

Youth and the Great Recession

Introduction

This Special Section of the International Journal of Psychology brings together contemporary evidence on how young people perceive and have responded to the recent major economic downturn, which has become known as the 'Great Recession' (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011). Although the Great Recession officially ended seven years ago, its impact is still shaping the opportunities and life chances of young people. Employment opportunities have dramatically declined in the aftermath of the recession, and compared to older workers young people (aged 16 to 24 years) were hit especially hard. For example in the European Union youth unemployment increased from 15% in the first quarter of 2008 to a peak of 24% in the first quarter of 2013, compared to a rise from 7% to 10% for the whole work force (Eurostat, 2016). Great variations exist across countries; in Greece and Spain youth unemployment grew to over 40%. In the US, youth unemployment in 2008 was 14% and in 2013 it was 15.5%. Since 2013, youth unemployment rates have declined yet are still above 2007 levels.

These economic shifts are key social forces with potential to shape future life courses. How did young people experience this change and how did it affect their expectations for the future? Developmental scientists have long been interested in how social and economic changes can affect individual lives (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Greenfield, 2009; Oishi, 2014; Silbereisen, 2005). While the impact of the recession on employment outcomes is well documented (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Danzinger, 2013), less is known about its impact on young people's psychological or socio-emotional responses (Fletcher, 2015; Parker, Jerrim, & Anders, 2016). The recent global economic downturn has undermined employment prospects for young people and is likely to also undermine their confidence, self-

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3 perceptions, values, and outlook to the future. Economic setbacks and uncertainty have
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5 mounted among all youth, including seemingly advantaged college students and among
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7 those who hold a postsecondary degree qualification (Fogg & Harrington, 2011; Schoon &
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9 Bynner, in press; Vuolo, Mortimer, & Staff, 2016), yet there is relatively little evidence on
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11 the impact of the Great Recession on young people's achievement orientations, their values,
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13 and behaviours.
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18 This special section of the International Journal of Psychology contains five articles by
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20 leading experts from psychology and sociology, bringing an interdisciplinary perspective to
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22 the conceptualisation of young people's response to economic change. Experiences of
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24 young people in the US are illustrated using large-scale panel data as well as more fine-
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26 grained analysis using qualitative interview data. Evidence from the European Social Survey
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28 is used to assess the impact of the economic downturn on human values, social attitudes
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30 and indicators of wellbeing and health across Europe. Most of the papers use the timing of
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32 the Great Recession as a 'natural experiment', assessing changes in perceptions, values, and
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34 behavior before and after the onset of the crisis, taking into account pre-existing trends and
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36 conditions. Moreover, the authors use individual-level measures of the recession
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38 experience, such as unemployment, as well as national-, or group specific rates of
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40 unemployment to be able to identify macro-economic versus micro-level consequences.
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42 Dependent variables, or responses to the recession, are also measured collectively and
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44 individually.
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52 Taken as whole, these articles enable us to draw four key conclusions regarding the
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54 effect of the Great Recession on young people's future expectations, values, and
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56 behaviours. First, the impacts of the recession vary for different outcomes, pointing to the
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3 need to consider multiple dimensions of human development in context, and by age. Age
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5 differences in response to economic downturn suggest potentially sensitive periods for
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7 effective intervention. Second, young people between 18 to 25 years of age have been hit
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9 especially hard. Reduced prospects and opportunities for employment in the aftermath of
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11 the Great Recession are likely to bring with them economic scarring effects that will be
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13 evident for many years to come, affecting other life domains such as the timing of family
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15 formation, health and wellbeing. Third, and somewhat surprisingly, the general belief in the
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17 'American Dream,' i.e., the belief in opportunities for success, allowing social mobility for
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19 those with high aspirations and willingness to apply effort, while challenged, continues to
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21 guide individual behaviour. At the same time, trust in institutions has declined. Young
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23 people see it as their own responsibility to lift themselves out of their difficult situations,
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25 and to help others in similar circumstances. Increasing support and concern for others
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27 suggest increased awareness and importance of relationships with others and greater
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29 communal responsibility. Fourth, key psychological orientations have been affected by the
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31 economic downturn. For example, feelings of self-confidence and self-worth have
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33 diminished.

