

Students' views on happiness in the era of multiple crises in Greece

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Abstract

The crisis that began in 2008 in Greece was not simply a financial crisis but a multiple and plural crisis. This multiple crisis has had a profound impact on people's well-being and happiness, reaching far beyond the losses of jobs and income, and affecting citizens' satisfaction with their lives. This paper attempts, through a bottom-up approach and using focus group interviews, to give sixteen secondary school students the opportunity to reflect on their experiences of and insights into the impact of the crisis on their well-being and happiness, to discuss their views on education and the notion of happiness at the time of the crisis, and to share their thoughts on the role which education can play in student happiness attainment. In this attempt, Boudieu's theoretical concepts and, in particular, 'habitus' are used as the main conceptual and methodological tools to help us explain, analyse and develop a holistic understanding of students' lived, embodied, affective experiences and views about happiness in contemporary Greece – a goal that goes beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research.

Keywords: *Socio-economic crisis, education, happiness, habitus*

Introduction

The contemporary socio-economic situation in Greece prevents or limits students' well-being and happiness, as well as their ability to flourish, and

strengthens inequalities and conventional class hierarchies. It could be argued that the inequalities that students face at school and in Greek society involve not merely differences in wealth, income and economic security, but 'differences in access to valued circumstances, practices and way of life' (Sayer, 2005). Drawing on Illouz's work (1997), it could also be argued that, at this time of multiple crises in Greece, young people face inequalities in their potential for happiness and in their chances of obtaining access to ordinary forms of well-being. Jenkins (2000) makes the point that all young people experience life differently because resources and penalties are dissimilarly allocated on the basis of shared categorisations of different social groups. The aforementioned statement could be applied to young people in Greece in the age of austerity.

Despite the vast number of studies that focus on the current social and economic situation in Greece (see, for example, Economou et al., 2014; Kentikelenis et al., 2014; Mallianou and Sarafis, 2012; Ifanti et al., 2013; Lionis and Petelos, 2013; Baranouski, 2014; Kondilis et al., 2013, etc.), little is known about the impact of the crisis on students' well-being, happiness and life satisfaction levels, and about how students themselves experience this impact (see, however, Doliopoulou, 2013; Daskalakis, 2014; Prekate, 2014; Tsekeris et al., 2015; Kalerante, 2016; Papastefanou and Oikonomidis, 2018).

There are some studies that explore the above issues, but they focus mostly on middle-aged and older people rather than younger people and children. Moreover, little is known about the subjective definition of happiness, or about the way students perceive happiness and education at this time of crisis, as well as the possible role of education in student happiness attainment. Educational and sociology theorists have not adequately addressed these issues through a qualitative sociological lens.

For this reason, the research study which this paper is based on endeavoured to give several secondary school students in Greece the opportunity to discuss their experiences and share insights into the impact of the crisis on their everyday lives, and to share their views on happiness and education and on the role which education can play in their happiness attainment.

Specifically, in this paper I focus on the following research question and sub-questions:

According to students, what constitutes happiness?

- Do students situate happiness into the current socio-historical context of multiple crises? In what ways?
- How do students' conceptualisations of happiness resonate with their everyday practices?
- According to students, to what extent and in what ways is happiness related to education?

Conceptual-theoretical framework

The study that I present in this paper is informed by the work of Pierre Bourdieu and, specifically, by the theoretical concept of habitus. The concept of habitus, although it is less well known, lies at the heart of Bourdieu's theoretical framework. Habitus is a complex and enigmatic concept that Bourdieu developed to demonstrate the ways in which 'not only is the body in the social world, but also the ways in which the social world is in the body' (Reay, 2004, 432). Habitus could be defined as a gendered, simultaneously rigid and dynamic resource that individuals possess and use as they engage in emotional practice, and as a system of durable, transposable dispositions, bodily beliefs, passions and drives (Bourdieu, 1990). According to Bourdieu, habitus is a socialised body: a structured body, 'a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of that world – a field - and which

structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world' (Bourdieu, 1998, 81). Thus, habitus is historical, a product of all biographical experience (Steinmetz, 2006), embodied and expressed through durable ways of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking.

Habitus is mainly a method for analysing the dominance of dominant groups in society and the domination of subordinate groups. It can be used to focus on the ways in which the socially advantaged and disadvantaged play out, through daily interactions, attitudes of cultural superiority and inferiority established in their habitus. While it is important to view individuals as actively engaged in creating their social world, Bourdieu's method of habitus emphasises the ways in which 'the structure of those worlds is already predefined by broader racial, gender and class relations' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, 144). Habitus, then, is a means of viewing structure as occurring within small-scale interactions and activity within large-scale settings.

