Women in Crisis? How Young Greek Women Navigate ‘Emerging Adulthood’ following the Effects of the 2008 Economic Crisis

by

Ioulia Kazana

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Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences
Department of Sociology

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Το δήλω ώχει το βουλητικόν αλλ’ άκυρον.

Women want, but can’t.

Aristotle, 384-322 B.C.
Abstract

This study focuses upon Greek women aged in their twenties and thirties, examining how they have experienced ‘emerging adulthood’ amidst the post-2008 social and economic crisis. Despite several commentaries charting the social consequences of the Greek crisis, few have examined exclusively on young women. This thesis is among the first to demonstrate the gendered effects of the Greek crisis. Based on in-depth interviews with 36 young women in Thessaloniki and Athens, the study assesses how young women negotiate ‘emerging adulthood’, by examining certain attributes of the crisis, combined with Greece’s unique cultural fabric. The thesis examines how traditional markers of adulthood, such as having a job, acquiring accommodation, establishing stable romantic relations and forming families have been considerably curtailed due to the effects of the crisis.

The findings of the thesis are positioned around three major themes; firstly, the importance of education and work for young women during emerging adulthood. Due to a reduction in labour market opportunities in medium-high skilled work, young middle-class women have found themselves facing considerably curtailed employment prospects. The study examines how young women negotiate these challenging employment contexts, learning to find ways of coping within these situations. Secondly, with most young women forced to live with parents, the thesis examines the ways these living situations provide both a safety net, but also a hinderance to their sense of autonomy and independence. Finally, the thesis explores how young middle-class women in Greece negotiate love and intimacy under conditions of financial hardships and a general context of uncertainties and insecurities. The thesis concludes with the argument that significant social uncertainties and repeated experiences of personal injustice and social strain have resulted in resignation - an accepted state of their life events with few alternatives and hopes of positive change.
Acknowledgments

This thesis is the result of hard work which has been done years before my arrival to the UK. It is the outcome of my hard studies in Greece and commitment to what I love. The opportunity that Dr Katerina Kozaitis gave me to work as her research assistant in 2011, in a topic on the crisis and its effects on the people from Thessaloniki, inspired and encouraged me to conduct my own study on the effects of the crisis on women like myself.

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This work is the product of voices who haven’t been taken seriously in the place they come from. Now these voices can at least be heard.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The global financial recession which erupted in the United States in 2008 severely affected Europe and magnified pre-existing social problems in the weakest chain of the European Union, the so-called P.I.G.S. of the ‘European South’—Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain. This condition formed a new reality for the vast majority of the people of those countries, by transforming their financial and social status (Bosco & Verney, 2012; Rhodes, 2013; Hassel, 2014; Matthijs, 2014). Within the context of the PIGS, widespread austerity measures have been introduced as methods of managing economic insecurity, but with profound collateral effects on many of their citizens.

According to Fouskas (2012), the current economic crisis shares common traits across the world, but in Greece is a unique case due to the magnitude and ferocity of economic harm on its citizens. Liakos (2011) has likened the Greek case as an amazing observatory of the great crisis of modernity, experienced in a painful manner by its people. Structural weaknesses of the Greek capitalist socioeconomic formation pre-existing the crisis (Michael-Matsas, 2010a), such as clientelism, political patronage, the absence of a strong industrial base, and corrupt practices of State officials (Pappas, 2013), have rendered the effects of the Greek crisis longer lasting, and even more extreme in the extent of austerity than other southern European nations. The consequences of multiple ‘bailout packages’ and subsequent austerity measures imposed by the Troika of international lenders— the European Commission (EC), European Central Bank (ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Dafermos, 2013; Lekakis & Kousis, 2013) have resulted in cumulative hardship for many of its people, not least those already placed in vulnerable economic positions—young people being one of specific interest in this particular study.

The Greek crisis has had a major impact on young people’s life chances, by increasing unemployment from 22.7% before the crisis in 2007, to over 50% in 2014—a figure which has remained similar up until 2017 (Eurostat, 2018). Young adults are more likely to be affected
than other groups during economic recessions, due to their lack of work experience (Danziger & Ratner, 2010). Yet, the added insecurities of work in Greece result in a severe destabilisation of their lives, inability to survive economically, as well as a negative impact on their mental health and well-being. Bell and Blanchflower (2011) indicate that younger individuals are more likely to experience depression compared to other individuals, due to rising rates of unemployment (see also Economou et al., 2012; Tsekeris, Kaberis & Pinguli, 2015). Furthermore, increases in reports on suicide in Athens have been attributed to the hopelessness amongst young people, and especially women, due to their lower financial status (Christodoulou et al., 2016).

Whilst young people, as a generic group, have received much attention on previous studies examining markers such as unemployment (Tagliabue, Lanz & Beyers, 2014; Williamson, 2014; Leontopoulou, Mavridis & Giotsa, 2016; Mastrotheodoros & Motti-Stefanidi, 2017), the gendered effects of the crisis have yet to receive scholarly attention. Indeed, despite some noted differences in the effects of the crisis between young men and women (European Commission, 2010; Featherstone, 2014; Papadakis, Kyridis & Papargyris, 2015), we have witnessed limited research on the voices of these young women, as they confront the harsh reality of the Greek crisis. It is with this focus that this thesis concentrates, examining how certain attributes of the crisis, combined with Greece’s unique cultural fabric, which serve to provide a fertile context with which to assess how young women negotiate ‘emerging adulthood’.

**Young Women in the Crisis**

In general, the most affected groups by the global financial crisis have been those already in a disadvantaged position in society, including young women. Long-standing inequalities in gender distribution and discriminatory norms and practices place women in a precarious position compared to men in Greece. Men, although affected by the uncertainty of current times, suffer lower unemployment risks than women (Papadakis, Kyridis & Papargyris, 2015), and are in comparably better positions both financially and socially to cope with adversities (Seguino, 2010a). On the one hand, unemployment for women has risen, in part, due to budget cuts in education, health, and sectors which have traditionally employed higher
numbers of women (Walker, 2009). On the other hand, in Southern Europe especially, many female workers are not covered by any social security entitlements, unlike in Northern European countries, which tend to protect the female workers with social security systems (Pearson & Sweetman, 2011). As Holmes and Jones (2009) explain, given men’s and women’s different engagement on the labour market, the macro-economic impacts are highly gendered. Despite the progress accomplished in the last few decades with women’s entrance into the labour market and better performance in higher education, the current financial crisis has encouraged effects such as long-term unemployment and/or underemployment, and sex discrimination which tend to affect women disproportionately (Drydakis, 2015).

The experience of young women in Greece also involves their ongoing negotiation with a traditional culture in Southern European countries that position them overwhelmingly as homemakers and caregivers (Karakatsanis, 2000). Low income families especially are more dependent on women’s financial contribution for children’s health and education, due to deficits in male earnings, or in some cases, where women are single mothers (Fortin, 2005; Stadelmann-Steffen, 2008). Women are usually the ones that tend to juggle different family duties and responsibilities, with care duties commonly expected even for young women (Corrigall & Konrad, 2006; Maume, 2006; Farre, Gonzalez & Ortega, 2011).

Since the 1990s, there has been an increase in the number of young women in Southern Europe entering higher education and achieved degree qualifications and beyond. Danziger and Ratner (2010) suggest that university educated young women are generally less vulnerable to recessions and unemployment than those without these qualifications. Similarly, Edelman et al. (2006) argue that young people who graduate from university have always had more prospects to attain a good job in the labour market compared to the individuals with no academic degree (see also Haveman & Smeeding, 2006). In Greece, however, this empirical reality – that higher education qualifications are generally associated with better employment prospects – is far more complex since the crisis. Because of labour market deficits since the crisis, which have seen reductions in medium-high skilled employment, Greece has witnessed those more educated becoming more at risk of unemployment than previously (Drakaki et al., 2014; Labrianidis, 2014). The realities of those young women who are more educated experiencing greater economic hardships is one of many challenges which they must confront, fundamentally shaping what it means to ‘grow up’ in a nation which offers few outlets for financial and social independence.
Growing up Greek, Women in Crisis

This project focuses on Greek women aged in their twenties and thirties and constitutes one of the first attempts to identify the ways that the current economic and social crisis has affected their understandings and experiences of their emerging adulthood. It examines what it means for a Greek woman to grow up in a society which finds itself between traditional norms and modernization, as well as radically changing in the midst of social and economic upheaval. Young women in Greece frequently appear to live in contradictions. On the one hand, ‘successful transition’ to adulthood is articulated through terms such as leaving the family home, having a stable job and financial independence, getting married, and having children; yet, on the other hand, the new economic order of the Greek crisis imposes major barriers, rendering the transition to adulthood extremely challenging. Taking this argument even further, cultural norms in Greece place different cultural and family expectations on the pathways of young women. Beliefs such as not leaving home until you get married still exist in Greece – a country which can be generally described as still harbouring patriarchal values which impose restrictions on the behaviour of women (Woestman, 2010). Therefore, although these women are adults in a chronological sense, the new socioeconomic landscape often makes them ‘act’ and live like they are still in previous life stages, as they are not able to follow the ‘standard sequence’ of a traditional transition to adulthood (Arnett, 2000; 2004).

Throughout this study, I refer to the concept of ‘adulthood’ and more specifically, ‘emerging adulthood’ – a concept developed by Arnett (1998) to denote the ways that traditional milestones of growing up have been elongated by social change, namely achieving careers, leaving home, and getting married at a later point in the life course than previous generations. Several other bodies of research have also been developed at the same time, namely studies in what is called ‘transitions to adulthood’ (Côté, 2000; Maguire, Ball & Macrae, 2001). The term ‘emerging adulthood’ is a suitable concept to apply to Greece given the socio-economic conditions which have been widely reported as delaying many traditional markers of adulthood, such as getting married, owning your own home, and establishing financial independence.

Since the middle of the 20th century, the term ‘adulthood’ was the unquestionable period of an individual’s life course (Hobsbaum, 1995; Beck, 2000). Settled into a long-term job, the typical 21-year-old had usually completed education, and was married with a new-
born child or was about to have one (Arnett, 2004). That is not to say that past youth transitions were utterly unproblematic and straightforward (Goodwin & O’Connor, 2005). Yet, as Lee (2001) put it, recent economic insecurities and social uncertainties have given place to a more delayed and resilient adulthood. One of the first to systematically address the problematic nature of emerging adulthood in contemporary society was James Côté (1994; 2000) who argued that mass consumerism has functioned as an impediment for a traditional transition to adulthood. Côté developed the idea that young people have become more ‘egocentric’ and attracted to materialism, with a consequent dismissal of more traditional social markers of adulthood transition, such as marriage. Like Côté, Arnett (1998; 2000; 2004; 2006) argued that industrialization led to a prolonged education and training for young people along with a delay in marriage and parenthood. Both Côté and Arnett maintain that young people’s delay of a traditional transition to adulthood is due to their need to experiment with themselves for longer than past generations did, whilst key milestones of the achievement of adulthood such as marriage have faded away, due to a more ‘egocentric’ culture young people have been nurtured in. Anglophone research (Woolbers, 2000; Danziger & Ratner, 2010; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011) has tended to perceive higher education as the key factor of achieving a stable and indeed financially profitable transition to work. Though, such a transition has been reported as highly problematic for young women particularly who live in Greece, as they are more likely to be unemployed and more restricted from home to seek solutions abroad compared to men (Livanos, 2010; Seguino, 2010b; European Commission 2013; Kretsos, 2013).

Focusing on the structural contexts of the crisis and how these conditions alter experiences of ‘emerging adulthood’ brings with it a need to address other social issues, besides the widely examined effects on unemployment. Drawing on different themes of the crisis, and how these have affected ‘emerging adulthood’, I examine the effects on the family lives of young Greek women, together with how their intimate lives with partners have been re-shaped since the crisis. Examining how the crisis trickles down into the everyday lives of young women, besides the more obvious impacts of unemployment and underemployment, is of crucial importance to this study.
The Effects of the Crisis on Emerging Adulthood

Beyond the headline features of the crisis in Greece, most of which concern high unemployment levels and high levels of public debt, there is also a multitude of different aspects which impinge on emerging adulthood. This study adopts the concept of emerging adulthood coined by Arnett (2004), and positions this around three main themes – unemployment/underemployment, relations with immediate family and parents, and intimate relationships. The choice of these three aspects of emerging adulthood corresponds with themes encountered in previous research (Seiter & Nelson, 2011; Silva, 2013), as well as the broad data themes derived from this study. I position these features of emerging adulthood around a brief outline of extant literature, followed by positioning these around the main research objectives of the study.

Unemployment/Underemployment

Completing education and starting full-time work are crucial for the journey into adulthood. Employment is connected with financial independence, which is one of the most important criteria for perceiving oneself as an adult (Arnett, 1997). As already expressed as far, reductions in medium-high skilled employment have led to those young people that are more educated having higher risks of unemployment (Drakaki et al., 2014; Labrianidis, 2014). Unemployment is, however, only part from the story of a wider range of difficult experiences of working conditions for these young women in Greece. As will be described through the data, working in poorly paid, temporary jobs, and often in hostile environments, are commonplace for the young women in my sample. The seeming consistency and lack of feasible end to these conditions of work further result in a status position which is more aligned with a fear of having no job than any job. Coming to terms with these working conditions and accepting their fates, can lead those women towards a re-orientation of a new existential order, and a renegotiation with their expectations and future.

For the majority of the women in this study, their expectations of having high educational qualifications render their status as ‘emerging adults‘ as deeply troubled and complicated. More broadly, this study contends with the question of how these women see their futures in a society which has few opportunities for attaining stable, well-paid work.
How does their gender impact on these experiences? What do these often-toxic working conditions do to the perceived status position of these women? How do these work conditions impact on their emotional resolve and well-being? And to what extent do these women entertain the realistic possibilities of leaving Greece to find work in other countries?

Families and Parents

Beginning with the impact on families, there are few studies examining how the Greek crisis impacts on the relationships which young women have with their immediate families of origin (Leontopoulou, Mavridis & Giotsa, 2016; Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017; Vleioras & Mantziou, 2017). A wider literature has charted the ways that young people’s relations with parents, for example, can be altered by economic hardships (Fuligni & Pendersen, 2002; Updegraff et al., 2012; Shenaar-Golan & Walter, 2015). These indicate a number of challenges ranging from relationship conflicts, up to difficulties having time to spend together due to extended working hours, for example. This is not to argue that the crisis is the only feature of importance here. Rather, in Greece, there are an abundance of additional cultural and role expectations that exist, which combined with the effects of the crisis make a rather complicated set of circumstances for young women to navigate. Societal expectations in Greece place pressure on young women to conform to the traditional pathway of leaving home only upon marriage, combined with being one of the first providers of care to parents in old age or sickness. Being a young woman growing up with parent/s therefore has a major role to play in how ‘emerging adulthood’ is experienced – and this study explores the complex dynamics between the role of the crisis, and related cultural norms of Greek society.

This study chapter positions itself around the following questions; how do young Greek women experience their relationships with parents as they grow older? How do they manage and reconcile these continued relationships with their parents even beyond the point of transitioning into adulthood and leaving the family home, including relations between fathers and mothers? How do young women reframe those relationships with parents after they have left home? This places specific attention on factors such as emotional strain, parental authority and control, constraints to personal freedom of young women and interference with lifestyle, emotional support which draws on the ways that young women
continue to receive material support from parents, and whether leaving the parental home establishes independence from parents as well as a defined status of ‘adulthood’.

**Intimate Relationships**

Intimate relations are broadly conceived as including relations with partners, may also bring a unique set of cultural and structural issues which merge together. Some studies have noted how in Greece, intimate relationships for young people have become more challenging, in part due to the pressures in home life intensified, due to financial and social strain (Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017). As a by-product of strains on the domestic sphere, the impacts on young people who are often forced to live at home into their 20s and 30s place further difficulties finding and maintaining relationships with intimate partners (Pnevmatikos & Bardos, 2014). Cultural expectations in Greece regarding leaving home only when married persist as common patriarchal values (Reher, 1998; Woestman, 2010; Petrogiannis, 2011). Yet, because young women find it hard to develop relationships with intimate partners (who also commonly experience the same setbacks as a result of the crisis), achieving independence and being able to form a new life with a partner become challenging (Pnevmatikos & Bardos, 2014). How the status of intimate relationships is re-shaped as consequence of the crisis remains an area of investigation which has attracted only limited scholarly focus. Furthermore, the ways these intimate relationships have implications for the hopes and material realities of attaining ‘adulthood’ for young women remain a central topic for this study.

The focus on intimate relations is positioned around the following questions; how are intimate relations sustained and altered as a result of the crisis? How have the conditions of the crisis resulted in renegotiation of relationships and expectations? One pressure which is confronted during the study is the ways through which financial strains impose direct and indirect hardships on intimate relationships. Although more extreme in non-cohabiting or married couple relationships, hardships are imposed on those young women maintaining intimate relationships whilst still living in the parental home. The harsh confrontation of having to decide on future choices of action, such as whether or not to get married, are heavily underpinned by the crisis, where absence of stable work and home/private space have a major impact on the sustaining of intimate ties.
The Motivation and Methods of Undertaking the Study

My interest in emerging adulthood in contemporary Greece partly derives from my own difficult experience meeting the traditional markers of adulthood for as long as I lived in Greece, as well as my desire to give voice to women who so far haven’t had the opportunity to be heard publicly. My story as a researcher focusing on young women’s emerging adulthood started in September 2013, when I left Greece to look for options abroad. Constantly frustrated, profoundly hurt, and betrayed by the country I loved so much, I decided to move to an unfamiliar Island where I had never set foot – the UK. Being an educated middle-class young woman myself with several academic and non-academic certificates in the hope of increasing my chances to obtain a job, I can in many respects identify myself with the participants of my study. Although this is not an autobiographical study, I draw upon a ‘reflexive sociology’ (see Philips, 1988) which helps in bridging the differences between researcher and participants – a matter I discuss in detail later in Chapter 3. With the present project, I am attempting to add a valuable insight into academic knowledge about the discourses and practices that young women in Greece currently adopt, in order to attain adulthood in times of national crisis.

This research is based on the voices of 36 women aged between 20 and 37, the majority of whom were well educated and from middle-class backgrounds. My interest in these attributes of young women, as opposed to say working class women, derives from the need to understand how both labour market deficits in available work for those with higher skills, in tandem with being met with continued frustrations at a personal level, plays out for these women. The interviews were all open-ended to give these women agency to share their testimonies in the order they wished. The research was completed in the summer of 2015. Half of the fieldwork took place in Athens, the capital and largest city of Greece, which dominates the Attica region and is one of the world’s oldest cities. My stay in Athens lasted 5 weeks. The rest of the research took place 520 kilometres north of Athens, in the city of Thessaloniki. Thessaloniki is the second largest city of Greece. The situation in Thessaloniki is in many respects similar to Athens. Well-established businesses have closed down over the past six years, resulting in a major problem of unemployment. The reason for choosing these two cities instead of a rural area, is mainly because I intended to focus on university educated
women that tend to live in bigger urban areas (Qian & Smyth, 2007; Arcury & Christianson, 2010).

**Synopsis**

In chapter 2, I will review the literature related to the main themes of the research within the context of emerging adulthood and the general socioeconomic climate of Greek society. Firstly, I will situate the social context of the study – the global economic crisis which has had a severe impact on the everyday lives of Greek people, and young women in particular. Secondly, I will present research on ‘emerging adulthood’. Here I will argue for the significance of sensitivity to gender, as well as a broader focus on how middle class young women have experienced major challenges in their transition to adulthood in Greek society, in the emerging adulthood literature.

In chapter 3, I will outline the theoretical and methodological perspective of my own project, through reference to symbolic interactionism, feminist standpoint theories, reflexivity, and feminist-informed interviewing. These will be related to the actual doing of the research, that is key elements of the research design, such as sampling, recruitment strategies, interview process and collection of data, the transcriptions, and the strategies followed for the data analysis. Interlinked symbolic interactionism and a gendered perspective will be apparent throughout my three finding chapters which following the methodology chapter, put an emphasis on women’s experience of turning into adulthood amidst the current social and economic crisis. Finally, I discuss the ethical considerations for the design of the whole research.

Chapter 4 examines the first empirical theme of the thesis: young women’s emerging adulthood and the importance of work. Work is fundamental for young women’s social status and gender role in Greek society, functioning as either an opportunity to establish independence from parents or an impediment, and indeed a stronger sense of dependence on parents’ support. As I will show, the participants of this study place a great significance on higher education as a means of gaining employment. The questions which will be examined are the role that these women consider education plays in their employment prospects, and how realistic these views are, considering the current state of the Greek labour market. As I will show, it is the unmet expectations between education and career options, together with
either continued setbacks in finding employment, combined with extremely hostile work conditions for those employed, which results in challenging social consequences for these women.

Following the previous themes of education and work, chapter 5 examines how young women negotiate their lives with their parents, amidst the Greek crisis. As I will show, family ties in Greece, the most important safety net for young women amidst crisis, have been strong even in pre-2008 era. These relationships can be positive and helpful for the young women that need both financial and emotional support, yet they place repeated strains and tensions on their personal lives. Here I will examine the gender dimension, showing how these relationships can differ between daughters and mothers, compared to fathers.

In chapter 6, I will discuss how young women negotiate love and intimacy under conditions of financial insecurity, dictated by neo-liberal social orders, which by and large have a severe impact on intimate bonds. I will illustrate the value that both coupled and non-coupled participants place on intimate relationships for purposes of emotional support, warmth, and reciprocity. The chapter develops by positioning the young women’s critique of Greek culture and men’s interest in pursuing them. The young women’s anxiety and lack of certainty regarding loving relationships were increased by their perceived reluctance for men to take their own responsibilities and confront directly structural hardships such as unemployment, and pursue women by following traditional flirting rituals. The chapter develops a discussion of the ways the economic strains impact on couples’ everyday interactions by focusing on the ways women respond to adversities and try confront them.

Chapter 7 places the key findings of my project in a broader context of sociological research on young women’s emerging adulthood, explaining that the Greek case can offer more general perspectives on these subject matters. The chapter also offers predictions about the enduring Greek crisis on the lives of young women, and presents a case for developing further research, examining how neo-liberal conditions have altered the lives of young women in cross national studies.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I will present a thematic assessment of emerging adulthood, which is attuned to the life course of young women, and the broad economic climate of Greek society. The chapter starts by outlining the social context under which the study is positioned – the global economic crisis which has had seismic impacts on the lives of Greek citizens. Positioning the Greek crisis, I discuss the timing, some of the causes, the meaning of the word ‘crisis’, as well as the severe impact that this financial turbulence has on the everyday lives of young Greek women in particular. After situating the social context of my study, I present the different typologies that have been addressed to the notion of ‘emerging adulthood’. Whilst emerging adulthood has been traditionally perceived as a taken for granted ‘middle period’ of the life course, recent research has presented how the last decades’ socioeconomic conditions have led to the de-standardisation of young people’s life course (Di Blasi et al., 2016; Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017). Developing the emerging adulthood, I will present the core themes that recent research has interlinked it with within the general context of the global crisis. These consist of the three key milestones of emerging adulthood which are education and transition to work, family relationships, as well as intimate partnerships. The emerging adulthood research is then related to the social conditions in Greece, and the relevance for explaining the lives of young women.

Initially, I assess the impact of the current economic crisis on the damaged employment prospect of young people, with focus on the educated female population who encompass the core sample group of this study. I demonstrate the situation of women’s employment options as based on the context of the Greek economic crisis. Additionally, I indicate how in the context of the current socioeconomic upheaval, higher education can be an obstacle for work opportunities, whilst the career prospects of young people with higher education in an Anglophone context is usually a broad determinant of successful career
prospects, and indeed higher wages (Danziger & Ratner, 2010; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011). I finish the section by introducing the phenomenon of ‘brain drain’ – why some young women choose to leave Greece, whereas others stay despite challenging socio-economic conditions.

Whilst I focus principally on young women, there is also a need to examine other dimensions of their personal lives and significant others. One of these is the everyday negotiations between young people (and women in particular) and their parents. Parents and family more generally offer an important buffer for young Greeks during economic hardships. I further chart some of the unique cultural attributes of family lives and care roles in Greece, which are analysed with respect to the roles and experience of young women.

The Greek Crisis: A Transitional Challenge

The impact of the 2008 global economic crisis on the life outcomes of citizens across the globe has been examined in several studies (e.g. Norton, 2012; Overbeek, 2012; Pentaraki, 2013). Factors from uncertainty of personal financial investment such as mortgages and borrowing, employment insecurity, and further cuts to social security and welfare, have all been highlighted as symptoms of the global economic crisis. In Greece, the effects of the crisis have various unique attributes, notably in terms of the size, scale, and ferocity of these neoliberal policies deployed by the State and its associated governmental agents of the ‘Troika’ (the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Union); the latter have created a new economic regime for Greece, underpinned by its management of debt and financial risk (Fouskas, 2012; Lekakis & Kousis, 2013).

When the (global) financial crisis began in 2008, Greece was ranked as the 27th largest economy in the world (Eurostat, 2011a). Its real impact on the lives of the Greek population though, has been high unemployment rates, which appeared after May 2010. This was the time when the Greek State, led by the prime-minister Giorgos Papandreou, signed the first Memorandum of agreement with ‘the Troika’, a conglomerate of the European Central Bank (ECB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union (EU). The ‘Troika’ imposed austerity measures on the Greek economy which became more extensive since the initial Memorandum was signed. These ‘reformatory’ measures, although initially signed and implemented to avert Greece’s default (Economou et al., 2013; Kentikelenis et al., 2014), in effect led to reductions in public spending, thus having serious financial and social
consequences on Greek citizens through radical deterioration in labour market conditions and even further cuts to the welfare State (Hall, 2011; Kretsos, 2012; Dafermos, 2013).

Choupis (2011) argues that the managers of national crises, in their effort to scaremonger and at the same time neutralize any resistance and critique, embraced a vocabulary which facilitated their plans. A prime example has been the term ‘crisis’. ‘Crisis’ comes from the ancient Greek word ‘κρίσις’ and means to ‘judge’, ‘decide’ or ‘distinguish’. Dafermos (2013) reminds us that the ‘father of medicine’, Hippocrates, used the word ‘crisis’ to describe symptomatology, referring to a crucial stage in the development of an illness, at which either the patient would recover or they would die. The interpretation that Dafermos gives about the use of the ancient word ‘κρίσις’ is that a decisive judgment needs to be undertaken about the solutions and the exit of the current situation.

Greece is considered the most financially problematic nation in the chain of EU member States, even amongst the rest of the Southern countries (Portugal, Italy, and Spain) of the European zone (Michael-Matsas, 2010a). Political life has always been challenging in Greece, for reasons associated with its Ottoman occupation, the ‘sensitive’ geographical position of Greece, as well as external interventions (Makris & Bekridakis, 2013). Epigrammatically, the list of catastrophes to Greek society over the past century or so includes; the 1896 economic default, the 1897 catastrophic for Greece war against Turkey, the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars, the 1914-1918 World War I, the 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe, the 1936-1941 dictatorship of Metaxas, the 1940-1945 World War II, the 1946-1949 Civil War, the 1967-1974 military junta, and the 1974 Turkish invasion in Cyprus. Talalay (2013) explains that although Greece’s impressive recovery after the economic devastation following both World War II and the civil war between 1946 and 1949, once it entered the EU (1981) and joined the Euro currency, its financial state changed dramatically. Data depict the bleak reality of a public debt of 109 per cent of GDP for 2008, which reached the staggering proportion of 177 per cent in 2015, according to Eurostat (2016).

There is a complex array of explanations for the economic crisis in Greece. Firstly, the most common approach adopted by many Marxist-inspired economic commentators is that Greece has been used as a neo-liberal social experiment in mass privatization and selling off nation’s goods and services (Harvey, 2014; Varoufakis, 2015b). Condemned as an economic model, the Greek case of neo-liberalism is notable compared to other Mediterranean nations, to the extent that its effects have been more cumulative and far reaching, affecting not just
the poorest, but also those from the middle classes. Furthermore, such a neoliberal model has also relied on the careful manipulation of Statecraft (Wacquant, 2009) by which the State has entered into an undemocratic ‘deal’ with neo-liberals from the IMF and European Central Bank, to instill mass privatization policies with little or no public consultation or democratic imperative. The classic case in point is Alexis Tsipras’ decision to ignore the wishes of the nearly 62% of ‘No’ voters – those 62% who voted against the revised and more extensive austerity measures in the Greek Bailout Referendum on the 5th July 2015.