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41 In this introduction we elaborate on these themes by drawing on the evidence presented in
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43 the articles of this special section. This is not the first analysis of the effects of the Great
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45 Recession on the psychological orientations and experiences of young people, nor will it be
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47 the last. Rather, the authors in this special section document lessons learned up to 2014 and
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49 suggest where we might expect other consequences to surface or to recede in the years to
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The transition to adulthood as a crucial developmental task

Among the many global life transitions across the lifespan, the transition to adulthood ranks very high in terms of its importance, complexity, and uniqueness. It is a demographically dense period (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011) with multiple transitions related to the assumption of new social roles involving education, work, leaving home, partnership and family formation - all occurring within a relatively short period of time. It is when educational and life plans formulated through adolescence - often with considerable individual and societal investment - meet the opportunities and constraints of post-adolescent life. In particular, this is the time when one typically confronts, or at least becomes familiar with, the necessity of compromise in the interplay of competing life goals (Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010; Schulenberg & Schoon, 2012). The transition to adulthood is a critical phase of the life course, a make-or-break period in young people's lives, in which external shocks have the potential to create life-long diverging destinies (Schoon & Bynner, in press).

While during childhood and adolescence individual lives are organised by institutional structures, such as compulsory schooling and legal frameworks for parental support and child protection, most of these structures fall away when children reach the age of majority, generally age 18. For example, in the UK family law has failed to create policies extending the period of dependence of young people on their parents (Jones, 2009). The law assumes that by the age of 16 years, young people are able to make decisions about their own care. There are, however, national differences relating, for example, to consent to participate in medical studies and treatment, and there is no European consensus on the legal obligation of parents. In some countries legal responsibility ends with the completion of education and training (e.g. Austria and Hungary), while in others it is left to individual understandings of

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3 family obligations. Consensus about parental responsibility and support is also lacking across
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5 U.S. states. In the absence of institutional support structures, many young people, especially
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7 those from relatively disadvantaged families, find themselves alone without a safety net.
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11 Against this background, the transition to independent adulthood has much significance in
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13 laying the foundation for adult identity (Eliason, Mortimer, & Vuolo, 2015), and enabling the
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15 development of capabilities needed to function effectively across life domains. In the
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17 aftermath of the 2008 world banking collapse and the ensuing Great Recession, young
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19 people encountered multiple problems in establishing themselves in the labour market: a
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21 rise in youth unemployment, working for low wages or in temporary positions, frequent job
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23 churn, working in jobs unrelated to one's training and qualifications, or working part-time
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25 while preferring full-time work. These are just some of the challenges young people were
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27 facing and continue to face (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Danzinger, 2013). In the immediate
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29 term, the outcome of the transition from education to work gives signals of continuing
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31 employability. Failure to master the transition successfully can leave the young person with
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33 diminished confidence (see Shane & Heckhausen), eroding self-esteem (Aronson, Johnson &
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35 Staff; Park & Greenfield), and lack of trust in the institutions that are supposed to support or
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37 prepare them for the transition into the labour market (Reeskens and Vandecasteele,
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39 Aronson). These threats are not only relevant for young people with low level qualifications,
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41 but also for those gaining postsecondary degrees.
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50 Moreover, young adulthood is arguably the most formative period with respect to the
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52 development of beliefs about how the society, the polity, and the economy are shaped.
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54 Beliefs and values are thought to crystallize between ages 18 and 25, a period of great
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56 mental plasticity, and to remain largely unaltered through the remaining adult years (Alwin
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3 & Krosnick, 1991). This “impressionable years hypothesis” was supported based on data
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5 collected for the US General Social Survey (Giuliano & Spilimbergo, 2014). Individuals
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7 experiencing recessions during their formative years (age 18 to 25) believe that luck rather
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9 than effort is the most important driver of individual success, they support more
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11 government redistribution, and they have less confidence in institutions. Being exposed to a
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13 recession before the age of 17 or after age 25, however, had no impact on these beliefs. The
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15 authors argue that the period between ages 18 to 25 is the age during which the majority of
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17 societal beliefs are formed, with the notable exception of confidence in the government, for
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19 which experience of shocks during this highly formative age as well as slightly later in life are
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21 relevant. Thus, recessions appear to have long-lasting effects on young adults’ beliefs,
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23 values and world-views, and once the period of early socialization has passed, the core
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25 orientations are unlikely to change.
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Adjustment during adolescence