Usually, habitus in educational research is used as an explanation of the data rather than a way of working with it. In this paper, I attempt to use this concept as a way of questioning the data in order to show how habitus can still be embodied in ambivalently located individuals within the field of education, generating uncertainty, ambiguity, anxiety and a sense of deprivation (Reay, 2004).

To sum up, within this paper, I focus on students' views on education and happiness in the context of multiple crisis in Greece and the possible role of education in happiness attainment – concepts that have been relatively neglected by educational theorists. In this attempt, I use the aforementioned theoretical and conceptual framework as a basis and I employ habitus as a theoretical concept that will help me analyse the data generated by the focus group interviews. I

employ habitus because it holds promise for exploring the affective aspects of living in an unequal society, and may help us develop a holistic understanding of the lived, embodied, affective experiences of inequalities in contemporary society and build more complex models of social stratification (Reay, 2015). A psychosocial understanding of students' habitus (created within the educational institution) may allow for a better and richer appreciation of how the exterior – wider social structures such as the socio-economic crisis in Greece – is experienced and mediated by the interior, the psyche (ibid), and creates the proper conditions for a happy or unhappy life. It may also introduce other variables that may explain and predict social inequality (Illouz, 1997).

Methods of the research study

Epistemological and ontological assumptions

The methodology and the research process of this study are informed by the hermeneutic/interpretive perspective, as well as by critical epistemological underpinnings that derive from a 'transformative paradigm' (Riyami, 2015) and refer to reality as a social construction. From this aspect, I intentionally adopt an ethical, moral, political standard by which to judge the situation I study, and practise my research with consideration of the social, economic, political and cultural context of my specific research's objects and events (Hammersely, 2013). In other words, following critical epistemological underpinnings, this paper attempts to explore contemporary issues of today's social contexts in Greece, to develop connections among the economic, political, social and cultural standards of contemporary Greek society, to look for ways in which participants create new visions for Greek society, and to think of an action agenda for education reform that might change the lives of participants.

The aforementioned epistemological understandings of the world, as well as my own ontological position, shape my view about the possibility of attaining

respondents' experiences or 'voices' through a research study. For me, subjective accounts are not completely transparent. They are reflexively constituted between the researcher and the researched and, although they are always somewhat unknown, it is possible to grasp from them something about the respondents' articulated experiences and subjectivity (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000).

Research approach and methods for data collection

Within the framework of a qualitative approach, a two-stage research project was carried out: the pilot phase and the main phase of the study. At the strategic level of my research design – in conformity with my epistemological and ontological perspectives – I chose to conduct focus groups with a small number of students so as to approach my research questions in an open way. The decision to use focus groups was made partly due to the fact that this method offers a means of exploring the ways in which students interpret the world and their place within it. Moreover, this method seemed most appropriate for the age, the level of understanding and the cultural characteristics of the target group. It was also considered suitable because of what it can reveal about how students experience the impact of the social and economic crisis in Greece. According to many researchers, focus groups are very helpful in collecting data that have complex and extremely difficult meanings to approach (Krueger and Casey, 2000), and offer access to the ways people think about a defined research theme.

Research participants – access and procedures

My intention in this research study was to approach research participants whose views would capture diversity of experience and would help me classify key issues for future development. Thus, I employed the 'purposeful sample' technique (Patton, 2002). I started the fieldwork of the main phase of the study

by locating two secondary schools in Athens which constituted suitable venues for my research. The schools I chose were typical urban schools; my choice was based on student composition. The first school was located in an area very close to the city centre and contained large percentages of students from immigrant and working-class Greek families. The second school was located in a southern suburb of Athens, and catered mostly to students from middle-class Greek families, with a small percentage of immigrant students. I purposively sampled students from these schools on bases of gender and age, and I finally chose sixteen participants (eight girls and eight boys), comprising eight students from each school. My participants were students between 13-15 years old (the 2nd and 3rd years of lower secondary school). To proceed with my research, I continued with the informed consent procedures.

Ethical considerations

My research study complies with European and national Greek legislation and fundamental ethical principles, including those reflected in the Charter for Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the European Convention on Human Rights and its Supplementary Protocols, Articles 3 and 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the principles of regulation on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (GDPR).

