youth activism in poor communities. Whereas transnational activists are more likely to be young adults and often college students, young activists in impoverished communities are more often teenagers working in collaboration with adults. Like those students in the rustbelt who are trapped in inferior schools, these young activists also attend inferior schools. But rather than dealing with those inequities in private they are raising them as public issues, in part because they are channeling anxiety and frustration into analysis and action in programs where they partner with adult mentors. Groups like the Educational Opportunity Gap Project in New York and New Jersey, Youth Organizing Communities in California, the Philadelphia Student Union in Pennsylvania, and Students 4 Justice/Colorado Progressive Coalition are organizing, often with teachers, to improve facilities, fight budget cuts, insist on more accountability and student voice in the public schools, and challenge inequalities in the allocation of resources (Torre and Fine 2006). In fact, many of the projects youth take up reflect a fight for basic needs such as textbooks in public schools, travel subsidies for students who use public transportation to get to school, or green spaces near public housing. But the activism itself heralds a new form of youth development programs.

In these new models of community youth development (CYD) young people's frustrations and anger are channeled towards social change. Rather than pressing youth to accommodate to the status quo or identifying risk laden youth as the problem, in youth organizing and activism, young people are encouraged to contest the way things are (Watts and Flanagan, in press). To do so, they learn how to gather information and critically analyze the issues, including the power dynamics and politics that underlie them and, as a result, are more strategic thinkers (Larson and Hanson, 2005). Groups like Youth in Focus or SOYAC (Serving Our Youth and

Communities) train underrepresented groups in Youth Led Action Research techniques including gathering and critically analyzing information, evaluating policy decisions, and planning and executing action plans (London 2006). Adults who are sensitive to age-based inequities of power and knowledge partner with young people, serve as their mentors, and connect them to resources. The process of political commitment occurs as young people develop a sense of solidarity with others, appreciating the connection between their own experiences of oppression and those of other youth and realizing that collective action is necessary to bring about change (Pearce and Larson, 2006).

When they learn how to analyze the political and economic bases of social issues, young people develop a political consciousness that helps them deal with personal experiences of oppression (Watts, Griffith, and Abdul-Adil, 1999). Nonetheless, there are challenges to making these new youth-adult partnership models work, even for those who contest the more common asymmetrical relationships of power between generations. To make these partnering models work, training of and support for individuals and practice guided by regular reflection between the youth and adult partners are essential (Camino 2000; HoSang 2001).

Youth activism and organizing are part of a larger change in mainstream youth development and community based organizations (part of the trend focusing on positive youth development) which increasingly feature young people in authentic leadership and decision making roles. Examples include youth-led community organizations, public policy consultation, community coalitions for youth development, and decision making in non-profit organizations (Camino and Zeldin 2002). Many of the young people in these programs are similar in age and background to the marginalized youth featured in the first part of my paper. But the very experience of being connected to other youth and adults in an organization provides a larger sense of community and the experience of being part of the decision making process in these organizations enables youth to see how, collectively, they can solve public problems that we share.

In contrast to therapeutic interventions that target youth as “risky” -- deficient, dangerous, or needy--the newer models reframe youth and the notion of risk. They begin with the assumption that youth are assets to their communities, and that, given the opportunities, they will contribute to rather than drain community resources. Indeed, the fact that youth are more willing than their elders to take risks is an asset that can revitalize organizations and communities. Historically, youthful risk taking, idealism, and commitment has invigorated movements for social change. For example, in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa it was the militancy of youth that rejuvenated the African National Congress (Ngomane and Flanagan 2003). In the United States, it was the risks taken by the youth who comprised the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) that revitalized Civil Rights organizations such as the NAACP (Oberschall 1989).

Perhaps because youth insist on authenticity, their involvement in contemporary youth-adult partnerships appears to bring both the adults and the organization back to their core values (Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, and Calvert 2000). These new institutional models provide spaces where young people are free to explore alternative selves and to evaluate the challenges and choices before them with a fresh lens. Rather than encouraging young people to capitalize on individual assets for private gain, these programs promote the power of collective identity and shared leadership (Lewis-Charp, Yu, Soukamneuth, and Lacoé 2003). In certain ways these models differ from the more fluid and flexible forms of political activism discussed earlier. Although egalitarian forms of leadership are common in both, Community Youth Development organizations are more likely to be based on face to face contact and thus may engender more accountability to one another when compared to the fluid membership of activist groups organized in virtual space.

In summary, the new narratives and forms of youth civic engagement reflect both an awareness of globalization and the interconnection of local and global issues as well as new

organizational forms that encourage the kinds of inventiveness, flexibility, creativity, and change that global communications portend. Political action helps to make public the private fears associated with uncertainty. It provides sources of social connectedness and support, the “larger sense of community and fuller sense of character” to which Sennett alludes.

### **Re-generations**

In any historical period youth embody the collective anxieties of their society as well as its hopes for the future. Each new generation contributes to social change by reinterpreting the social contract that is the legacy of earlier generations (Mannheim 1952). More than their elders, youth represent the possibilities of the future rather than the patterns of the past. And, more than their elders, the choices young people make today are linked to their images of what the future holds and the possible selves they envision. Thus, the tensions in the narratives sketched in this paper are a good barometer for society. Focusing on youth helps us appreciate the new set of choices that globalization presents us and the kind of world those different choices portend. We can choose private or public hope.

In *Radical Democracy*, C. Douglas Lummis reflects on Rousseau’s conclusion that the social contract is the basis on which human beings could live in an orderly community and still be free. Lummis concludes that democratic faith, a belief that people will choose public over private goods, is essential for that contract to work.

Democratic faith is the decision to believe that a world of democratic trust is possible because we can see it in each person sometimes. It is the decision to believe in what people can be on the basis of what they are sometimes. It is the decision to believe that each polity and each person contains the possibility of a democratic version of itself. It is the belief that as people are free, they are free to become that, too. None of this has been proved, but neither can it be disproved. One is free to believe either way (1996:154).

Understanding the anxieties, risks, and hopes of youth as they imagine the future is an essential part of this picture.

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