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36 Focusing on the development of adolescents aged 15/16 years, Johnson and Staff (this
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38 issue) provide a much needed overview of adolescent adjustment across a number of
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40 domains and over an extended time period. Using annual nationally representative U.S. data
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42 from the Monitoring the Future study, they examine broad population trends among 10th
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44 graders between 1991 and 2014, drawing out the ‘big picture’ of how adolescents fared
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46 before, during and in the aftermath of the Great Recession. Their findings suggest that the
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48 recession had only a slight effect on the well-being and adjustment of adolescents.
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52 However, their behaviour was affected in one important respect: adolescents experienced a
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54 steep drop in their employment opportunities. The reduction in their employment has
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56 disrupted a long-term pattern of early vocational socialization and development of work-
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3 related confidence in the United States (Mortimer, 2003). Unpaid work activities may be
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5 increasingly substituted for paid work. Teens experienced a gradual increase in time spent
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7 volunteering and engagement in community activities. Teenage volunteering, and later
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9 unpaid internships are alternative means of experiencing work environments and may boost
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11 chances for employment later on. Educational performance and expectations increased
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13 over the period of study, perhaps in response to deteriorating job prospects for those
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15 without postsecondary degrees. The majority of teens now expect to obtain at least a
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17 Bachelor's degree. Despite these high aspirations, the researchers note trends towards
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19 lower levels of self-esteem and an increase in depressive symptoms, suggesting that the
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21 uncertainty associated with the economic decline might have taken its toll. Interestingly,
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23 these changes emerged as a delayed effect, about 4-5 years after the official end of the
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25 recession, perhaps after it became clear that the economic situation was not reverting to
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27 pre-recession levels and families were hurting from persisting exposure to hardship. The
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29 authors provide an insightful discussion of their findings, arguing that the recession did not
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31 have strong consequences for adolescent adaptation, yet calling for continued monitoring
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33 given the potentially long-term effects of reduced self-esteem, and declining opportunities
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35 to develop work values in occupational settings.
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Values and Beliefs