Moreover, the study is guided by the Ethics Guidelines of the Institute of Educational Policy of the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, the Association of Greek Sociologists, BERA – The Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018). I chose these particular ethical guidelines because they seem best suited to enabling me to weigh up all aspects of the process of conducting educational research and to reach an ethically acceptable position in which my actions will be considered valid and reliable.

Methods of data analysis

In this study, I employed the technique of thematic analysis (Ryan and Bernard, 2003), in order to focus on students' perceptions, experiences, ideas and opinions. Thematic analysis allowed me a great deal of flexibility in the interpretation of the data. It also allowed me to approach the data derived from the focus group interviews more easily, by sorting them into broad themes. The analysis began early in the research process and it was subject to continuous review and revision. The process of analysis was reflective and cyclical in that it was directed to reveal particular themes as they emerged from the original research questions (Rapley, 2001).

In the next sections, I try to present the findings in their rawest possible state (Holliday, 2007), in order for them to be closest to the reality of their setting. However, as I have analysed, interpreted and arranged the data under thematic headings according to my research questions, it is already different from the social reality from which it was taken. Of course, the data in question does not allow us to make claims about the majority of students, since the project findings only relate to a very small number of students; nonetheless, the findings do offer important insights and provide some interesting indications of secondary school students' views.

The impact of the Greek socio-economic crisis on students' well-being, practice, dreams and aspirations for the future

Economic difficulties and material deprivation

Greece is still in a deep recession, and the impact of the crisis and the government's austerity measures, as students perceived it, have materialised as economic difficulties, changes to individual lifestyles, and a fall in living standards. In particular, students highlighted unemployment, job insecurity, income reduction, and increased poverty as results of the crisis. Several students

reported families suffering from material deprivation, as well as a partial or total inability to meet emergency expenses or payments for rent and bills. As a consequence, they noted, many families had become disorganised and experienced high levels of stress.

‘I know students whose parents have lost their jobs and they don’t know how they will manage to survive.’

(Aris)

‘I do not think that the change is so great for everyone... but of course there are some families that have been hit hard by the economic crisis.’

(Paul)

Negative psychological effects

In addition to the issues mentioned above, most students argued that the multiple crises in Greece had affected their everyday lives and well-being in many ways. The majority of the students pointed out that the socio-economic crisis brought not only economic problems but also their concomitant negative psychological effects. The entire structure of society changed, and people began to feel insecure and see themselves as casualties of the situation and its difficulties. Insecurity became commonplace. Students described the social space today as being infused with misery, fear, tension and an increasing sense of insecurity, created in part by the psychological terrorism of fear-focused news broadcasting.

‘...the economic crisis has changed the psychology of many people and their daily lives: how they spend their money, what they do in their spare time every day. They are not so open and social anymore... they are afraid of what the future will bring them.’

(Nikos)

'I remember when I was little, things were very different... we did not think so much about the financial crisis... now in recent years we hear about the crisis everywhere, in the news, in school, and it is generally a topic that everyone discusses...'

(Litsa)

What students describe here is a condition of existence without predictability or security – a condition of existence which is full of fears and which affects people's material and psychological wellbeing. People in Greece, according to the students interviewed, feel a sense of constant change and its concomitant anxiety, insecurity and increasing precarity – what Lazarrato (2009) calls the 'micro-politics of little fears' (Ball, 2015, 11). According to Lazarrato (2009), our emotions are linked to the economy through our anxieties (Ball, 2015). In recent years, people in Greece have become fearful, and precarity has become their fundamental condition.

The growing gap between the rich and the poor

Moreover, in the views of several students, since the beginning of the crisis, the rift in Greek society between the privileged rich and the working and middle classes has grown deeper and deeper. The latter groups face serious economic problems since the recession; of all sections of society, they were most affected by the austerity measures, the high unemployment rates and the dramatic salary reductions.

'...the rich have become richer and the working- and middle-class families have become poorer and are not able to meet their needs.'

(Vassilis)

Today, the average working- or middle-class family is not able to fulfil its traditional role in welfare provision – a fact that deeply demolishes social cohesion as a whole (Zambeta, 2014).

Positive and negative possibilities arising from the multiple crises

As stated by some students, there are both negative and positive possibilities arising out of this multiple crisis. Many students reported that the difficulties of the crisis had made them more serious and more mature; they had ‘reorganised’ themselves and their lives and they had learnt how to cut down on expenses and how to live with less.

‘...a positive thing, as I said before, is that we have become mature earlier. We don’t waste our money anymore on things that we don’t need. I cannot imagine something negative about this...’

(Gerasimos)

Some students argued that this era of crisis could become a time of reform and opportunity for the whole country.

