'Their Risks Are My Risks': On Shared Risk Epistemologies, Including Altruistic Fear for Companion Animals^[1]

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Abstract

This paper builds in two ways on previous sociological studies concerning how people experience risk. Firstly, we discuss how risk is experienced in shared or altruistic ways as concern for others, and thus how emotions regarding risks produce solidarity. Secondly, we consider in particular how the others for whom one becomes concerned are not always people, and are sometimes instead companion animals such as cats and dogs, thus expanding the analysis beyond anthropocentrism and towards 'animal-human symmetry'. Previous studies that have examined the shared or altruistic elements of fear (eg Warr, 1992) focus narrowly on crime. Those that broaden out to consider other risks besides crime (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002) do not include companion animals as subjects about whom people have concern. The article draws examples from open-ended interviews conducted in Ottawa, Canada, demonstrating how these themes arise as people narrate their experiences of risk, and pointing to the need for future research.

Keywords: *Risk, Fear, Emotions, Solidarity, Companion Animals*

Introduction

1.1 Underpinning the risk society thesis (Beck, 1999) is the idea of individualization. Traditional forms of social organization like community, family and gender are said to tend to dissipate into more chaotic situations where individuals must invent new lifestyles, for themselves and by themselves (Beck, 1999). Such accounts of this purportedly "categorical shift" (Beck, 1992:127) in social relations, however, tend to be hypothetical and speculative, rather than grounded in empirical research into how people actually understand and respond to risk (Lupton, 2006; Doyle, 2007). Related to this lack of empirical grounding, the risk society thesis, broadly construed, is limited by some difficulties we address in this paper. The individualization argument (the idea that communal bonds are dissolving) apparent in the risk society thesis ignores the point that risk not only individualizes but conversely also promotes solidarity. There is an array of theorists that may be understood as analyzing how risk and perceived threat produces social solidarity at broader levels, dating back to Durkheim (see Garland, 1990, on Durkheim's analysis of crime, punishment and solidarity), and also including, for example, the work of Mary Douglas (1994) and theories of moral panic (Cohen, 2001) as well as other writing in the collective behaviour tradition (see Marx and MacAdam, 2004). We focus here on solidarity among small groups, groups mostly around the size of the traditional family. We suggest that such small group solidarity created in relation to risk is still central to how people organize and make sense of their lives. While 'family' often may no longer take traditional forms, small groups are often still understood in terms of narratives of family. As critics argue, writings about the risk society focus only on certain facets of how people experience risk, to the neglect of others. For example, such writings focus too narrowly on pervasive fear and overly on constructing the human subject as simply risk-averse (Elliot, 2002; Mythen, 2008). One dimension that is neglected in such accounts is the way that so-called negative emotions like fear and anxiety related to risk can also foster communal bonds.

1.2 Beck's ontology of risk assumes that these systems-level changes envelop people's experiences and interactions (Hier, 2008). However, working to empirically ground risk society theorizing, Lupton and Tulloch (2001) use qualitative research to link people's experiences of risk to their biographies, offering a more nuanced vision. Each person, situated uniquely in the life course, varies in how they experience and talk about risk (Tulloch and Lupton, 2003). Lupton and Tulloch use the term "risk epistemology" to refer to a set of relatively durable dispositions towards risk that instruct the relationship between the risk knower, their

life course, and how they understand risk. Lupton and Tulloch interpretively inquire into how people narrate their experiences of various risks instead of prejudging this question, as the grand theorizing of Beck does.

1.3 Building upon Lupton and Tulloch's contribution, in this paper we consider the role of emotions like fear in how shared senses of risk emerge in small groups. Lash (2000) refers to risk-based sociality as 'risk culture'. Lash argues the risk society thesis is too concerned with institutions and social systems. Ignored are local sense-making practices in relation to risk. The idea of 'risk culture' moves the analysis away from the systems theory orientation of Beck and down to the scale on which people communicate and socialize. Families have always been similar, albeit institutionalized, miniature 'risk cultures', although whom people consider as family, perhaps increasingly, may not fit with traditional institutionalized definitions of family. Similarly, Tulloch and Lupton (2003) write that people develop 'shared risk epistemologies', spread over more than one person. In such cases, what people judge as risky is what could be seen as risky for their children, spouses or workmates, for example. We conceptualize shared risk epistemologies as forms of knowing, sometimes tacit, that underpin risk cultures.