Whilst the combination of imposed neoliberal control and complicit interaction with the State in Greece is hard to refute, the underlying rationalities regarding how Greece allowed such a system of totalitarian economic control to set foot is more complex. One argument is that a historical legacy of ‘clientelism’ and chronic incompetence are responsible for facilitating these politico-economic processes. Clientelism is a term which sits closely with informal corruption, although is subtler in operation with the latter term. In Greece, it is commonplace for some citizens to befriend politicians to gain personal benefits, such as public-sector employment opportunities for family, preferential national service location, or help with navigating other difficult bureaucratic tasks. Politicians themselves may strike ‘deals’ with citizens, such as support in elections (see Fouskas, 2012). This process of clientelism can be traced back to the Ottoman period and its ‘oriental values’ (Papakostas, 2012), where high taxation, imposed by often corrupt officials, resulted in deals being struck with private citizens, who would seek personal benefits of lower or no taxes in exchange for money or goods (Kaplanoglou & Rapanos, 2012). Clientelism therefore helps provide some further nuance to the argument that the crisis is simply imposed on its citizens. Although Greek citizens are far from active purveyors of extensive neoliberal restructuring, the customs and behaviours of Greek culture enable political behaviour to operate in a way which is not about supporting the collective good, but instead private interest. Public inquiries linking many senior politicians with having received personal allowances from citizens, often including financial incentives, are commonplace (Katsios, 2006).

Other commentaries, most notably those from outside Greece, have argued that Greece’s experience of the crisis can be attributed to its ‘laziness’, ‘too long vacations’, ‘greed’ and ‘desire for hefty pensions on retirement’ (Maselli, 2015). The German centrist-right news media has been especially condemning of the so-called ‘Greek attitude’ – that the behaviour of the Greek people has resulted in an economic fate – its lack of hard work and effort of its
people a strong factor in the economic climate (see the German magazine Focus, or Das Bild). These arguments are of course difficult to validate with any empirical evidence. On the contrary, data show that Greeks are the hardest working Europeans (2,037 hours/year), take home lower wages, and rarely get paid overtime (OECD, 2015). These collective myths and stereotypes about the so-called ‘Greek character’ have nonetheless had some effect on the sensibilities of politicians’ views about Greece, which have subsequently affected how they enter negotiations over Austerity packages.

Memorandum Unlimited

The social and economic consequences of this crisis with its neoliberal experiments and the measures imposed by three separate Memorandum of Agreements have had dramatic implications for Greek society. A Memorandum of Agreement (also known as a Memorandum of Understanding) is a formal business document used to express the convergence between two (or more) parties that wish to work together. The purpose of a Memorandum is to have a written understanding of the agreement between the parties, describing the terms and details of the partnership agreement. The first Memorandum of Agreement (also known as first bailout package), signed between the Hellenic Republic under Giorgos Papandreou and the Troika, was in May 2010. Of the 107.3 billion of financial assistance, only 72.8 billion was disbursed by March 2012 – when a second Memorandum was signed, comprising the undisbursed amounts of the first package, and additional 130 billion euros for the years between 2012-2014. The second Memorandum was superseded by a third one in July 2015 for ‘stability support’ in the form of a loan with an availability period of three years (Varoufakis, 2015a).

Some of the austerity policies, imposed by the multiple Memorandums, are the reduction of the basic salary to 500 euros monthly and 400 for young people (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 2012), cuts in pensions and social needs, price liberalization, high taxation and lowered labour demand, with a subsequent sharp decline in the population’s standards of living. Koukiadaki and Kretsos (2012), for example, argue that the new reforms not only failed to deliver growth, but led to the deterioration of working and living conditions. In the same vein, Panagiotou (2010) raises the issue of social instability and dramatic worsening of people’s living standards (see also International Monetary Fund, 2013), whilst
child malnutrition increased from 23% in 2008 to 41% in 2012 (UNICEF, 2014). Similarly, Kentikelenis et al. (2014) indicate how austerity measures have affected health, as well as the public’s access to public health services in Greece. A survey, conducted by the City of Athens Homeless Shelter (KYADA) between March 2015 and March 2016, indicates that the homeless people in Athens are estimated to be over 9,000, sixty two per cent of them Greeks. Alamanou et al. (2011) call those people ‘neo-homeless’, with many of those homeless consisting of the educated middle classes, whose current living conditions are directly associated with the economic crisis and their job losses. Health care services are being constantly deteriorating (Kentikelenis et al., 2011), whilst suicide rates hit a record increasing by 40 per cent after the introduction of new austerity measures in June 2011 (Economou et al., 2016), in a country where suicide rates were among the lowest – 2.8/100,000 citizens (Reuters, 2012).

As Markantonatou (2013) explains, the austerity measures implemented by the Troika are not only punitive, but also highly unsuccessful, as they intended to take the country out of the crisis by 2010 – a target which up to date gets postponed year by year. Therefore, at the time of writing, the left-wing government by Alexis Tsipras signed Memorandum 4 in May 2017, which expects the Greek government take fiscal measures to save 450 million. Cuts in unemployment and social benefits, high emergent taxations, cuts in medical care, and reductions in heating allowances are only a few of the new austerity measures that the new government is planning to take in the aftermath of the new agreement with the Troika.

Kretsos (2013) argues that young people are one particular group that has suffered considerably under within the crisis. Similarly, Gounari (2014) states that young people are usually the least advantaged group, as are more likely to occupy part time jobs and to be deprived of any insurance (see also Papadopoulos, 2014). The latter, Christodoulou et al. (2016) maintain, has led to higher levels of hopelessness. Reported official rates of 60% unemployment have been well documented as placing youth in a difficult set of circumstances (Biletta & Eisner, 2007; Mizen, 2009; European Commission 2013; Kretsos, 2013), with major social effects on their life chances, hopes, aspirations, and capacities to survive economically.

Yet, at the same time, one element unique about the Greek crisis is the fact that it has extended beyond working class, with income inequality in Greece rising for both those classed as working class and middle class (Molokotos-Liederman, 2016). Tsekeris et al. (2015) argue that the middle classes in Greece – those that constitute the main corpus of Greek society – are now experiencing an extended negative impact. The present study focuses on women
that tend to have more temporary, casual, and informal jobs, with poor working conditions, low incomes, and insurance systems which do not protect them adequately. Furthermore, as the European Commission (2010) has shown, for young women, the service sector where jobs are typically more commonplace (also Labrianidis & Vogiatzis, 2013; Drydakis, 2015) has been hit hard by the effects of low wages and limited job security, with pension cuts universally disadvantaging women in different ways to men (World Health Organization, 2011; Featherstone, 2014). Following Rubery and Rafferty (2013) it is crucial to unpack what the effects of austerity are for men and women. It is therefore possible that the structural conditions of Greece play a key part in altering what it means to be a young woman growing up in Greece, raising questions about the empirical relevance of existing conceptions of ‘youth’ or emerging adulthood.

**The Concept of Emerging Adulthood**

In the aftermath of the World War II and the decades following it, most Western societies witnessed economic prosperity which allowed young adults to experience an ordered and predictable transition to adulthood, including finding a stable career, getting married, and having children when aged by the early 20s (Vleioras & Mantziou, 2017). Arnett asserts that as recently as 1970 “young people grew up quickly and made serious, enduring choices about their lives at a relatively early age” (2004: 3). However, it has been argued that over the last decades of the twentieth-first century, in many countries this ‘institutionalized’ fashion of achieving adulthood has become increasingly elusive for many young adults (Mary, 2014) – often in ways which leave young adults in a disadvantaged position. A standard period of adulthood is said to have given place to a more complex and insecure life transition (Lee, 2001), occurring over a much longer time frame compared to the past (Schwartz et al., 2013). Therefore, Featherstone and Hepworth (1991) suggest that the structure of the contemporary youth life course has become fundamentally altered as an outcome of the social, economic, and cultural transformations of the society.

This de-standardisation of the contemporary life course necessitates a new term that helps conceptualize the lives of young people aged from their late teens to their mid- to late 20s. The research on transitions to adulthood has explained the ways that young adults are called to take decisions and actions, including finding a stable job, leaving the parental home,
and establishing one’s own household. There has been debate on the ways that ‘adulthood’ and ‘transitions’ have been conceptualized by scholars. One attempt to define this particular life stage is the notion of the ‘arrested adulthood’, developed by James Côté (Côté & Allahar, 1994; Côté 2000). Côté’s broad thesis is that traditional pathways from adolescence into adulthood have been impeded by the influences of mass consumerism. For Côté, consumerism has resulted in a breakdown of previous social markers for adulthood transition – namely marriage and parenthood – which have become less attractive for adolescents, as a result of a heightened state of individualization and ego-centrism created via the mass media and consumerist principles. Whilst Côté’s analysis has plausibility regarding the increasing status of consumerism and its effects on the aspirations of some young people, it has several pitfalls. One is the notion that traditional markers of adulthood, such as marriage and children, have been considered less important for young people, replaced instead by more ego-orientated pathways, such as careers and higher education. Although Côté does not deny that these traditions have disappeared altogether, his thesis suggests that the meanings and investments which these receive have changed into more ego-centric outcomes.

Côté’s suggestion that the mass media has occupied such a key role in influencing young people, compared to socialisation sources such as family, friends, and community (and within the confines of class, culture, gender, and ethnicity), is problematic. A welter of examples exists illustrating that despite growing up in different social conditions and generations, the attitudes which children and their parents share are strikingly similar (e.g. Moen, Erickson & Dempster-McClain, 1997; Dhar, Jain & Jayachandran, 2016). In turn, Côté’s thesis is derived from examples largely from North America, which leave several questions about whether his thesis can be generalised to societies which still maintain strong expectations and traditions around values of marriage and family. Examining traditional pathways to adulthood across Europe, there is a mixed picture when it comes to the frequency of, and expectations towards marriage (to use one such example). A rich literature on the Mediterranean in general and Greece in particular (Reher, 1998; Papataxiarchis, 2012), has tended to emphasize the pivotal importance of marriage especially for women, serving as an integral rite of passage to adulthood (Dubisch, 1991; Pnevmatikos & Bardos, 2014).

Like Côté, Arnett (1998; 2000; 2004; 2006) identifies major changes within Western industrialized nations over the past 20 to 30 years, including widespread participation in postsecondary education and training, greater tolerance of premarital sex and cohabitation,
and an increasingly delayed time before entering marriage and parenthood. Arnett uses these changing societal structures and choices exhibited by young people to devise a new concept, known as ‘emerging adulthood’ – a new period of the life course between adolescence and young adulthood. Arnett suggests that this period begins around age 18 and extends through the 20s. Young people perceive adulthood as a process “intangible, gradual, psychological, and individualistic” (Arnett, 1997: 15), and accordingly, “events have very little salience for young people in their own conceptions of the transition to adulthood” (ibid.: 16); instead, they look to psychological and material independence as a means of expressing the ideology of individualism they have embraced (ibid.: 17).

As such, Arnett (1998; 2004) suggested five features that make emerging adulthood distinct: it is the age of identity explorations (of trying out various possibilities, especially in intimate relationships and work), the age of instability (the instability derives from the explorations and shifting choices in intimate relationships and work), the self-focused age (young adults develop skills for daily living, while they gain a better understanding of who they are and what they want from life), the age of feeling in-between (they feel in transition, neither adolescents nor adults), and the age of possibilities (when they have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives). Emerging adulthood is perhaps the most heterogeneous period of the life course because it is the least structured. Consequently, many emerging adults would feel that they are in the midst of these processes of emerging adulthood, but have not completed them yet – on the way to adulthood, but not there yet (Arnett, 2003).

Moreover, Arnett (2000) describes emerging adulthood as a period of optimism, where young people have more options and potentials than in any other life period. It is argued that emerging adults in various cultures tend to feel optimistic about their future quality of life, financial prosperity, career achievements, and intimate relationships (Nelson, 2009; Seiter & Nelson, 2011). According to Arnett, emerging adulthood is a purely psychological period based upon an existential maturation where young people have the opportunity for self-exploration and independence. Arnett states that although his sample is comprised of American university students, his concept of emerging adulthood can apply more generally to young people aged 18–29 across most Western industrialized societies. Although widely applied and supported as a concept, ‘emerging adulthood’ has some limitations. As Bynner (2005) argues, emerging adulthood fails to recognize that individual experiences are highly shaped by social forces, such as gender, social class, qualification level,
and family economic status (Heinz, 2009; Petrogiannis, 2011). There are young people that have different life trajectories even in societies profoundly affected by industrialization and globalization. Although some young people with the right qualifications, training, and contacts can enjoy new opportunities and make successful transitions to adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Williamson, 2014), there are many others whose future prospects are less promising. Therefore, a ‘standardized’ emerging adulthood stage that Arnett suggests is not universal, but rather depends upon cultural (Nelson, Badger & Wu, 2004; Mitchell, 2006; Bynner, 2008) as well as social institutions (Heinz, 2007).

Emerging adulthood also differs demographically and depends on the cultural and socio-economic environment of social development or socialization (Leontopoulou, Mavridis & Giotsa, 2016). While previous studies have focused on both the USA and the UK (Stone, Berrington & Falkingham, 2014), over the past decade, there has been an increasing interest in investigating emerging adulthood in several other parts of the world, including China (Nelson, Badger & Wu, 2004), India (Seiter & Nelson, 2011), and European countries (Sirsch et al., 2009). Although emerging adulthood has been criticised as a universal developmental stage (Bynner, 2005), it is generally recognized that the transition to adulthood has become more delayed, with traditional markers of adulthood, such as getting married and leaving home, occurring later than in previous generations (Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017).

Across Europe, a number of recent studies have shown cultural similarities and differences in transitions to adult life (Zukauskiene, 2015). In the Mediterranean region, emerging adults grow up in similar ways (Iacovou, 2002; Vogel, 2002). Postponement of parental home leaving, high unemployment rates, and a difficulty in finding a job, especially by young women, are some of the characteristics that young individuals face in southern European countries (Lennartz, Arundel & Ronald, 2015). The interpretation which is given for those aspects in youth development in Mediterranean societies concerns the complex interaction between structural factors, such as high unemployment rates and inefficient youth policies, cultural factors, such as “clientelistic relationships in the political arena” (Gal, 2010: 96), and ‘familism’ that replaces the absence of the welfare State support for young people (Sestito & Sica, 2014; Inguglia et al., 2016).

Currently, there is a very limited body of research focusing on the criteria for the transition to adulthood (Petrogiannis, 2011; Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017) and the developmental features of emerging adulthood (Leontopoulou, Mavridis & Giotsa, 2016) in
Greece. With questions regarding the universality of the emerging adulthood thesis to nations outside the US, UK and other parts of Northern Europe, Greece is an important ‘case study’ site through which to interrogate these interpretations.

**The Greek Case of Emerging Adulthood**

As I will show, the strong influence of family relationships on their lives during emerging adulthood and even beyond it, is a unique aspect of young people’s development in Greece – a feature that diversifies Greece to the rest of the Westernized world. Therefore, although it appears that young adults who live in Greece consider individualistic criteria, such as accept responsibility for your own actions, make decisions for your life, establish equal relationship with parents, as important markers of a successful transition to adulthood, Greeks place a higher value on family relationships and responsibilities associated with caring for close family members (Petrogiannis, 2011). Mylonas et al. (2006) explain that in Greece, young people do not challenge values associated with their responsibilities towards their parents and extended family. As Sakellariou and Koronaiou (2018) explain, obligations and caring duties between family members are values of Greece’s traditional agricultural societies from the pre-World War II period. These values are still important elements of the Greek family system and are respected by all generations. Moreover, Petrogiannis (2011) noticed a clear gender difference in the way young adults consider the criteria for the transition to adulthood. Whilst men rated financial independence and family formation criteria as more important for adult status than women, women valued family capacities, as well as norm compliance as the criteria for a successful transition to adulthood.

The optimism and lengthy explorations of identity and career possibilities described by Arnett (1997) dismiss important institutional, social, cultural, and cross-national variations in shaping adulthood transitions (Mitchell, 2006). As Galanaki and Leontopoulou (2017) explain, levels of optimism towards their futures are lower among young Greeks compared to other cultures. The presentation of emerging adulthood as a life stage characterized by self-exploration and optimism fails to recognize the cumulative setbacks established by the crisis which reflect heavily on these reduced levels of optimism for the future. Di Blasi et al. (2016) in their research on emerging adulthood in times of socioeconomic recession
concluded that the youths’ feelings of instability about the future are more a consequence of a structural lack of support, rather than the outcome of an identity exploration. Instability is not a choice that young people in Greece tend to make as part of an adventurous self-exploration, but rather a condition which has been imposed on them by the socioeconomic structure of the country. Therefore, instead of optimistic, young adults tend to feel rather pessimistic regarding their options for any career prospects, regardless of their training and efforts.

Defining ‘youth’ has been a challenge for this study (as in general like Furstenberg, 2001 suggests) as the boundaries from adolescence to adulthood depend on a range of factors, such as the macrosocial context (socioeconomic conditions), as well as the microsocial one (family, personal values). Emerging adulthood is a productive concept in raising awareness of the impact that globalization and technological transformation have on young people’s transitions to adulthood. A mere focus on the individualistic qualities for the achievement of adulthood is limited and inaccurate, with socioeconomic structures highly important for the understanding of how young women perceive their biographies within the environment they live in. Although Arnett does not discount such ideas, the extent to which his work offers a detailed application of the interplay between structural changes and individual pathways into adulthood is partial, especially in contexts outside of the USA and Northern Europe.

The concept of emerging adulthood is not culturally universal and requires a degree of adaptation to the conditions of Greek society. Factors such as the role which Greece has as a nation of hybridity, i.e. neither purely ‘Western’ nor ‘Eastern’ (Bavaj, 2011), make the Greek case a difficult one to apply to the concept of emerging adulthood – a concept which is constructed from Anglo-American cultural conditions. Structural weaknesses, such as the absence of an industrial economy and corrupt practices of State officials, existed long before the crisis began in 2008. Young adults’ life chances have been severely tested since 2008 with unemployment rates going beyond 60% (European Commission 2013; Kretsos, 2013).

When we feature gender within analyses of emerging adulthood, we find even fewer accounts. As such, the focus on understanding young women’s subjective construction of adulthood will exist at the forefront of this study. Women are currently in a particularly vulnerable position in Greece due to disproportionate cuts in services, in tandem with the lack of any safety nets and social benefits compounding long term unemployment and/or
underemployment (Drydakis, 2015). The independence that women may aspire towards achieving during transitions to adulthood is stretched in time, with young women in Greece often leaving the parental home after their 30s (Eurostat, 2016). Leaving the parental home when aged into the 30s is both attributable to the current crisis, as well as patriarchal gender expectations in Greece which enforce rigid standards on young women – the classic standard being that marriage should be the most desirable means of leaving home (Woestman, 2010; Papataxiarchis, 2012).

Finally, categories such as ‘working’ and ‘middle’ class in Greece do not apply neatly to conceptions derived from Anglophone contexts. Typically, in the UK, for example, social class has either been defined as a ‘real’ objective distinction created by economic and occupational hierarchies (Goldthorpe, 1997), or as a culturally situated identity position which is more complex than simply what job you have and how much money you possess (e.g. Skeggs, 2004). The UK also has a rather unique cultural history of class framed around the significance of feudalism up to and beyond the industrial revolution during the 1800s (Thompson, 1963; Roberts, 1971). In Greece, there are few published accounts within which comparisons can be drawn to the British case (or elsewhere besides). As such, this study proceeds cautiously with any suggestion that the class politics of Greece resemble those from other nations.

During this study, the label ‘middle class’ is used to define the sample of women interviewed. This label, ‘middle class’, is complex in Greece. There are firstly some overlaps with meanings and understandings of class in the UK and elsewhere. There was a strong cultural belief in the importance of education and aspirations to enter occupations such as doctors, lawyers, accountants, or teachers among these women. These educational pursuits mostly involved the young women having attended university, and with significant parental support for these choices also evident in most instances. The ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu, 1984) which is commonly connected with these educational backgrounds and intended occupational investments is also of relevance, such as having parents who themselves have jobs in similar professional sectors as the intended pathways of the women, engaging in extra-curricular activities such as learning foreign languages, music, theatre, to name a few examples (see Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2010). Where the label, ‘middle class’ is an uncomfortable fit however concerns the actual (not aspired) jobs which these young women conduct. Due to major shortages of jobs in high skilled professional sectors such as IT, law, engineering, and
teaching (Livanos, 2010), a large number of middle class young women have been forced into taking lower-skilled, casual positions in the hospitality or touristic sector (e.g. cafe/bar work, hotel porters and receptionists, beauty therapy).

This study is not intended to be a study which directly engages with the meanings of class. Rather, the focus is concentrated on what emerging adulthood means within the conditions of the crisis for young women, who I describe as ‘middle class’ based on the features already noted above. The material realities of these young women are that their high educational levels in particular, operate in many cases to increase the risks of unemployment and underemployment in Greece (Drakaki et al., 2014). Quite literally, these young women can find themselves priced out of a labour market, where receiving little social or financial return for their educational investments, must learn to cope with these bleak material realities in their own ways. The positioning of the study within a set of distinct socio-economic circumstances (expressed as ‘the crisis’) also provides an opportunity for assessing whether class operates as a means of social distinction and advantage for young women (e.g. Skeggs, 2004). In other words, in a climate where jobs and social security has been drastically reduced, do concepts such as cultural capital have any validity, especially if there are few options for material ‘success’.

**The Core Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood and Greece**

Emerging adulthood research is vast in size, covering a wide number of aspects of young peoples’ lives. During this section, the emerging adulthood literature is unpacked in accordance with three main features, which have been widely understood as having important influence on the life outcomes of young people; work and education, the role of parents and families of origin, and intimate relationships. The selection of these three features also corresponds with previous applications of the emerging adulthood literature (Arnett, 1998; Seiter & Nelson, 2011; Silva, 2013). Unpacking the three bodies of literature as related to emerging adulthood, this section also requires analytic work to address how far the bulk of these Anglophone-based studies can be applied to the Greek context, which as previously mentioned, has only a small evidence base from which to understand emerging adulthood. It is with these goals that this section proceeds.
**Work-education**

As mentioned above, the global financial recession which began in 2008 has led to economic deregulations, exacerbating pre-existing social inequalities in Southern Europe, and particularly for young people below the age of 30 whose chances of employment were decreased significantly (Eurofound, 2012). A significant amount of research suggests that young people in most industrial countries face a higher risk of unemployment than the rest of the population (Giuliano & Spilimbergo, 2009; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Chalari, 2012; Kretsos, 2013). In the same vein, Dietrich (2013) argues that although the effects of the crisis are widespread across populations, it is the young people who have been hit disproportionately, due to unemployment rates having increased dramatically. Unfortunately, the disadvantaged position young people face (compared to other age groups) when entering the labour market applies to all European countries (Biletta & Eisner, 2007). This happens due to difficulties with demonstrating suitable levels of experience, as well as young people tending to have more temporary and short-term contracts compared to other age groups (Russell & O’Connell, 2001; Livanos, 2010; Dietrich, 2013; Tsekeris, Kaberis & Pinguli, 2015).

In *The Precariat*, Standing (2011) describes how global changes have resulted in a growing fragility regarding the certainty of career and wages. These effects have largely been the result of neo-liberal changes to labour markets, leading to situations where many young people have little sense of security or certainty regarding work opportunities. Similarly, Bauman (2007) has described the liquid nature of work in the 21st century, and its resulting dissolution of stable career pathways. Both narratives describe the extreme uncertainty of work in contemporary times, focusing in particular on young people, immigrants etc. Whilst both Standing and Bauman argue that these effects have been disproportionately felt among the socially marginalised, the situation of Greece, and young women in particular, could translate with these interpretations.

However, there are essential differences across different European countries in terms of young people’s risks of unemployment and their prospects of escaping from it (Russell & O’Connell, 2001). Eurostat data, which records aggregate unemployment rates for EU nations (across all age bands), shows that in 1998, Greece’s unemployment rate was in line with the EU average at 7.4% unemployment (Eurostat, 2018). However, in the years after the crisis
erupted in 2008, these rates increased by approximately 5% each year, comprising a peak of 28% in 2013. Since 2013, there has been a small decrease in total unemployment across Greece, with a reduction to 21% witnessed in 2017. For young people aged 15-24, Eurostat shows that in 2007, 22.7% were unemployed, with this figure increasing in 2014 to 52.4%, before stabilising to 47.3% in 2016 (Eurostat, 2018). Contrasting youth unemployment figures with aggregate data is important to illustrate that the reported decline in unemployment reported after 2013 is much smaller for young people. There are, however, problems with data recording with these figures only including those persons who register with the State as unemployed. Furthermore, the figures do not give an account of the levels of pay and conditions of work in Greece which have also been reported as falling heavily for many sectors throughout the majority of the post-crisis period (Kretsos, 2013; Drydakis, 2015).

Biletta and Eisner (2007) mention that youth unemployment in Greece has never attracted enough attention among several political parties. As Kretsos (2011) puts it, Greece, along with other Southern European countries, has been historically characterised by strong family ties as the main cornerstone of support and solidarity. The European Commission (2013) admitted that the biggest victims of the current economic crisis are young people and especially those aged between 18 and 24 years, characterizing this age group as a ‘lost generation’. Youth unemployment levels have been twice the national average, with women experiencing higher unemployment risk (Chalari, 2012; Kretsos, 2013; Papadakis, Kyridis & Papargyris, 2015). In light of this, current EU empirical studies demonstrate that women have been affected by the unemployment in different ways to men, regarding their physical and mental well-being (European Commission, 2010; World Health Organization, 2011). The latter has been confirmed by recent research on the vulnerability to health/mental health by factors such as long-term unemployment, debt, and sex discrimination which affect mostly women (Drydakis, 2015).

Russell and O’Connell (2001) argue that the chances a young person has of making a successful transition from unemployment to work do not depend only on their country of origin, but also on other factors such as gender, age, family background, human capital characteristics (such as education, experience, and duration of unemployment); they conclude that women generally have less opportunities for a successful transition to employment. Although it is possible that there are class differences in Russell and O’Connell’s argument, these remain unexplained. Writing in the context of Greek culture, as a factor
shaping gender and unemployment, Karakatsanis (2001) argues that traditionally, patriarchal norms are responsible for why women tend to experience higher levels of unemployment than men. In particular, Greece has seen women entering the formal labour market at a time period comparably later than women in Northern European societies, which Karakatsanis attributes to traditional cultural norms regarding women maintaining the home. This process of women entering the formal labour market has been attributed by some scholars as an example of women demanding greater financial independence in reaction to a previous generational idea of women as homemakers (Karamessini & Rubery, 2014).