‘...sometimes a crisis is needed in order to change things.’

(Efi)

The responses of these students suggest that, regardless of the severe distress this crisis has caused, there is something good emerging: students have become more conscious, and are able to realise the difficulty of the situation. These views are consistent with Christodoulou’s (2010) view of crises as situations of difficulty that, despite causing chaos and constraints, also offer opportunities for criticism, reflection, new narratives and change.

However, the drawback of this earlier maturity, as some students declared, is that they have also become very worried and find it difficult to enjoy their childhood. They have become much more aware of the situation in Greece; many students mentioned that they frequently discussed the economic crisis and the financial problems of their families with their parents, their teachers and their classmates, they worried about the future, and they watched the news. As a result, students explained that they sometimes felt they had been forced to grow up faster through exposure to their parents' problems and that, as a consequence, they were losing a large part of their childhood.

‘...maybe we have matured earlier than we should, we care more now about what is happening in our family, but as a result we are not so carefree and happy...’

(Gerasimos)

Students' replies revealed a strong and multifaceted relationship between the impact of the multiple crises in Greece and a crisis in childhood. This fact is consistent with the relevant literature (see, for example, UNICEF Office of Research, 2014).

Implications for students' dreams and aspirations for the future

Regarding dreams and aspirations for the future, the majority of the students stated that they had a vision of what they wanted to become in the future and of how their life would be. Most of the students had set goals, had embraced them, and were directing their efforts towards them. Only two students did not feel ready to set goals for the future and they could not visualise where they would be in ten years' time.

‘I would like to study paleontology and work here in Greece. Greece is the best place for paleontology. And Greece needs our support in order to come out of the crisis and face the problems that the crisis has created. I would like to have my

own home... that it will be around 100-120 square meters and it will be mine, to do my hobbies...'

(Michalis)

The majority of students' aspirations for the future appeared to be shaped by gender-specific ideas about certain jobs. Boys overwhelmingly aspired to take on roles in traditionally male-dominated sectors and favoured professions such as engineering (civil, mechanical, electrical), while girls gravitated towards female-dominated sectors and professions such as teaching (kindergarten, primary and secondary school).

'...in ten years' time, I will be in a kindergarten chasing little kids or I will still be at the university.'

(Maria)

'I would like to be a physical education teacher and to live on my own.'

(Afroditi)

Students' different professional paths could derive from individual preferences, but mostly they seem to derive from cultural factors that define gender roles. It seems that girls prefer occupations that allow them to reconcile work and family, and choose occupations with job security, employment benefits, and low penalties for career interruptions, (Görlich and de Grip 2009; Croson and Gneezy 2009).

Moreover, all of the students' dreams for the future included studies at university, their own family, a large and pleasant home of their own, a nice car, etc. It could be said that students' ambitions, dreams and aspirations for the future were influenced by their hope for the future and their habitus. Hope, according to Grant (2017), can be regarded as a form of social capital which

shapes students' habitus – namely, the 'set of acquired characteristics which are the products of social conditions', such as socialisation with family members and others outside of the family unit (Bourdieu, 2005). Students' aspirations are also probably related to their socio-economic situation and to the difficulties they faced in their families in this age of austerity – and they are, perhaps, defined by their objective life conditions.

Students' conceptualisations of happiness in relation to their everyday practices

Individualistic and materialistic conceptions of happiness

Happiness, in the view of the students interviewed, is related mostly to personal achievements and professional success. Students viewed and defined happiness in individualistic terms; according to them, self-improvement and personal development are their main goals in order to be happy, and this sometimes came at the expense of the collective improvement. Moreover, they presented their future family, as well as the acquisition of material goods, as achievements necessary for happiness attainment.

'I will be happy when I have my family, my dream job, and I am able to have fun with my family and friends.'

(Vassilis)

In the socio-economic context of crisis and globalisation, industrial western societies increasingly promote competition, individualism and liberalism (Stacey, 2011). In this context, the educational system fosters competition and individual improvement at the expense of the collective, of group effort, solidarity and participation. Students' one-dimensional and individualistic views of happiness, as can be seen in their replies, are consistent with the values that are traditionally cultivated in the Greek education system.

Many students defined happiness in terms of financial success and did not situate it in the current socio-historical context of multiple crises.

‘Happy is someone who has managed to realise most of his dreams of having a good job, a family, making money, hanging out, [having] hobbies and enjoying them with no stress... and he is also happy with his children, with the dreams of his children...’