1.4 Lash (2000) argues that forms of risk-based sociality are also emotional cultures. Emotions have been defined in a variety of ways in previous research. Some literature has understood them as purely psychological phenomena residing entirely in the individual, and sometimes reduced them to mere physical or biological symptoms; in another, converse way of thinking, emotions have been understood as purely cultural-discursive constructs, so that emotions are reduced to simply 'talk about emotions'. Focusing too much on individual psychology and physiology ignores the role of the social and cultural and renders emotion as something akin to an innate drive, whereas too much focus on discursive emotion scripts can leave us with a theory of the human subject as a cultural dope completely at the mercy of such scripts (Harding and Pribram, 2002). Emotions should be understood instead as neither fully individual nor cultural; that is, in short, emotions are relational. The individualization supposition (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) of the risk society thesis ignores other facets of the relationship between risk and sociality. We wish to highlight here how emotions concerning risk, in contrast to the notion of individualization, may have a solidarity-producing potential. Risk culture forms through the productiveness of emotions in binding people who share concern for each other regarding things they understand and narrate as risks. Focusing on solidarity formed through a shared sense of risk shows so-called negative emotions like fear overlap with "feel-good emotions" (Planalp, 1999) in engendering social bonds.

1.5 In this paper we focus on the subjective and biographical specificities of knowing and dealing with risk and illustrate with a small number of examples drawn from a selection of interview respondents from Ottawa, Canada.^[2] We are interested in children, intimate partners and parents as the humans that shared risk epistemologies form around. However, we go further than Tulloch and Lupton's (2003) work on shared risk epistemologies, by also working to achieve some symmetry in the treatment of human subjects and companion animals as the figures towards whom such concern is oriented. Save for some notable exceptions (Arluke and Sanders, 1996; Serpell, 1996; Haraway, 2003; Eddy, 2003), social science has ignored the role of animals in the lives of humans, and constituted animals as objects instead of beings with whom we have primary relationships. In a number of these interviews, talk about companion animals figured as prominently as talk about children, parents and intimate partners. People have meaningful relationships with companion animals, yet researchers have not explored the ways in which companion animals become part of social networks (Charles and Davies, 2008). We will argue in particular that companion animals are drawn into networks of sociality and emotions related to risk.

1.6 The paper is organized in four parts. First we assess the literature concerning fear and risk in everyday life, in order to build up a theoretical discussion concerning the emotional dynamics of shared risk epistemologies. Next, we situate these writings against a framework arguing for human-animal symmetry in social science that accounts for narrated risk and narrativized emotions as they concern both humans *and* companion animals. After commenting briefly on the interpretive method of this study, we discuss various examples of respondents' narratives that espouse various contours of shared risk epistemologies as shaped by their position in networks of risk-based sociality. These both illustrate our arguments and suggest further avenues for research. We conclude by discussing briefly how the notions of human-animal symmetry and shared risk epistemologies are contributions to the sociology of emotions and the sociology of risk in everyday life.

From Fear of Crime to Risk and Emotions

2.1 A number of authors have empirically investigated the role of fear as it regards so-called criminal events (Hollway and Jefferson, 1997; Sparks, Girling and Loader, 2001; Jackson, 2004). These authors argue 'fear of crime' as an analytical concept may not be useful for discussing the way people experience and make sense of potentially undesirable events. Jackson (2005:301) contends that to focus on fear is to ignore other emotions that feature prominently in public responses to crime and other risks. Previous research has overestimated the extent of fear of crime (Gray et al., 2008). Previous research regarding fear of crime has also poorly conceptualized emotions more generally (Lee, 2007).

2.2 There is crossover potential between fear of crime research and writings about risk (Jackson, 2006). Crime is of course only one of many forms of risk that are experienced in the contemporary world. While there is a massive body of research regarding 'fear of crime', crime is less salient than other risks for large numbers of people. A "life course trajectory" of risk-taking and risk-avoidance is examined and analyzed by Lupton and Tulloch (2002) in their study of risk and everyday life. Tulloch and Lupton (2001:21) stress their research "is strong on the ways in which people narrativise risk, and how they situate personal and social risk...". One rationale for focusing on stories instead of quantitative indicators in studying emotions related to crime, and to risk more generally, is that what fear of crime and other risks means to any person must be situated in relation to their biography and the particular experiences they have had over their life course (also see Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Ditton and Chadee, 2006). For example, Lupton and Tulloch found that, unsurprisingly, gender is often crucial to understanding experiences of risk.