A number of recent studies in the Anglophone context have indicated young adults’ tendency across the world to pursue additional training and education, as a means to achieve a more successful career or maintain their jobs by keeping skills up-to-date (Lewis, Smithson & Kugelberg, 2002; Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006). The frequent reason which is given for the necessity of lifelong learning is the potential competitiveness it could offer in a constantly changing global economy; in that context, lifelong learning can be found in policy discourses (Biesta, 2006) and is encouraged by European States not as a right, but rather as a duty that individuals must utilise with responsibility; the resources the State provides them in order to adjust to the demands of the global economy (Edwards, Ranson & Strain, 2002). Over the last few decades, the widening of participation in higher education has been a policy adopted by many Western European countries (Brooks & Everett, 2008). Despite this expansion through education, training, as well as lifelong learning, continue to be stratified with young graduates being positioned differently, according to their educational choices. Brooks (2006) contends that changes in higher education do not disrupt social hierarchies, but rather reinforce them (see also Halsey, 1998). Bourdieu (1984) provides his analysis of the basis of the middle-class habitus, explaining that privileged young adults can use their financial resources in order to achieve entrance to higher ranking universities. Bourdieu argues that it is the habitus of those middle-class young adults’ families that allows them such choices, with working-class students by contrast struggling to enter higher status University institutions (Thomas, 2002). Of the very few studies in Greece on this matter, Sianou-Kyrgiou (2010) argues that there are more but not equal opportunities, since the entrance to high status universities depends on the students’ performance and choices, which are directly associated with their parents’ socio-economic capital.
The European Commission (2008) introduced the term NEETs (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training) in 2008 to monitor young people’s position in labour market. The majority of NEETs according to the European Commission are aged between 15-24 and usually low-skilled. NEETs are not a homogeneous group (see Yates & Payne, 2006) and they present significant differences across nations. Greece is an interesting exception to the empirical picture of young people classed as NEET. A large number of Greek NEETs (over 25%) have studied at the University. But this sub-sample of NEETs is in a better socioeconomic position than the NEETs in the rest of Europe, as they are offered significant financial resources from their families (Drakaki et al., 2014). Finally, there is a clear gender dimension (Tsakiridou, Kyridis & Vamvakidou, 2011), with women NEETs representing a 17.4% compared to 16.5% of men (GPO & KEADIK, 2013: 12, 17, as cited in Papadakis, Kyridis & Papargyris, 2015).

The social and personal impact of unemployment and underemployment

The negative impact of the current economic crisis on young people’s employment experiences has encouraged the development of a phenomenon which has been called the ‘brain drain’ (Dalla, Chatzoudes & Karasavvoglou, 2013). It has been widely discussed that one consequence of the Greek crisis has been for a large number of skilled young people to leave the country in search of new opportunities. The concept of ‘brain drain’ or ‘talent flow’ (Carr, Inkson & Thorn, 2005) is a phenomenon in which qualified and highly skilled people leave their countries and emigrate (Baruch, Budhwar & Khatri, 2007). The ‘brain drain’ phenomenon is not new, yet over the last decade it started gaining more attention due to radical transformations in the global economic and political arena. The phenomenon of out-migration is not new in the case of Greece either, yet it recently got exacerbated due to the current financial turbulence and the discrepancy between labour market and labour force qualifications (Labrianidis & Vogiatzis, 2013). Labrianidis (2014) explains that ‘brain drain’ occurs due to poor demand especially in the private sector. Although data is unavailable, it is possible that many young people in Greece will continue to reconsider their options of looking for work outside of Greece, with implications for how they conceive of their own long-term prospects. For young middle-class women, the effects of having strong educational
qualifications may well be counterproductive for their long-term employment prospects, given the current state of labour market in Greece for high-medium skilled employees (Kretsos, 2013). Therefore, questions remain about the ways young women reconcile these tensions in experiencing emerging adulthood, as well as making future decisions regarding their relationships with partners, family, and friends. Whilst capturing those who have left Greece is beyond the capacities of this study, examining why some consider, or refute any chances of leaving Greece are analytically significant.

The effect of the current crisis on individuals can be dramatic, yet its implications might vary significantly among people coming from different age groups, as they engage with the crisis in different ways depending on their personal, subjective experiences (Chalari, 2014). As far as younger individuals are concerned, Christodoulou et al.’s (2016) research indicates that they tend to present higher hopelessness, due to their vulnerable position in the labour market. Although the economic recession has not ended and its full impact will emerge throughout the time, mental health problems related to the socioeconomic changes and consequences of the current crisis have already been recorded (McLaughlin et al., 2012; Ten Have, Van Dorsselaer & de Graaf, 2015).

Silbereisen explains that “the high rise in potentially distressing encounters (...) such as increasing unemployment rates, reductions of social benefits, adaptational pressures related to the new social institutions, and the loss of former frames of reference (...) result in impaired levels of well-being and negative self-related attitudes” (2005:3). De la Sablonniere et al. (2010) also argue that periods of dramatic social and economic transformation have a negative effect on individuals’ psychological health and personal well-being. Long-term youth unemployment can determine negative mental health problems, such as depression and risk for suicidal behaviour (Kieselbach, 2003). Feelings of insecurity, anxiety, fear, losing the meaning of life, and suicidal attempts are only some of the consequences of failing to cope with extreme social and economic changes (Domagala-Krecioch & Majerek, 2013). Differences also exist between genders, with women found to have higher reported symptoms of mental health problems (66%) compared to men (59.1%) in Greece (Papadakis, Kyridis & Papargyris, 2015).

The current crisis and austerity policies have so far had a major impact on choices and life experiences. With a significantly reduced welfare State in Greece, family and intergenerational solidarity is often the only option that these groups have for both practical
and emotional support. The section pays attention to the intersection of the current economic turbulence in Greece with cultural norms pre-existing the crisis, concerning responsibilities and caring roles, in particular.

**Families**

The vast array of structural changes across the globe has impacted on a host of social institutions and practices. A crucial manifestation of these challenging times has been the impact on parents, and families more generally, to support their children aged in their 20s and 30s. Families’ presence in youth research is quite predominant, given its importance in young people’s lives and identity development (Wyn, 2004; Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005). Kinship ties, and the nuclear family especially, provide the individual with a secure emotional underpinning and a safe environment from the societies’ adversities which ultimately form individual’s self-identity (Keesing, 1975; Hutson & Jenkins, 1989). As I will present, youth research on families often argues how young people need to learn how to ‘stand-alone’ due to their families’ reluctance to support them by any means. There is, however, a significant amount of literature which argues that due to socio-economic hardships, parents have become a valuable source of support for their adult children.

On the one hand, Silva’s (2013) findings on American working class young people and their transitions to adulthood indicate that young people are taught how to stand alone without relying upon their family’s or even the State’s support. The American educational system teaches young people that they are independent and accountable for their own mistakes and life choices. Silva adds that young Americans know that there won’t be anyone out there to provide assistance and support, and this makes them feel frustrated, disappointed, and betrayed. Not having any choice though, young people often end up embracing this ‘stand-alone’ logic of neo-liberalism. Conversely, it has been suggested (Fuligni, Yip & Tseng, 2002) that young Chinese adults from the USA, who continue to stay with their parents, usually contribute financially to the family by paying rent for their bedroom – which could indicate inter-cultural shifts in the USA.

On the other hand, there have been several ways that the Anglophone literature has presented the financial as well as emotional support that young adults receive from their
parents. It has been argued that regardless of their income level, U.S. parents do their best to provide adequate financial assistance to their young adult children. Given significant cuts to the welfare State system in the USA, families often provide material support and investments in their own adult children (see Fuligni & Pendersen, 2002; Furstenberg, 2010). Shoeni and Ross (2005) argue that two thirds of American emerging adults in their early 20s and 40% in their late 20s receive some level of financial support. Similarly, Furlong and Cartmel (2007) point out young people’s tendency to stay longer in their parents’ home in most developed countries. Likewise, Leccardi and Ruspini (2006) who conducted a cross-cultural investigation of the challenges young people face in their transition to adulthood, argue that parents are an important source of support for young individuals. This picture is also demonstrated in the UK, with Heath and Cleaver’s (2003) research illustrating the strong ties between young people and parents, even when young people leave their parents’ home. In the same vein, the National Survey of young Australians which took place in 2007 indicated that young people between 11 and 24 seek advice and support from their parents when they need it (Mission Australia, 2007). Elsewhere in Finland, Lahelma and Gordon (2008) argue that young people continue receiving their parents’ support in various ways even when they don’t live together.

The influence of the family on young people’s lives is highly evident in Mediterranean societies, amongst them Greece, whose traditional long-standing cultural norms replace the lack of the welfare State support (Reher, 1998). A rich literature on Southern Europe suggests that it is taken for granted that families will be the main providers of their members’ needs, as a response to the lack of any family policy (Reher, 1998; Billari, Philipov & Baizan, 2001; Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Furstenberg, 2010; Huffman et al., 2015). Symeonidou (1997) indicates that all Southern European countries are well below the EU average of social protection expenses, while Greece has never really had an explicit family policy. Gunther et al. (1995) explain that this is the cause of a late economic development and social change in those countries. In this context, in Southern Europe, the Mediterranean family is the one that covers the absence of the welfare State both in material and non-material ways (Moreno, 1997).

As in other southern European countries, the Greek family is the primary provider of welfare support, which is reinforced by the absence of family policy (Papadopoulos, 1998). The Greek family protects its members from unemployment and the State’s absence by
pooling the ‘family wage’ and distributing it according to each one’s needs (Bermeo, 2000). The latter means that the financially sound head of the household will provide their incomes to those members that are not protected by a full or part-time job. In that case, solidarity within the family functions as a ‘social shock absorber’ (Moreno & Mari-Klose, 2013). The Greek family model places emphasis on the importance of support and solidarity among family members (Pnevmatikos & Bardos, 2014). Paxson makes a reference to the Greek familism as “the notion that family relations are prominent social relations, that the family should be a cohesive unit, that the family’s loyalty supersedes all others” (2004: 144). The lack of family policy and the role of the Greek family as the main welfare provider towards its younger members result in a relationship highly characterized by dependency amongst members, a situation where young people’s sense of autonomy can be affected whilst they transit to adulthood.

**Independence from parents?**

One of the most important consequences of the economic and financial changes is the trend for young people to remain financially dependent on their parents for longer than had been the case with the previous generation (Pusey, 2007). The transition to adulthood is not just an individual process; it presupposes that the whole family will alleviate the youngest members to achieve emotional autonomy (Yanir & Guttman, 2011). Therefore, both parents (mothers especially) and children will need to find the ways which will allow the latter to access their adulthood and reach their autonomy (Hutson & Jenkins, 1989). Autonomy is defined as being free from others’ control. Although the transition to adulthood might seem as an individualistic process, it is moderated by the development of character values that include considerations for the rights and needs of others (Arnett, 1998). Cicirelli (1992) divides the term ‘autonomy’ into two subcategories: the ‘independent autonomy’ where the individuals might occasionally take advice from others, yet they are the ones to make their own decisions, and the ‘shared autonomy’ where the individuals both consult with others and involve them in their decision making.

In his analysis on how young Americans define emerging adulthood, Arnett (1998; 2000; 2004) presents three different conceptions of it, as have been described by his
participants. The first one is the self-*responsibility*, which implies both self-efficiency and self-reliance. The second conception of becoming an adult is the independent decision making, which implies less dependency on parents and more self-sufficiency, with emphasis on young adults making sensible and independent decisions for their lives. Finally, financial independence, which refers to self-responsibility and independent decision making. Interestingly, these conceptions of independence do not imply emotional detachment from parents, with autonomy (independence) and relatedness (emotional attachment) coexisting, rather than as opposing dynamics in the relationship between parents and their children (Arnett, 1998).

A further aspect of independence from parents and achievement of adulthood has to do with the space and living arrangements between young people and their parents. Allatt and Yeandle (1992) argue that leaving home is an indicator of independence. Similarly, Cordon and Yuan (1997) suggest that the formation of a new household is one of the most important aspects of independence and successful transition to adulthood. Cohabitation with parents is more commonplace for young people in Southern countries than other parts of Europe (Lennartz, Arundel & Ronald, 2015). Iacovou (2002) shows that young adults coming from northern Europe are encouraged to leave their parents’ home significantly earlier than youths from the South, reflecting different attitudes about independence.

The current financial crisis in Greece, has led many families in Greece to come together and try to cope with the financial adversities by sharing the same household. The percentage of emerging adults in Greece aged between 20 and 29 who live with their parents is one of the highest in Europe at 71.5%. In Greece, the age of leaving the parental home is 30.6 for males and 28.0 for females. Therefore, residential patterns vary significantly between countries, whilst there is a clear correlation between economic conditions determined by the State and choices regarding living arrangements (Iacovou, 2002). The latter has affected contemporary emerging adults’ lives, by creating complex and non-linear transitions to adulthood with extended co-residence or even returns to the parental home, due to the lack of any State support (Hochstenbach & Boterman, 2015).

Holdsworth and Morgan (2005) argue that a linear and definite dualism of dependence versus independence does not represent the different experiences of young people’s lives. Although having private space for living is an important component of autonomy and independence, leaving home does not necessarily connote a straightforward
attainment of full adult status. Similarly, Aasve et al. (2007) by pointing out the cultural differences between Scandinavian and Mediterranean countries in the living arrangements amongst young people, argue that the procrastination of the young individuals who live in the South to leave the parental home should not be considered as a failure to achieve an adult status. For example, Scabini et al.’s (2006) research suggests that most Italians continue to cohabit with their parents through their 20s, yet while doing so these young people also develop considerable social, sexual, and occupational autonomy. The authors further explain that the general socioeconomic state along with the career chances, support, and safety nets of those countries should be taken into account, in order to end up in a conclusion of whether leaving home signals independence. In other words, the most important criterion of independence is not leaving home, but the nature of parent-child relationships and the impact on the meaning they give for their own sense of independence.

However, the prolonged co-residence with parents has been a characteristic facet of Mediterranean countries well before the current economic recession. Young adults’ behaviour regarding these living arrangements is by and large determined by these cultural norms of family life (Douglass, 2007). Flaquer (2000) argues that young people’s dependence on their parents should not be regarded necessarily as a negative feature of the Mediterranean culture; rather, it increases young people’s resources and chances to find a good job (given the more challenging labour market conditions they have to face), and therefore enter the adult life to their advantage. Flaquer (1995) maintains that in the case of young women especially, it favours them to invest in studies which may end up financially profitable. Yet, as Papadopoulos (1998) explains, what the Southern European culture has ended up achieving, is the nurturing and reproduction of this very assumption that family is the key provider of its members, rather than the State. According to Papadakis et al. (2015), this has led to the formation of an ‘overprotective’ family system in Greece that disempowers young people’s decision making, resulting in passive without any motivation for initiatives individuals who gradually get marginalized and excluded from the labour market.
**Mother-Daughter Relations**

Since Adrienne Rich (1976) noted the deficit in understandings of mother-daughter relationship dynamics, we have witnessed a number of researchers responding to these research gaps (see Hirsch, 1981; Pecchioni & Nussbaum, 2000; Kraemer, 2006; Onayli & Erdur-Baker, 2013; Shenaar-Golan & Walter, 2015). Fischer (1981) suggests that the mother-daughter relationship could be viewed as having a ‘life-cycle’, which includes several periods of transition for both of them, such as the daughter’s adolescent years, the daughter’s transition to adulthood, marriage and motherhood, and the mother’s old age. According to Kraemer (2006), mothers act as their daughters’ first teachers and therapists, while also serving as the most significant sources of emotional and financial support. Similarly, feminist psychoanalysts like Shenaar-Golan and Walter (2015), argue that a daughter’s greatest object of love is her mother, and therefore, a daughter is influenced by her mother in every stage of her development. Hutson and Jenkins (1989) suggest that the mother figure sets the character of the family relationships in many households, whilst Akgun (2008) argues that the mother plays a more important role than the father in the bringing up of the children.

In Greece, relationships with mothers are significantly closer and more intimate than relationships with fathers (Paxson, 2004; Tsai, Telzer & Fuligni, 2013). The Greek mother is the main provider of intimacy and all forms of care towards all family members, and especially children and the elderly (Papataxiarchis, 2012). Therefore, as Pnevmatikos and Bardos (2014) suggest, it is not appropriate to suggest a decrease in intimacy with parents during the transition to adulthood, due to the particular closeness to the mothers which remains high over time, and especially with their daughters.

In Greece, young women remain dependent on their parents until they get married and very frequently even later (Brandt, Haberkern & Szydlik, 2009). Intergenerational dependency and mutual caring is regarded as a moral obligation (especially for women who are the main providers of care services) (Reher, 1998). As Symeonidou (1996) put it, in Greek society women are ‘compulsory altruists’, expected to provide social care towards all family members. Southern European society gives value to the collectivity and the moral duty that parents and children should look after each other, while concurrently stigmatizing those who choose to ‘go it alone’ and seek independence from family (Bermeo, 2000).
The so-called ‘strong maternal bond’ between mothers and daughters also brings with it clashes and conflicts. Several studies have demonstrated that adverse economic conditions can have a negative impact on family relations, primarily through the economic pressures they create in family life (McLoyd et al., 1994; Gutman & Eccles, 1999). Such economic pressures involve the inability to cover basic needs and pay bills. The latter can be a major source of adversity for parents, whose stress may lead to hostile parenting, resulting from their family financial difficulties (Conger, Rueter & Conger, 1994). Kim et al. (2001) explained that increasing hostility by parents towards their children during the adolescence and early adulthood leads to increasing hostility by the children towards parents. Scaramella and Conger (2004) argue that conflicts between mothers and daughters are more frequent and intense than those they have with their fathers. Such conflicts are usually money related, as well as concerning arguments about the amount of time spent outdoors or clothing tastes (Conger & Conger, 2002). Daughters feel sometimes that their mothers’ over-protectiveness puts their sense of autonomy at peril (Penington, 2003).

**Gender roles and the historical significance of marriage/cohabitation**

Although rates of cohabitation are high in the US and Northern Europe, they are very low in Southern Europe (Douglass, 2007). Greece has a unique social and cultural context in comparison to other countries in Europe and North America (Marcos & Bahr, 2001). The role of the nuclear family is still dominant in Greece, because of the strong influence of the Orthodox Church on standards of behaving and living. Orthodox Christianity in Greece acts as a reference point for the majority of its citizens (Georgiadou & Nikolakopoulos, 2007), due to the country’s homogeneous religious composition and landscape (Roudometof & Makrides, 2010). Molokotos-Liederman (2016) for example, suggests that at a time when economic pressures from the crisis on the Greek family are too great, the Orthodox Church has become a critical provider, and functions as a ‘second family’ by supporting poorer families materially (see also Makris & Bekridakis, 2013). Yet, the significance of this support from the Church has become even more significant, both in terms of material aid given, but also the long-standing values it tries to enforce upon Greek culture.

In the 1960s, ethnographic research conducted in Greece (Campbell, 1964; Peristiani, 1966; Friedl, 1967) emphasized the importance of kinship, marriage and procreation, and
portrayed both maleness and femaleness as universal. The term ‘domestic model of gender’ was suggested by Loizos and Papataxiarchis (1991) in their *Contested Identities*, to present a set of ideas about ‘manhood’ and ‘womanhood’ in married life. The ‘domestic model of gender’ stresses the pivotal importance of domestic kinship for the definition of male and female identities: men are the only providers of the household and the defenders of the kinship loyalties, while women are presented as ‘mothers’, ‘wives’, and ‘caregivers’. Loizos and Papataxiarchis add that relationship between men and women is characterised by ‘complementarity’, ‘mutual dependence’, and ‘ideal equality’ (1991: 7-8). Loizos concludes by stating that “full adult status for both men and women requires an indissoluble marriage, blessed with children” (Loizos, 1994: 67).

Most importantly though, *marriage* is depicted as the key point of gender role in Greece. Both men and (especially) women acquire a newfound status in society, by accomplishing their gender role expectations through marriage and parenthood (Loizos & Papataxiarchis, 1991). Marriage was considered as the vehicle for young women to escape from the family environment and live an independent life (Pnevmatikos & Bardos, 2014). In the same vein, Dubisch (1991) explains the significance that marriage has for both genders, and brings up the lack of attention that has been paid to the role of marriage in the lives of men. Dubisch argues that marriage is as important for women and the fulfilment of their roles as wives and mothers as it is for men; men’s destiny is marriage, as they are recognized by the society through women (in the same ways that women define themselves through men). The fact that Greek people tend to refer to unmarried men and women as ‘boys’ and ‘girls’, regardless of their age, is an indicator of the importance attributed to marriage for the individual’s achievement of *full adult status* (Roland, 1992).

Much of the above research assessing the history of intimacy and marriage in Greece has typically been conducted in rural areas, where much stricter traditions of marriage and gender behaviour are established than those in urban areas. Also, it has been largely formed of anthropological studies based on Greek culture during the 1960s and before. It is important here to explain that although since the 1960s Greek society has changed considerably both in urban and rural locales, marriage in Greece is still an important rite of passage in transitions to adulthood. Carroll et al. (2007) refer to marriage as a ‘teleological goal’ because both men and women expect to get married at some point, even if they do not eventually marry. Therefore, marriage still constitutes an important marker of one’s adult status.
Beyond the ideological importance of marriage and the nuclear family in Greek society, actual rates of marriage in Greece have actually fallen at a similar rate to the rest of Europe. Table 1 compares marriage rates at multiple time frames between 1970 and 2015 between Greece and the EU average.

Table 1: Marriage Rates – Greece compared to EU Average (28 nations combined) – selected years (per 1000 population)

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Source: Eurostat, 2017

Table 1 shows that although Greece still has marginally higher rates of marriage compared to the EU average, we have seen a general decline in marriage (with some small fluctuations) between 1970 and 2015. 62.4% of Greeks are married, which is above the EU average of 55.3%. Only 3.8% of Greeks class themselves as divorced, below the EU average of 7.4%. Rates of Greek citizens who class themselves as ‘single’, and have never married or been in a cohabiting partnership, stand at 24%, which is below the EU average of 28.1% (Eurostat, 2011b). What these data indicate is a general picture which suggests that marriage still persists as the most dominant mode of consensual union above other forms. Taken further, there is also evidence that marriage is still the preferred relationship type with which to have children, with only 7% of births outside of marriage, compared to 40% in the EU average (Eurostat, 2013).

For young women, marriage remains an important marker of attaining a status of adulthood, although with different meanings attached to marriage in Greece, which do not always involve a direct ‘split’ from parents. Yet, before marriage occurs, we find in Greece, like in other nations besides, that young people often explore their intimate identities through different partners before finding ‘the right one’. These intimate ties are a significant feature of emerging adulthood research, defining a key aspect by which so-called ‘independence’ is developed.
Intimacy

Intimacy is an important aspect of emerging adulthood (see Oswald & Clark, 2003; Arnett, 2004; 2007; 2010; Silva, 2013). As mentioned earlier, Arnett (2004) called emerging adulthood the age of identity explorations – the life period, where young adults attempt new possibilities in various areas of life, and especially intimate relationships. Arnett explains that emerging adults not only regard the exploration of various intimate relationships as normal, but also necessary for one’s preparation to a serious commitment and marriage. What is interesting here, is that exploration and variety in intimacy is a new phenomenon. Arnett explains that whilst in previous generations premarital sexual relationships were a taboo and sexual activity was restricted until marriage, nowadays committing to a relationship from early age is viewed as an unhealthy attitude which could lead to choosing the ‘wrong’ kind of partner. Collins (2003), for example, argues that adolescent romance carries developmental currency for the more serious relationships which will come up in adulthood. An interpretation for this focus on exploration could be the fact that contemporary emerging adults pursue more the ‘pure’ relationship and value interpersonal qualities, such as kindness, care, and love. Silva (2013) argues that today’s emerging adults experiment and wait longer to get married, until they find a ‘pure’ relationship which meets their personal needs. Henderson et al. (2013) indicate that intimate relationships have become more a matter of identity and lifestyle choice, rather than a matter of survival.

The decline of traditional courtship amongst individuals occurred amidst a continuously changing social landscape which shifted the ways that gender behaviour and sexuality is being represented. Those shifting representations are very clear in contemporary popular culture, introducing an uncommitted sexual behaviour which can be entertaining and adventurous. Doherty (1999) suggests that the invention of visual media increased the amount of sexual material in popular culture, liberating young adults’ sexual behaviour. The rise of feminism as early as in the 1960s, the increase of the college parties (Laumann et al., 1994), as well as media such as films, magazines, and advertising called for a more eroticized portrayal of both the male and female body (Kunkel et al., 2005). In those representations, women are depicted as sexually desirable objects who actively initiate and enjoy sexual interactions (Jackson & Cram, 2003).
Literature on the significance of intimate relationships for young people (and women specifically) focuses on a range of features, such as the process of finding a significant partner, building a relationship, to the impact on individual well-being (Green et al., 2001; DiTomasso et al., 2003; Kentikelenis et al., 2011; Dafermos, 2013). This focus on intimacy includes the role of a fulfilling partner which has been used to understand how young adults understand their lives and social roles (Greve, 2012; Henderson et al., 2013). Research on intimacy during emerging adulthood stresses the role of romantic relationships as a ‘precursor’ and a ‘rite of passage’ for a successful transition to adulthood (Welsh & Shulman, 2008; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). As Furman et al. (2007) put it, these relationships are important not only in the development of identity and autonomy, but also a factor which determines the timing of an individual’s departure from their parents’ home, to the formation of their own family. More specifically, Lanz and Tagliabue (2007) suggest that a romantic partner plays a key role for a young woman’s life who plans her future on the basis of her intimate relationship.

What is important, is to understand why intimate relationships are crucial in this process of entering the ‘adult world’. Tanner (2006) explains that emerging adults experience a ‘recentering process’ which takes them from the dependence on their parents towards independence and adult roles. In that respect, emerging adults commit to relations of their choice, amongst them romantic partners who now become central figures of their social network. Therefore, their new romantic experiences are the initial steps that lead them to future marital relationships which are a quintessential component of adulthood (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009).

Furstenberg (2008) has suggested that delaying marriage and cohabiting is more common in middle class young people than to working class. In the same vein, Williams and Guest (2005) who carried out a comparative study amongst Asian young individuals’ attitude towards marriage found that middle class people tend to be more individualistic and delay marriage until later. Delaying marriage amongst middle-class people is usually associated with their aspiration to make the ‘right’ life decisions not only about romantic partners, but also about their studies and career options. In effect, these two components, a prestigious occupation and establishment of family, are highly interconnected, as both occupation and marriage can determine income and social level (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010). As Amato (2011) explains, marriage in an earlier age is usually a characteristic of young people lacking personal aspirations and higher education. Whilst not to condemn these choices, sociologically
speaking, having placed a high-level of investment in education and career options tends to result in a delay in the marital age (Meier & Allen, 2008).

Regardless of young adults’ social capital, economic predicaments postpone marriage for the majority of educated young people, who now have less control of their financial destinies and find it difficult to materialize their future plans regardless of their efforts (Leccardi, 2006). Emerging adulthood is the period during which young adults are expected to take serious decisions for their lives, such as studies, career, and romantic relationships (Arnett, 2004). Yet, the increased socioeconomic uncertainties, characteristic of contemporary society (and especially Greece), make young adults’ life course even more complicated (Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Kretsos, 2013). Risk society (Beck, 1992) can help explain how and why young adults need to carefully evaluate their financial position, in order to decide whether to pursue longer-term intimate relations.

**Risk society and intimacy**

One of the most influential theories on the shifts in the personal relationships of the late modernity stems from the work of Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck. Both Giddens and Beck explain how contemporary social, economic, and technological transformations have affected and reframed personal relationships, and especially those ones involving sexual activity. In his book *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Giddens (1992) argues that women’s involvement in the labour market emancipated them from men and their ‘protection’, while it provided them with economic and social independence. Giddens’s description goes even further to argue that as long as women do no longer seek a ‘traditional marriage’, people look for a ‘pure relationship’, where they can negotiate how they want to live together. Therefore, couples do not live together because of an institutionalised commitment (marriage) or because of social and/or economic dependence, but because they enjoy ‘confluent’ love. Similarly, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim in *The Normal Chaos of Love* (1995) talk about the ways the *individualisation*, propelled by globalisation and the new model of labour market, has reduced the traditional dominance of the nuclear family model. Beck (1994) argues that due to the absence of obligatory and traditional norms and structures, individuals opt to produce their own biographies and make their own destinies, rather than to rely on partners. Beck explains that in the arena of personal relationships, individualization results in a gender neutrality, as
gender roles no longer structure the life course. Individuals have more agency in their intimate partnerships, resulting in both conflict between them, and active choice and negotiation in the conduct of relationships.

A number of scholars have criticised the work of Beck and Giddens. Among these critiques include the lack of recognition of issues of class and disadvantage in women’s lives, which complicate the extent to which they ensue agency over their ‘choices’. Among these critiques include the fact that women are paid less than men for similar jobs (Elming, Joyce & Costa, 2016), and experience major consequences to careers and pensions due to time out of work, as a result of having children (Arber, Davidson & Ginn, 2003). Women are also likely to work in more fragile, short-term contracts than men, which subjects them to greater insecurities in their capacities to have financial independence from men (Fawcett Society, 2014). Jamieson (1999) explains that personal relationships remain highly gendered and argues that men exercise more power in the partnerships than women. Examples include control of money, the ability to opt out of domestic labour, and child care.