(Mateo)

According to the students, there seems to be no doubt that having money is an important aspect of being happy. Students’ experiences of deprivation and their lack of access to quality education and to leisure relationships within the family appear to determine their notions of happiness (Andresen and Ben-Arieh, 2016). We could argue that their conceptualisations of happiness are based on the needs and deficiencies that have emerged during the crisis and around that which cannot easily be achieved in such difficult times.

Students’ conceptualisations of happiness in terms of financial success contradict the thoughts that they expressed in another discussion that followed after watching a video about life and happiness. In this discussion, most of the students agreed with the video’s message: that money is not necessary in order to have a good and happy life.

‘...the message they wanted to share was nice: that money doesn’t matter, it's more important to feel nice, to not be serious all the time and to feel free.’

(Marileni)

Differentiated conceptions of happiness

One student stated that happiness is something ephemeral and uncontrollable, such as a situational pleasure.

'...there are times that I feel nice, but there are times that I don't. This is how it goes.'

(Amalia)

Another student pointed out that happiness is an addiction because it provides relief for short periods of time and then fails us over and over again; we are hooked, and we want to have more and more all the time.

'You cannot be happy all the time. It's a feeling that comes instantly but, in that moment, you cannot enjoy it because you want more and more...'

(Efi)

It seems that after years in troubled educational institutions and through exposure to mass media, people have ended up confusing 'the pursuit of happiness' with the pursuit of power, money and prestige (Giroux, 2006). 'To have or to be' is a questionable dilemma, which Greek society has yet to address in pedagogy, curricula, and school practices. Students need to learn that happiness is not necessarily only an intrinsic consequence of material possessions.

For some students, happiness depended on others. They believed that only through others people's happiness can one feel happy.

'...you may not be happy, but seeing your children being happy, growing up, studying, then you become happy because you feel pleased with yourself because you gave them the right bases.'

(Mateo)

'Happy is someone who makes his parents' dreams come true...'

(Lucia)

According to some students, while happiness can mean different things to different people, there is a conceptualisation that fits almost everyone: that of achieving your dreams and of being with people who love you.

‘People are different, so everyone can think of happiness differently, but I think that there is something that covers everyone... happy is someone who has done what he has dreamt of.’

(Marileni)

‘I think someone is happy if he has achieved his goals and if he is with people who love him.’

(Efi)

In the view of several students, people can be happy in one domain of their lives and unhappy in another. For example, one may be happy in his/her working life and unhappy in his/her family life – or vice versa.

‘Someone may have achieved his goals, as we said before, but he may have lost a friend or a relative, someone whom he loves, and then he will not be happy... or maybe he has gained a lot of money by working all the time but he hasn’t done something adventurous that he would like to do like going to the jungle or doing some extreme sports...’

(Gerasimos)

Happiness in students’ everyday lives

Happiness did not appear to be related to students’ everyday experiences. Students seemed to put their hope for happiness into the future; happiness would begin when they finished school and their studies and ‘went out’ into society. They thought that, if they studied hard as children, they would be assured happiness later in their adult lives. This hope for happiness, according

to the students, helped them find purpose in school, accept the misery that they felt there and maintain their courage to continue.

'I think we are at an age where we should be happy, but we have so much homework, classes and all the things we have to do but don't want to... just in order to be happy in the future.'

(Christos)

'...from 1-10 [satisfaction level] I imagine 10 is the ideal... then I would say 5, because I still have a lot to do in the future because I am very ambitious...'

(Gerasimos)

Happiness appears to come as a side effect of students' hardworking childhood; for the students interviewed, happiness depends on other forms of capital, as well as on acquiring capital. Students will make themselves happy, as an acquisition of capital that will allow them to be or to do this or that, or even to get this or that (Ahmed, 2010).

Only a few students put forward that they were happy in the present because they had everything they needed: their parents, friends and health.

'I think I'm happy. I have my parents, I have my friends, I am healthy... I believe that, up to that point, I am happy.'

(Helen)

'...there are other people who feel much worse than me... so when I compare myself to them, I feel fine I have everything I need.'

(Lucia)

Not living in the moment, not enjoying simple things in the present is a great obstacle to happiness. Living in a present state of contentment and joy could

influence students' levels of happiness (Spring, 2007) but, unfortunately, only a few students appeared to do this.

Students' childhoods appeared to have become less enjoyable due to the pressure of the school. As students go into higher grades, the workload drastically increases, which gives them less time to spend with friends and increased stress (Barlow, 2003).

'I think I'm quite happy, but I've been quite nervous and stressed about secondary school and its obligations...'