2.3 What do we mean by ‘risk epistemology’? We use the term risk epistemology to refer to a way of thinking that shapes how risk can be known and narrated by the subject. Epistemology involves not only thought and language but also emotions. The term risk epistemology allows us to think about how biography manifests in the present through narration of risk. Yet risk is not made sense of all by one’s self. Risk is often made sense of within one’s interpretive network. Sociality that forms around a shared sense of risk is what Lash (2000) calls risk culture. Lash argues the risk society thesis puts too much weight on rational, institutional responses to risk and ignores the “non-institutional and anti-institutional sociations” (pg. 47) based on emotions that, Lash argues, are more pivotal in how people make sense of everyday risks. These sociations are emotional communities that engender common bonds in the face of risk.

2.4 Solidarity entails a set of people energized and bonded by emotions. A shared mood demarcates the group and prevents outsiders from entering (Collins, 1982). Bonding in relation to risk is recursive; drawing another being into a network of risk-based sociality simultaneously creates risk. In other words, forming a bond requires closeness and emotional investment in another being, creating new risks for us, if something threatens that other being. Such a bond leads to awareness of what the other considers risky, informing one’s own sense of risk.

2.5 In this paper we try to conceive of emotions differently than the fear of crime literature and related research on the sociology of risk have done previously. What if we did not start from the assumption that these emotions lead to defensive behavior? Instead of trying to sum up people’s experiences with reference to a singular emotion category, perhaps we should focus on an intersecting and sometimes contradictory palette of emotions occurring simultaneously. In particular, the point that solidarity is formed through a shared sense of risk suggests that so-called negative emotions are not mutually exclusive from, but instead overlap with, “feel-good emotions” (Planalp, 1999). Solidarity entails the joy of being with others. The joy of solidarity overlaps with fear oriented towards risks. The so-called negative emotions most often thought of as responses to risk can be broken down, for example into fear, anxiety and worry (see Jackson, 2005).^[3] We are arguing that these emotions can also be analyzed as overlapping in complex clusters with other emotions (eg. joy) oriented towards altruism and care. Our relations often intersect in ways that give rise to emotions being experienced as overlapping instead of as one at a time. Fear is not always corrosive and damaging (Jackson, 2005; Gray et al., 2008). Fear can be altruistic (Warr, 1992). Fear can be oriented towards care. Different emotions merge in stories people tell about risk, demonstrating that emotions are not merely biological responses or physical sensations, as some psychological definitions claim. Emotions may be experienced in groups and narrativized in stories told about mutual involvement with others (Singer, 1995). Talk about emotions is expressive, not only of broader anxieties beyond the immediate situation, as Jackson (2004) argues, but also of desire for solidarity.

2.6 Warr’s (1992) research concerning ‘altruistic fear’ is a predecessor of the shared risk epistemologies approach. Warr argued that previous fear of crime research had not focused on the fear that people have for the safety of those around them. Personal fear applies to the self, whereas altruistic fear applies to a social network. Altruistic fear amongst a network of people may take complex forms; people fear for others to varying degrees. There is also sometimes a gendered division of labour with altruistic fear, as we will discuss. Some people in a social network may be expected to perform a particular gendered orientation of altruistic fear. For instance, while mothers may tend to express more altruistic fear for their children than husbands, husbands may tend to express much more altruistic fear for their wives than wives do for husbands (Warr, 1992).

2.7 The research of Warr on altruistic fear is an important contribution insofar as it draws attention in this vein of research to how so-called negative emotions are productive of action that is oriented towards preservation of others. One problem with the research of Warr, argues Tulloch (2004), is it conforms to standardized social science survey techniques. Traditional social science has not turned towards analyzing how people construct risks and emotions through their own narratives, and so misses a great deal of nuance. Quantitative research does not emphasize the multiple and changing interpretations of some event that occur retrospectively. Yet the consequences of Warr’s approach are valuable for research on risk and emotions. Following Tulloch (2004), our analysis is more concerned than the quantitative work of Warr with how people narrativize emotions, and with their sense of self and of relations with others regarding risk.