Despite some changes in gender orders in Greece, such as greater numbers of women in the labour market, it remains the case that Greece is still largely governed by patriarchal norms (Kaparou & Bush, 2007). In assessing the Beck-Giddens thesis, we should be mindful that the so-called ‘democratisation’ of gender is particularly problematic as an explanation of women’s lives in Greece. For example, even if we assume that intimate relationships have changed, we cannot necessarily accept that these relations are characterised by a radical transformation or ‘democratization’. Therefore, the question remains how well the concept of ‘pure relationship’ could sit with Greek society and its current socioeconomic and political changes.

**The impact of the economic crisis on romantic partners**

As early as in 1979, Jahoda suggested that employment is connected not only with incomes, but also with non-financial benefits. These include time structure, social contact and status, as well as collective purpose and activity. Unemployment and economic hardships can affect families’ well-being by increasing depression, as well as marital unhappiness and conflicts on how the money resources should be allocated within the household (Gudmunson *et al.*, 2003).
Charles and Stephens (2004) show that economic strain can increase the probability of divorce. Dew (2011) adds that negative effects of financial problems amongst spouses, related to a satisfactory coverage of family needs, are increased when there are young children.

The literature on financial conditions in Greece and their effects on young people’s intimate relations, though limited in volume, presents the extreme disadvantages and uncertainties imposed on these ties by the economic context. Drydakis (2015) explains that the current financial crisis and lack of economic resources can have a negative impact on young people, including high levels of stress, insecurity, and loss of self-esteem, which in turn affect their family and intimate relations. Similarly, Christodoulou et al. (2016) argue that the crisis and unemployment cause higher hopelessness to younger adults compared to other age groups, with a direct impact on young individuals’ mental well-being and social life. Absence of romantic relationships due to both socio-economic factors, such as unemployment and lack of finances (Gudmunson et al., 2007), as well as lack of privacy in their living conditions (Molgat, 2002), have been found to be a severe predictor of emotional loneliness (Odaci & Kalkan, 2010). Feelings of loneliness are connected to the lack of romantic ties and a close intimate attachment (Green et al., 2001). A poor work-life balance – such as low incomes, precariousness, and long hours – has been noted as linked to stressful conditions (Pagoulatos & Triantopoulos, 2009; Gounari, 2014) and a limitation of socializing and providing with the possibility of finding partners.

Gudmunson et al. (2007) describe how economic adversities are associated with a wide range of negative psychological symptoms and unfriendly attitude towards others. These include depressed mood, anxiety, low self-esteem, guilt, and even physical illness. However, research on the impact of economic strain on spouses suggests that unemployment affects men and women in different ways, as expressed by the following features. In 1990, Conger et al. explained that financial pressures have a more negative impact on the husbands’ social role and identity, usually resulting in mood swings and unpleasant interactions with other family members. This argument is based upon the belief that masculinity has been associated with high levels of self-esteem and achievement (Whitley, 1983). Men’s inability to accomplish their conceived ‘duties’ as financial providers can lead to low self-esteem, which in turn takes the form of devaluation and de-romantization (Jenkins et al., 2002).
Summary

In this chapter, I have developed a thematic assessment of how emerging adulthood operates in the context of Greece, with respect to the experiences of young educated women. I began the chapter by outlining how and why the global economic crisis has affected Greece and traced back the modes of State reaction to counteract these economic conditions. Following the general context of the crisis in Greece, I presented a theoretical linkage to the concept of ‘emerging adulthood’. Recent studies concerning emerging adulthood and their destabilization of young people’s lives, tend to overlook women’s experiences, and especially those from educated middle class backgrounds. In contrast, this study developed a gender dimension to ‘emerging adulthood’, drawing links with how the structural inequalities in Greece have affected groups beyond the working classes.

After building a gendered orientation to the concept of ‘emerging adulthood’, I proceeded to argue for connection with several thematic areas which help explain young women’s experiences in the Greek crisis. Firstly, these include the context of education and work, which play a key role in providing financial options for achieving a path towards adulthood. Yet as I argue, for young educated women, the Greek context can lead to considerable barriers, given limited labour market options for low-medium skilled work. In many situations, this has forced young people to leave Greece – a process known as the ‘brain drain’. Secondly, I examined the role of families on the capacities of young women to achieve the status of ‘adulthood’. I charted some of the unique cultural features of the Southern European and the Greek family model more specifically. Here I explained how the solidarity provided amongst family members has worked as a ‘cushion’ for young people’s everyday economic struggles and frustrations, yet also within these relationships, also occasional conflict. Finally, I assessed the importance of intimate relationships in the lives of young women. By placing the romantic interactions in the socioeconomic context of Greece, I challenged the traditional values of the importance of marriage and assessed the shift in the gender roles and dating practices.

During chapter 4, I develop many of the themes presented in this chapter, focusing directly on the experiences of young women in education and work. This draws closely with how the climate of the Greek crisis has played a key role in shaping their actual lives and future aspirations.
Chapter 3

Methodology

In this chapter I will discuss my methodological perspective which is informed by symbolic interactionism from a gendered perspective, and its relevance to issues of reflexivity and feminist-informed interviewing. These themes will be presented as an interlinked theoretical and methodological framework, where I will unpack how these relate to the practicalities of doing my research during the second half of the chapter. Here I will outline key aspects of the research design: sampling, recruitment strategies, the interview process, the transcriptions which will follow the collection of data, and finally the strategies for the data analysis. The chapter ends with a discussion of how the researcher addresses ethical considerations through the design of the research and criteria of quality relevant to the research.

Situating a theoretical framework: The centrality of women’s experience

The basis of my study originates from ideas stemming from symbolic interactionism (SI), which takes as its central principle the view that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that such things possess. The use of symbolic interactionist theory, which provides a useful and resourceful set of concepts to explore the establishment of human experience, will be complemented by a standpoint perspective. Given that women’s experience is so central to the aims of the thesis, I will be drawing on a theoretical framework which both embraces the origins of the SI approach alongside developments in feminist theory associated with standpoint feminism. The latter shares some overlaps with the traditional principles of SI. Features such as the core emphasis on human experience and perception remain consistent across both theoretical areas. Both SI and standpoint feminism give emphasis on understanding an individual or a phenomenon via human experiences. As Charon (1991) put it, an individual perspective is very powerful for the interpretation of ‘reality’. On the other hand, standpoint feminism places greater significance on the gendered construction of knowledge underpinning how women are situated in the world, and how this
situatedness akin to ontology is crucial to how they see and understand their own experiences and status of being. Therefore, it is necessary to perceive each woman an expert of their own narrative and value their individual perspective and reality equally.

It is accurate to speak more of multiple feminisms, rather than a single feminist approach. Standpoint feminism occupies a position which may seem more dated than other more recent approaches which draw from other strands of social theory, such as from Foucault (Ramazanoglu, 1993) and Bourdieu (Adkins & Skeggs, 2004). Standpoint theory overlaps with Marxist feminism (where women’s emancipation will occur if they fight against capitalism), dual-systems theory (where women’s oppression is the outcome of both capitalism and patriarchy), as well as critical feminism (which argues that women as a social group are exploited by men as a group). With these perspectives in mind, standpoint theory can be judged less as an overarching theory, and more as a mode of analytic inquiry which provides feminist scholars with a theoretical lens through which to situate women’s experience and voice, however diverse and intersecting these may be. As such, the position adopted is not reductionist – I do not seek to exclude the possibility of accounts such as Marxist feminism which draws attention to the effects of capitalism and exploitation on gender inequality. Instead, the focus on lived experience and human action of women supports a close connection with symbolic interactionism which I regard as important to explaining the findings, and as the means through which to make sense of the narratives of the women in this study.

My focus on how the deep structural consequences of the financial crisis are not only evidently gendered, but also transformative in that the effects stretch beyond the marginalized and poor to the educated middle class – a group who, as has been suggested, typically weather the storms of economic uncertainty better than the working classes (Birdsall et al., 2000; Russell & O’Connell, 2001; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Tsekeris et al., 2015). Why standpoint feminism than other more recent ‘post-feminisms’ has been adopted as a theoretical lens to situate my study and help explain the findings is precisely to give close reference to how the macro conditions of Greek society have impacted on the micro-level lives of Greek women. What I argue is that the rich connection offered by standpoint feminism with symbolic interactionism, is a focus which best fits with my approach. My position is committed more to gender equality and to give voice to a group largely hidden from the exploitation of market societies and neo-liberalism. The lack of any publicly identifiable
narrative of gender in the context of crisis is telling of the ways that the hardships faced by Greek citizens have been universalised, rather than assessed in different terms, and according to different social groups’ experiences, notably women’s. My commitment is therefore personal as much as political. Projects such as transcending a gender binary or adopting positions which favour new perspectives to previous groups ignored by second wave feminism are legitimate positions to occupy, but not the ones I choose to adopt in this study, for risks that they detract from what I deem to be more penetrating and indeed damaging structural issues – poverty, injustice, and the power of the State. Instead, the way I position standpoint feminism, however modest, is to create a political platform for women’s voices to be granted in a highly-charged politico-economic arena, which on a daily basis leads to human suffering on a catastrophic scale, and in ways that implicate women in often profound and damaging ways.

Framing human experience: The origins of symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionism originated in the work of the social philosopher George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), whose ideas were translated into a sociological framework principally by one of his students, Herbert Blumer (1900-1986). Mead published little during his lifetime; his ideas mainly spread through his teaching at the University of Chicago, where there was a sociological tradition of field studies of urban life. The symbolic interactionist school was the product of a loose amalgam of Mead’s theories – mainly as interpreted by Blumer - and a commitment to field studies championed by Hughes (Cuff & Sharrock, 1998).

Mead’s most important book, *Mind, Self and Society* (1934), established the social nature of the self, of knowledge and community as a product of human interaction. The self is not a ‘structure’ or some set of attitudes, values, dispositions, and the like (Prus, 1997). In declaring that the human being has a self, Mead asserted that the human being can be the object of their own actions. Therefore, from the position of SI human society is to be seen as consisting of acting people, and the life of society is to be seen as consisting of their actions. The acting units may be separate individuals, collectivities whose members are acting together on a common quest, or organizations acting on behalf of a constituency. A human society consists of acting units (Blumer, 1986). Similarly, social structure in any of its aspects (social position, status, role, authority, and prestige), refers to relationships derived from how
people act toward each other. The life of any human society consists necessarily of an ongoing process of fitting together the activities of its members. Human beings, in interacting with one another, have to take account of what each other is doing or is about to do, meaning that one has to fit one’s own line of activity in some manner to the actions of others. A cardinal principle of symbolic interactionism must respect the fact that in the first and last instances human society consists of people engaging in action (Collins, 1994). Howard Becker (1970; 1999) argued that according to an interactionist approach, a collective act is not impossible and can be ‘effective’; by the latter he means that people can usually agree how and why something has happened and whether they are happy with the outcome or not.

Drawing from the work of George Herbert Mead, Herbert Blumer, and Howard Becker, I will stay true to my participants’ narratives and try to understand the processes through which their lives are composed, constructed, and created from their own perspective. Each person becomes human through interaction with others, and the scientific model of observation, data collection, and interpretation is nothing more than a fundamentally human project. The position of symbolic interactionism is that the meanings that things have for human beings are central in their own right. This is the basic position of symbolic interactionism’s orientation that the researcher needs to understand the way the actors define reality, in order to understand social phenomena; and in order to achieve an understanding of their reality, they need to put themselves in other people’s shoes (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). This leads to a kind of an insight that Max Weber called ‘Verstehen’ (understanding). By using this feature of the research process, Weber meant the observation, understanding, and interpretation of the subjective point of view of other individuals.

**Bringing women’s experience into view**

As Lindsey (2015) argues, mainstream theories have assumed the universality of the human experience and used it indiscriminately as the yard-stick of (androcentric) research. While most knowledge has been generated and defined by males, the perspective they espouse is not the only one and not always appropriate and applicable to women’s experiences (see Speedy, 1991). The experience of women, both in academia and in academic research, “had been distorted and misinterpreted” (Wilkinson, 1986: 9). Women had been excluded from
the framing of issues in sociology and other social sciences as these were developed within male universal discourses, which take male lives, experiences, and meanings for granted, while they render women’s experiences invisible or ‘other’, what standpoint feminists labelled as ‘malestream’ sociology (Stewart, 2003). The latter is the outcome of the systematic biases in malestream production of knowledge (epistemology) which did not include women’s voices and perceived masculinity as the norm. Standpoint feminism challenged malestream theories as problematic and argued that women’s standpoint, values, and experiences should be included in the sociological research.

Blumer (1986) emphasized the need to “highlight individual accountability and agency, and address structural, cultural, and material conditions as people experience and reproduce them in their day-to-day lives” (Fields, Copp & Kleinman, 2006: 157). When considering gender, symbolic interactionist theory can help the researcher to understand the meaning participants place on their own experiences. By attempting to understand my participants’ realities with symbolic interactionist theory only, it would leave open the theoretical question of whose perspective needs to be paid attention to. Symbolic interactionism requires complementation with feminist standpoint theory, in order to provide a more acute reference to women and patriarchal positioning (Hennessy, 1995).

Standpoint feminism is influenced by symbolic interactionism which suggests that gender is socially constructed, and therefore it can be useful for understanding the construction of gender and sexuality. Robert Stoller’s (1968) and John Money’s (1975) ‘sex/gender distinction’, where sex denotes biological and physiological characteristics while gender refers to cultural expectations of men’s and women’s roles, was not accepted by symbolic interactionists such as Goffman, who in his book Gender Advertisements (1976) explained that men’s and women’s poses in adverts have nothing to do with biology, but rather with our culture’s expectations and definitions of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, Goffman (1959) concluded that gendered selves are managed presentations or performances, and not expressions of internal truths. Likewise, Garfinkel (1967) argues that the individual’s sense of gendered selfhood is the outcome of our culture’s expectations of what gender ‘is’ and what it ‘means’. In the same vein, Kessler and McKenna (1978) maintain that the sex is a socially constructed ‘natural attitude’ which is predetermined by the society’s expectations of what is masculine and what is feminine. Most recently, West and Zimmerman (1987), with their concept of ‘doing gender’ (rather than being gender), explained that men
and women are not biological categories but social, and as such their status depends on their performance which should adhere to the society’s expectations of gender roles. Therefore, individuals are constantly assessed for their gender performances through their interactions with others. West and Zimmerman’s social constructionist’s approach to gender and sex has been a great influence for feminist scholars.

In her work *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (1987), Dorothy Smith outlined the reorganization of sociology, and raised the need for a sociology for women from the ‘standpoint of women’, that is the social world from women’s perspectives. A women’s standpoint epistemology intends to make women’s (instead of men’s) experiences the point of departure (Clough, 1994). For standpoint feminism knowledge is socially situated, as it has been generally presented from a gender-specific perspective; therefore, standpoint feminism’s essential goal is to challenge the male hegemony which is the only source of production of knowledge, and take women out of the periphery of that knowledge.

Similarly, Hartsock (1981) argued that women create different realities from men through their different activities and experiences. For Hartsock, women always have different types of knowledge, because their experiences and roles in all societies are different from men’s. Thus, Hartsock maintained that knowledge is always socially situated. The feminist standpoint “expresses female experience at a particular time and place, located within a particular set of social relations” (1983: 303).

Criticisms of claims such as construction of a unique ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ (the ones that derive from women) have come from postmodern feminists who argue that there is no universal truth or knowledge and therefore, it is impossible to generalize their experience. However, standpoint feminism tends to ignore the various differences amongst different women by assuming alleged commonalities in their experiences. Standpoint epistemology does not take account of other aspects of social division; instead, it assumes that subordination is universal for women or even that middle-class white feminist theory can represent the experiences of all women. More importantly, feminists critique the assumption that the theoretical hegemony of gender (Davis, 2008) excludes features that create and define social identities, such as age, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disabilities (Shields, 2008). This intersectional perspective, namely the interactions among various sub-features of a social identity, was initially introduced as a theoretical framework by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989). Crenshaw addressed the invisibility of women of colour and called for the
recognition of race and its interaction with the gender as a determinant of black women’s experiences. The theorization of the intersectionality helps provide a perspective for explaining how women’s experience can be diverse and multifaceted and has become a central component in gender theory (Walby, Armstrong & Strid, 2012). Important features of gender (such as race, class, age, and sexuality) can help more fully explain how women’s experience may take shape (Bilge, 2010), the Greek financial crisis being one such important context through which to situate these intersectional perspectives.

Dorothy Smith (1990) defended standpoint feminism by arguing that it is exactly all these differences and diversities that divide women that allow us to talk about a universal women’s experience. Smith talked about ‘women’s lived experience’ as a universal category which embraces the polyphony and multiplicity of women’s everyday actions and lives. And indeed, what several standpoint feminists have claimed is that the recognition of ‘standpoint’ itself gives room to the view that there are more than one positions that the world can be seen and experienced, and from which knowledge is produced (see Rose, 1983; Harding, 1986). A standpoint is not “a spontaneous attribute or consciousness”, but rather “an ongoing achievement” (Weeks, 1998: 8). Donna Haraway (1988) addressed the fact that all knowledge is situated and located, and like Hartsock, she argued that women’s standpoint is a more privileged vantage point on knowledge. Taken for granted that there cannot be one feminist standpoint only, Haraway developed the plural thesis of ‘situated knowledge’. According to that thesis, situations of women are multiple and diverse, and women speak from their own unique standpoints, expressing their own truths and producing their own knowledge. In the same vein, Hartsock talked about the situated knowledges as ‘partial’, as they are “located in a particular time and place” (1989: 90). Finally, Jane Flax argued that “any feminist standpoint will necessarily be partial” and “none of us can speak for ‘woman’ because no such person exists” (1990: 90).

This study is driven by a feminist standpoint framework (Smith, 1974; Hartsock, 1987) which privileges young women as the narrators of their own life experiences, as well as valuable and credible producers of knowledge. A feminist standpoint is essential to examining women’s experiences and giving voice to their own kinds of knowledge. Standpoint theory is an epistemology, an account of the evolution of knowledge (Cockburn, 2015); knowledge is the nucleus of standpoint feminism’s research. In this regard, I perceive my participants as legitimate creators of knowledge, whose lived experiences are the starting point from which
knowledge is built. Feminist standpoint theory gives agency to underprivileged groups, as a reaction to the crude quantitative research, and emphasizes the need for all women’s voices to be treated as vast and polyphonic experiences. One of the purposes of having a feminist standpoint is to try to “make specific connections between certain modes of gendered subjectivity” (Weeks, 2004: 184).

In my research, I do not intend to claim a universal credibility and applicability of women’s experience. In other words, I will not argue that the women I talked to represent all women in Greece. In total, my sample encompasses 36 young women, the majority of them well-educated. As such, I position my sample as a group who are culturally privileged, but like so many Greeks today, economically struggling. Unemployment levels for those with university-level qualifications in Greece rose from 12.81% in 2010 to 25.5% in 2015. These increases were identical for persons with only basic educational qualifications. Assessing Greece in comparison to most other developed nation States show that having better qualifications is not a factor in explaining employment likelihood (OECD, 2017).

Taking stock of these structural realities in Greece, my sample are particular and unique women with particular standpoints. Their stories are partial, one-sided, and reflect their own realities, their own experiences and knowledge deriving from their own particular cultural capital and economic background. Women have multiple and diverse voices, while the same subject may have many intersections with aspects such as their ethnicity, sexuality, class, as well as gender. The symbolic interactionist perspective does not provide us with a full understanding of patriarchal power and injustice (see Jackson & Scott, 2010). What the SI does though, is that it provides a great deal of support for the feminist criticism of traditional social science assumptions, theories and methodologies, as well as analytical tools for the research women are doing on women’s lives (Stewart, 2003).

**Autobiography-Reflexivity**

Of importance to my study is the issue of reflexivity. Discussions of a ‘reflexive sociology’ (Phillips, 1988) find an interesting echo in Alvin Gouldner’s (1970) urgings for a new ‘praxis’ of sociology – a genuine change in how we both conduct research and we view ourselves.

In her book *Anthropology that Breaks your Heart* (1996), Behar argues that in anthropology, which historically exists to give voice to others, self-revelation has always been
a great taboo. Behar prompts ethnographers to write vulnerably, she warns however that vulnerability and the exposure of the self should be essential to the themes and arguments they try to make, and not an exposure for its own sake. Likewise, Judith Okely denies a dichotomy between the personal and the intellectual, between memoir and ethnography. In her essay ‘The Self and Scientism’ (1996: 27) she argues that “there is a need for more explicit recognition of fieldwork as personal experience instead of sacrificing it to a false notion of scientific objectivity”. In the same vein, Znaniecki suggests that in order to “ascertain at first-hand what a certain activity is, someone needs to try to experience it by observing and performing it personally” (1934: 49). Denzin (1993) notes that researchers can get to know themselves better by reflecting upon themselves and bringing forth their ‘autobiographical past’. Finally, for Michael Herzfeld (1997) a dichotomy between friendship, intellectual intimacy, and anthropological objectivity is ultimately false.

Of course, autobiographical and reflexive methods have long been viewed by many within the social science paradigms of positivism as unscientific, and at odds with objective, standardized forms of research. Indeed, writing about the private lives of both ethnographers and their informants has been subject to debates about the humanistic versus scientific validity of a focus on individuals. According to Bruner (1993), there is always a danger to focus so profoundly upon the self, that it completely overshadows the matter of subject and ends up too egotistical and self-centred (Bruner, 1993, in Reed-Danahay, 2001).

However, although the concept of reflexivity has been questioned and criticized for giving room to a narcissistic self-representation in ethnographies (see Offen-Braun, 1992; Bruner, 1993), the reflexive practice itself means to bridge differences between researcher and respondents. By reflexivity, I mean a keen awareness of the impact and maybe bias that I, as a researcher, may have on my research, on the selection of the themes and people to be studied, on the general experience of the fieldwork, as well as the process of actually writing the research. “Reflexivity means taking a critical look inward and reflecting on one’s own lived reality and experiences” (Hesse-Biber, 2006: 200). On a personal level, I found this praxis of self-reflection very helpful in the research process. By turning the anthropological lens back upon myself not only to the phases of active interaction during interviewing, but also to the phases of coding, interpretation, and writing, I did not simply achieve to personalize and make the research mine, but also to find myself in a dialectical relationship between me and my participants and understand them better. As Chiseri-Strater suggests, “turning in upon
ourselves as researchers makes us look subjectively and reflexively at how we are positioned” (1996: 119).

The distinction between my roles as a young Greek woman, and thus a member of the social group under study, as well as a researcher who studies issues that concerned my own life a while ago is not a clear one, but rather intertwined in a problematic way. According to Oakley (1981a), a balance in the status markers is essential for the avoidance of power and authority imbalances which can have a negative impact on the interview process. According to Hesse-Biber (2006), feminist researchers are particularly concerned with reducing the hierarchy between the researcher and the researched. As my actual fieldwork has shown me, similar status characteristics provided me with an easier access to an open dialogue with my participants. Reflexive methods can give more credibility to the research, as they reject the ideas of ‘armchair’ sociology that creates notions of otherness and structural ‘objectivity’ (see Geertz, 1988). Rubin and Rubin (2005) point out the importance of cultural affinity between the researcher and the subjects under study, and argue that on the one hand women should be interviewed by women, while the female researchers should have a similar cultural capital and class with their participants. Thus, the researcher will not only gain reciprocity and rapport from their participants, but will also reduce any implications of power and authority from the researcher’s point of view.

The fact that my status characteristics are similar to those of my participants’ ones (gender, age, race, and in the majority of the cases sexual orientation) helped me to gain a better access to the interviews (as long as they considered me an insider), as well as aided me to obtain rapport and better understand my respondents’ meanings and feelings. However, it is important to note that at several points of the discussion with my participants, being an outsider proved to be an advantage, as it encouraged me to ask questions that otherwise I might have taken for granted. There were several points where I noticed a fluidity in my insider/outsider status depending on the topic under discussion. Indeed, my status used to change every time we were discussing issues of the lived experiences of my participants which I had never or no longer experience. In any case, a reflexive research study did not only allow me to explore my participants’ interpretations on the issues under study, but also to reflect back upon myself and my connection with them as interwoven components of the data.

Paraphrasing Schwartz and Jacobs (1979), I experienced the contradiction of being ‘native’ of my culture, and an anthropologist who finds out from my own society. But how
can we rediscover what we already know? Behar contends that this “native anthropology” brings up a “shift toward viewing identification, rather than difference, as the key defining image of anthropological theory and practice” (Behar, 1996: 28). She concludes that the feminist movement reflecting upon biography as well as autobiography, has changed fundamentally the way scholars in a wide range of disciplines think about both the subject and subjectivity. This research takes into serious consideration all the above and although profoundly reflexive – besides as Bruner put it “every ethnographer leaves traces in the text” (1993: 2) – renders the women under study and their personal lived experiences the subjects of my gaze.

Research design

In this section I am giving a detailed outline of the basic elements of my study. I discuss the sampling techniques I used, as well as how participants were recruited. Subsequently, I discuss the interview process that I followed in order to collect my research’s data. Finally, I describe the techniques I utilized in order to analyse my collected data. The chapter ends with a discussion of the ethical principles that were relevant to my research.

Sampling

Thirty-six female respondents were recruited to participate in open-ended qualitative interviews and, as mentioned above, to talk about their experiences of growing up amidst the current financial crisis (see Appendix 1 for full sample details). According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), the credibility of a research does not depend necessarily upon the number of its participants, but instead on the final picture that the polyphony of the different voices creates when brought together.

In order to explore what represents, from my participants’ point of view, the main milestones for the attainment of adulthood, I recruited women between the ages of 20 and 37, as my aim was to explore what happens when they complete their academic studies and attempt to enter the labour market, as well as establish romantic relationships. My research did not exclude those women who haven’t studied at the university but went directly to work. But although my initial ambition was to include women from different socio-economic
classes, my attempts did not reach any success. The posts I advertised on local cafes and job centres did not seem to attract working class women, since the women who responded to them were largely middle-class, university educated young women. Moreover, having used the snowballing technique, I relied upon well-educated middle-class friends who introduced me to friends of them with a similar background. Therefore, most of my participants are middle class young women who studied or keep studying at Greek and/or European universities. Of course there were some exceptions, with three of the sample self-defining themselves as working class. Moreover, my sample included both those women who are in employment and those who are not. Interestingly, my participants’ financial state is not necessarily the factor determining their living arrangements; as I will show, there are young women who amidst the general turmoil and the frustrations it entails, are choosing to stay at their parents’ home, as it is the only place that feels like a secure environment to live in, a ‘shelter’ which might offer them love and affection. As my aim was to try to cover as many living arrangements as possible, I interviewed women who either lived alone, with their husbands/partners, or still with their parents – factors which were used to explore potential differences in the meanings of ‘adulthood’ and the pathways towards this ‘outcome’ or ‘process’.

The starting point of my decision to narrow the sample to women only was partly autobiographical, that is my own struggle up to five years ago as a young Greek woman to survive in a society which is going through drastic economic restructuring, profound cultural transformations, and deepening social inequality which rendered my experience of growing up unpleasant. And even though it seemed to me that a whole generation had been condemned to a culture bearing lots of uncertainties and rising unemployment rates, the effects of this new economic era may be gendered. Therefore, although I am taking into consideration the fact that the current economic turmoil has affected men and women in many respects equally, this project seeks to explore the ways in which the financial crisis is experienced by women, as well as the implications it has for their social, financial, and personal lives. I do however, where possible, highlight areas of gender commonality and distinction through reference to prior research on men.
Recruitment strategies

Snowballing techniques have been used, where my initial participants were asked to nominate, through their social networks, other participants who meet the eligibility criteria and could contribute to my study (see Morgan, 2008). Thus, I begun by selecting as initial informants a few people I had already made contact with. “It is usually best to begin with those at hand, the people who may repose enough trust in one, to allow access to their private lives” (Rock, 2001: 34). However, I also advertised my research to prospective participants by posting recruitment announcements in unemployment services, community centres, and local coffee shops that is physical places where potential informants may hang out. The women who responded to this kind of strategy were university educated women. These were in line with the sample characteristics of my research design. According to Bussell and Forbes’s (2002) research on the impact of social, religious, and human capital on volunteerism, educational attainment beyond a high school diploma increases the chances that an individual will decide to engage in volunteerism. They also suggest that women are both more likely to volunteer and engage in more volunteering than men are. The sample which I ended up recruiting for the study corresponded with similar groups as those defined in the volunteering research – largely educated young women. These women expressed their interest in my research, as well as their eagerness to contribute to a study that appeals to them. Therefore, in the process of the interview, the women were frequently concerned whether their testimonies were interesting enough and related to my research. In most cases, in the end of our discussion, the participants expressed their wish to help my study as much as possible, through offering additional information, as well as further potential participants.