(Gerasimos)

'I believe that, at this age, we have no reason to be unhappy. As far as my health is concerned, I am fine, there is nothing to worry me, but also there is nothing special to please me.'

(Afroditi)

The majority of the students appeared to be willing to spend an enormous amount of their lives and time and energy trying to make happiness happen in the future, and they often remained unhappy and discontented with their life situation in the present. They seemed to suffer from a lack of resources that constitute objective happiness, such as free time for rest, hobbies, friends, etc. This arguably results in significant loss of life satisfaction, well-being and hope, as well as creating a spectre of growing uncertainty, precariousness and anxiety. They appeared to have limited sociability and an increased sense of duty and obligations.

Students' views on the relation of education and happiness

The effect of education on happiness

In the view of several students, educationⁱ contributes to happiness by being a vehicle that takes them closer to their future dreams. As we saw in the previous section, students define happiness mostly in terms of financial success and they put their hope for happiness into the future. Thus, they accept the 'misery' of their school years as a 'bad chapter' in the story of their lives, and as a 'torture' that they need to suffer through if they want to succeed and attain happiness in the future. Therefore, it can be said that, for the majority of the students, happiness is something that could only be experienced 'out of school', both spatially and temporally.

'I believe that Gymnasium gives us the basis we need in order to move forward because, without it we would not be able to go even to the Lyceum.'

(Paul)

'They just prepare us for the Lyceum. First we go through the torture here so that the Lyceum will not seem difficult to us.'

(Efi)

Specifically, according to several students, education has both a direct and indirect effect on happiness. Firstly, in their answers, we find the effect of education on happiness through employment, income, labour status and other socio-economic variables. In other words, according to the students, people with a higher level of education have a higher probability of being employed and reaching higher income levels, and are thus more likely to report higher levels of happiness. Secondly, we find that education and the acquisition of knowledge has the effect of creating 'self-confidence' or 'self-esteem'.

‘...I think, yes, education will help us achieve our goals in the future. It will help us progress in the future and become important...’

(Christos)

Education, for some students, did not seem to touch their current interests.

‘I think that for the profession I want to follow, education is not relevant at all. In a very few areas, education helps me.’

(Afroditi)

Students’ views of education

Several students described education mostly as a means to get credentials and to reach economic or career advancement. These students spoke of focusing their attention mostly on their occupational (economic) life; they wanted to succeed and this, according to them, as discussed in the previous section, required a university education. Although these students thought that education was necessary, their view of education concerned the rather narrow dimension of preparation for professional life in terms of knowledge.

‘OK, it has to do with what you want to become when you grow up... well, it might not be relevant to what you're doing, you might want to do something pioneering maybe, or something generic that does not need any education – or that needs very little. On the other hand, education is a very important tool that should [...] not only give you the various credentials... the official papers with which you build your CV. But it can also give you the experience and the knowledge that will help you realise your dreams... even in the situation that education is in today, it helps a lot.’

(Gerasimos)

For these students, education is linked with happiness only as long as it helps them find a job and have a substantial income. This excess materialism that

appears in students' replies may eventually have negative consequences for the psyche and contribute to unhappiness (Giroux, 2011b).

There were, however, some students that regarded education and, specifically, schools as places where students developed strong interpersonal relationships, expanded their capabilities, built their characters and acquired moral principles – all factors that seem to be most closely associated with personal improvement, productivity and happiness.

‘I believe that education is very important because, apart from knowledge, it gives us moral principles which are very important if we want to build a character that will help us in our social and professional life.’

(Marileni)

The students' views above could be used to describe, in a nutshell, an education system that aims at fostering student happiness. According to Noddings (2015), if education would focus on developing strong interpersonal relationships and on building characters and conveying moral principles, then it could have the potential to be a key pathway to happiness.

To sum up, the impact of the crisis and the government's austerity measures on students' well-being, practice, dreams and aspirations for the future, as students perceived it, has been immense, and has materialised as economic difficulties, changes to individual lifestyles, and a fall in living standards. In students' replies, we can clearly see the tension between the material deprivation of the lower- and middle-class and the consumer logic in which they were nurtured until the crisis. This tension could probably explain the identification of happiness with the acquisition of certain material goods.