Human-Animal Symmetry

3.1 Previous literature regarding fear of crime and the sociology of experienced risk, including the small amount of work discussed above that specifically addresses altruistic fear or shared risk epistemologies, has excluded companion animals from its analyses. In the *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003), Haraway argues that our companion animals (dogs, cats, birds, etc.) are notable as significant others and yet remain relatively obscure in social theory. The purpose of Haraway’s project is to preserve the presence of companion animals as subjects in accounts regarding the everyday lives of humans. Cultures, associated with humans, and nature, traditionally associated with animals, implode into one another. Likewise, this paper strives to push the boundaries of fear of crime and risk research towards human-animal symmetry. Although adults with families fear for and worry about their children and intimate partners, our data show that companion animals are also often positioned highly in risk narratives. Companion animals are complementary to peoples’ already existing social networks and become part of these emotional communities (Stammbach and Turner, 1999). The sociology of emotions can be used to challenge the anthropocentric license underpinning current conceptions of animals (Palmer, 1991; Fox, 2006). Emotions are integral in constructing what animals mean to us. It is also important to note that the particular character of risk-based sociality in human relations with animals depends on the kind of companion animal, because cocker spaniels have different capacities than cockatiels.

Methodological Considerations

4.1 This article draws a small number of examples from open-ended interviews with 25 people in Ottawa to investigate peoples' everyday reactions to risks. This data is used here only in an exploratory fashion, to provide examples and to begin to suggest avenues for future research. Initial respondents were contacted through distribution of posters in Ottawa; later respondents were garnered through snowballing. Interviews were guided by the assumption that every person has multiple salient dimensions to their subjectivity in relation to risk, which shift over their life course (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002). Respondents were asked for biographical information, allowing us to follow up later in the interview on connections between life course and understandings of risk. Here we focus specifically on findings generated in regards to questions such as 'is there anyone in your life whom you worry about?' Transcripts were coded by 1. type of emotions and 2. whom the emotion(s) concern. Fear and related emotions are focused upon because it is these that respondents discuss as connected to shared senses of risk. As previous researchers found (Charles and Davies, 2009), the respondents in this study introduced the topic of companion animals into the discussion of whom they worried about without any prompting from the interviewer.

4.2 This research is an example of interpretive methods. For Yanow (2000:5), "interpretive methods are based on the presupposition that we live in a social world characterized by the possibilities of multiple interpretations". Interpretive methods are not qualitative methods. Many qualitative approaches sometimes still operate with naïve realist presuppositions. Interpretation moves to the center of our epistemology and method. People with similar backgrounds attribute different meanings to events (Jefferson and Hollway, 2000) because knowing risk is an interpretive act. We even reconstruct past events according to new meanings we develop (Scott, 1996). Emotions also have to be made sense of interpretively (Mattley, 2002) since emotions do not speak for themselves. For instance, not all respondents have the same understanding of what 'worry' means (Gray et al., 2008).

4.3 We want to make three methodological points as it regards researching risk epistemologies. As Polkinghorne (2007:480) puts it, "respondents' stories may leave out or obscure aspects of the meaning of experiences they are telling about". This occurs for various reasons, including self-censorship. Not all respondents were willing to talk about whom they worried. There is also, for example, an intersection between gender and socially desirable responding, especially for men, which influences what respondents say (Sutton and Farrall, 2005). One technique we employ to help try to counter this is to, using different wording, return late in the interview to topics respondents speak away from early on, in order to make a second attempt to address such topics when the interviewee is more relaxed and the speech is flowing. Second, whatever risks people discuss as important to them early in the interview influences how they respond to initial questions about shared risk epistemologies, that is questions about others for whom they are concerned regarding risks. A technique used to deal with this issue is to ask the same question about risk epistemologies later in the interview when a discussion of risks differing from those earlier in the interview is reached. Third, and most important, talk about risk and emotions is articulated through narrative. Narrative organizes experience into temporally meaningful episodes. Through their stories, respondents narrativize risk and emotions, and this is an active process of self construction (Somers, 1994:622). Respondents are situated in various relations having multiple plot lines to follow, like "nation" and, especially for our purposes, "family" (pg. 625). Narrated risk and narrated emotions follow these plots (Singer, 1995). The analysis below shows how respondents' narratives about themselves as parents, for example, or about others (eg. children or loved ones), actively construct the self according to culturally available plot lines.

On Shared Risk Epistemologies

Children

5.1 For numerous respondents, children were the central focus of their concern for others, and their fear was an altruistic one, bound up with parental governance of the child:

If she wants to do something dangerous, I find a way so that she can explore that thing and learn to be safe instead of making it off limits. The other day she wanted to light a candle and have it dripping. So it is very easy to go 'don't touch it until you are older', but she'll never learn how to act appropriately with fire and to realize...so at one point I said 'no, you are going too far with this and you're being far too careless' and she realized, 'OK, that is the part where you stop'.