What is interesting here is that the life course literature (Birdsall, Graham & Pettinato, 2000; Russell & O’Connell, 2001; Ravallion, 2009; Woestman, 2010; Silva, 2013) suggests that working class women suffer more because of the financial hardships than other groups. Austerity tends to affect women, and especially working-class women, as it excludes them from the labour market, while it increases women’s burden in the housework, and therefore results in deepening the gendered division of labour (Ozturk & Ergunes, 2009; Sutton, 2010). However, although middle-class women are claimed to have better opportunities and sufficient levels of ‘cultural capital’ as resilience (e.g. Skeggs, 2004; Brooks, 2008), this research examines whether they are ultimately in a better situation than the working-class
women are. Since my sample consists predominantly of middle-class young women, I will explore the ways they have been affected by the current crisis. We know little about university educated young women who are not beneficiaries of their class position, and whom ultimately have repeated adversities and unmet hopes. My research will show that middle-class women are equally facing problems, yet in different levels and in different ways to those from the working classes. What I will argue is that the current socioeconomic crisis has changed some of the fundamental social values, and thus representing an important departure from the historic life trajectories experienced by previous generations of young women in Greece.

Half the interviews have been carried out in the town centre of Athens, as the crisis is more apparent and experienced in a sharper way in the capital (see *The Guardian*, 2011; Dalakoglou, 2012), and half in Thessaloniki, the second biggest city of Greece, which is the city I come from and a location in which I have established contacts. Larger urban centres, due to their nature, are particularly sensitive to the complexity of the socio-economic aspects of the crisis which intensify significant negative changes, such as closures and bankruptcies of firms, unemployment, and poverty (Spatial Development Research Unit, n.d.).

In terms of linguistic communication with my participants, since I am a native Greek speaker, I did not face any difficulty or obstacle in my communication with the research participants. The telling of stories was not an easy process, and in some cases, it was accompanied by strong feelings (tears, anger, shame, pride). Nevertheless, my established contacts in both Athens and Thessaloniki, my identity as a young Greek woman, my experiences, and familiarity with the social world under study facilitated me to establish rapport and build trusting relationships with my informants, while they provided me with an accessibility to the circumstances in which my participants’ actions are done, as well as to the meanings that things and affairs have for them.

**Interview Process**

I conducted qualitative interviews with 36 female participants. My interviews lasted on average 90 minutes. The form of interviewing I followed in my research was individual, face-to-face verbal interchange. Paraphrasing Fontana and Frey (2005), I utilised open-ended in-
depth interviewing, in order to understand the complex behaviour of my participants without having any a priori biases that potentially could limit or misinterpret what was important to them. Symbolic interactionism as a theoretical perspective seeks to ‘open’ the talk and obtain ‘authentic’ narratives (Rapley, 2001). My approach to depth qualitative interviews was broad enough and meant to give voice to the participants themselves who talked about issues that were of particular concern to their lives. I aimed to listen to my participants’ meanings and understandings of their experience in order to build a conceptual analysis of them.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggest that for feminist researchers a more open, loosely structured research methodology is necessary to learn about women, to capture their words, their concepts, and the importance they place on the events in their world. What is feminist about my interviews are the types of questions that I asked from my participants. By conducting in-depth interviews, I tried to get at an understanding of women’s lives and interpretations upon their experiences from their point of view. Although I had some specific ideas I wanted to find out, I did not have a specific set of questionnaire items with which I was beginning. I was especially mindful of Oakley’s (1981a) ideas on interviewing women, namely that the interview should be viewed more as a reciprocal conversation, not a means of receiving information only. Furthermore, my focus was to allow as far as possible a free and open discussion centring on the experiences of their own life narratives, rather than to exert undue influence on interview structure with a view to elicit certain pre-defined themes or concepts.

In order to achieve a level of detail, depth, richness, and focus, what Geertz (1973b) called thick description, I developed main questions, probes, and follow-ups. Although in-depth interviewing worked out properly most of the times, however there were cases where my participants needed to be provided with a series of more specific questions. Rubin and Rubin (2005) explain the usefulness of probes and argue that it is a technique which allows the participants to carry on talking about the main theme under study, while at the same time request for clarifications, examples and/or evidence for certain points. Indeed, probes were particularly helpful during my in-depth interviews. Hesse-Biber suggests that “probes allow researchers to provide the respondent with support and encouragement without pushing their own agenda into the conversation” (2006: 126). As long as my interviews were not structured, I found it quite useful to delve deeper into what the respondent was choosing to
discuss. Finally, probes and follow-up questions helped me in many occasions to explore more the latent meaning of the themes my participants were choosing to talk about.

I was aware of not interrupting the flow of the conversation I had with them, as I didn’t want to prevent them from recalling experiences in their own voices. I also used to remain silent at key points, allowing this way my participants to take control of the content, as well as the pace of the interview (see Paget, 1983). Nevertheless, my occasional silence at times did not imply passivity, but rather a form of collaboration with my participants. By letting the narrative unpack and through the use of ‘non-lexical expressions’ (Riessman, 1987), I encouraged my participants to say more. I tried to ‘listen’ carefully to my participants’ heartfelt points, sometimes by changing questions I had in my mind in advance. And although this could be difficult at times, I had to be ready for such changes following the pace of my participants.

Moreover, while my participants were talking, I listened for markers which were not only showing to them that I was following their discourse carefully, but also helped me to pick up the issues that matter to them. “Markers are a valuable source of information and often lead to the thick descriptions that characterize and enrich qualitative interview data” (Hesse-Biber, 2006: 136).

The open-ended theme guide encouraged my participants to express in their own words their ideas, memories, and interpretations on issues such as the effects of the current turmoil on their everyday lives, on their economic independence, as well as family and intimate relationships. The open-ended way in which interviewing was conducted encouraged my participants to initiate important to them topics, and give their own interpretations about them. Although I had a general plan of the questions I wanted to ask them “for the sake of an (impossible) neutrality” (Portelli, 1998: 71), I encouraged them to tell me what they wished to be heard. It was not difficult to ‘accept’ the sequence or the content of their narratives, as the ideal of giving voice to the participants has been at the heart of the politics and practice of feminist research. Therefore, I was quite open to new ideas that I hadn’t initially anticipated. My goal was not to judge their answers or topics they needed to discuss as right or wrong, but rather to find out how my informants make sense of what they have seen, heard, and/or experienced. At the end, as Geertz (1973a) points out, we are telling our version of their understandings. However, the women that talked to me had a way of telling their story, while they were covering the themes I wanted to have covered. Sometimes my
participants were repeating a concept or something that they have been experiencing for a long time a lot because it was important to them. Thus, although my open-ended questions were giving lots of space to them to direct the dialogues according to their will, however I covered all the research questions I had planned before my fieldwork. Generally, there was little or no divergence from the initial research plan.

Many of my participants thanked me at the end of their interview for giving them the chance to tell their story and make them feel unique in this world. By giving them more control of the interview as well as the range of topics to be covered, I managed to gain greater in-depth material. There are certain kinds of personal information that are usually unavailable to almost everyone. Several studies (Thorne & Henley, 1975; Miller & Swift, 1977; Spender 1985) have demonstrated how linguistic restrictions (both vocabulary and syntax) have excluded women’s experiences from social sciences (for instance, the generic ‘he’1). This, Spender (1985) suggests, results in the ‘mutedness’ of women who have to work around a vocabulary which is more suitable to them. Yet, a woman-to-woman talk is a different experience from a talk in mixed groups, as women tend to listen more seriously to each other and value their experiences which stand at the heart of feminist theorizing (see Oakley, 1981a; Finch, 1993; Roberts, 2013). And although we had difficult dialogues at times, I chose not to suppress or exclude their emotions for the sake of an alleged ‘rationality’ (see Becker, 1971; Oakley, 1974). The majority of my participants mentioned that the whole process was therapeutic to them, as they could open up to a special sort of stranger, one who felt more like a ‘friend’ very willing to listen to their stories and make them ‘real’ by allowing them to articulate them in their own particular ways.

Transcriptions

Interviews were recorded in Greek and translated and transcribed into English for analysis. Lapadat (2000) argues that theoretical and methodological implications of the processes of transcriptions have been consistently neglected by analysts. According to Silverman, “audio and video recordings are an increasingly important part of qualitative research. Transcripts of such recordings, based on standardized conventions, provide an excellent record of ‘naturally

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1 Interestingly, the word ‘human’ in Greek (Anthropos) is masculine and is never used to refer to women; women are usually mentioned as ‘women’.
occurring’ interaction” (2001: 13). Indeed, recording and transcribing provided me with a better accuracy of what was being said during the interview process. Prus argues that “researchers who write up their own interviews end up learning this material much better than do those who do not” (1997: 276). And although transcribing might be a slow and sometimes hard process, if undertaken by the researcher, it is more likely to familiarise them with the data (Fielding & Thomas, 2008).

Over my interviewing, I tried to empower my participants to name their experiences by using their own vocabulary (and not engaging them in the one I had in my mind) and listening carefully to their testimonies. At times, it has been hard for me to translate jokes, pain, despair or cynicism, all of which were literally describing the local realities my participants were experiencing. Temple and Young explain that “language constitutes our sense of self, as well as enabling us to communicate the ways in which we are similar to and different from others” (2004: 174). Paraphrasing Simon (1996), soon later I realized that what really mattered was to make the ‘right’ decisions about the actual cultural meaning that the language they were talking carried.

According to Hammersley, “transcription cannot be viewed entirely in linguistic terms, but it also depends upon the transcriber’s ability to use their knowledge of the language and culture to make sense of what people are” (2010: 12). Therefore, for Hammersley, what the researcher in the act of transcribing ‘hears’ is what they also ‘understand’. Kvale similarly proposes that instead of asking the question “what is the correct transcription?” a more constructive question would be “what is a useful transcription for my research purposes?” (1996: 165-166). Taking cue from Ross, translation was implemented as “an act of negotiation and not a search for perfection” (2009: 12). In other words, being a native Greek and fluent English speaker, I did my best to convey meaning from occasional Greek jokes, dictum, or slang phrases operationalised during the interviews to an English reader.

**Data Analysis**

The approach to analysis of data was two-fold. Firstly, with adherence to the principles of thematic analysis outlined in Miles et al. (1994), I started by transcribing and analysing data after each interview, rather than to wait until the completion of the research before undertaking such tasks. This approach was a valuable one in terms of being close to the data,
refining themes and lines of questioning in the interviews, as well as allowing me to ‘test’ and validate emerging themes established during this provisional strand of analysis (Prus, 1997). Secondly, after completion of the interviews and formal thematic analysis of the interview data, I undertook a staged approach. This started with grouping general themes in the data in order to assess broad topics and patterns. This was followed by a gradual refining and specific analysis of data which sought to pull out nuances and contestations in each of the themes (DeVault, 1999). I regarded this multi-stage approach to data analysis as important as a means of cross-validating points, as well as checking whether earlier established themes were in fact still relevant.

The data are presented verbatim, whilst the natural fashion of women’s speech such as hesitation, false starts, and grammatical errors (DeVault & Gross, 2012) have been maintained. For a more detailed understanding of the way narratives were told, I have used punctuation within the excerpts. In several occasions, sentences are broken to reflect the way the speech was taking place. Silences and inarticulate speech were not meaningful for me, but rather I paid special attention to these areas in a symbolic interactionist sense of engaging in one’s interpretation and reality.

I adopted a symbolic interactionist approach to the interpretation of data – an epistemological perspective which I sought to connect with the experience of women. As I have already explained in the conceptual framework, symbolic interactionism views what individuals do as a product of their interpretations of self and their world. As much as symbolic interactionism privileges certain ethnographic principles such as the accumulation of “thick description” (Geertz, 1973b), such connection with the experience of women also brings with it a political element – namely a focus on how injustice, discrimination, frustration and emotions of anger play out in the lives of the women in my sample. That is to say that whilst symbolic interactionism is concerned with uncovering meanings and experience of performative agents, this does not, and should not, negate any reference to patriarchy, power and politics – in other words, the critical prose of the analyst need not be peripheral and thus marginal to mere description. In practical terms, the role of thematic analysis in capturing themes was adopted with close eye on the meanings, language, and descriptions employed in each of the women’s narratives. Rather than adopting a narrative approach which would place more centrality to the narratives as continuous analytic tools, I decided on employing thematic analysis in order to explain nuance, variation, and patterns across data – an
approach which is well versed in previous qualitative studies, declaring an overt effort to employ symbolic interactionist and feminist perspectives (Oakley, 1981b; West, 1996; Deegan, 2014).

**Ethical Principles**

The development of the research design has been shaped by the principles of the British Sociological Association Ethics Guidelines, as well as the University of Surrey Code of Ethics (see Appendix 2 for full details). In this section, I intend to illustrate how informed consent has been gained from participants, how participant confidentiality and privacy are managed in the processes of generating and handling data, and how risk of harm to the participants has been managed in order to uphold standards of quality, transparency, and integrity.

The participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the research through the information and consent sheets I provided them with. The essence of informed consent is that participants understand and are aware of the purpose of their participation in the study without feeling manipulated or threatened (Bulmer, 2008). Participants were informed that they were not required to discuss anything they did not want to, and that if they decided to participate in the study and change their mind, they had the right to drop out from the research at any time. Indeed, in my research I haven’t included information that I obtained while I was not recording our discussion. There have been a few participants who wanted to discuss a few issues with me off the record, as an outcome of the rapport we built in the process, and therefore I interpreted that as meaning that they did not want me to include them in my research. Out of respect to them, I would find unacceptable to bridge the trust they showed to me and publish their inner and secret thoughts, fears, and complaints.

To maintain confidentiality, the sensitive data collected from the participants during the recruitment process have been stored in my password-protected computer. To ensure the safety and anonymity of my research participants, I am using pseudonyms which in some occasions have been chosen by the participants themselves. Interviews have been audiotaped only with their consent. The interviews have also been scheduled at a place convenient to them. As mentioned above, the participation required one or two hours of their time per session.
It has been suggested by Oakley (1981b) that most traditional in-depth interviewing is unethical, whether wittingly or unwittingly. The techniques and tactics of interviewing are really ways of manipulating the respondents, while treating them as objects or numbers rather than as individual humans (Fontana & Frey, 2005). It seems that the praxis of sharing a life story with a researcher is usually followed by ethical issues – of confidentiality, deception, honesty, consent, exploitation, betrayal (Plummer, 2000). And there is always a potential risk of harm and damage through the intrusion into someone else’s life.

Having taken into consideration the reasons above, I made clear to my informants that I was there to learn about their lives without passing judgment on them, while I demonstrated to them that I was an absolutely trustworthy recipient of their living experiences of their emerging adulthood amidst hard social and economic conditions which makes such a transition painful. Therefore, in the interactions with my informants I used prescriptive ethics such as reciprocity, honesty, accountability, responsibility, and equality, while I did my utmost to say and write nothing about them that could knowingly cause them any social or personal harm.

**Summary**

The aim of this chapter has been to illustrate the methodological aspects of the research design. In particular, I have sought to explain the theoretical and epistemological principles underpinning the project through reference to symbolic interactionist and feminist standpoints. These ideas will be returned to during the findings chapters, where theoretical application of these ideas takes place. I have further charted the ways that the research was conducted, making reference to the *doing* of the research via reference to reflexivity, and with regards the more analytic components of the research akin to recruitment, data transcription, translation, and analysis. In what follows, I will seek to unpack the ways that an emphasis on women’s experience can be activated during latter empirically situated chapters, where I develop several important insights into the ways that young women’s lives in Greece have been reshaped by the crisis, and the role played in their transitions to adulthood.
Chapter 4

Education to Employment Transitions and Work Experiences

This chapter is the first data analysis chapter, which focuses on young Greek women’s emerging adulthood – the significance of work, or absence thereof. Work is crucial for the journeys women face into adulthood, enabling and restricting the structural positioning in society, and ultimately setting expectations for how they conceive of their future lives. The chapter will start by drawing on the perspectives of young Greek women through their negotiations of work, and indeed unemployment. As a highly educated sample of young women, transitions to work are not met with the same opportunities and general benefits which we tend to see in Anglophone studies, which show that higher education is a broad determinant of greater career prospects, and indeed higher wages (Woolbers, 2000; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011). In Greece, which is undergoing radical social upheaval in the wake of the financial crisis, struggles to offer any such work opportunities for most young people are evident (Russell & O’Connell, 2001; Livanos, 2010). As will be outlined, young women have become conscious of these difficult social realities; transitions to work have been widely reported as highly problematic and risky, especially for young people (Biletta & Eisner, 2007; Mizen, 2009; European Commission 2013; Kretsos, 2013).

Locating young women’s experiences of managing their personal lives in such challenging structural situations is a topic of significant importance. As recent studies have emphasised, in the wake of the global financial crisis, scarce insight into the gendering of these economic effects have been developed (Smith, 2009; European Commision, 2010; Economou et al., 2013; Drydakis, 2015). Gender is a key area to unpack, not least as the nature of employment and experiences of the unique properties that women have in the labour market compared to men. Women are more likely than men to be unemployed in Greece (Karakatsanis, 1999; European Commision, 2010), more restricted in their freedoms to leave home and pursue a career overseas (Kyriazi, 1995; Gonzalez, 1999; Seguino, 2010a), and subject to greater workplace discrimination and pay restrictions than male counterparts (Annesley & Scheele, 2011; Kretsos, 2013).
Through the narratives of young Greek women, examination of how they navigate their experiences of work are developed. As will be explained, the extreme precariousness and highly toxic working conditions they confront raise several questions about the broad literature on emerging adulthood. In such contexts, the options for accumulating sufficient capital to leave home, and to support themselves and significant others are highly constrained. In turn, the nature of work conditions and restrictions on the security of employment further place women in vulnerable social positions, independent of their position as middle-class women. The final part of the chapter deals with the question of what Greek women do in the wake of these difficult choices; to stay put in Greece and put up with these difficult conditions, to exist in hope that their working lives may improve, or to find work options overseas. In the wake of questions about the ‘brain drain’ in Greece (Carr, Inkson & Thorn, 2005; Dumont & Monso, 2007; Labrianidis & Vogiatzis, 2013; Labrianidis, 2014), the factors underpinning why some leave and others choose to stay in Greece are also explained.

Lifelong learning: learning for earning?

One of the central topics of importance for my participants was their continuing investment in their educational studies. The multiple and sometimes diverse qualifications they had accumulated at school and later on at university were extensive and significantly above average rates of education for Greek citizens (Russell & O’Connell, 2001; Livanos, 2010; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011). Empirical studies have pointed to the importance of higher education for middle-class people; du Bois-Reymond (1998) considers middle-class people’s decision to go to university ‘predictable’, whilst Allatt (1996) argues that non-participation in higher education is ‘unthinkable’. Finally, Ball (2003) contends that participation in higher education is a ‘natural progression’ – an expectation induced through a conflation of peers and familial influences. Of the 36 women who participated in this study, 18 had one academic undergraduate degree, eight two degrees (i.e. including postgraduate), while three of them have over three academic degrees (including additional postgraduate qualifications, such as a further Master’s degree). Six participants in this study did not study at university but at technical schools (specialising in vocational learning for four years, resulting in a Bachelor’s degree at the end). Finally, only one participant finished secondary school and did not
complete any further studies. My participants situated advanced education as part of an ongoing pursuit for knowledge, rather than an instrumental means of gaining a job.

As will be outlined during this section, education was a response to the uncertainties and unpredictability of contemporary Greek society – ‘lifelong learning’ was a means of coping with these times in a way in which young women sought to re-define the purpose and personal fulfilment of education as an end in itself. My participants talked about a constant request from potential employers to prove their ‘experience’, yet not their academic knowledge. Therefore, when explained in reference to employability, my sample as highly qualified\(^2\) individuals spoke in despondent terms about the role of their education on career options.

Zoi, a student in agricultural studies from Thessaloniki, talked about her experience of pursuing a job as a means to cover basic needs, as her parents could no longer support her financially; her mother, who had been working in a private school for the last 20 years, had just lost her job, whilst her father’s salary had been cut by 50% due to the crisis. Zoi sought employment as a retailer in clothing shops and as a waitress in local patisserie shop, with no success in either application. The feedback she received from most employers was that she was ‘inexperienced’. Zoi was deeply distressed by the fact that no one was giving her the opportunity to learn and prove herself by offering her services:

*I’ve experienced it in a very tough way... When I was looking for jobs, everybody was asking for an experienced young woman between 18 and 25. They want you to prove your experience even in mini markets; you should be experienced to sell cigarettes and crisps! It’s so ridiculous... I mean, I’m 23 years old; where can I find that experience when I’m so young? On the other hand, I’ve got friends who are experienced but 30 plus, and therefore, they can’t get a job either as they are supposedly too old. It makes me cry... You can’t win... [Zoi 23, Thessaloniki]*

Zoi’s frustration was profound; she failed to reason with management views that 30-year-old women have ‘no stamina to work’ in hard conditions compared to younger women in their early 20s. Yet, Zoi could associate with the latter, as her 50-year-old mother was struggling to find any sort of job. As Zoi further remarked, “I can’t stand seeing such a hard-working woman

\(^2\) Of the entire Greek population, 24.6% were educated at tertiary levels (university and beyond) as of 2015 (Eurostat: 2017). This compares to 81% of my sample.
crying at home”. The paradox of older unemployed women with experience but ‘no stamina’, as well as younger women with stamina but no experience left Zoi and a number of other participants feeling confused, wondering which directions would benefit them to find a future job.

Although none of my participants expected that multiple academic qualifications would necessarily guarantee them a career in Greece, they remained committed to personally investing in the importance of higher education. Unlike in many other European States, such as England and Wales, in Greece education is free for students. However, since the crisis, students in Greece are more likely to study in their home towns and live at their parents’ home, rather than move to a different city where they would have to run a new household – choices determined by the benefits of saving money on accommodation. Yet, although my participants had low expectations for their capacities to pursue a career relevant to their academic expertise, they still hoped to achieve something. The degree of difficulty in their studies in tandem with their lack of options offered by the Greek labour market made them distressed and frustrated. Take Martha who at the time I met her was completing her distance learning Master’s degree in England, as well as training in Greek Sign Language. Martha described her despondency about her perceived mismatch between her academic achievements and the absence of any career choices she was offered in Greece. Martha stressed how much she had emotionally invested in her studies and her constant will to study and achieve a career. When asked during the interview to expand on her feelings about her current life situation she used a metaphor of a bicycle wheel – a representation of her “effort”, and “her sweat and blood”:

I would symbolise my life as a bicycle wheel, because the last few years of my life have been characterised by a constant effort. That’s why I didn’t think of a car’s or a motorcycle’s wheel, which do not demand such an effort, as my run towards everything is my sweat and blood, as well as my big effort. The bicycle leads me to a new path; though, I resent it every time, because it is a rather stressful process. [Martha 30, Athens]

Martha’s description of not giving up and trying to accomplish her dream career touched and distressed me. For most of my participants, their ongoing studies has been a difficult personal project which meant a lot to them. They were all very keen to share their frustrations and
difficulties about their future in Greece. Similarly, Sofia found her experience of striving to achieve a career in Greece “pointless”, and like Martha, also used a metaphoric language to describe her situation – a “hamster’s wheel” to indicate her futile progression achieved in the labour market. A final example of the mismatch between ongoing education and the tough labour market conditions comes from Efi, a 30-year-old psychology graduate from Athens. Efi was profoundly disappointed about the fact that she had done “everything she could” to get a job as a psychologist, but still couldn’t make a living on sporadic voluntary work experience:

*Everything in my life has got to do with effort. Effort to study, effort to find a job... I’ve studied Psychology, I’ve done a three-year training in psychotherapy, and I’m currently doing my Master’s. I haven’t managed to find a proper job as a psychologist though. I work voluntarily once a week. But I’ve got the feeling that unless I keep studying, I won’t manage to find a job in the future.* [Efi 30, Athens]

Despite the effort placed on educational studies, it was very well recognised that hard work and personal drive were limited in the pursuit of future employment. One key barrier (and facilitator) was the ways through which personal networks operated in Greek society, often to support employment through having access to personal associations.

**Importance of personal networks and work opportunities**

The role of personal networks in achieving employment has been frequently stated in previous research (Marmaros & Sacerdote, 2002; Calvo-Armengol & Zenou, 2005; Wahba & Zenou, 2005; Bermeo & Pontusson, 2012; Lekakis & Kousis, 2013), yet in Greece the significance of personal networks can be traced back to the cultural fabric of Greek society, where bartering and informal personal favours are commonplace (Karakatsanis, 1999; Konstantinidis & Xezonakis, 2013; Karamanis & Hyz, 2014; Tsekeris, Kaberis & Pinguli, 2015). Soula’s story provides an acute description of the issues associated with personal networks as a means of gaining employment. Soula described her education and her experience to pursue a career, a process which had been concerning her since she completed her first degree. Soula finished childcare teaching, and at the time I met her she was completing her second Master’s in special needs education. When asked about what led her to pursue so
many academic degrees, she responded that her initial hope was to “get a good job”. Yet, whilst realising “how things work in Greece”, she carried on studying just to keep herself busy. Below, I present Soula’s description of an incident, which functioned as an inhibiting factor in her efforts to pursue a career. It happened four years before our interview took place:

*I was distributing my CVs to all the child play schools in Thessaloniki. At some point I came across a lady who was working in one of them and said to me “because I liked you, let me ask you a question… Have you got any network which could help you out?” I responded “no”. Then she said to me “and then, why are you wasting your time going back and forth to the play schools? It doesn’t work like that!” Since then my wings are broken and I never tried again…* [Soula 28, Thessaloniki]

Personal networks point to the ways in which social relationships serve as a resource, allowing individuals and groups to cooperate, in order to achieve goals that otherwise might have been attained only with difficulty, if at all (Kilpatrick, Field & Falk, 2003). Soula, along with the majority of my participants (30 out of 36), had never directly benefited from any political or other acquaintances to gain employment. Receiving one rejection after the other resulted in an accumulation of feelings of injustice, while also reducing probability of employment due to continued lack of experience during this time out of work (Livanos, 2010; Bermeo & Pontusson, 2012).

A similar narrative as Soula’s comes from Mina who worked as a retailer in a shoe shop in Thessaloniki. Mina completed her Maritime studies a few years before our interview, but as she remarked, it is a sector that demands an expanded social network that she didn’t have. After several unsuccessful endeavours to approach key people who would offer her a job in a shipping company, Mina decided to get a job as a retailer, as “the time was going by and somebody needed to pay the bills”. Her account was more political than others, with the source of her personal predicament resting on the failures of the Greek civil society to offer equality for opportunity:

*It is not fair offering somebody a job just because they are friends with an authority figure from the Church or the Parliament. It is just so wrong. But we can’t really talk about equal opportunities in Greece… We have no democracy really…* [Mina 34, Thessaloniki]
In 2016 the Greek Statistical Authority conducted a survey on young people’s position in the labour market. The sample was consisted of young people aged between 15 and 34, and one of the survey’s outcomes was the fact that 39.9% of the participants had found a job with the help of immediate or extended family and friends. Chtouris (2015) identified a growing crisis of the political system in Greece, with young people feeling hopeless about their future, with little belief in any solutions from political parties. In 2015, approximately one out of three young people requested a job from a political figure, with those aged between 30 and 34 presented as the group who visit political offices to request help more frequently than any other age groups.