While it is important to view students as actively engaged in creating their social worlds, we should realise the way in which the structure of those worlds is already predefined by broader racial, gender and class relations. Habitus, then, is a means of viewing structure as occurring within small-scale interactions and activity within large-scale settings (Reay, 2004). Habitus is not a self-sufficient mechanism for the generation of action: like a spring, it needs an external trigger, and so it cannot be considered in isolation from the definite social worlds (and eventually fields) within which it operates (Wacquant, 2016). Thus, in the context of multiple crises in Greece, a context which is infused with misery, fear, tension and an increasing sense of insecurity, students' habitus does not seem to be coherent and unified. It seems to be broken or splintered between a super-specialised instrumental rationality that has been cultivated in the education system and an inner need for cultivation, acquisition of personal interests and self-realisation.

Conclusions

The impact of the multiple crises in Greece, as students perceived it, has materialised as economic difficulties, changes to individual lifestyles, and a fall in living standards. In particular, students highlighted families suffering from material deprivation, as well as a partial or total inability to meet emergency expenses or payments for rent and bills. As a consequence, they noted, many families had become disorganised and experienced high levels of stress. In addition to the issues mentioned above, most students argued that the multiple crises in Greece had affected their everyday lives and well-being in many ways. The majority of the students pointed out that the socio-economic crisis brought not only economic problems but also their concomitant negative psychological effects. Insecurity had become commonplace. They described the social space today as being infused with misery, fear, tension and an increasing sense of insecurity.

Several students reported that this impact has been immense, particularly for the lower and middle classes. Thus, it may well be argued that the multiple crises have aggravated the effects of inequality (Blyth, 2013). In students' replies, we can discern the affective aspects of living in an unequal society in the era of austerity. In this era, the students under study, most of whom are middle-class, experience uncertainty, ambiguity, insecurity, anxiety and a sense of deprivation; these affective experiences have been embodied in their habitus and it could be said that they act as a reflection not only of the existence of social inequalities in contemporary Greek society but also as the starting point of social inequalities (Reay, 2015). Reay does not claim that specific affective experiences are aspects of particular individual or class habitus, but rather that the impact of these affective and psychological transactions becomes sedimented in a certain habitus (Reay, 2015).

As stated by some students, there are both negative and positive possibilities arising from these multiple crises. These students reported that the difficulties of the crisis had made them more serious and more mature; they had 'reorganised' themselves and their lives and they had learnt how to live with less. However, the drawback of this earlier maturity, as they declared, is that they have also become more worried and find it difficult to enjoy their childhood.

Some students argued that this era of crisis could become a time of reform and opportunity for the whole country. The responses of these students suggest that, regardless of the severe distress this crisis has caused, something good is emerging. As George (2010) and Gamble (2009) argue, the crises could be considered an opening towards alternative scenarios or remedies, a major turning point which could lead to new institutions, new alignments, new policies, new initiatives and new ideologies.

Regarding dreams and aspirations for the future, the majority of students' aspirations appeared to be shaped by gender-specific ideas about certain jobs. Boys aspired to take on roles in traditionally male-dominated sectors, while girls gravitated towards female-dominated sectors and professions. It could be said that students' ambitions, dreams and aspirations for the future seem to be influenced by their socio-economic background (Reay, 2015), and are related to their socio-economic situation and to their objective life conditions and the difficulties they face in their families in this age of austerity.

Understanding students' aspirations and how they are shaped by their habitus is vital in gaining an understanding of the decision-making processes which young people experience. As Dumais (2002) argues, students' aspirations and educational expectations are part of their habitus because they represent a person's perception of his/her place within the social structure and reflect what is considered possible and desirable for them to achieve. 'Habitus is this 'can-be' which tends to produce practices objectively adjusted to the possibilities' (Bourdieu, 2000, 217). Children internalise perceptions and develop evaluations of themselves relative to other people within multiple contexts. Consistent with Bourdieu's theory (ibid), these perceptions are developed early in life and are to a great extent influenced by family context and by school and friends.

Parental practices, as well as parental educational expectations, which are class-based and driven by parental habitus – 'given who we are, what is possible for my child to achieve?' (Lareau, 2003; Roksa and Potter, 2011) – contribute to emerging habitus in children. Thus, students' educational expectations and aspirations for the future represent, to a certain extent, students' interpretation of Bourdieu's habitus as a set of dispositions, or a 'feel for the game' (Bodovski, 2014). Children in privileged families usually grow up having the need for studying and for developing higher educational expectations instilled

into them by their parents (Reay, 2015). These dispositions are important for both higher academic achievement and attainment, but also for life success in general. It could be argued that, through parental practices and then student practices, expectations and aspirations are part of how social reproduction is enacted in schools.