5.2 This respondent grew up in a small town and her mother always shaped what she could do and where she could go. In fact, the respondent's mother is still influencing how she thought about risk: "my mom says even in the small towns now they don't let the kids go off to the park. There are strange people around. Kids are abducted. Even small towns have changed. I'm afraid of kidnapping, though I know it is not usually a random stranger when kids are abused". In the same way her mother watched over her, she says "I don't let my daughter go to the park on her own. I don't let her go anywhere, not down the street. She can go over to her friend's house on the same block, but I always watch her". In this account, of course, the shared risk culture is the traditional, institutionalized family, and the account contains many conventional and familiar parental understandings of risk. Childhood is constructed as vulnerability, with adulthood constructed as competency (Tulloch, 2004; Pain, 2006). Urban space is constructed as inherently risky, and once a fear object is imaginable it is opened up to potential governance. Compassionate vigilance is enacted in this parent-child relation, with this watching over being part of the maternal plot of altruistic fear (Snedker, 2006). The presence of her mother's narrative of risk in the respondent's own demonstrates the strength of biography and sociality in constituting a shared risk epistemology. An avenue of further research this example points to is to explore the ways in which risk epistemologies are shared but also communicated inter-generationally

5.3 The next example is a contrast. It demonstrates a somewhat less conventional shared risk epistemology, showing how the webs of shared risk can extend beyond the traditional family unit. This next

respondent did not have children of his own, but could imagine himself having children in the near future. Others in his family did have children, and he developed a paternal-like altruistic fear for the well-being of these children despite living in a different city:

I do not have kids of my own, but I have five nieces and nephews. They are the main thing I worry about. Their safety. I think back to when I was in grade two, and I worry about them, their physical safety, he is now walking to school himself. It is something when I was in grade two I did no problem, but I tend to think it is different now, with him walking to school on his own. This is also why I took a first aid course, so if something happened while I was taking care of them, I would not have to wait for help.

5.4 This risk epistemology towards preserving the safety of the children is shared by the respondent and his sisters, even though the children are not his own. This respondent's position in the life course, where he is starting to think of becoming a father, influences his selection of beings for this shared risk epistemology.

5.5 People of course do not only develop shared risk epistemologies concerning children with whom they are biologically related. This next participant worked as a babysitter:

I baby-sit two preschool kids two times a week at their home, so there is always that horrible moment where you hear nothing and then a baby cry. One kid, I went to get his baby sister from her nap, and as I am coming down I say 'smells like smoke, what is going on'. He had put paper in the heating vent and the vent was turning brown. That made me freak out a bit. So we explained he should never ever put paper in the vent. Their risks are my risks, so I take responsibility. Once they get attached they really trust you. The parents trust me too.

5.6 Shared risk epistemologies involve mutual trust, and, as this example of the relation between the babysitter and the parents suggests, a key subject for future research is how trust at the small group level mediates various understandings and emotions concerning risk.

Intimate Partners and Spouses

5.7 Another key avenue for future research is the role of gender in such groups concerning risk. Some people in networks of risk-based sociality may be normatively expected to have a particular orientation of altruistic fear. Husbands, for instance, are often traditionally expected to express altruistic fear for their wives as a project of masculinity (Warr, 1992). Gender dynamics may be central in shared risk epistemologies concerning spouses. With this respondent, altruistic fear is bound up in a chivalrous attitude aimed at preserving his partner's safety:

We are living apart. She is completing a program in another city, so she moved. It is definitely a lot more difficult for a female to be alone than it is a male. One thing we both thought would be good is if she moved in with a roommate. I was not crazy about her living alone.... I definitely worry about her.

5.8 Contrary to previous research, Snedker found that men actually experience worry about others more than women do (Snedker, 2006). This worrying is bound up with gendered expectations of conduct in the face of risk. The same respondent worries for his partner when she jogs in places that are thought to be risky in the city of Ottawa:

I am not the biggest fan of running, but if she wants to go out for a run I will go. And even worse than running is walking, but if it is at night and she really wants to, I go....She will ask me to go. She has more of a sensitivity to walking alone than I, even when we are together. She picks up on things she thinks may be a threat. She wonders if people walking behind us are following us, and say 'let us stop, read this menu, see if this guy goes by', or ask me to speed up in a certain area. It is not so much walking where people are always out, but down the canal or down the paths I definitely will go with her..... She is much more pro-active with her safety. I do not feel I have to be.