Key people in powerful positions had been the only option for Katerina, whose father had sought assistance from to find his daughter a job. Katerina, who worked as a teacher in a private school in Athens, a job which was putting lots of pressure on her due to the hard relationship she had with her employer who was frequently humiliating her, spent “a whole winter crying at home”. According to Katerina, her father felt that he had to actively support his daughter by using the available to him network.

*My dad couldn’t stand seeing me crying all day after work. Therefore, he started using all his network to find me a job in a different institution. He didn’t make it though...* [Katerina 29, Athens]

Katerina’s father’s unsuccessful efforts to find a better job for his daughter, disappointed her and made her realise that there were not many options available for her. As she mentioned, her working conditions did not change by any means, however Katerina tried to see her working environment in a more positive light and come into terms with it. Similarly, Dina talked about her experience to find a position in the Ministry of Commerce in Athens. Although Dina emphasised that she was against the unmeritocratic practice of using family networks in order to get a job, at the same time she admitted that it served its purpose at the end, as she was for a long time unemployed without many chances to find a suitable occupation for her.
My parents made me work in the public sector, just because they had a family network [meson] and they thought that that was the right job for me. I was unemployed at the time, so it didn’t do me any harm. So, I worked in the Ministry of Commerce for four years and then due to cuts they decided to get rid of all the young people. [Dina 35, Athens]

Although only Dina (and to some extent also Katerina, whose effort was not successful) decided to talk openly about her experience to get a job in the public sector by using her parents’ social network, it was obvious from the discussions, and indeed the positions that some of them had, that Dina was not the only one who had such an experience. At least four participants had worked in the past for a short period in powerful institutions, such as various ministries of the Greek government or institutions of the European Union. Prestigious positions in various ministries tend to be predetermined for people who have a strong relation with influential political personnel, who at times provide young people with such advanced positions either for a short period of time or for life. The latter usually depends both on the politicians’ power and the amount of ‘obligation’ they feel they have towards the young people, and especially their parents who are usually their voters. Family networks are underpinned by political corruption processes, which tend to favour and look after the younger family members. It is more of a historical trend which extends way before the current crisis. In an Anglophone context, having social capital can offer the individual better chances. For example, in labour market young people can benefit from having ties with family contacts (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Inkpen & Tsang, 2005). However, in Greece, the beneficiaries are fewer, as the available positions in labour market are limited due to the crisis (Sotiropoulos & Bourikos, 2014).

Open talk about personal networks (meson in Greek) is taboo in Greece, as it is widely known that using somebody’s network is an unethical and unfair way of gaining employment, as it skips meritocratic competition and evaluation of each participant based on their qualifications. However, although the fact that talking about it may be a taboo, young people usually find themselves persuaded by the bleak reality of having to use any means of finding work. Therefore, although using family networks is usually an unreported practice, it is common, and even if it does not guarantee somebody a career, it still grants a degree of hope in an otherwise harsh and sparse labour market opportunity structure.
Insecurity and Extreme Uncertainty of Work

Insecurity and uncertainty were the main feelings overshadowing all my participants’ interpretations and experiences of working in Greece. All participants explained their difficulty of engaging with a constant sense of uncertainty, disappointment, disorientation, and humiliation that the newly transformed insecurities of Greek labour created. My participants’ experiences of insecurity echoed what Standing (2011) and Bauman (2007) argued about the neo-liberal changes to labour markets and the impact on young people’s sense of insecurity, regarding career opportunities. Some participants were more directly political in their assessment of the consequences of the crisis on their personal lives.

Nikoleta considered that the current crisis was a direct attack to individuals of her generation who were experiencing unprecedented levels of humiliation and everyday uncertainties. She remembered how humiliated she felt herself in the long process of looking for a job by getting constantly rejected by employers. Nikoleta compared her generation to her parents’ one, in order to stress the impact of the current crisis on the devaluation of academic achievements, given that older people had not pursued as many studies. Yet, in her view, the older generation had been given more opportunities, higher incomes, and a better work-life balance. Nikoleta argued that young people had been hit severely and exposed to conditions of high stress and insecurity. Reported official youth unemployment rates (European Commission, 2013) have a major social impact on young people’s sense of hope, aspirations, as well as capacities to survive economically (Mizen, 2009). As for Nikoleta’s own life, hopeless and frustrated with the bleak work regime she was experiencing, she mentioned that she was now “immune” to stress.

*We are living in an era where everything is changing radically. We got used to a state where we don’t know what the next day will bring us. This used to upset me a lot by the way; it is my natural situation now. I am used to stress. What I’ve seen so far is that we have all been humiliated. This is how I feel like personally. We used to dismiss our parents’ achievements, but look at us now – we work all day long, the working environment is unacceptable, the incomes disgraceful... We are supposed to have studied and we are much more qualified than our parents are. I think this is a huge humiliation for our generation. [Nikoleta 29, Athens]*
Nikoleta’s profound pain and disappointment touched me during the interview. It was apparent to me that she tried to desensitise herself from the strain she was experiencing in order to avoid any further hurtful experiences of pursuing a job unsuccessfully. In contrast to Nikoleta, Meropi was more open about her ongoing feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, and mentioned that the precarious nature of her job affected her even at times she was employed. Although Meropi worked as a full-time teacher, she only worked for short contracts. The school she was working for also delaying paying her by up to four months, leaving her struggling financially during this time.

For a short period of time I am always unemployed, and this conveys many insecurities and fears. Therefore, I’m always short of money and unable to cover my expenses. This lack of insecurity and uncertainty affects enormously my everyday life; it doesn’t allow me to feel happy and relaxed even at times I work, because I know that it will be temporary. [Meropi 25, Athens]

Meropi talked about ‘the psychological empowerment’ that her job offered her, although the conditions were not always ideal leaving her unable to cover her expenses. My participants were met with the stark reality that they should put up with the hard conditions, or otherwise find themselves without work. Precarious employment among my participants always entailed imperfect working conditions, which had markedly deteriorated since the current economic crisis. Kretsos (2013) explained that the economic crisis exposed a young workforce in Greece to risk, rendering them more dispensable and vulnerable to their employers. As I will show below, it was sometimes at the employers’ discretion to pay my participants fairly.

Sofia, who worked at an academic institution, was worried about having to look for a new job, as her contract was meant to last for nine months and it was shortly reaching its end. Sofia was aware of the new working establishment and was trying to come to terms with it. Interestingly, at times Sofia was justifying ‘decisions from above’ related to employment regulations, and especially with those that were related to public sector positions.

I don’t know what bothers me more... The general uncertainty or the working environment? Today I am working in this office. How do I know what will happen
tomorrow? We live in a ‘liquid society’³, don’t we? We will see... Personally, I always try to be ready for the next position which might be posted and make sure that I have the proper skills! I prepare myself for the ‘war’! [Sofia 31, Athens]

Dimitra was in her sixth month of her pregnancy at the time of our interview and expressed concerns about her job contract which was finishing at the same time she was giving birth to her baby. Dimitra’s job was only short-term and although she needed stability, she had few options for work besides. As she said, “you should get what you can from a country which gives nothing”, although the price she had to pay was a continual sense of searching for the next job after the completion of a short-term post. Although her family was trying to put her at ease, Dimitra was still feeling insecure about the upcoming end of her employment contract, along with the increase of her expenses which would come with her child’s birth.

I am so stressed at the moment... My contract at work finishes in October and I don’t know what to do. Of course I am giving a birth in October and everybody tells me “don’t worry, you wouldn’t be able to bring your baby up if you spent all day at work”, but we have such economic pressures... [Dimitra 32, Athens]

As discussed in chapter 2, although the impact of the crisis is widespread across populations, unemployment rates for young people have increased dramatically (Dietrich, 2013; Eurostat, 2018). As well as being highly risky and uncertain, work also impacted heavily on the affective experiences of the young women, namely with respect to the exploitation and feelings of powerlessness they felt. The pervasive sense of uncertainty regarding work in Greece leaves little room for hope and expectations for the future. These narratives of self-destruction and profound disappointment are now examined, building from these previous themes.

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³Ironically, the participant had no educational background in the social sciences, nor had picked up a copy of one of Sigmund Bauman’s many ‘liquid-entitled’ monographs. This use of the term ‘liquid society’ should be conceived as a coincidence!
Drydakis (2015) suggests that women are more likely to feel vulnerable both physically and mentally to factors such as higher insecurity due to high long-term unemployment, debt, social isolation, and sex discrimination. In a similar vein, current empirical studies demonstrate that young women have been affected more negatively by unemployment in relation to their health and mental health than are men (European Commision, 2010; World Health Organization, 2011). Christodoulou et al. (2016) argue that younger individuals present higher levels of hopelessness, while Bell and Blanchflower (2011) suggest that recessions render young people more pessimistic about their lives. These themes were all consistent features within the data.

My participants informed me of repeated practices, where employers were depriving them of their annual holiday leave and bonuses and/or asking them to work longer hours without compensating them. Yet, the biggest cost to my participants’ well-being was the lack of respect and understanding which they received from their employers. An example was Eugenia who worked in a bakery shop in the historic centre of Athens. Eugenia was grateful for the chance she had to “share her painful experiences” of humiliation at work. She called her employers “devil” and gave me a few examples of her employers’ inhumanity towards her colleagues and herself. She referred to her experiences in the bakery as “scars in her soul” that she would never manage to overcome. Amongst her employees’ unfair practices was the rights Eugenia had for receiving tips the customers were offering her personally for her services. Below, Eugenia described the ‘deal’ she did with her employers in the context of the current crisis:

_When I first started working there, I was in an incredible need to earn some money. Unfortunately, my employers got it and started manipulating and using me. First of all, I work for 12, 13 or even 14 hours and I don’t have any rights on my tips. My employers said to me from day one “I offer you the job, but the tips are mine”. They never pay me for the extra hours I usually work, while they pay for my insurance partially only – two days out of six. And I accepted everything. And I strongly believe that these are the outcomes of the crisis, because there are no jobs available like in the past, where you were looking for a job and you could find one within three-four days. Nowadays you don’t know when and whether you will manage to find a job. We’ve got a massive_
sense of insecurity and fear! And this is something that our employers are aware of and they seize the chance to exploit us. [Eugenia 27, Athens]

Eugenia explicitly attributed the exploitation she was experiencing to the current financial crisis and her employers’ behaviour. Eugenia explained that compared to the pre-crisis era, she could not just walk away and pursue a better career. Eugenia resented the constant humiliation she had been experiencing at that bakery for over four years, yet she was prepared to tolerate and suffer it because it was still consistent with the payment methods. Similarly, Lena who worked as a school escort in a private school in Athens used derogatory words for herself such as “rubbish”, who had been systematically treated with disrespect by her employer; the latter had recently called Lena “stupid” in front of the students she escorted to school.

My job is rubbish. I am rubbish too. I feel like I haven’t achieved anything in my life. I am zero. I hate my working environment. I have no rights whatsoever because I work in the private sector. My employer treats me like rubbish. The other day he called me ‘stupid’ in front of the students, and he told me that I don’t do my job properly. And this annihilates me... Don’t call me stupid; just tell me that I’m wrong and I’ll try to get better... Seriously, I’ve reached a burnout point! [Lena 29, Athens]

One of the defining features of the interviews was the ways that any notions of typical middle-upper class professions, such as teaching, medical practice, and law had also been severely affected by the crisis. This picture – that professional occupations have been affected by neoliberal restructuring – is not solely isolated to Greece (Russell & O’Connell, 2001; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011), but research suggests it has certainly been far more extensive in Greece in terms of cuts to wages and length of working hours (Eurostat, 2012; Kretsos, 2013; Featherstone, 2014). Katerina, who worked as a teacher in a private school in Athens for four years, described to me the difficult conditions under which she worked. She said that for over a year she was coming back from work ‘tearful and depressed’, as she couldn’t tolerate the constant humiliation, the threats, and pressure her employers were putting on her.
Over time my employers put more pressure on me and make my working days very hard. I feel very stressed every time I come back from work... I have to prepare a lot for the next day and I feel so fatigued. I come back home and I don’t want to listen to anyone and anything. I have to tolerate all those shouts from my boss and I need my time to unwind and recover from it. [Katerina 29, Athens]

Katerina explained that she did not have the option to talk to her employers about her problems, as they had already responded by threatening her that she would lose her job, unless she tried harder. These threats towards employees who complained about working conditions, long hours, and delayed payments were, according to my participants, a common practice. My participants were very aware of the insecure nature of the labour market, accepting and managing to survive these realities as best they could. Kali, for example, who worked as a lawyer in Athens and dealt with the indebted households since the crisis commenced, shared with me her harsh working experience. Her interview was arguably a cry for help, as the working conditions under which she worked were affecting her mental and emotional well-being. Kali mentioned that her clients’ “stress and anxiety lest the banks confiscated their properties” were “killing” her. People’s “dramas, tears and sobs” made her feel more like a “counsellor” than like a lawyer. Kali’s experience of work was deteriorated by her employer’s lack of respect and intention to exploit her as much as he could.

I hate my job... It doesn’t make me feel happy. It stresses me, I’ve lost my sleep... I feel so negative about everything... My job kills me. It’s been like that for over four years now, I can’t take it anymore. My soul feels black. Whatever job you do, you should be able to offload and unwind when you go back home. But I don’t have that luxury with my job because my clients call me on the phone, they shout, they swear, they sob, and it happens so constantly... And every time they call me I think “help me God, I don’t want to talk to them”! I haven’t managed to handle my job and it has now affected my private life and well-being. [Kali 30, Athens]

Kali indicated that her monthly incomes were not more than 900 euros, of which 330 euros were paying for her insurance. Although she had continuously requested from her employer to cover her insurance expenses, he kept responding with threats such as “there is a queue of junior lawyers out there for me”. Kali complained that she was “working under her employer’s conditions with a freelancer’s duties”, and said that she debunked the myth that
“lawyers in Greece earn lots of money” from early on. As I will show below, the Greek population traditionally opt for professions that are perceived as prestigious and profitable, such as law, medicine, and engineering, resulting in higher levels of completion for work in these particular sectors (Livanos, 2010).

Mina described her own experience of the ways her bad working conditions were affecting her. As she explained, the demanding workload in tandem with the working pattern and low incomes were putting so much pressure on her, making her feel that there was nothing to give her any joy and excitement except food.

*I feel so bad every evening I come back from work... And when I go back home I always think of food. Food is my reward from a shitty day! I know that with food I try to recover from my stress at work. It is the only thing that makes me happy, although I don’t fit in my clothes anymore. I look so bad... [Mina 34, Thessaloniki]*

Mina was distressed about her appearance and throughout her interview she mentioned how bad she thought that she looked due to high food consumption which she claimed was all that was making her happy. Mina’s self-confidence was severely affected by her body weight, however she argued that unless something changed in her working environment, she would not be able to look after herself and her body again.

As well as impacting heavily on the affective experiences of these young women, such work conditions were also directly linked to a degradation of the self, whereby certain forms of work involving a close correspondence with artistic performance and similar such activities, were regarded as personal attacks on their way of life. As Antigoni’s story illustrates below, the experiences of cuts to the theatrical industry resulted in a major impact on her personal well-being. Working as an actress for several years with her husband, Antigoni had seen her incomes reduce year on year as a result of State cuts to the arts industry. In turn, most people could no longer afford to pay for a ticket to watch her performances. Antigoni talked thoroughly about the devaluation of the arts and generally everything which does not cover people’s essential needs (shelter, food, and to a lesser extent clothing). Amongst several examples of the disappointment was the continuous inconsistency of the State. After being funded by the State for a large performance, Antigoni conducted all the preparations by paying the running costs with money she had borrowed from the bank. Yet, soon after
creating a big debt, the State’s finance office said to her that there were no resources to cover her performances anymore. The latter devastated Antigoni.

*The truth is that this country has broken my legs… My wings! I was going through a period where I was trying to develop myself as an artist and I was very knowledgeable and experienced. I got my wings broken, because I was in a phase where I had started big productions. And the crisis broke my wings. I had to hold back and restrict myself dramatically. This suffocated and distressed me very much.* [Antigoni 32, Athens]

Antigoni shared her deep disappointment by using the expression “it has broken my wings”, a common expression used in Greece to describe personal devastation or extreme helplessness. Antigoni also shared her conviction that structurally nothing would change for Greek people; she saw her only solution as adapting herself to the new reality, formed by the post-crisis conditions.

A similar example of distrust towards the State and efforts to adapt to the new reality was Glafki who along with her husband ran a small bookshop in the centre of Athens. Glafki had tried to find a job in the public sector. After completing her studies, she managed to work in several departments in the public sector, which were only short term (up to six months each). As a result, Glafki was finding herself unemployed every six months. The constant insecurity and hopelessness of finding herself unemployed for long periods led her to the decision to start up her own business instead.

*In the past, I used to work with very short contracts. I was working for five-six months, and as soon as I was getting familiar with the job’s duties and I was ready to give 100% of myself, it was getting over. This is really incredible! They were breaking my wings by saying to me “it’s over”. [Glafki 32, Athens]*

Glafki was feeling hurt for not having been given the capacity to exercise her profession, which was both an intellectual and financial investment for her. After several continuous unsuccessful efforts to get a permanent and stable job, Glafki decided to run her own business, which although it did not exactly apply to her studies, was still an ‘intellectual profession’ she could be proud of practicing. Glafki had the cultural capital, the education, as
well as an upbringing which allowed her to engage with cultural activities from young age, however she was lacking the social capital which could potentially favour her to find a job of her expertise. In her effort to come to terms with the reality and survive, Glafki focused on the positives instead of what she had lost. In other words, Glafki lowered her intellectual possibilities, changed her motivations, and used her new profession as a heuristic device – a new agenda which gave her a new meaning and life prospects.

Similarly, Eleonora worked as a secretary in a local Clinic in Thessaloniki. The first time I met Eleonora was 16 years ago, at the University where we both completed our undergraduate studies in History. She was a really committed student and she later completed two Master’s degrees, whilst she received Proficiency in both English and French. After multiple efforts to find a job, Eleonora managed to work as a full-time secretary in a Clinic. As she said, she only started working there in the hope that she would do it temporarily, “just to get some experience and keep myself busy”; yet, at the time I interviewed her, she had already completed four years in that job! Eleonora felt profoundly disheartened for not getting any recognition for her studies which had not compensated her financially so far. She talked about the disappointment, sense of hopelessness, and disorientation that the lack of security in Greece was causing her.

I can’t find a job in Greece, especially a relevant one to what I’ve studied. And I’ve tried really hard to achieve those degrees... Sometimes I go back home and I feel emotionally empty. In the evenings, I lie on the bed and I look at the ceiling with an empty gaze, wondering what I’ve achieved in my life so far. I’ve left all my dreams and wishes go wasted, plus the years that will never come back. At the time I was studying, I was expecting a much better routine, a different pathway, different choices, better incomes... I was not expecting that in my 33 years I would be feeling lost and concerned about the future. I was assuming that I would already have taken decisions about my life, I would have a decent career and a family... I would live as a proper adult... [Eleonora 33, Thessaloniki]

Eleonora added that her monthly incomes were not more than 600 euros per month, an amount which did not allow her take control of her life, take any serious decisions or make plans for the future. The lack of any career options combined with her limited financial resources, challenged Eleonora’s transition to adulthood. Now aged in her early 30s, Eleonora...
could not feel as a ‘proper adult’, as no matter how hard she tried to achieve stability and security, the increased socioeconomic instabilities did not allow her to settle.

The descriptions of financial prosperity and career achievements as features of the emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) do not sufficiently explain the negative impact of the current crisis on young people’s life-course trajectories (for exceptions, see Domagala-Krecioch & Majerek, 2013; Côté, 2014; Piumatti et al., 2014; Di Blassi et al., 2016). The constant deterioration of the current financial state in Greece restricted my participants abilities to ‘grow up’, regardless of their efforts. In a similar yet contrasting form to Eleonora, Victoria explained the transitions from working in a bank pre-crisis to post-crisis. During this time, she emphasised a fundamental re-drawing of employment aspiration – from a situation of receiving bonuses and having a good work-life balance pre-crisis, to a vastly different situation post-crisis:

*I experience my job as a means to survive only. The fairy-tale I had in my mind or the aspirations for career and promotion are gone; they don’t exist anymore. They made it clear to us that we cannot claim any pay rise. Since 2009 we’ve been living with the uncertainty that we might get fired; this means that we’ve got a harder workload, so that we can prove our employers that we deserve our position because we put a lot of effort in it. And although it is nice that we manage to maintain our jobs, on the other hand the employers exploit our anguish and needs, and say “now shut up. You’ve got your job, you follow orders, and you should be grateful and happy”. Therefore, I’ve stopped dreaming. I just follow the orders. [Victoria 37, Athens]*

Victoria placed most of the blame for these conditions on the financial industry more generally, and specifically many of her wealthy colleagues who were themselves beneficiaries of the crisis (largely selling off shares and buying properties overseas). Victoria’s contempt for this behaviour had created many tensions at work. Later during the interview, she described her worries about mortgage payments, as her home was the only asset she had. But as she said, if her home was taken away, she would not have a debt either. “No house, no debt” Victoria commented. Victoria was tired and disappointed both with the State and people in Greece who opted to “remain silent and just follow orders”. Her pain and sense that nobody would help her out desensitized and stopped her from dreaming about her future. At the end of our interview though, she shared with me her aspiration to leave everything behind and move to a small house with a garden on an island.
During this section, I have presented how negative working conditions, such as long working hours, wage cuts, as well as lack of respect and understanding from employers can impact overall wellbeing and expectations for the future. As I have shown, the typical middle-upper class professions have been severely affected by the current crisis. The lack of career options, the devaluation of their qualifications, and limited financial resources compromise my participants’ transition to adulthood. Radical socioeconomic upheavals and instabilities dent them a settled life-course trajectory and capacity to ‘grow up’, regardless of their will and efforts. During the following section, I build on some of the themes of the previous section, namely the ways through which the participants sought to reconcile their personal situations – what I call ‘compromised employment’.

**Compromised employment amidst the crisis**

One of the important characteristics of the Greek crisis is the ways in which the young women had begun to change their expectations about work. From finding a good job to finding any kind of job, accepting bad working conditions because it provided an income, and disregarding the hope of finding full-time or permanent contract work. All of these were cited as realistic goals – modes of compromise which had, for the most part, become accepted features of the new social order in Greece, and especially prominent among young people.

Fani completed her studies in Physics two years before we met for the interview. Her parents’ finances were restricted over the final year of her studies and they could barely afford to pay for her bills and food. This had put pressure and strain on Fani, who felt that she had to succeed in her studies. After returning to her parents’ home, she tried to find a job as a teacher in a private school, only managing a small number of home tutoring hours paid at five euros per hour. Although Fani was not happy with her casual job, calling her earnings “pocket-money”, she argued that it was the result of the general devaluation of any academic achievement and expertise in the context of the crisis. As I showed in chapter 2, whilst young people with higher education qualifications experience low levels of unemployment (OECD, 2000), higher education in Greece does not guarantee any sort of employment (Patrinos, 1997; Livanos, 2010). Fani earned up to 100 euros per month, which she was satisfied with on the basis that she *had* a job and was not unemployed. She remarked that young people had
to adapt to this new reality and learn how to survive with the 400 euros that the IMF imposed as the basic salary for young people (see Gounari, 2014).

I am not asking for lots of money. I would be happy even with 400 euros/month; because let’s be honest, we all need to learn how to live with this amount only. [Fani 24, Thessaloniki]

The constant devaluation of her academic qualifications and the disappointment she experienced even before she completed her studies made Fani more adaptive and resilient to the Greek reality. Rather than challenging the fact that 400 euros were not enough to cover her monthly needs, Fani preferred to reshape her priorities, where she argued that people should learn how to compromise and try to live with what is offered to them. At the same time, Fani took for granted parental support, as she acknowledged that such a limited amount of money would not be enough to provide for somebody’s needs.

Similarly, Katia completed financial studies at Macedonia University, Thessaloniki. Her parents struggled to cover her living costs during her four-year studies, and therefore she had to contribute with part-time casual jobs in local coffee shops. When she finished her studies, she tried to find a job relevant to her profession in financial studies, but ultimately failed in this quest. After a long period of unemployment, Katia compromised with a job in a clothing company, where she worked as a full-time wholesaler. Katia felt that she was being exploited by her employers, who were not compensating her adequately for the long hours she was working. However, her long-lasting period of unemployment made her appreciate her job, which at least was allowing her to pay her bills.

Although I don’t like my job, I feel very productive, because I’ve been in a position of being unemployed, feeling useless, waking up in the morning upset and stressed, looking up for jobs, and sending CVs literally everywhere without receiving any correspondence from anywhere. I prefer receiving 600 euros/month than nothing at all, because at least it gives me the ability to cover some of my expenses. [Katia 25, Thessaloniki]
Interestingly, Katia challenged the views of many young people whom she argued “constantly complained” about the current socioeconomic situation in Greece, consolidating this with the argument that “at least she had a job” and “things could be much worse”. Correspondingly, Dimitra used to work in a Greek airline for over four years, where she was earning 1500 euros/month. Yet, due to the great losses that the company experienced, Dimitra along with 24 other colleagues lost their jobs “within a night” without any pre-warning. Dimitra had to move on and look for another job, and she considered herself lucky for having managed to gain employment as a secretary in a university in Athens.

_I used to earn 1500 euros, whilst now I get 700 euros per month. Yet I still feel very lucky, as I’ve got friends who have been completely unemployed for long periods. I can’t complain really..._ [Dimitra 32, Athens]

Dimitra explained the fact that she had to adapt herself in a working regime different to what she had known so far, within the context of having well-educated friends who were still unemployed. Amongst them, Dimitra referred particularly to a female friend of hers, whose failure to find a job was having a severe impact on her emotional as well as physical well-being. Likewise, Anna, whose dream since she was a child was to work as an archaeologist, eventually gained a part-time job in a local medical clinic. Anna talked about her hard work both at school and university to complete her studies in archaeology, and then her passion and eagerness to have her dream job. Although disappointed about her failure to pursue a career in her field of expertise, Anna appreciated how lucky she was to be employed. By comparing herself to her friends, who although qualified were still struggling to find a job, Anna was grateful for having a job which kept her busy and out of the house.

_Although I don’t like my job, I’m grateful I’ve got it because it keeps me busy, socialized, and I’ve got something to be looking forward in the morning, as I don’t have to stay at home all day in my pyjamas. I get dressed, wear my make-up, I feel that people at work appreciate and love me, and feel good about that._ [Anna 30, Thessaloniki]
Roxani is also an example of somebody who preferred to compromise with casual job irrelevant to her expertise than doing nothing at all. Roxani completed European studies in Thessaloniki and luckily, at the time I met her, she had managed to get a job as a secretary at a University in Thessaloniki. After going through a prolonged period of unemployment and uncertainty about her future which ‘drove her crazy’ and cost both her physical and emotional well-being, she decided to ask for a job as a waitress in a fast-food restaurant in a local shopping centre. Roxani was astonished by the positive impact that that job had on her life at the time, as it allowed her to feel productive and keep herself occupied.

As soon as I reached a point where I started going crazy being at home all day, I decided that it would be nice to do any kind of work just to take my mind off. Therefore, I started working in a fast-food restaurant which I liked as an experience, because it helped me mentally very much. [Roxani 29, Thessaloniki]

A number of studies have illustrated that unemployment can have a negative impact on individuals’ well-being, as it tends to deprive them of time structure, activity, status, as well as collective and individual goals (see Kawachi & Wamala, 2006; Warr, 2007; Tefft, 2011). Unemployment is a stressful life event that directly reduces individual well-being, while it increases mental stress and the risk of depression (see Giuliano & Spilimbergo, 2009; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Economou et al., 2013; Drydakis, 2015). Most of my participants were not unemployed, but rather had compromised with jobs which were below their graduate qualifications.