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47 Values and beliefs have multiple functions for individuals and for the society as a whole.
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49 They play a crucial role in guiding personal goals, plans and behaviours (Schwartz, 1994);
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51 they also influence health and wellbeing (Kasser, 2002). Individual values and beliefs both
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53 reflect and shape societal values (Greenfield, 2009), as well as the economic system and
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55 institutional outcomes (Giuliano & Spilimbergo, 2009). Thus, if the Great Recession has
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3 impacted values and beliefs it will have implications not just for personal lives but for
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5 society at large. It is thus important to learn more about underlying processes and
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7 mechanisms.
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11 Reeskens & Vandecasteele (this issue) differentiate between the more constant and
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13 enduring human values and more transient social attitudes. They argue that while values
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15 (including self-transcendence and benevolence, conservation, self-enhancement, hedonism
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17 and openness to change) can be considered universal and relatively stable after the early
18
19 most formative age period, social attitudes, such as political trust or satisfaction with the
20
21 economy, are less stable and more responsive to situational changes. Using the European
22
23 Social Survey following a cohort aged 15-24 in 2008, they examine both aggregate-level
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25 population data and individual level data, showing that, as expected, values underscoring
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27 openness to new experiences or emphasizing self-restriction and order remain resistant in
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29 the face of sudden economic shocks. Likewise supporting prior expectations, declines in
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31 political trust and in satisfaction with the economy in the face of economic risk show the
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33 direct response of these social attitudes to the experience of economic hardship (Reeskens
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35 & Vandecasteele). However, counter to their expectations they find that social trust is less
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37 affected by changes in national youth unemployment rates, suggesting that it is less
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39 dependent on situational conditions and less volatile than political trust and satisfaction
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41 with the economy. Moreover, they find other unexpected patterns. Values reflecting self-
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43 enhancement (the importance of being successful) and hedonism (seeking pleasure and
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45 gratification) become less important – possibly indicating that these values might be pushed
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47 aside when the individual is confronted with economic uncertainty and hardship.
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51 Interestingly and consistent with the study by Park and Greenfield, noted below), they find
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3 increased self-transcendence values (the importance of helping others). These findings
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5 suggest that when times are tough, people support collective values and assisting one
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7 another. The effect of the recession is thus not consistent across diverse values and
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9 attitudes, and appears to reflect less of a “me first” response but support for helping one
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11 another.
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17 Consequences varied depending on whether the recession was directly experienced via
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19 group-specific unemployment rates, or whether it was experienced indirectly via national
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21 unemployment trends. Political trust and satisfaction with the economy were undermined
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23 by both national unemployment risk and the direct experience of economic hardship, while
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25 social trust was inconsistently affected. The national context of youth unemployment did
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27 not affect social trust, suggesting that it is less directly impacted by the economic crisis,
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29 although personal experience of hardship did have an impact. This pattern suggests that the
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31 development of social trust is more an individual process than one driven by contextual
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33 change. But it is the national context that shapes values of self-enhancement and hedonism,
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35 rather than the direct experience of hardship.
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43 The way young people are responding to the recession might both affect, and reflect, how
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45 they cope with the crisis. They show growing distrust in social institutions and the
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47 economy– but also assign increasing importance to supporting others.
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52 These findings within the European context resonate with evidence from the US. For
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54 example, Johnson & Staff also found reduced levels of hedonism (going out at night for fun)
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56 among adolescents in the aftermath of the recession. Moreover, Park & Greenfield (this
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3 issue), presenting evidence from the US Freshman Survey, show that students'
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6 communitarianism, i.e. the importance of helping others, increased in the aftermath of the
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8 recession. They interpret their findings to suggest, in line with Greenfield's theory of social
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10 change and human development (Greenfield, 2009), that declining societal wealth fosters
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12 collectivistic values. Such collective orientations emphasize the importance of one's
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14 relations with others and society - perhaps with the intention to ameliorate societal
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16 problems. At the same time, however, they find that students' materialism, i.e. the
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18 importance of being well off and achieving financial independence, also increased. Their
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20 findings thus suggest declining societal wealth has also increased the value of materialistic
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22 achievements, supporting assumptions of organismic theories. Such theories assume that
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24 alienating conditions are associated with materialistic aspirations (Kasser, Ryan, Zax, &
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26 Sameroff, 1995), i.e. you value what you are missing. While this trend was apparent at the
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28 aggregate societal level, once young workers directly encounter difficulties in the labor
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30 market themselves, they may increasingly value rewards that are more attainable (e.g.,
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32 downplaying extrinsic rewards, such as money), thus protecting themselves from cognitive
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34 dissonance (Johnson, Sage, and Mortimer, 2012). It is therefore important to differentiate
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36 between population- and individual level responses to the exposure to economic
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38 uncertainty and risk and to identify macro-economic versus micro-level processes.
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48 Together these findings suggest that in the aftermath of the Great Recession young people
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50 have lost trust in social institutions, but social relationships and support for others appear to
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52 have become more important. Potentially in times of economic hardship personal and social
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54 relationships might appear to be more reliable than anonymous institutional structures. The
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56 findings could indicate a trend towards "hunkering down", of focusing on social relationships with
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3 relatives and family, which has also been noted by Owens and Cook in their analysis of the US
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5 General Social Survey (Owens & Cook, 2013). They could, however, also be interpreted in terms
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7 of “collective agency” conceptualised in Bandura’s social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001).
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10 Across many spheres of functioning individuals recognise that they do not have direct
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12 control over social conditions and institutional practices and thus turn to others for help, or
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14 develop “collective agency” melting their self-interest into the service of common goals. The
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16 social cognitive theory of agency rejects the dualism between agency and structure,
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18 between individualism and collectivism. Individualism is not necessarily the opposite of
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20 communitarianism, as suggested by Greenfield (2009). It is possible that in times of
21
22 economic uncertainty the limits of institutional support structures are recognised, and
23
24 agency is exercised through socially coordinated and interdependent effort. The experience
25
26 of the economic crisis has thus not created a “me-first” reaction, but has instead instigated
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28 values of “cooperative individualism” where human communities rest on reciprocal
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30 individual acts of helping one another. It has brought about the awakening of a “collective
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32 agency” or “cooperative individualism” where terms of living together have to be
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34 renegotiated.
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Individual Achievement Orientation and Agency