5.9 Narrated risk follows available plots, in this case plots related to conventional masculinity and heterosexual monogamous relations. The respondent's gendered spouse persona draws on cultural plots of heterosexual monogamous relationships, demonstrating that the way people make sense of risk is influenced by the way they make sense of gender (Race, 2007). The gendered persona of the spouse is formed here in part through negotiation and narration of urban risks.

Parents

5.10 People in these interviews sometimes spoke of an altruistic fear for their parents. While people may take on the risk epistemologies of their parents or others, they also may define themselves against these ways of thinking, an interesting topic for future research on inter-generational risk sharing and communication of risk epistemologies. This respondent is concerned for her mother:

She ended up doing an administrative thing, but I worry she is not happy. Maybe the reason I take so many risks is she never does. She lives simply, enjoys her routine, does not care if she travels, whereas I want to travel the world, help people, do work in my community and get married and have children. I wish she would live her life to the fullest.

5.11 This respondent's narrative suggests how risk epistemologies are socially facilitated through the

interactions we have with others (also see Ronay and Kim, 2006). Her mother's individual risk epistemology shapes the respondent's in a way that orients her towards taking risk and 'living life to the fullest'.

Companion Animals

5.12 As previously mentioned, we argue for a move to achieve 'human-animal symmetry' in the analysis of shared risk epistemologies. For example, many respondents were centrally worried for their cats:

I had a big scare a couple months ago. The cat got on the balcony. I am on the 8th floor. This cat is not the brightest. I am trying to get him, I could not reach, and he went right over the edge. So I went down and got him and said 'you are never going out here again'. That was scary. I would be sad if anything happened to my cat.

5.13 Indeed, for several respondents, their companion cat was the primary being with whom they shared affection. When asked why she cared for her cat so much, one respondent replied: "I feel quite lonely a lot of the time. I do not have close friends I do things with". The cat becomes the primary companion, drawn to the very center of the (limited) social network. Thus the cat becomes the subject of their altruistic fear more than any other being:

My cats are my life. They are all I have left in this world. When I went to get the first one he jumped on me, and the lady said 'oh my, this cat has never been on a person, not even us'. He was all curled up on me. They are my life.

I worry my cat I have had for 18 years is in failing health. I lost another cat last year who had been with me for 18 years, and that is difficult, because I see signs of the deterioration. I am maintaining her and giving her medication but she is my essential companion because I have lived alone for a long time. I divorced thirty years ago.

5.14 As these examples suggest, companion animals can sometimes contribute more stability to relationships than humans. Because of this long-term stability, companion animals are made sense of as beings according to the available plot of familial relations. Worry about risks to their cats can even become central to life course decisions:

We just got this cat. He is old and fat and has always been inside. We live downtown so there is a dilemma whether to let the cat outside for freedom or keep him inside to prevent getting hit by a car. We keep him inside because the corner is very busy. Just last summer the superintendent's cat got hit by a car. It will influence us when we are looking for a place in Vancouver because we want a 'room to roam' place that is safe, but in Vancouver you have coyotes. A friend recently did a study of coyotes tracking them to their dens, and found they ate a lot of cats and some small dogs. He found a lot of cat name tags in the dens, so it is a legitimate risk, the safety of the cat.

5.15 That the respondent and her spouse would make a decision about where to live on the basis of the potential risks to the cat speaks to the degree to which the cat has become a central figure of altruistic fear. As Smith (2003) puts it, involved in insisting on the 'humanity' of companion animals is an ethics of care on the part of the human, which involves acknowledgement of the companion animal having to live in human-made environments that can be risky for the animal.

5.16 Just as some people may conduct heroic acts to save the lives of humans they care for, people may go to great lengths to preserve companion animal lives when animals are at risk. This respondent describes how:

We were at my Grandma's house, and it was winter time so the lake was frozen over and Kaylee [the dog] was walking along the side of the lake and fell in. All I thought was 'I need to get her out of there'. I started into the lake, and managed to grab her and was able to get her out and afterwards everyone was yelling at me saying 'if she falls in you let her go'. But to me that was not an option. I could not stand there and do nothing. I risked my life to save hers, but it was the furthest thing from my mind. I had to save her...she is a part of the family, she has been with me forever. She does not care what I look like, or if I had not had a haircut in a while. I felt as if it was my child who had fallen in the water. You would not say 'sorry, hope you can swim'. I went in after her. This winter we were up there again and mom said 'if she falls in you cannot go after her'. And it is like, 'you keep telling me this mom but if it was to happen I would go in again'.

