

# Work, Identity, and Purpose

- ▶ Agenda:
  - ▶ Education and work—current challenges
  - ▶ Future of work and education
  - ▶ Identity and purpose in an age of uncertainty



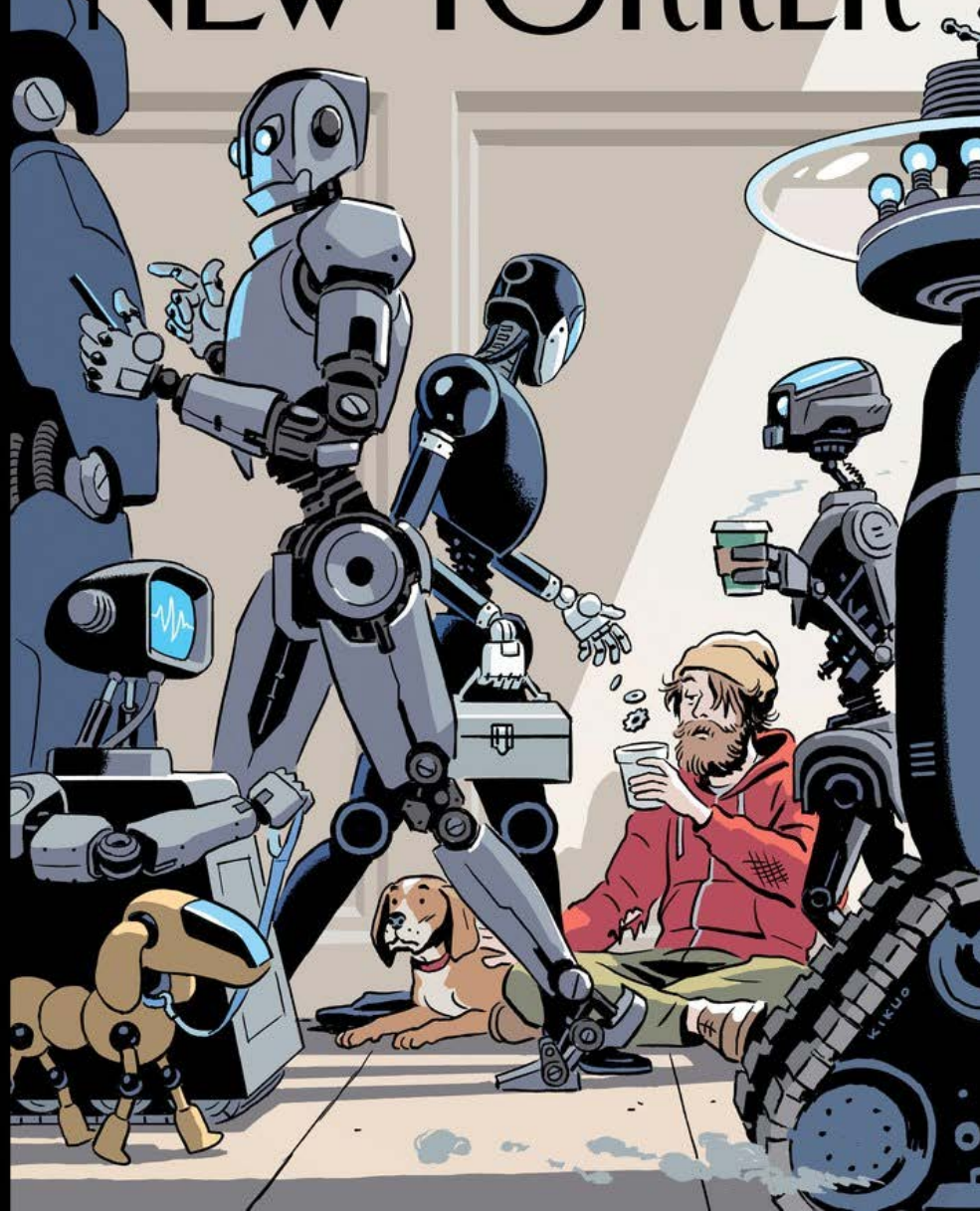
# An Experience-Near Beginning: Work in America

- ▶ **Boston College Working Project participant**
- ▶ Bankruptcy---I felt like a failure in that I wasn't able to change and market myself well, or adjust to the changes in the recording industry. There was an emotional and mental impact on me that hit me, and it happened to be at the same time that my ex-wife was having an affair. So, the divorce was impending, the bankruptcy was impending...and my decision-making was deteriorating. And that's what led to my car accident and prison eventually...That was probably the darkest time in my life, because all my identity - again, for me as a man, my identity is in my work - and you know, my marriage, and both those things were falling - my twin towers - were falling apart.