In this era of multiple crises, it appears that happiness for students is related mostly to personal achievements and professional and financial success. Students viewed and defined happiness in individualistic terms; in their view, self-improvement and personal development are their main goals in order to be happy. Moreover, they presented their future families, as well as the acquisition of material goods, as achievements necessary for happiness attainment. Students' views of happiness seemed to be one-dimensional – a fact that is consistent with the values that are traditionally cultivated in the Greek education system (Kalerante, 2016).

It could be argued that students' conceptualisations of happiness are based on the needs and deficiencies that have emerged during the crisis, and centre around that which cannot easily be achieved in such difficult times; they form a 'habitus of necessity', which operates as a defense mechanism against necessity (Bourdieu, 2000). These middle-class students find themselves in an unfamiliar field, and they have developed dispositions and powerful emotional responses in response to this exposure. Students' accounts reveal a great deal of anxiety about being contaminated by poverty and privation. Their fear of getting too close to need leads to a repudiation of need in order to maintain a sense of independence and achievement (Reay, 2004).

In the views of the students, happiness was unattainable in the present, and was something that could only be experienced 'out of school', both spatially and

temporally. This may have to do with the hard reality that young people – and especially young people from lower classes – undeniably experience in Greece (Chalari, 2014). Students often seemed unhappy and discontented with their life situation in the present, putting their hope for happiness into the future; happiness would begin when they finished school and their studies and ‘went out’ into society. Students gave the impression that they were suffering from a lack of resources that constitute objective happiness, such as free time for rest, hobbies, friends, etc. They also appeared to have limited sociability and an increased sense of duty and obligation. This arguably may have resulted in significant loss of life satisfaction, well-being and hope, as well as creating a spectre of growing uncertainty, precariousness and anxiety.

Here we can see clearly how the exterior – wider social structures such as the socio-economic crisis in Greece – is experienced and mediated by the interior, the psyche, and how it creates the proper conditions for a happy or unhappy life (Illouz, 1997). We can also see how social class is actually lived, how it informs our inner worlds and shapes our life chances in the outer world (Reay, 2005). As Ahmed (2010), Frey and Stutzer (2002) argue, social indicators can predict how happy persons with different social backgrounds can be. Spring (2007) alludes to the fact that those who are privileged enough to receive quality education benefit in multiple ways, from better health and better job prospects, to more chances for happiness. As such, relieving poverty is important to ensure the attainment of a certain level of happiness.

According to several students, education contributes to happiness by being a vehicle that takes them closer to their future dreams. Education, for these students, did not seem to touch their current interests; they described it mostly as a means to get credentials and to reach economic or career advancement. There were, however, some students that regarded education and, specifically,

schools as places where students developed strong interpersonal relationships, expanded their capabilities, built their characters and acquired moral principles – all factors that seem to be most closely associated with personal improvement, productivity and happiness.

As stated by the educational theorist Nel Noddings (2015), happiness and education are, properly, intimately connected. Happiness should serve as an important educational aim on several grounds. A good education system should contribute significantly to personal and collective happiness by supporting emotional development; it should help students feel good about who they are and where they come from, as well as helping them feel comfortable with others that are either similar to or different from themselves. Emotional development and happiness may ultimately disturb conventional class hierarchies (Illouz, 1997). Starting from the belief that good educational practices can help bring happiness to all, Noddings argues that schools should take upon themselves roles which have been traditionally assigned to the family, and promote the ways of living that promote happiness (2015).

In Greece today, we live and work in a historic moment of intense and rapid social change which offers many possibilities; a crisis is a historic moment of contestation, 'in which the reordering of social arrangements becomes a possibility' (Jones, 2010, 793). Crises, apart from amplifying disorientation and increasing the sense of flux, force people into a bewildering array of new contexts that release creativity, energy and new possibilities (Bussey, 2012).

Our challenge in this era is to re-imagine our roles as educators and researchers and find ways to create opportunities for students to build meaningful understandings of the world. Education is not about showing life to people, but about bringing them to life. The aim is not to get students to listen to convincing

lectures by experts, but to get them to search for new fruitful configurations regarding their lives, to re-connect with the social sphere and its support mechanisms, to speak for themselves in order to achieve – or to strive for, at least – an equal degree of participation and a more democratic, equitable and just future.

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Notes

ⁱ By ‘education’ here, students mostly refer to formal education that takes place at school and not the informal education that might involve outside learning e.g. from doing coursework, assimilating news media or works of art and culture, taking part in work-related training and experiences, or from social interaction and routine as well as extra-ordinary life experiences.

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