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Edited by Anne C. Petersen and Jeylan T. Mortimer
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Youth Unemployment and Society

Youth Unemployment and Society is a timely and important volume that examines the phenomenon of prolonged adolescence. Historians, psychologists, economists, and sociologists join forces to provide a cross-national examination of trends in youth unemployment and intervention strategies in the United States and Europe. Assessing the causes of aggregate societal unemployment rates, the authors address factors that make individuals more vulnerable to unemployment and consider the developmental consequences of this experience. The volume also examines how persistently high rates of youth unemployment feed back on society, affecting its values, beliefs, and institutions.

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Foreword

KLAUS J. JACOBS
Chairman of the Board
Johann Jacobs Foundation

This volume is the first title, it is hoped, of a long series devoted to the better understanding of human development, particularly that of adolescents and young people. The chapters published in this book were presented from November 7–9, 1991, at the Johann Jacobs Communication Center, Marbach Castle, Germany, during a conference sponsored by the foundation of the same name. The event was organized by Anne C. Petersen, then dean of the College of Health and Human Development at the Pennsylvania State University and now, since March 1992, vice-president for research and dean of the Graduate School, University of Minnesota.

The goal of the conference was to examine the causes and consequences of youth unemployment, for both society and the individual. In addition, part of the conference was devoted to the analysis of policies and programs to prevent the causes and treat the consequences.

Forty-five scientists and young scholars from Europe and the United States also studied some of the misconceptions about youth unemployment, which may lead to both wasteful government programs and missed opportunities. In addition, they analyzed some of the existing successful programs and considered how these might be exported to other countries and other cultures. Finally, they looked at the need for ongoing research to help render interventions by government, industry, or families as effective as possible.

Most people will agree that the theme of this first Johann Jacobs conference is an important one, and I am afraid its importance will continue to increase. Although the Johann Jacobs Foundation is aware of the limited impact of such a conference, we are pleased to have had the opportunity to improve the knowledge on such a critical problem as youth unemployment and its consequences for society.

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It only remains for me to thank Anne C. Petersen for her enthusiasm and competence in organizing this first Johann Jacobs conference.

Finally, I would like to convey my gratitude to the speakers, discussants, and other participants, who all contributed to the success of the event to which this volume is devoted.

*Johann Jacobs Foundation
Zürich, Switzerland*

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Introduction

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Youth unemployment and marginality are multifaceted problems, having complex multiple causes and requiring diverse strategies of remedial action. This major premise was used both in developing this volume and in generating the conference that preceded it. The causes, consequences, and remedial actions are construed as having their locus at both the individual and societal levels. Thus, this collection is interdisciplinary, bringing together the thinking of social scientists representing the fields of psychology, sociology, history, and economics. A further assumption is that cross-national comparisons greatly enhance our understanding of the causes of the problem of youth unemployment, as well as providing us with insight into its solution.

In the first chapter, Hess, Petersen, and Mortimer provide a general orientation to what follows, discussing the meaning and sources of youth marginality, trends in unemployment in industrialized countries, and the causes thereof. The particular consequences of unemployment for adolescents are featured, with emphasis on identity formation, career development, and mental health. The authors examine the programs and policies that have been developed to cope with high youth unemployment rates in the industrialized countries of Japan, Western Europe, and the United States, identifying the features of programs that have proven to be most successful. Finally, they alert us to the possibilities of other social roles that may function as viable alternatives to paid employment, such as volunteer work, which offer youth meaningful connection to society and socialization experiences that will help to prepare them for their adult social roles.

In the following section on societal investment in youth, Coleman and Modell debate whether adults' interest in directing their resources of time, energy, and money toward the preparation of youth for adulthood has diminished during the course of societal modernization, that is, dur-

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ing the movement from agrarian, to industrial, to postindustrial society. Turning to macrosocial perspectives on youth employment, Fend examines changes in the patterns of transition to adulthood and, consequently, the meaning of unemployment through historical time, from premodern Europe, through the period of industrialization, and into the twentieth century. White and Smith then offer an economic analysis of the causes of persistently high unemployment in modern societies, with special attention to the implications for youth.

Whereas the macrosocial perspectives of historical and economic analysis draw attention to the effects of broad societal forces on unemployment, and illuminate factors that influence aggregate levels of unemployment, a microsocial, or social psychological, perspective is necessary to understand the implications of unemployment for individuals. In the initial chapter of the section titled "Individual Perspectives," Rutter alerts us to the complexities of causal analysis, pointing to diverse conceptualizations of causation, means of testing causal hypotheses, and the implications of the insights generated by these considerations for intervention programs. Because the probability of unemployment is not the same for all persons, factors that distinguish unemployed and employed youth may be either the result of prior differences or consequences of the unemployment experience itself. Hence, cross-sectional studies, in which data are collected at a single point, have limited value. Instead, there is a great need for longitudinal studies that follow the same individuals through time. Mortimer reviews longitudinal studies that address the problem of selection into employment, identifying those prior characteristics that may predispose an individual to become unemployed. Furnham summarizes the evidence, also mainly drawn from longitudinal studies, with respect to the psychosocial consequences of unemployment. After examining the distinctive features and outcomes of youth unemployment (as opposed to unemployment in older age groups), he cogently argues that the experience of unemployment is not the same for all youth and that key individual attributes importantly moderate the experience and the consequences of being without work.

The next section of the volume recognizes that unemployment and society are reciprocally related. Whereas societal, and especially economic, forces determine the aggregate level, distribution, and social meaning of unemployment, the phenomenon of unemployment feeds back on society, affecting its values, belief systems, and institutions. Te Grotenhuis and Meijers raise the issue as to whether large numbers of unemployed youth in modern, postindustrial societies are fostering alternative value systems

that deemphasize the importance of work and threaten the ideological premises of the welfare state. They also assess whether high rates of youth unemployment foster deviance and the emergence of a permanent, marginalized underclass. Hamilton addresses the intervention strategies societies have undertaken to ease the transition of youth to adult work roles, focusing on the institution of apprenticeship in the Federal Republic of Germany. He identifies several criteria that can be used to evaluate the measures societies take to reduce youth unemployment.

In the last section of the volume, Bertram outlines several productive strategies for international comparative research, in response to recent changes surrounding German reunification and developments in Central Europe. He proposes that the extension of general schooling, intended as a means of preparing youth for increasingly complex occupational tasks, may actually be dysfunctional given that it neither imparts specific occupational training nor links youth to particular employers. Lengthy academic training in secondary schools may be particularly disadvantageous to youth who are not oriented toward university entrance. He urges that investigators from several countries undertake collaborative studies of the linkages between educational policy and youth unemployment.

In his critical overview of the contents of the volume, Heinz addresses the macrolevel and microsocial processes that channel the movement of young people into the labor force and determine individual and societal reactions when such movement does not successfully occur. Heinz places special emphasis on a convergent theme: that free-market processes must be supplemented by structural mechanisms to facilitate the transition of young people from school to work. Coordinated action on the part of the state, employers, and the educational system is needed both to enhance investment in the human capital of young people who do not enter universities and to prevent the development of a permanent underclass of marginalized and discouraged workers.