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# THE NEW YORKER



# Education and Work: A Marriage of Convenience?

- ▶ Current status of the relationship:
  - ▶ The needs of the marketplace have long sought to dictate educational policies and practices.





# Education and Work: A Current Challenge

- ▶ Current Narrative:
  - ▶ Study hard and play by the rules.
- ▶ Work is changing radically.
- ▶ How do we infuse meaning and purpose into schools if the workplace no longer offers meaningful work for all?

# The Shifting Work Context

- ▶ Impact of automation and technology
- ▶ Inequality
- ▶ Rise of precarious work
- ▶ Growing levels of instability at work
- ▶ Increases in length and impact of long-term unemployment
- ▶ Deindustrialization
- ▶ Growth in ill-informed solutions to the problems about work and security

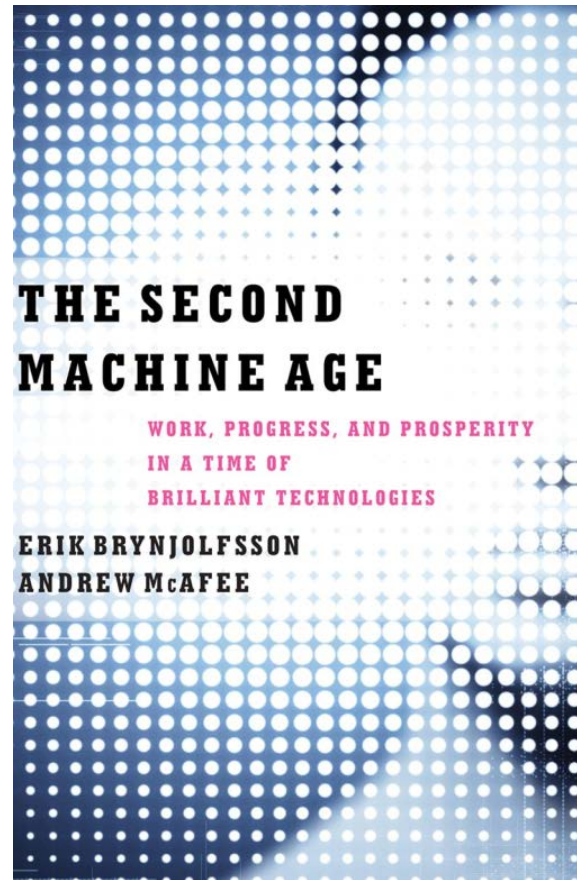
Almost  
**one in three**  
working U.S.  
families **struggle** to  
meet basic needs.







# The Second Machine Age



The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies” recounts changes that are radical, somewhat unexpected, and transformative:

# Implications of the Second Machine Age for Work and Careers

- ▶ Computers that can think are transforming the workplace.
- ▶ Robots are common in factories and warehouses.
- ▶ Lower skilled jobs are being replaced by technology.







# Alternatives to the Second Machine Age Vision

- ▶ The OECD published a report in 2015 on working in light of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

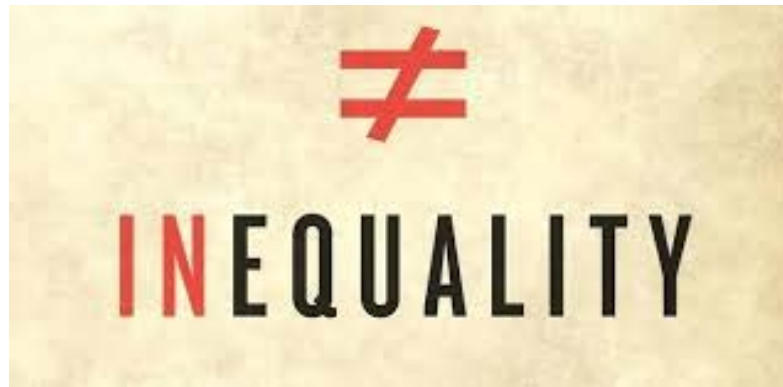


# OECD report

- ▶ Prior to summarizing these possible futures, the OECD report did highlight some good news.
  - ▶ More than two billion people emerged from extreme poverty over the last four decades.
  - ▶ Unskilled workers have seen real increases in their wages
  - ▶ Life expectancy has improved
  - ▶ Literacy is more widespread than ever.