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46 Values and beliefs can be understood as indicators of agency, reflecting how individuals
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48 interpret and respond to contextual circumstances and experiences of contextual change. A
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50 crucial indicator of agency is individual achievement orientation. Two papers in this special
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52 issue focus on how the recession has affected the iconic ‘American Dream.’ To what extent
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54 can it be maintained in the uncertain and constrained economic climate following the Great
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3 Recession? Shane and Heckhausen differentiate personal “merit agency beliefs”, i.e.
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5 individual beliefs about how far up the social ladder they can climb, and more general
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7 “merit societal beliefs”, reflecting the potential for all people to succeed based on their
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9 skills, effort and persistence. Based on evidence from a 10-month longitudinal study of US
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11 college graduates, they show that individual or personal “merit agency beliefs” were
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13 affected by the economic downturn, but not the meritocratic ideology of the “American
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15 Dream,” applied to people in general. US college graduates remain largely optimistic
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17 regarding the meritocratic nature of society and expectations for their own future upward
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19 social mobility. Still, they are more likely to adjust the belief about their own capacity to
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21 make it than give up on the “American Dream” just yet. Moreover, they argue that
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23 individual ‘merit beliefs’ are stronger predictors of one’s own achievement goal-setting and
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25 expectancies than broad beliefs in a meritocratic society.
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32 Pamela Aronson confirms this view, taking a different perspective. While Shane and
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34 Heckhausen adopt a psychological approach guided by motivation and action theory,
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36 (Aronson) uses a sociological lens to examine contradictions between individual agency
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38 beliefs and societal beliefs. Aronson’s argument centres less on the role of individual goal
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40 pursuit than on the role of institutions in supporting the education-to-work transition. Based
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42 on in-depth interviews with college students and recent graduates of a commuter college in
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44 the state of Michigan, US, she shows that in the aftermath of the recession students from
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46 less privileged backgrounds hold on to the ‘American Dream’ and consider higher education
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48 qualification as the key to make it in the labour market. The majority of students in her
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50 sample were first generation college students who considered a graduate degree as vital to
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52 get ahead in society, to avoid dead-end jobs, and to find a decent job with career prospects.
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3 Many of the graduates considered pursuing further, post-graduate education, but had only
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5 vague ideas about how to achieve this and were forced to put immediate financial awards
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7 above long-term investments in education.
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11 In the aftermath of the recession many students were struggling to meet basic needs and
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13 worked while studying to be able to pay their bills and to support their families. In
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15 contradiction to the 'American Dream,' nearly half of the graduates entered low-paid jobs
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17 that did not match their qualifications. They experienced uncertainty about how to repay
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19 their student debts while earning only slightly more than the minimum wage, and they had
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21 difficulties in planning for the future due to reduced employment opportunities. These
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23 problems induced concerns about their stress levels and the risk of depression and ill health.
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25 But in the face of these pressures, students did not demand greater governmental support.
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28 Instead, they perceived the transition to independent adulthood as an individualised
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30 process, where the responsibility to make it rests with youth themselves, not societal
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32 institutions. The students emphasized the importance of educational participation as the
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34 only route to establish themselves in the labour market and to reach independent
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36 adulthood. To this effect they appear to have internalised the "American Dream" despite
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38 eroding confidence in the effectiveness of education and employment institutions to protect
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40 them from the negative effects of the economic downturn.
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47 The differentiation between individual social attitudes and more generalised human values
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49 described by Reeskens and Vandecasteele, or between personal and societal merit agency
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51 beliefs introduced by Shane and Heckhausen, and the more in-depth analysis of individual
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53 experiences by Aronson enable us to gain a better understanding of seemingly contradictory
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55 findings. Support for meritocratic values is upheld, even though limits to one's personal
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3 capability to succeed are recognised. Seeing that individual effort does not necessarily pay
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5 off (as also noted by Giuliano & Spilimbergo, 2014), more generalised societal values are not
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7 yet written off. Again, the pattern of findings across studies is consistent with the
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9 assumption of “collective agency” (Bandura, 2001), i.e. in times of economic hardship and
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11 uncertainty self-interests are merged into a common goal.
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Self-views and perceptions of health and wellbeing