According to Arnett (2000), emerging adulthood is a psychological period based upon an existential maturation where young adults have the opportunity for lengthy explorations of identity and career possibilities. Although my participants belong to the model that Arnett and other scholars have suggested (i.e. Seiter & Nelson, 2011), the current crisis has a major impact on my participants’ self-identity and life trajectories. The acceptance of those jobs, which were well below their graduate status, created a sense of disappointment and failure to achieve their ambitions, regardless of their hard efforts. At the same time, that difficult compromise in a socioeconomic and political arena which did not offer them many options does not present a positive image of the way my participants grow up.
Chalari in similar research on the lived experiences of the Greek economic crisis of three different generations suggests that “Greeks contribute to change in Modern Greek society with their ability to consider the crisis in a reflexive and critical manner, rather than to passively receive social, political and economic transformations” (2012: 35). Despite Chalari’s important reference to avoiding understanding Greek citizens as cultural dupes who have done little to condemn the Greek State and overall causes of the crisis, there are obvious limits in the change-making capacities of citizens. At the time of writing, Greece had undergone four different stages of progressive implementation of austerity measures. On each occasion, public protests had taken place across Greece. The most visible demonstration of public discontent was the decision of almost 62% of the public in 2015 to reject the State’s prescribed bailout proposal during a public referendum. Within days, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras had ignored the 62%, implementing the bailout proposals. How far the Greek people can serve as ‘contributing to change in Modern Greek Society’ should therefore be carefully positioned within these contexts. This demonstrates clear barriers in the public’s efforts to challenge the State.

This project was conducted in the summer of 2015, approximately half a year after Tsipras’s vision of a new left order in Greece. The majority of my participants did not anticipate anything progressive from the ‘liberal’ prime-minister, believing that even if he had the best intentions, the ‘banking system’ would not let him make any improvement in the people’s lives. Being disappointed and hurt by an accumulation of State failures to remedy the crisis in Greece, my participants reached a point where they feared a shift even further downwards in their material situation – a form of vertigo akin to a fear of falling. With unemployment rising, and the banks restricting cash flow from citizens’ post 2015 (with the capital controls which imposed a daily limit of 60 euros), having any kind of paid employment was a positive result in itself, independent of any emphasis on the status of employment. Some of my participants had reflected on these issues at the time of the interview and appeared largely suspect or controlled in their sense that any kind of radical change would feasibly emerge from the new Tsipras’s government in Greece:

*It was Samaras, it is Tsipras now... I haven’t seen any changes though! The only thing I can see is my employers charging their cakes eight euros both pre- and post-crisis,*
whilst my incomes are significantly less than they used to be. I mean, I see that the wealthy become wealthier and the poor poorer. [Eugenia 27, Athens]

In the first ten days, I was over the moon with Tsipras’ victory on the elections. I mean almost with no reason, I thought that the city had changed its colour! At the moment, I try to restrain myself though because I’m not sure to what extent Tsipras could fight against Germany or France or Portugal. The war that is taking place is tough and it comes from different directions. The Greek crisis has got European dimensions. [Victoria 37, Athens]

These sentiments voiced towards the nature of the State in Greece were important factors shaping how my participants saw their future. All participants had lived through successive governments and remembered Greece well before the crisis era, and as such were acutely aware of the difference in the quality of their lives. Regardless of Tsipras’s claims of tackling the so-called ‘humanitarian crisis’ in Greece, most of my participants remained unconvinced by his promises, and lived with the everyday reality of poor work conditions and insecure labour. Faced with these highly challenging structural conditions, it has been claimed that a large number of young Greeks are leaving Greece to find new opportunities for work (Labrianidis & Vogiatzis, 2013; Labrianidis, 2014). This was a common theme which arose during the interviews, especially given that as a highly-educated sample they were in regular contact with friends who had either left Greece or were contemplating leaving.

Should I stay or should I go? Decisions to leave the country

Two years ago, a Greek TV advert targeted young Greeks who regarded going abroad as their only choice. In the advert, there is a young man who is about to take his flight to Montreal, however the last minute he decides to cancel his plans and stay back. His friend who accompanies him at the airport gets astonished by his decision and asks him to reconsider. The young man responds to him “I’m not leaving. I’m sure I can make it here too. Besides, my people are here; my family is here, my friends are here, my girlfriend is here... Who am I going to be there? Just a foreigner... Greece is my home.”
Like the advert, Sofia ruled out the possibility of leaving Greece for reasons similar explained by the actor. Sofia worked as a short-term administrator at a University in Athens. Very well educated and fond of Greek literature and drama, she explained to me that staying in Greece, although precarious, was a very conscious choice. Sofia explained that her whole life remains in Greece, and that leaving would present her with new challenges without friends, family, and anonymity (‘as a foreigner’). Sofia recognised the hardships she was going through by her choice to tolerate her situation and stay in Greece. She explained her choice by arguing that Greece is not just a country, but also a unique way of thinking and living that she could not sacrifice:

*Although I’m thinking that I may never find a proper job, I now feel more attached to my family. I wouldn’t find it easy to live abroad on my own, as a foreigner, and one of the reasons is that I love Greece very much. I’m one of them who don’t want to leave Greece. I want to stay in Greece and contribute here. If I have anything to offer, I will offer it here.* [Sofia 31, Athens]

Sofia’s experience was in many respects rare. Half of my participants had considered moving abroad, due to their belief that a life abroad is very well organised and everyday life is easier than in Greece; people enjoy high-quality services (health, education), and most importantly, they have better chances of finding a job in the area of their expertise with a satisfactory income. The women who expressed their wish to migrate considered life abroad characterised by ‘professionalism’ in many respects; promising career prospects related to their field of their expertise, work experience abroad, as well as a greater match between educational expertise and wages – factors mentioned as the most important factors for living abroad. The countries of their preference were usually England, the Netherlands, and Germany, but also countries outside Europe, such as Australia, Canada, and the USA, in other words places which tend to offer more economic opportunities. These countries were also where my participants usually had social networks to draw from (Damanakis, Konstantinidis & Tamis, 2014). Lena, a childcare worker from Athens, is a prime example of somebody who thought about leaving Greece, as she considered life abroad.
I had been on holidays in Holland a while ago and I really enjoyed it there. Everyone was calm and happy, not like us in Athens. Different mentality, more humane... Different level! And I considered it as a motivation to leave Greece to be honest. I want to leave Athens particularly. And I need to do such a change as soon as possible because I am turning 30 soon. It’s kind of now or never. [Lena 29, Athens]

Lena spoke to me about the pressure she felt ‘turning 30’ and the rush she believed she was in to make serious choices. Lena explained that the age of 30 is a ‘benchmark’, a ‘nodal age’ where people are supposed to be settled both in terms of career choices and relationship status. The fact that she perceived that she hadn’t accomplished neither, was impacting severely on her well-being. Her resentment for the nature of her day job lacking quality, respect, and recognition for her services, along with the loneliness she was experiencing were making her looking for options abroad. Arnett’s theory on lengthy explorations of identity and career possibilities (1998; 2004) does not apply to my participants, given the important institutional, social, and cultural conditions shaping their adulthood transitions. My participants’ experiences of instability were not a product of self-exploration, but rather a consequence of a structural lack of support. Therefore, instead of feelings of optimism, my participants felt rather pessimistic regarding their future in Greece.

As already mentioned, unemployment and/or underemployment had a severe impact on my participants’ mental health. My participants talked about the psychological distress they experienced due to their inability to exercise their professional qualifications in a labour market where medium-high skilled work was very scarce. Nafsika’s father left Greece to work in Congo as a teacher, in the hope that he would earn and save more money for his family’s needs. Nafsika visited him in Congo over her Easter holidays for three weeks; there, she had the chance to interact with young people who had left Greece temporarily, in order to save some money and start up their families in Greece.

When you are unemployed and you can’t keep yourself busy, you are not facing financial issues only, but mainly social and mental ones. And I realized that when I got to Congo, as I met Greek people who moved there not just because they needed to earn some money, but because unemployment made them mentally and physically sick. I met men who had just been engaged and were determined to spend at least two years in Congo, in order to earn some money and come back to Greece and start a new life with their partners. [Nafsika 22, Thessaloniki]
Yet as Nafsika pointed out, the separation from their partners was affecting the quality of their bonds and intimacy, resulting occasionally in arguments and/or separations. The latter was a common feature amongst my participants’ reasons for staying in Greece. They would not leave Greece, unless their partner followed them. Similarly, worries about leaving family were also cited as reasons to remain. Roxani, for example, noted that:

_Since I’ve finished my studies, it’s been difficult to find a job. I used to go to the unemployment centre and I was looking at all those people waiting in the queue. In the meantime, all my friends started leaving Greece one after another. I didn’t want to leave, as nobody wanted to leave home either. I would suffer if I had left, especially on my own._ [Roxani 29, Thessaloniki]

From the beginning of our interview, Roxani stressed the significance of the role her family played in her life. Roxani _needed_ me to understand how important it was for her to be at home with her loved ones, and if she ever attempted to go abroad, she would only do it with her partner. Bonds in the family were important reasons for staying. In conjunction with this was the ethical responsibility that some young women felt to look after their elderly and/or sick parents. As will be unpacked more in the following chapter on family relations, one of the most significant reasons why my participants decided to stay close to their parents was because they felt morally obliged to look after them; the latter concerned their mothers especially who could not usually rely upon the male members of their families for care work. These findings mirror those of Labrianidis (2014), who argues that despite the benefits that his participants perceived about moving abroad, most did not want to leave Greece alone. This effect was especially common among female participants in his study, who referred to wanting to look after their elderly parents.

Although covering a minority of participants (4 out of 36), some young women regarded their reason to stay in more moral and political terms – wanting to use their knowledge to help their country. Zoi was ironically working outside an unemployment centre selling Sim cards for mobile phones. The name Zoi means ‘life’ in Greek, and I thought that it matched with her story about successfully recovering from a life-threatening illness that she had contracted as soon as she got to the university. Zoi was very passionate about her studies
and throughout the whole interview she repeated how much she was craving to work and create.

*I want to try here in my country first. I’m very excited and full of energy for work because I’m young. I want to create. I believe that nobody wants to leave their country; it is the circumstances that make you take the decision to move abroad.* [Zoi 23, Thessaloniki]

That passion and enthusiasm for life, located in the midst of her experiencing serious illness, was something which helped motivate Zoi, albeit an exception compared to other participants. Others regarded their motivations to stay as attributable to the lifestyle of Greece. Katia, for example, completed financial studies at the Macedonia University, Thessaloniki, and mentioned how different she had thought her perspectives would be when she first started her studies. Although disappointed about her career prospects, she expressed her gratitude at living in Greece; a “cool” place, where according to her, people tend to go out after work compared to people from north Europe who “only know the route between home and work”.

*For Greeks, getting out meeting friends is a major issue. A coffee or a drink after work is what changes your whole mood. What’s the point of life if you just work and rest up? I believe that we don’t live in order to work; we work in order to live and experience different things and this is why I chose not to go abroad, because I know that I wouldn’t have that chance outside Greece.* [Katia 25, Thessaloniki]

As I have shown above, there are several reasons keeping my female participants in Greece; either it is their love for their families and their wish to share their lives together or the ‘unique lifestyle’ and Greek culture incomparable to any other culture in the world, these young women refuse to move on in a non-Greek reality, by embracing the problems they face and trying to work with. Well-aware of what this choice might entail, my participants try to focus upon the positive side of their stay in Greece, and emphasise instead the benefits to their social lives by staying close to family and friends.
Summary

This chapter has examined one of the fundamental features of young women’s emerging adulthood – work, or as is so often the case in the Greek context, poor quality work conditions. As has been previously explained in studies outside of Greece (Russell & O’Connell, 2001; Biletta & Eisner, 2007; Vosko, McDonald & Campbell, 2009; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Choudhry et al., 2012), work has profound impacts on the future opportunities offered to young people to accomplish a status of full independence and adulthood. The Greek context, however, provides a fertile opportunity with which to assess the ways that work offers a means of establishing a sense of independence from parents, and indeed to question the role that gender plays in these trajectories. I have shown that young middle-class women in Greece have, like many groups, suffered extensive hardships in the wake of the economic and social turmoil emblematic of the crisis. Their high levels of education offered little payback for the opportunities of achieving a secure and stable income, or indeed for even acquiring any source of employment in some instances.

Concentrating on several specific themes, I have demonstrated how young middle-class women negotiate these precarious structural realities. For a highly educated sample of young women, recourse to precarious work as a means of social survival, rather than aspiration, has become commonplace. Charting the emotional side of unemployment or negative conditions of employment of the young women, the outcomes for these young women have been altered from aspirations of finding a good job and starting an independent life, to competing for scraps of work, which either temporary and/or poorly paid, offer bleak hopes of financial security and stability. Rather than challenging the neo-liberal political context underpinning their insecurities in work, most of these women have appeared to compromise with these economic conditions. These acts of compromise should, however, be carefully contextualised in the midst of what is a gradual worsening of life chances for young people in Greece. Despite some claims of improving employment levels (Eurostat, 2016), the focus on unemployment data masks insight into the often cruel and harsh working conditions which young people face, where temporary, poorly paid jobs are the norm. Indeed, after nearly a decade of austerity in Greece, where successive governments have tried and failed to alleviate these structural and social conditions, compromise appears, on the face of it, to be one of the few modes of psychological survival for these young women.
In their study on personal and social suffering in Greece, Tsekeris et al. argue that “the members of the Greek middle class (the main corpus of the post-war Greek society) are now experiencing an extended and heavy subjective and social suffering, widespread negative feelings of ontological insecurity, hopelessness, inferiority, uncertainty, anxiety, and despair” (2015: 7). I have argued that due to a shortage of medium-high skilled labour in Greece, those young people from middle-class backgrounds actually face higher risks of unemployment than other groups, precisely because they are over-qualified out of the labour market (Livanos, 2010; Labrianidis, 2011; Papadakis, Kyridis & Papargyris, 2015). My analysis offers one of the first assessments of what these social conditions have done to the aspirations, mental resolve, general social lives of those middle-class young women negotiating ‘emerging adulthood’.

Over half of those interviewed were contemplating a life outside Greece, as a result of these difficult conditions. Whilst many described ‘pull’ factors for staying, such as family, partners, and a Greek lifestyle, it should still be acknowledged that the sample was generated from those already remaining in Greece some eight years after the crisis officially hit. The so-called ‘brain drain’ – the mass exodus of educated young people from Greece and other Mediterranean societies to Northern Europe and North America – is a reality which this chapter has been unable to fully address because of the sample. Yet, the very fact that so many Greek young people now see this as one of the few options for survival is pertinent and still likely to stay in the minds of those choosing to stay, for now at least.

In the next chapter, the analysis will again focus on the effects of the crisis, in terms of how this has shaped the transitions into ‘emerging adulthood’ for young women’s so-called independence. Because of the lack of finances gained from work, many of the young women I interviewed are forced to live with parents well into their 30s and 40s, rendering the extent to which they can be regarded as ‘adults’ problematic. The chapter details these experiences, and draws closely on the intersection of the Greek crisis with cultural norms in Greece regarding care work, family obligations, and the unique relation between young Greek women and their mothers, in particular.
Chapter 5

Inter(Dependencies) and Parental Relationships

This chapter examines a paramount topic in emerging adulthood research – how relationships with parents are negotiated and change as young women grow older. Much debate has circulated in emerging adulthood research about the so-called pathways that young women may take when they age, notably the ways their relationships with parents may be altered as they reach what could be considered to be adulthood. The majority of Anglophone studies examining how young peoples’ family relationships change during adulthood have argued that ties with parents initially dwindle upon leaving the family home (see Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Silva, 2013). Arnett (1998) argues that for young Americans, the preeminent criteria for the emerging adulthood are the individualistic character qualities of accepting responsibility for one’s self and making independent decisions, along with becoming financially independent. Common in this Anglophone literature is the theme of individualism, the emphasis on the capacity of the individual to stand alone as a self-efficient person, without relying upon anyone else (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; 2002). The individual is compelled to choose and construct her own biography out of the social resources that are available (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005).

Although family is almost universally acknowledged to be important in young people’s lives, the dynamics of relationships between young people and their families are often assumed rather than explored (Wyn, Lantz & Harris, 2011). The recognition of the ongoing role of family relationships in supporting young women is particularly important to acknowledge. The family is an institution that is far more complex than we might suspect. People’s attitudes toward the family, the way they live family life, and the type of influence that family has over the lives of ‘emerging adults’ are key areas in need of investigation (Reher, 1998). Young people alert us to the importance of understanding the significance of family relationships in their lives, and for identifying the material, emotional, social, and economic resources between family members (Wyn, Lantz & Harris, 2011). In this chapter, I examine the place of parents in the lives of young women.
In Greece, the relationships which young people have with their parents are different to Anglophone contexts. As Petrogiannis (2011) argues, to be considered an ‘independent’ adult is not related to the emotional ties with parents, but rather with the acquisition of responsibilities and the establishment of a relationship with them on an equal basis. Without any identifiable welfare State, parental relationships in Greece can provide a quasi-safety net for young women – a practice even more exaggerated as a result of neo-liberal restructuring in Greece since the crisis post-2008 (Michael-Matsas, 2010b; Dafermos, 2013; Lekakis & Kousis, 2013; Pentaraki, 2013; Talalay, 2013). The provision of material and emotional support, therefore, serves as crucial attributes in helping young people in the wake of these difficult political economic circumstances. Yet, even pre-2008 – the time before the crisis took root – it was common in Greece for parents to maintain a strong feature in the lives of Greek women well into their adulthood (see Reher, 1998).

This chapter places specific attention on factors such as emotional strain, parental authority and control, constraints to personal freedom of young women, and interference with lifestyle. One dimension of these relations with parents is the value of financial and emotional support which draws on the ways that young women continue to receive material support from parents, and how emotional bonds are enacted. Because living with parents is commonplace among the young women in this study, the context of attaining a status of ‘adulthood’ therefore comes under question, given the obvious restrictions to independence through these living regimes. As such, the chapter grapples with questions about what ‘emerging adulthood’ means for these young women confronting these living conditions. As much as the crisis plays a key part in the reasons for living with parents, for young women, other cultural factors also play a part in the continued co-relations with parents. Alongside patriarchal norms which place different cultural expectations of young women, care work and duties around supporting parents into older age also play a key part in explaining why relations with parents are not always reduced as a result of leaving home. The final theme of the chapter addresses the ways that young women make inter-generational and cross-national comparisons in attempting to reconcile and justify living at home.
**Tensions in the parental home**

Strain between young women and their parents, notably mothers, is a strong theme identified in social scientific research (Fuligni & Pendersen, 2002; Updegraff *et al.*, 2012; Shenaar-Golan & Vered, 2015). These tensions commonly exist in terms of the consequences of maintaining tightly knit bonds in Greek society, exacerbated especially by young women living in the same home as, or geographically close to their parents. Sociological research has widely documented many of the tensions which can exist in families between young people in their late teens/early 20s and their parents (Hutson & Jenkins, 1989; Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005; Kraemer, 2006). There are clear gendered issues associated with these relationships, raising questions about mother-daughter relations specifically, and how these relations can at times be tenuous (Fischer, 1981; Hirsch, 1981; Kraemer, 2006; Onayli & Erdur-Baker, 2013). In the climate of Greek society, I argue that these relations can be placed under even further strain, as well as in terms of everyday personal relationships which are tested as women grow older.

**Constraints and Complaints living within and leaving the family home**

Whilst living with parents can be an essential means of providing young women aged in their 20s and 30s with housing, love and material support, this often comes at a cost to their personal freedom. Among the complaints made by the young women in my study were arguments about chores in the home, frustrations with being judged for wearing ‘unsuitable’ clothes when socialising, as well as restrictions on socialising with friends in the family home. Anxieties were further felt with respect to the level of intrusiveness by mothers in particular, who were commonly perceived to ‘infantilise’ their daughters.

One example is Nafsika. Nafsika’s father worked as a teacher in Congo where he had migrated to save some money for his family’s needs. After spending a year as a student in Thessaloniki, Nafsika’s mother decided to leave her hometown and reunite the whole family by moving into the same house as Nafsika.

*When I get back home, we sometimes argue really seriously and we say things that we don’t mean. And this makes our cohabitation nasty and uncomfortable. I tried to find*
a job and a new place to move in on my own, but the truth is that I’m not able to afford a flat’s expenses. The main reason I usually argue with my mum is that she likes controlling or restricting me, as if I was still a child. She thinks that I am too young for certain things and that I am not able to take care of myself and judge what is good and what’s bad for me. Also, she doesn’t like me spending many hours outdoors. The other day I got the car to have a drink with some friends, and she kept calling me to see what time I was coming back. And I left my friends because I didn’t want her to worry about me, as that would bring up more tensions. I knew that she wouldn’t go to sleep until I got back home. This is something that I was not experiencing when I was living on my own. [Nafsika 22, Thessaloniki]

Nafsika experienced her mother’s control in similar ways as when she was back in her hometown as a school student. She recalled the time when she could enjoy her privacy “as a proper adult woman”, which in turn had helped her improve her relations with her mother. As the proximity between daughter and mother had reduced sharply, the tensions and disagreements between the two women had grown. Recent cohabitation with her mother created a crisis not only in their relationships, but also in Nafsika’s self-identity. Nafsika was the oldest of the children, however her mother’s attitude was not giving her enough ‘space’ to feel and act as an adult. Her mother’s lack of trust, control over her own life, and general effort to ‘infantilise’ her, suppressed Nafsika’s will for agency and responsibilities. Being tired and sometimes intimidated by the tensions she had at home, Nafsika chose to compromise and behave (at least most of the times) in ways that would not upset her mother and put her family relations at peril. Nafsika blamed the crisis for having taken “her independence away”, and tried to cope with the reality that she would spend the rest of her student life in the same house with her mother and younger siblings.

Relieved about her decision to leave her parents’ home was Elli who was living in Athens for about a year. Elli emphasized her love towards her parents, and mother especially. However, as she described, cohabitation with her mother was making her feel more “like a child” and less than “an adult” due to her mother’s efforts to be in control of her daughter’s life.

_I feel like a proper woman! I feel that I can look after myself. When I get back home I feel like a young child and not like an adult. I mean, when I’m in Athens, I get ready, I put my high heels on, my dresses and all that, and I know that my mum will not be_
there to ask me “where are you off to?” I mean, my mum admires me, but she is also worried about who I hang out with. Now I only talk to her on the phone and she can only say to me “take care”. She can’t restrict me from Athens. [Elli 25, Athens]

Elli explained further that her mother would never negatively criticise her clothing choices, resulting in Elli restricting her dress code whenever her mother was around her. Like Nafsika, Elli felt restricted and infantilised by her mother’s control over her life choices. Feeling infantilised by the expectations of mothers in particular, was regarded as affecting how far many young women felt able to develop independence and freedom to live their own life outside of parental control.

A similar example to Nafsika’s and Elli’s restricted sense of freedom comes from Magdalini, a young school teacher from Athens who was provided with work from the government every second year. At the time I spoke to Magdalini, she was unemployed and profoundly affected by the living arrangements with her whole family in Athens. Her parents’ concerns about her and their continuing questions about the people she would socialise with made her feel restricted, resulting on many occasions in family tensions and arguments.

Sometimes I feel like I want to kill them! I mean, especially since I’ve come back from university, things like “where are you going?”, “what are you up to?”, “what time are you coming back?” sound to me like... They seem really odd to me! I mean, it makes sense when you live in the same house with them. I am not working at the moment, which means that I spend lots of time with them and this brings tensions and arguments. [Magdalini 25, Athens]

Magdalini had been in a relationship with a young man from Athens who was also living in his parents’ home. The latter was making Magdalini even more distressed, as she could not find a way out of the situation to spend more time with him. Zoi described a similar situation to Magdalini, although in a more modest fashion and in a less impactful form. As Zoi explained, cohabitation with her parents involved a form of “mini control”, which meant that her parents would restrict her sense of freedom and autonomy. Although her experience of living with her parents was regarded as “not too bad”, Zoi admitted that her social life with her friends was not always easy.
Of course, living with your parents does not offer you the same amount of freedom. I mean there is a mini control over my life. But not too bad... My biggest complaint has always been the fact that I can never invite people around at unsocial times. I would love to be a bit more independent, stand on my own feet. [Zoi 23, Thessaloniki]

A lack of freedom and privacy were ranked as significant issues faced by my participants who were residing with parents. Difficulties starting and maintaining intimate relationships with partners were especially challenging, leading to frustrations. Sasa regarded these challenges to spend time with her boyfriend as a “loss of dignity” when living with parents, which significantly improved after managing to afford her own apartment.

In the meantime, I had formed my own romantic relationship and they were restricting my outings with my partner; I wouldn’t dare to ask them to go out, especially in the weekdays. Thus, I decided to live on my own, as my parents were suppressing me and I couldn’t feel free. By living alone, I feel like I won my dignity back, as they can’t control my private life any longer. [Sasa 30, Thessaloniki]

In amongst frustrations regarding having privacy and personal space, were deeper issues in families experiencing poverty and sustained economic hardships following the crisis. My participants who lived with their families, emphasised that the lack of space was affecting their freedom, asserting that a spatial independence from the family home was underlying lack of autonomy from parents. The value of privacy was significant for my participants not only for their own sense of independence, but also in making their parents recognise their own space and not violating it. Smaragda, from Thessaloniki, for instance, was completing a distance learning postgraduate course at a Cypriot university, which she was finding demanding. Since her parents brought her grandmother to live with them, Smaragda had to offer her own bedroom to her grandmother; as a consequence, she had no private space to study or even to sleep.
I live with my parents, my brother, and my grandmother; we brought my grandma at home since we’ve lost my grandfather. She’s got a few mental issues – bipolar disorder and depression. Therefore, she’s all the time on pills and her behaviour is a bit weird. I mean, when I want to study and need some peace at home, my grandma wants me to check on the roof because she might think that somebody is walking on it! I’ve given my room to her and I’ve been sleeping on the sofa for about two years. It’s been difficult with my exams. And my brother doesn’t want me there either. So, I have no private space to read, talk on the phone, and relax. Of course I wouldn’t even consider to rent my own place! [Smaragda 24, Thessaloniki]

Smaragda’s description of her new life conditions was articulated in a rather optimistic mood, despite clear personal difficulties presented in her narrative. She explained that she did not mind living with one more person at home, and especially her grandmother who was “funny” and made her laugh. She only resented the lack of privacy that she had been experiencing over the last two years. This reference to the lack of privacy in Smaragda’s quote should be contextualised in relation to the crisis – the increased financial strain on families impinges on physical space in the home, brought about by caring duties. The crisis not only increases financial adversities among families, but is compounded by caring roles, often conducted within the family home across Southern Mediterranean societies, and especially involving women as core caregivers (see Reher, 1998). Although Smaragda was not the main provider of care towards her grandmother or other family members, she did not question her family’s decision to take her out of her own bedroom for her grandmother’s welfare. Smaragda mentioned that her brother kept his bedroom for himself and was never asked to offer it instead of his sister; however, that “made perfect sense”, as he was a “man who needed his own space”.

Understanding how privacy is shaped, requires an acute recognition of the structural forces shaping these processes. Smaragda’s quasi-relaxed attitude towards the living arrangements she was experiencing in the past two years stems from the sense of autonomy she was feeling in other aspects of her life. Although she was sacrificing her personal privacy for her grandmother’s welfare, Smaragda was not feeling psychologically distressed. The latter was associated with the emotional support she was being offered by her family (and mother especially). Therefore, Smaragda’s consent to offer her physical space to her grandmother, was compensating her with the material and emotional support she was receiving from her family.
The importance of privacy is a common theme in defining independence for young people who live with parents (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005). Harris et al.’s (1996) study on privacy regulation illustrates that when privacy is respected, family functioning and a sense of control (i.e. functions of privacy) are enhanced. Altman’s (1975) privacy regulation theory explains why people prefer staying alone, but at other times like being involved in social interactions. Altman regards privacy as a dialectic regulation process where privacy is not static, but a selective control of access to the self or to one’s group (p.18). In the case of Smaragda, privacy is a personal trade-off – the price of the crisis is that her grandmother’s welfare becomes a necessity within her home, with her own personal sacrifice for privacy. Unlike Altman (1975), the decision to reside with family of origin is not necessarily a choice, but an inevitable part of the structural predicaments of the crisis, placing clear limits on personal mobility.