# General findings from the OECD report

- ▶ The positive outlook about poverty reduction is tempered by two disturbing trends:
  - ▶ Growing inequality
  - ▶ Notable reductions in job creation.



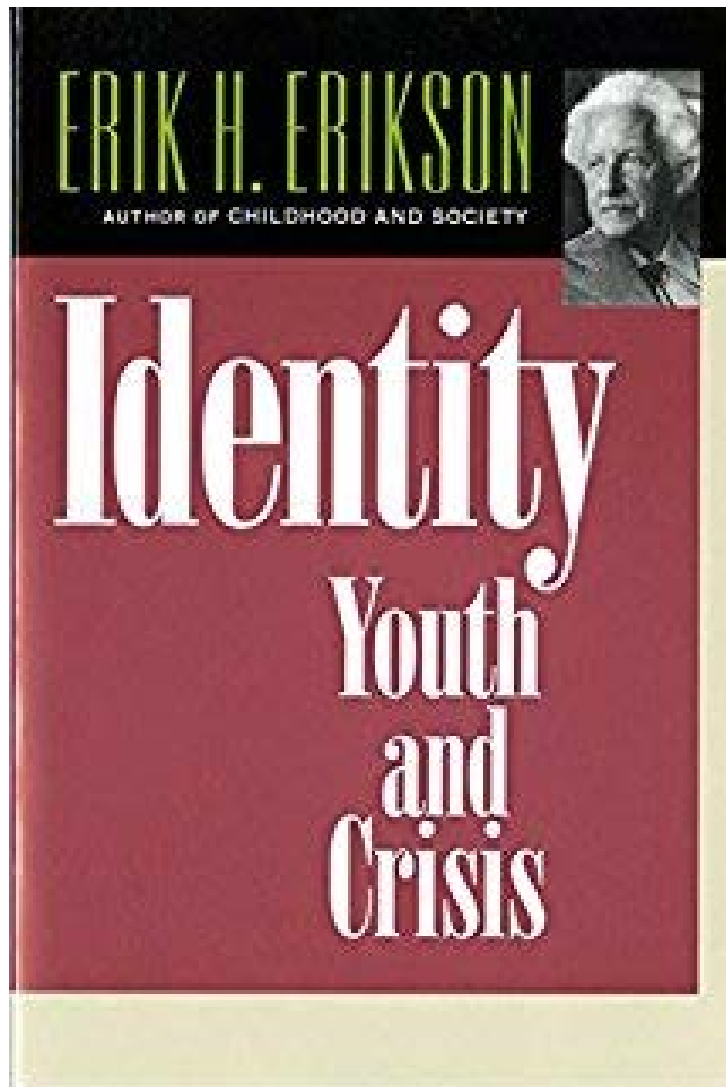


# National Academy of Sciences Report

- ▶ Advances in technology will result in major changes in the workplace.
- ▶ Income inequality is a function to some degree of automation at work.
- ▶ Artificial Intelligence is just beginning
- ▶ Creativity, adaptability, and interpersonal skills will be more important than ever.

# Identity in an Age of Uncertainty

- ▶ Identity development:
  - ▶ Psychology in context.
- ▶ Our contexts provide a means for us to understand ourselves and to derive meaning about ourselves.
- ▶ Where have you gone Erik Erikson? Our nation turns its lonely eyes to you...



# Identity in an Age of Uncertainty

- ▶ Identity in the age of uncertainty....
- ▶ The nature of identity is becoming more fluid.
  - ▶ The moorings upon which we root ourselves are insecure.



# Purpose in an Age of Uncertainty

- ▶ Both education and work have provided powerful vehicles for the nurturance of purpose.



# Research on the Age of Uncertainty

- ▶ Boston College Working Project
- ▶ In-depth interviews with 61 adults across the U.S. on their working lives.
- ▶ In relation to identity and purpose, the trends are clear.
  - ▶ People strive to connect to work for many reasons, including survival.
  - ▶ Work evokes many layers of meaning.

# How do we steer education and work moving forward?

- ▶ Intentionally and carefully....
- ▶ First, we should not leave these issues to chance or to the “market”.
- ▶ Second, the future of work, while daunting, in my view, can be managed and shaped by intentional and ethical values and by an educated and critically-thinking citizenry.