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19 The authors in this special section also examine self-views and subjective perceptions of
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21 health and wellbeing. Although the predictive value of self-esteem with respect to
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23 important individual outcomes has been questioned (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, &
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25 Vohs, 2003), self-views give meaning to experiences, thereby enabling individuals to react
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27 appropriately to such experiences (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & McClarty, 2007). Positive
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29 self-views are found to be associated with a person’s overall life satisfaction, wellbeing and
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31 mental health, even after controlling for the experience of socio-economic risk and
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33 disadvantage (Trzesniewski et al., 2006). Regarding the effects of the recession on young
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35 people’s self-views and subjective perceptions of wellbeing, the research reported in this
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37 special section finds that the demands of the recession slowed the development of positive
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39 self-views among adolescents (Johnson & Staff), among general population samples
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41 (Reeskens & Vandecasteele), and among college students (Park & Greenfield). Moreover,
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43 the recession was linked to increases in depressed mood (Johnson & Staff) and lowered
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45 levels of subjective health (Reeskens & Vandecasteele). However, the associations were not
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47 strong, especially not for adolescents (Johnson & Staff), suggesting that younger age groups
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49 might be better protected against the effects of the economic downturn than their slightly
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51 older peers who are preparing for the transition to independence (see also Schoon &
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3 Bynner, in press). Moreover, if indicators of subjective well-being are seen as volatile and
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5 responsive to contextual circumstances, it can be expected that they will improve as soon as
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7 economic circumstances improve (Reeskens & Vandecasteele). But if subjective self-
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9 evaluations are more stable and enduring constructs (Swann et al., 2007; Trzesniewski et al.,
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11 2006), lowered self-views and lowered levels of well-being could set in motion a chain of
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13 long-term developmental problems.
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18 Looking at historical trends, among adolescents levels of self-esteem have been relatively
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20 stable (Johnson and Staff), while among college students self-views generally have increased
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22 over the years (Park & Greenfield), suggesting that in interpreting historic trends, one
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24 should take into account the composition and age of the sample. Students reaching the end
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26 of their studies and preparing for the transition to adult independence are reporting higher
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28 levels of social and intellectual self-confidence than students at the beginning of their
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30 studies. Among the post-recession cohort, however, levels of self-esteem among
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32 adolescents have decreased (Johnson & Staff). If this trend continues into the future, we
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34 might note so-called longer-term “scarring effects” undermining the self-confidence and
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36 initiative of young people.
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Human Development in Context

