



The Tumbleweed Society: Working and Caring in an Age of Insecurity

Allison J. Pugh

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Today we live in a society in which relationships, social ties, and jobs seem to change constantly. People roll this way and that, like tumbleweeds blown across an arid plain. Yet we know little about the broader impact of job insecurity and uncertainty in our lives.

In *The Tumbleweed Society*, Allison Pugh offers a moving exploration of sacrifice, betrayal, defiance, and resignation, as people adapt to insecurity with their own negotiations of commitment on the job and in intimate life. When people no longer expect commitment from their employers, how do they think about their own obligations? How do we raise children, put down roots in our communities, and live up to our promises at a time when flexibility and job insecurity reign?

Based on eighty in-depth interviews with parents who vary in their experiences of job insecurity and socio-economic status, Pugh finds that most people accept job insecurity as inevitable, even as many maintain high standards for their own dedication: a "one-way honor system" in which workers are beholden but employers are not. But while many seem to either embrace or resign themselves to insecurity at work, they try to hold off that insecurity from infiltrating their home lives. Erecting a "moral wall" to corral the maelstrom at work, however, comes with a price. Placing nearly all of their hopes for enduring connections on their intimate relationships, she argues, can place intolerable stress on their intimate lives, often sparking the very instability they long to avoid.

By shining a light on how we ourselves adapt-and prepare our children-for the new environment of uncertainty, Allison Pugh gives us a finely detailed portrait of what commitment and obligation mean today.

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