# Steering the Future of Work

- ▶ Create work:
  - ▶ Economically sanctioning caregiving work.
  - ▶ Create work, based on fair tax policy and fair distribution of resources:
  - ▶ Creativity
  - ▶ Empathy and caregiving work
  - ▶ Public leaders need to develop just and humane policies about the role of work in people's lives



# Steering the Future of Work

- ▶ Share Work:
  - ▶ People do not need to work 35-40 hours a week.
  - ▶ People can share jobs and develop other activities that are meaningful.
- ▶ Reduce inequality:



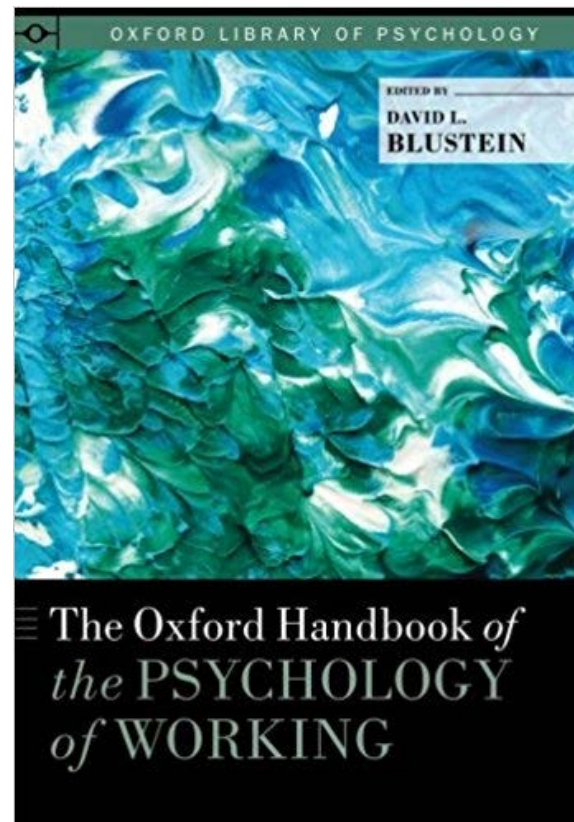
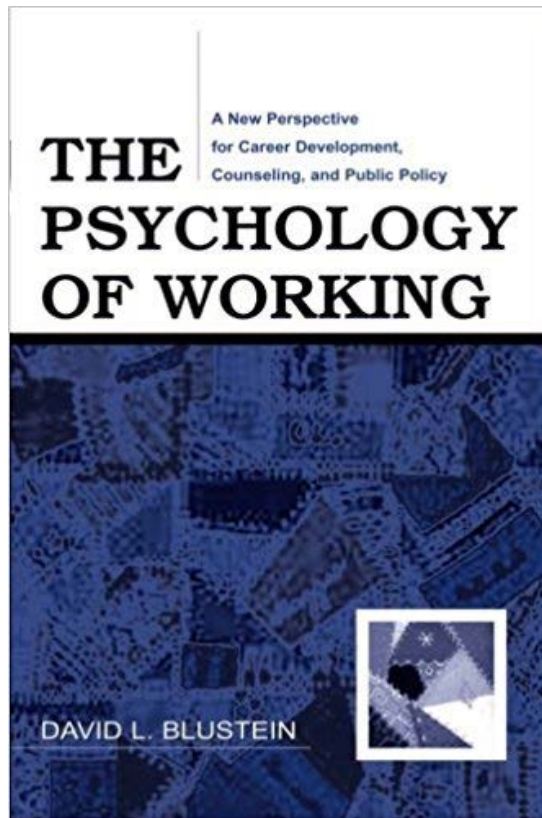
# Steering the Future of Education

- ▶ Infuse critical thinking more explicitly into educational practices.
  - ▶ Critical consciousness
  - ▶ Humanities and literature
- ▶ Educate people for engaged and critical citizenship.
- ▶ Educated people will not settle for a class-oriented society.

# Conclusion

- ▶ Weaving purpose and meaning into this dialogue is both difficult and necessary.
- ▶ The education and work linkage is more complex and less stable.
- ▶ An educated citizenry is essential for ensuring that we keep our eyes on equality, intentional planning for work for all, and shared resources.

# For Further Information...



# Thank You!

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