5.17 With shared risk epistemologies comes a sense of responsibility to act on fear. People can be selfless when it comes to their companion animals. Attachment perhaps occurs in part because companion animals are non-judgmental beings. The network of risk-based sociality extends to companion animals because companion animals are not thought of simply as pets or objects. Instead, companion animals become those cared for under the culturally available plot of familial relations.

Shared Risk Epistemologies Revisited

6.1 How do people experience and make sense of risk? There is a literature regarding the risk society that constructs human subjects as being more and more personally responsible for their own future in a brave new world of "de-traditionalized" modernity as well as of pervasive fears and anxieties (Giddens, 1990, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, 2002). This literature concerning individualization does not

emphasize the emotional dynamics involved in socially facilitated knowledge of risk. When the literature concerning risk and individualization does mention emotions, it maintains a division between so-called positive and so-called negative emotions. The literature concerning individualization and the risk society also conceives of the subject as encountering risk and forging a self all alone instead of vis-à-vis interactional bonds that form in the face of risk.

6.2 The above examples of shared risk epistemologies support Lash's (2000) claims about sociality and emotions rather than individualization characterizing everyday experiences of and responses to risk. Risk culture refers to group-level emotions that form in the face of risk, in turn creating solidarity. This belonging is not necessarily to the biological family, but is still often narrated in terms of familial-ness, which may include companion animals. Family-like groups may be constituted institutionally in terms of risk – witness the contestation regarding the question of with whom one is eligible to share one's employee insurance benefits, and whether, for example, a same-sex partner may be eligible. Rather than being concerned with risk and institutional definitions of family, we instead focus here on how risk in part generates emotional understandings of family, whether traditionally defined or in new groupings that may still be narrated as familial.

6.3 This paper has begun to explore the idea of shared risk epistemologies related to so-called negative emotions like fear. Attention to interpretive and emotional processes shows how over-emphasis on rationalized reflexivity discounts the other ways people make decisions concerning risk (Elliot, 2002). People narrate a sense of self and their position in social networks according to available plots (Somers, 1994). The culturally available plot line of family is often fundamental in the production of shared risk epistemologies. Interrelated with familial plot line are plots concerning gender. It is also possible for animals to be recognized as central figures in risk narratives. Availability of the familial plot, even applied to relationships not fitting with institutional definitions of family, speaks to continuity with past forms of social organization more than Beck's (1997:95) comments about individuals cobbling "together their biographies themselves" can account for.

6.4 Emotions, we have argued, are narrativized in stories people tell about their experience of relations with others, be those others humans or animals. Fear need not be equated with individual corrosive fight or flight responses, nor need worry be conflated with forlorn danger-prevention behavior (Gray et al., 2008). Experience of a socially facilitated sense of risk can promote and symbolize small group solidarity. We have not explored the potential dark side of this: creation of collective solidarity through fear, worry and anxiety could target some scapegoat (Douglas, 1994; Cohen, 2001; Hacking, 2003). Yet demonization is not always the outcome of solidarity formed through so-called negative emotions.

6.5 Companion animals are often framed as staving off isolation. Some respondents describe animals as family members (also see Charles and Davies, 2008). In the risk narratives shared by respondents, some animals are not positioned as deserving of the same commitment as are people. Nevertheless, keeping with the theme of solidarity as an effect of risk, sociality that forms around subjects of altruistic fear is a world comprised of animals and people together. This sociality is post-humanist (Fox, 2006), involving emotions for companion animals. Considering human-animal symmetry confronts the anthropocentrism underpinning traditional accounts of fear and of emotions generally.

Notes

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² Ottawa is the capital city of Canada, located approximately six hours north-east of Toronto in Ontario.

³ Jackson (2005) differentiates fear from anxiety and from worry because most quantitative studies mask considerable complexity and do not assess the difference between these emotions. Jackson argues that fear, current and event-specific, should be distinguished from anxiety, which is future looking and fatalist, whereas worry requires more of an effort to manage whatever is affecting the individual. Fear is too strong in relation to the present, and anxiety is too diffuse in relation to the future, whereas worry accommodates both reaction to the fearful event and the anticipatory aspects of anxiety.

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