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45 The lives of young people are not taking place in a social vacuum, but are shaped by a
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47 changing socio-historical context. In the aftermath of the 2008 world banking collapse and
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49 the ensuing Great recession young people are encountering increasing problems in
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51 establishing themselves in the labour market. The recession undermined employment
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53 opportunities generally, yet young people at the cusp of independent adulthood were hit
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55 disproportionately hard. As already mentioned, the articles in this special issue focus on
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3 young people in the US and Europe. To gain a better appreciation of the generalization of
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5 findings across cultural contexts, more comparative research is needed. For example, is the
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7 belief in the “American Dream” also apparent in other countries, which are not primarily
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9 guided by neoliberal beliefs and provide a more supportive welfare system (such as
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11 Scandinavian countries) or a social partnership between education and employment
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13 institutions to facilitate a smooth transition from education to the labour market (as for
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15 example Germany, Austria and Switzerland).
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20 Large country-specific variations in youth unemployment rates reflect differences in
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22 institutional structures supporting young people against the adverse consequences of an
23
24 economic downturn (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Schoon & Bynner, in press). For example,
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26 countries with a strong social partnership between education and employment, such as
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28 Germany, Austria and Switzerland, experienced lower levels of youth unemployment than
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30 countries characterised by liberal market economies, such as the US or the UK. Countries
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32 with a weak, mostly family-oriented welfare regime, such as Greece and Spain, experienced
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34 the highest levels of precarious employment for young people. Thus, more detailed analysis
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36 of cross-country variations in values, attitudes and self-perceptions is needed. There is dire
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38 need for more longitudinal studies following multiple age cohorts of young people over time
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40 to distinguish recession effects from pre-existing long-term trends.
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47 Across country differences in youth unemployment rates may reflect country specific
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49 structural factors, such as a highly flexible labour market, the degree of protection for those
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51 in employment, or the use of temporary contracts. They may also be associated with
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53 differences in the extent to which families are prepared to support their kin against the
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55 adverse consequences of unemployment, or to provide financial, social and emotional
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Youth and the Great Recession

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3 support to those who continue in education. Over the past 30 years young adults are taking
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5 longer to complete their education, begin careers and become financially independent
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7 (Buchmann & Kriesi, 2011). At the same time, measures to support young people in their
8
9 transition to independence have been reduced. For example, in the UK childless 18 to 21-
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11 year-olds are barred from receiving housing benefits and their entitlement to jobseeker's
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13 allowance has been removed after six months of failing to find a job. The extent that young
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15 adults are delaying the transition to financial independence means that support must be
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17 obtained from other sources. In the absence of institutional support for young people,
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19 parents are expected to take on this role (Settersten & Ray, 2010; Swartz, et al., 2011). The
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21 Great Recession is likely to have increased young adults' need for additional support and for
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23 parents to supply it. In instances where young people cannot depend on their parents for
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25 support they are more or less left on their own, without a safety net.
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Summary

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36 Taken as a whole, the articles in this special section suggest that the economic recession has
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38 affected the values, beliefs, and well-being of young people, although these effects were
39
40 not uniform across domains of adjustment, they were generally small, and there appear to
41
42 be age differences. The period between ages 18 to 25 seems to be especially sensitive to the
43
44 impact of economic uncertainty and hardship, while younger adolescents appear to be more
45
46 protected. The time after leaving compulsory education is a critical period for establishing
47
48 one's adult identity. Shocks to the economy undermine not only employment opportunities
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50 and life chances, but also feelings of self-worth and the belief in one's capability to make a
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52 successful transition to independent adulthood and to climb the social ladder. Economic
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54 uncertainty appears to erode trust in the capacity of the educational and economic sectors
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Youth and the Great Recession

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3 to assure successful youth transitions from school to work. While trust in institutions
4
5 appears to be undermined, young people (especially those in the US) continue to subscribe
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7 to the “American Dream”, even if they see their own life chances reduced. Moreover, there
8
9 is increasing endorsement of helping others – possibly indicating a change towards a more
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11 communal orientation and support for social justice, also as reflected in the strong
12
13 endorsement by young people for the politics of Bernie Saunders in the US and Jeremy
14
15 Corbyn in the UK. The congruence across the studies reported in this issue suggests that young
16
17 people's response to the recession appears to be less of a "me-first" reaction than "let's
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19 help each other": a form of “collective agency” to counter the inadequacy of social safety
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nets.

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