Freedom, dignity, and privacy are closely interlinked ideas, all of which have profound impacts on my participants’ self-identities and living arrangements. Whist associated, there are also distinctions to be drawn between each. Within the data, freedom was more broadly conceived as a construct, describing the ability to choose to take a particular pathway of living independently. There was, however, an active recognition that pure freedom to choose a course of life independent from parental influence was not an option – some level of compromise must be achieved, as described within the narrative of Nafsika and Sasa. Dignity was instead assumed to be a more important goal to achieve, although not possible when sharing space with parents and wanting to develop sexual intimacy in ways which are not subject to the close gaze of parents. In contrast to Sasa, Smaragda’s narrative notes the reality of the crisis on family living, where she recognises that the situation of her grandmother living with them is more important than her own personal privacy – a situation which is pragmatically articulated as a social and economic necessity.

In conjunction with challenges residing in the same household and the effects this has on personal privacy, challenges also exist in terms of leaving the home. In Mediterranean Europe, the process of leaving the parental household is quite different to that of northern Europe and the United States, where young adults normally leave their parental household when they have acquired sufficient financial independence and maturity to live separately. This is different to the Anglophone marker of economic independence. Of course, what exactly ‘independent’ and ‘mature’ mean in such context varies, although getting married has
traditionally been regarded as one of the most significant markers (Reher, 1998; Billari, Philipov & Baizan, 2001). Indeed, marriage was the most widely used among my participants. Therefore, leaving home in Greece should be contextualised in the context of family life, as well as the youth labour market, high rates of youth unemployment and lack of job opportunities (Kretsos, 2013), along with a tradition of lifelong studies (Pechtelidis & Giannaki, 2014). As explained earlier, empirical studies have pointed to the importance of higher education for middle-class young people (Biesta, 2006; Brooks & Everett, 2008), and Greece has a large number of young people entering higher education more than once (Papadakis, Kyridis & Papargyris, 2015). Parental expectations that their daughters will leave home as soon as they get married creates pressure and emotional tension, while restricting freedom to live life the way they want.

Sasa gave her own description about Greek parents’ view on when it is appropriate for their daughters to leave home. Sasa studied Law and inherited her father’s legal practice in Thessaloniki. After experiencing a challenging cohabitation with her parents who placed considerable restrictions on her whereabouts and personal freedom and leisure, she decided to go against their will and move into her own flat.

In a Greek family context, the only reason for a young woman to leave her parents’ home is to create her own family; otherwise, there is no real reason to leave it. Greek parents find it difficult to accept that their daughter lives alone – what does she do there? – while it might be alright for the son. Anyway, in Greece it is already hard to afford living on your own, but it’s also a kind of taboo. [Sasa 30, Thessaloniki]

Sasa’s experience of having to find a justifiable reason to leave her parents’ home was very similar to Dina’s – a 35-year-old woman from Athens. Dina described her decision to leave her parents’ home and live with her best friend in an apartment five blocks away – a decision viewed by her parents as one of ‘abandonment’ towards them. Dina explained that her parents would never forgive her behaviour, unless she got married – living with friends as an exit route from the family home is not deemed justifiable as a legitimate mode of living and ‘independence’. In contrast to Sasa and Dina who had moved to their own places despite their parents’ objections, Nikoleta aged 29 from Athens, explained how guilty she would feel
leaving her family’s home, as a consequence of the ‘psychological war’ she was experiencing with her mother. That ‘war’ was conceived as an emotionally exhausting ordeal, during which Nikoleta felt trapped and unable to leave the house:

*She [Mother] is very manipulative and she blackmails us with heart issues (relating to her illness). She wants us to leave her place as little brides. I’ve seen many cases so far with young people who cannot live on their own, because their parents think that they will abandon them. But I would feel very guilty if I left her.* [Nikoleta 29, Athens]

Nikoleta’s narrative of her mother using her health issues as a means of gaining sympathy and intimacy from her daughters is a good example of how the gendered care ethic can be used as a means of manipulation and control. Young women in Greece are seen as delivering crucial modes of care to their parents in old age (Cylwik, 2002; Karanika & Hogg, 2016), which brings with it a set of cultural expectations and moral duties to conform to. That guilt turned into an obligation and moral duty to care for their mothers which put strain and pressure on them, thus limiting their opportunities for leaving the home legitimately. Nikoleta’s narrative further establishes the guidelines of the mother-daughter relationship – one of care infused with control – an outcome that can ultimately restrict the freedom of young women to exit the home and subscribe to any recognisable form of ‘independence’.

The ability to leave the home is not purely driven by economic factors alone, but influenced heavily by emotional pressures to conform to parental (notably motherly) expectations. Such expectations as have been described in this section can place pressure on young women, who largely attempt to conform to their mothers wishes in not leaving home until they have a justifiable exit strategy – typically marriage. Whilst the coexistence of living with parents is a common part of the structural hardships of the crisis, the capacities to leave the home are still largely rare. In the following section, further explanations are provided for the rationales for leaving the home, and the personal challenges in doing so. These are framed as both directly associated with, and independent of the crisis, linked directly to the cultural norms and familial practices of Greek society.
Although experiencing strain from the interactions with their parents, and mothers especially, my participants’ relationships and cohabitation with their parents are not always associated with unpleasant or negative experiences (see Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005). Usually the more positive features of living with parents concern the avoidance of economic difficulties, paying for their own property, in addition to benefits such as having food prepared, or clean laundry. Regardless of the age of the young women, living in the parental home is usually linked with a lack of responsibilities in the household, and takes the pressure off my participants’ lives. Some participants argued that if they did not get on well with their parents, they would not have made the decision to live with them. Below, three participants who were employed and had stable incomes (although low incomes), decided to stay with their parents for practical reasons.

Katerina, for instance, described in a joyful way her need to find a cooked meal waiting for her on the table. Although Katerina was concerned about the fact that she had just formed a romantic relationship, but with limited time and space to invest with her partner, she expressed her reluctance to achieve total ‘independence’ and move into a new home away from her parents. She reflected on the times she was a student where she had a “different sense of freedom at home”, yet she stressed the security of being “looked after” by her parents with bills paid and food offered unconditionally. Katerina said that she was aware of sounding like “a spoilt child” who expects her mother to take care of everything, however she said that it was convenient and she enjoyed it.

Of course it’s been very convenient with my parents – ready food waiting for me on the table and all the house expenses covered. Every day I come back from work my mum sets up the table for me and I wait for her to serve me as if I was in a tavern! And when I finish, I stand up, get the chocolate from the drawer, and I take a seat in the couch. And if there is no chocolate I tell her off! [Katerina 29, Athens]

Parallel to this was Zoi’s description of cohabitation with her parents. Zoi chose to live at home with her parents to save money. Although Zoi wanted to live a more independent life, like her fellow students, who could socialise with each other at all times, she tried to position her experience of co-residence with her parents on a more positive note. Cooked
food, washed clothes, and somebody to keep her company were the positive features of her experience living with her parents.

There are many positives when you live with your parents. You have your mum at home who cooks for you, does all the washing for you, and you don’t have to worry about anything. I go back tired from my classes and I never have to worry about food and washing! Also, it is important that there is always someone home to talk to, you never feel lonely. [Zoi 23, Thessaloniki]

Zoi tried to be positive about the fact that she “hadn’t really lived a student life in Thessaloniki” by putting emphasis on positive traits which facilitated her life and were demanding less responsibilities from her life. In a similar fashion, Nafsika put aside the fact that her whole family had moved into the same house with her while she was studying medicine, in order to save money by “eating all from the same casserole”. Although Nafiska was feeling that her privacy had been compromised by having to live with her mother and her younger siblings, she emphasized the love she was feeling for her family and the quality of the time she could spend with them.

Sometimes it can be good living with your whole family. They might make your life difficult at times, but it doesn’t matter... There is always food at home... We have great fun, we laugh, we are never bored... And I love my mum very much... [Nafsika 22, Thessaloniki]

Nafsika took all her frustrations about her cohabitation with her whole family and lack of privacy inwards and tried to think of the positive outcomes of such a compromise. Although she was finding her relationship with her mother difficult at times, Nafsika described it also as a loving and caring one that was making her feel safe. Parallel to this was Maria’s description of cohabitation with her mother. Although she questioned herself about whether living with her mother was healthy, Maria put in an order all the reasons why she traded off her independence. Maria called herself a “mummy’s kid”. Prepared meals and washed clothes, the absence of any sort of responsibilities for the house, as well as emotional support
and happy family moments were amongst the reasons she opted to stay at her mother’s home.

These narratives present evidence of positive attributes of living with parents, whilst not exclusively, tended to exist more among those participants aged in their early 20s. These positive attributes were perhaps less evident for those young women aged in their late 20s and 30s, who placed a higher level of importance to their own independence and privacy. The main exceptions to this, however, came in cases where women had extreme difficulties potentially running a property of their own. Eleonora, for example, spoke of her fear to take the risk and run her own household. She argued that the precariousness of the post-crisis labour market was giving her few options to “open her wings” and move on with her life. Eleonora explained that her procrastination to take the decision and move out was partly due to the quality time she was spending with her parents at home.

_I could have probably made different choices. I haven’t taken a serious decision yet. It’s just that my current job is not offering me any sense of security. Although I’ve got my job at the moment, I don’t know for how long I will be able to maintain it. I don’t know, I’m scared of leaving home, taking responsibilities, and opening my wings. Everything comes with a cost – either you choose to live alone and take control of your life, or you stay with your parents. I chose the second one, given that I have a great relationship with my parents. If they were suppressing me and cohabitation with them was horrible, I would have definitely chosen something else instead._ [Eleonora 33, Thessaloniki]

Young adults who have pleasant relations with their parents are usually more likely to stay and/or return to their parents’ home where they will be welcomed (Ward & Spitze, 2007). Care, paid bills, and somebody to talk to have been the main arguments which explained their decision to remain more dependent upon their parents than they would be if they left them. Therefore, lack of independence might sometimes be what these young women had to trade off by living with parents, despite not always being a ‘choice’ but an economic necessity.

Only two of my participants argued that living with their families was entirely their choice, as it offered them comfort, company, and warmth. In both cases this involved my participants having lost their fathers. The loss and bereavement experienced, occurred along
with a sense of guilt and responsibility towards their widowed mothers, who had become
dependent on their daughters for emotional and practical support (see Troll, Miller & Atchley,
1979; Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005). Maria, who lived in Athens with her mother and sister,
explained why she was so close to her family.

*I’ve lost my dad when I was 19, and that has been a big loss. Hence, I’ve got such strong
ties with my mum. But deep inside me I know that I should not stay in Athens in the
fear that I’ll miss my mum. I’ll end up with seven cats otherwise!* [Maria 30, Athens]

Maria described her potential decision to leave Athens as another loss that she did
not want to experience. Her future was concerning her, as she was in a relationship with a
young man from Thessaloniki and she was torn between two cities and two choices: either in
Thessaloniki with the man she loved or in Athens with her mother and sister. The choice of
leaving her mother was presented as a difficult decision, formed of guilt in leaving her mother
in the wake of her difficulty overcoming life without her husband who had died. In a similar
way, Sofia talked about her choice to stay with her mother and sister. Having lost her father
a while before our interview took place, Sofia expressed her happiness about her decision to
reside with her family, in order to appreciate family moments. Worried about her mother’s
well-being after her husband’s loss, Sofia chose to stay with her and look after. Finally, Sofia
argued that the life circle would close with her caring for her mother, admitting later on that
this was a “Greek attitude” that she respects.

*At the moment, I live with my mum and sister, but it’s nice. I don’t experience it in a
negative way; on the contrary, I quit enjoy it, as I feel that I spend my time in a safe
environment. It’s not that I don’t like responsibilities. And indeed, I contribute as much
as I can. It’s just that, for personal reasons, I don’t want to leave my mum, unless there
was a serious reason, such as to get married – that serious! I mean, I wouldn’t leave
my mum just because I would like to stay on my own. I appreciate that other people
might have such a need, but in my case, it is my choice. I want to be there looking after
her. Our parents look after us when we are little and then we look after them, and
somehow the life circle closes…* [Sofia 31, Athens]
Riches and Dawson (2000) provide a detailed examination of the social and cultural contexts of bereavement in reference with a death of a close relative. Among a multitude of emotional reactions to bereavement in families, adjusting emotionally to the death of a family member, such as a parent, can lead to what the authors describe as ‘premature maturity’ (p.115 for descriptions). Here the grief reactions of children can be neglected by the responsibility for providing care and support to their parents or other family members. This ultimately can lead to difficulties for young people moving on and coping with their grief, where a sense of responsibility and guilt may drive the obligation to support a parent.

‘Smotherhood’? Mother-Daughter Relations and Challenges

Another common complaint about the living conditions with parents came from the women who were married and had become mothers – a complaint centred around the perceived failure of mothers to respect the terms of their daughters’ marriage and family. As Fischer (1981) put it, the daughters’ home is also, after all, their son-in-law’s home. One example is Margarita from Athens, mother of a one-year-old baby girl. Margarita explained to me how difficult it had been at the beginning of her marriage to make her mother understand that she was now married, and therefore no longer available to spend time with her as she had previously. Things became even worse when Margarita became a mother. Margarita recited an incident in which her baby was ill. After calling the doctor, Margarita’s mother refused to leave the home, claiming that she did not trust her daughter’s ability to deal with the situation.

And she said to me “shouldn’t I or your mother-in-law be here? We are older than you and we know better”. And I responded “what are you talking about? Are you saying that you know better than us? For every serious issue we got to have our legal guardian here? You must not be serious!” And this is very typical of a Greek mother. [Margarita 32, Athens]

Margarita admitted that her emotional bonds with her mother had always been very strong, and in some occasions “maybe too strong”. However, since she got married and decided to form her own family, Margarita realised that she had to take control of her life, and set the boundaries between her new family and her family of origin. Although initially she found it
hard to turn her mother down, especially knowing that her mother’s behaviour “was coming from a good place” as she wanted to protect them, Margarita argued that at the end her mother “accepted the situation”, whilst Margarita “saved her marriage”.

Frequent in the data were instances of what the young women described as ‘over-protective’ interventions from their mothers. Elli, for example, described a situation in which she had decided to spend the night at her boyfriend’s apartment, leading to her mother suffering from increased anxiety – the outcome of which was for Elli having to return home late in the evening.

*My mum cannot accept the fact that I might have a boyfriend and I might sleep with him. I remember once, I had told her that I would stay overnight in my boyfriend’s place and she nearly got sick. My brother called me after midnight to ask me go back to my parents’ home, because my mum was not well at all. She is worried... And I got back home where I realized that her blood pressure was dangerously high... [Elli 25, Athens]*

Later in the interview, Elli explained that this incident had given her the recognition that her mother was holding her back in her life, and preventing her from growing up and enjoying important experiences, such as intimate relationships. Further examples of restricted freedom, as a result of their mother’s intervention, were framed through the language of ‘pressure’ and ‘suffocation’. Sasa, for example, gave an interesting viewpoint of the role of her mother, whose devotion to her children had persisted, despite Sasa and her siblings being aged in their 30s and 40s. She attributed this to the cultural context of Greece, which she claims positions motherhood as a duty even beyond the point of children reaching ‘adulthood’.

*I think that Greek mothers are a bit of a particular case... We are a very typical Greek family, where my mum is absolutely devoted to her children. I am 30, my siblings are over 40 and they have formed their own families, and my mum still thinks that she has responsibilities towards us, that she has to help and look after us, to worry when we don't feel great, like we are still 10... This is not always great because it puts lots of pressure on me, it suffocates me. [Sasa 30, Thessaloniki]*
Although Sasa described her mother as a loving and caring parent who had devoted her life to her children, putting aside her own needs and sacrificing her whole life for her children’s development and well-being, the over-protection she was often being offered was not always pleasant in Sasa’s view. As Sasa explained, her mother’s ‘excessive concerns’ about her daughter sometimes made her feel infantilised, and not like a proper adult, a professional woman who could put up with her life. Similarly, Pelagia from Athens, who was newly married, argued that in Greece adult children remain “overly attached to their mums” and in some instances, they still cohabit with them. Interestingly, Pelagia explained this outside the context of the crisis and argued that this happens because Greek mothers are “experts in manipulation”.

*I mean we need to change our mothers’ attitude towards us. Otherwise, people who keep living with them after the age of 25 end up becoming their mum’s mum. Our parents need the security and protection that they used to offer us when we were children.* [Pelagia 30, Athens]

Nikoleta from Athens shared a similar view with Pelagia on “Greek mothers’ attitude”, by giving examples from her own experience. Nikoleta described her mother as a caring person whose love “can go off limits”. Her mother’s concerns about her – including the time she would return back home and how warm her clothes would keep her – made Nikoleta feel restricted, and as she mentioned “did not leave her much space to feel like an adult”. In one of the many examples she gave to explain the lack of agency she was experiencing at home, Nikoleta mentioned the time when a woman visited their home and offered her a little gift. Before she even took it in her hands, Nikoleta’s mother reminded her that she had to thank the lady who offered it. Nikoleta considered the latter incident “ridiculous” and “humiliating” for her image of herself as an adult woman. She did not associate cohabitation with parents necessarily with the current crisis, but rather she explained that it is “a Greek thing”, different to rest of the Western world.

*My mum gets hysterical with me about everything! From what I will put on me – “you will get cold, wrap yourself up” – to what time I will get back home. It is a tragedy that
I still live with my mum, it is such a Greek thing, completely different to what German or American families do. [Nikoleta 29, Athens]

My participants also noted how similar they thought they were to their mothers. In support of Fischer (1981), my data illustrate that married daughters were more likely than the single ones to see commonalities in their behaviour. The latter was usually perceived either neutrally or negatively. Penington (2004) argues that daughters struggle with the love for their mothers and their desire to be different from them. Yet, several of the participants acknowledged that in the future they might end up being similar to their mothers!

Magdalini moved to her parents’ home after a three-year-period of unemployment. She expressed her wish for her own home, as the lack of privacy was causing tensions in the relationship with her mother who “pissed her off” and “suffocated” her. Her mother’s distrust of her daughter’s capacity to look after herself and a few late outings were some examples of their clashes. Paradoxically, Magdalini justified her mother’s attitude, by arguing that she might become similar to her.

The experience of living with my parents again is not very nice. If I could, I would leave them instantly. I’ve got friends who face similar issues because our parents treat us as they used to when we were 18 years old. They can’t get that we are older now. At the same time though, I think that I will become the same when I become mother myself – especially in such a precarious and dangerous era. [Magdalini 25, Athens]

Here, Magdalini raised the issue of precariousness that the new socioeconomic era brought with it. While she complained about her mother’s overprotectiveness, at the same time she justified her attitude by placing it into the context of the current crisis and its uncertainties and dangers. My married participants, and especially the ones who had become mothers themselves, were already able to reflect upon their relationships with their mothers and put themselves in “their mothers’ shoes” and see both sides (Kraemer, 2006). Indeed, those women found themselves echoing their mothers’ attitude in a variety of ways. One example was Stella, mother of two young children, who complained about her mother’s tendency to interfere in her life. She argued that “having strong family bonds is a Greek thing”, along with the “Greek habit” of not keeping any secrets, as well as criticising one another’s life choices
on a frequent basis. Stella ultimately excused her mother’s tendency to interfere in her life, by suggesting that her mother role helped her understand herself better.

*I’ve started understanding her more through my role as a mother. All the answers I was seeking came through my role as a mother. I’m becoming very similar.* [Stella 30, Athens]

Once Stella acknowledged her commonalities with her mother, she argued that “Greek families are not too bad after all”. Stella stressed the importance of support that parents offered their children – especially at times of crisis. Her mother, for example, was the main provider for her young children, as both she and her husband were financially struggling to cover all their needs. My participants complained about their mothers’ lack of trust in their ability to look after themselves properly. This included overprotectiveness and manipulation. However, they acknowledged a few behaviour similarities with their mothers. The latter made them more understanding and brought them closer to their mothers, as they could see life through their mothers’ perspective.

The following section unpacks exactly what Stella suggested about the pros and cons of the Greek tendency to maintain tight bonds amongst family members. Although family strain has been a common theme throughout my research, interestingly, my participants found ways to play it down, by arguing that their parents are a significant source of both material and emotional support.

**Sources of (In) Dependence**

While the recent labour market regime in Greece creates frustrations, insecurity, and uncertainties, the parental home/s still serves as a crucial hub, by which my participants express emotional security. Youth researchers (e.g. Bagnall, 2005; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007) point out the tendency of young people to live for a longer period in their parents’ home in most developed countries, largely due to increased costs of living, and difficulties finding stable employment. The capacity to remain within the family home has been predominantly articulated as an economic choice, rather than necessarily as driven by emotional ties and
devotion to parental wishes. The latter is crucial in the context of Greece, given that decisions to stay in the parental home are not always a product of finances, but also depend heavily on emotional and cultural factors.

During the previous section, explanations as to why and why not all young women feel able to leave home were unpacked, incorporating economic, cultural, and emotional factors. This section builds from these previous themes to explore the more complex struggles of striving towards a sense of independence. I address the interplay between parental involvement and personal (in)dependence, outlining that parents are not always framed as restrictors of personal independence, but also enablers.

**Receiving Financial Support: Between Dependence and Independence**

Of the subsample of 20 participants who received some level of financial support from their parents, almost all revealed that these material resources occurred on a frequent basis. They suggested that although their financial dependence upon their parents did not make them proud, at the same time they normalised it in the general context of the low pay regime. Anna had been married for three years when the interview took place and lived in Thessaloniki. Although both she and her husband worked, their money was never enough to pay for all their needs, making Anna’s parents’ financial support necessary. Anna was feeling ‘guilty’ that she could not survive without her parents’ financial help. Equally though, by referring to her social network which was being offered substantial material resources by their families (in some occasions they had moved in their parents’ home where they lived all together), she argued that “we should see our lives in the context”.

> *I don’t know any couple not receiving financial support from their parents. And although I feel bad about it, we really can’t make it without them.* [Anna 30, Thessaloniki]

Anna’s narrative reflects an uncertain identity position regarding her moral stance towards receiving money from her parents. Although the surface-level reading of her narrative can be taken to mean that this support is an essential means of survival for her (which I do not
dispute), the deeper meaning embodied in her framing of this is one of linguistic persuasion and justification to herself (and the interviewer) that these acts of receiving support are morally acceptable (note Garfinkel, 1967). Similar narratives were uncovered in other interviews, such as with Elpida, who like Anna justifies her moral ambiguity regarding receiving support from her mother:

*My mum gives me stuff constantly; for example, she pays for my bills without letting me know. And although this doesn’t make me feel right, it takes a lot of pressure off me.* [Elpida 37, Athens]

Elpida knew that the less than 400 euros she was earning every month from small contract work completed at home was insufficient. Although the house she was living in was offered to her by her father as an inheritance gift, she was still not able to maintain it and live the independent life she was craving. In the fear of losing what she currently had, Elpida accepted her mother’s financial support. As Elpida described, her mother could appreciate how difficult it was for her daughter to request financial support from her family, after having been financially independent for over 20 years. Similar descriptions of tact and sensitivity in offering material resources to their daughters was also expressed elsewhere.

*My parents worry about me, call me on the phone all the time... For the last two years I didn’t have any food to put on the table. I had ended up with three euros in my wallet, and I could only cook lentils. My mum was sending me meat... Not like she used to in the past... I mean she used to send me food before the crisis as well. But now it was vital! I was calling her on the phone and I was saying “can you buy me some food?” “And she was saying “yes, we are coming to fill your fridge up”. Do you understand? Tough...* [Antigoni 32, Athens]

Antigoni was feeling embarrassed about the hardships she had been through. She mentioned that her parents had encouraged her many times to move with her family into their own home in a smaller town in Macedonia, Greece. However, she found it difficult to give up on her home and lifestyle in Athens, as Katia also shared the same emotions of embarrassment as Antigoni. She also received financial and material support from her parents, although she had
a full-time job and lived with her partner. However, Katia’s low-paid job, in association with her partner’s casual job as a trainer did not offer them enough resources to cover their basic needs, as well as unpredictable costs in their household.

Thankfully, my parents help me a lot. The truth is that no matter how autonomous we strive to be, it is a bit hard not to accept their support. For example, something might break or you need to buy something brand new, like a white good... I mean, I hardly manage to cover my bills. If something unpredictable breaks, there is no chance to cover it... So, there is definitely support. I don’t feel autonomous, I feel embarrassed for asking them money, but I have no choice. [Katia 25, Thessaloniki]

Although Katia’s hard efforts to be independent and obtain the autonomy of ‘a proper adult’, she admitted that she was still dependent on her parents’ material support and felt a lack of independence and autonomy. Similarly, Kali’s parents have always supported her, making sure that she had her own place to live just before she got married. Kali’s job as a solicitor offered her no more than 560 euros/month, a salary which as she described as impossible to survive economically. However, Kali’s parents were so generous that they had not only bought her a new place, but were also present in covering all sorts of her needs, even those associated with her entertainment and social life, such as outings and holidays with her fiancé.

The fact that my parents bought me a place to live, paid for the furniture, covered my medical expenses when I broke my leg and I couldn’t go to work is so vital for me. Generally speaking, my parents have always been very supportive in all my needs. They have been present to everything! And at the time I did not have a job, they were giving me money for food, bills, my entertainment... [Kali 30, Athens]

So far, we have seen several examples of financial support being given to the young women in my sample by their parents. Within these narratives we see the uneasiness of identity positions of these young women who appear to display some stigma in receiving financial support from parents (and loss of independence), yet use the language of necessity and hardship to frame their moral positions. On the one hand, receiving support from parents is more commonplace and socially acceptable in Greece compared to most Northern
European and Anglophone countries (Iacovou, 2002). Following this approach, it is plausible that receiving support need not require any moral justification from these women. Yet, explaining why these women felt the need to engage in these modes of identity work to explain these rationales for receiving financial help also appears to proclaim that their independence was challenged by receiving money from parents. In other words, receiving parental support posed a threat to their own projections of what they deem to be ‘independence’, even if the initial reading of these narratives may appear as the opposite of this.

As a sample which can be described as largely middle class, the support from parents whose incomes were generally better than their children’s, was a vital means of survival. In the context of a State which has seen considerable cuts to services, even for the poorest members of society, support from parents becomes an imperative means of assistance where the welfare State is effectively diminished. Several critiques were offered about the role of parents as key modes of support. Dina illustrated how Greeks organise themselves on a day-to-day basis. She argued that people need to form and maintain reciprocal networks in order to help each other in the State’s absence. She was frustrated that the office she was working in was about to close and she was ‘dreading’ the moment she would have to rely upon her parents again.

In Greece, your survival depends on the neighbourhood, the village, the city, your fellow man, and definitely not upon the State! I mean, I will call the doctor who lives next door, because he is friends with my dad, because the State hasn’t got any. I won’t go to the hospital, because I know that there’s nothing there. I’ll get my dad’s pension, because I’ll never get any pension in my life. Therefore, the core is the family in this country, because there is no organized State here. [Dina 35, Athens]

Dina’s argument supports a view that young adults receive aid from their families in response to the welfare State’s inability to provide them with those safety nets they could rely on. One of the most important consequences of the economic and financial changes is the trend for young people to remain financially and materially dependent on their parents for longer than had been the case with the previous generation (Pusey, 2007). And as the period of young adults’ dependence on their families grows longer, the financial and
emotional burden of parenthood grows heavier (Furstenberg, 2010). This is an important factor to note in Greece—a nation which has witnessed a considerable rolling back of welfare provision, including pension provision which limits parental finances and the level of financial support they can feasibly offer their children (Matsaganis, 2013; Papadopoulos, 2014; Zartaloudis, 2014; Drydakis, 2015; Huffman et al., 2015). Here the indirect impact of family strain on young women is relevant, contributing to their lack of independence. Iakovou and Berthoud (2001) suggest that unemployment should be treated as a separate stage in emerging adulthood. Considering the fact that almost all my participants (34 out of 36) are not happy with their incomes, unemployment or bad employment is a reality they are forced to confront. Yet, dependency upon family goes beyond the economic and the confines of the household, and affect identities, social relationships, senses of connection, obligation, and reciprocities (Edwards & Irwin, 2010). In the first place, the absence of a reasonable income (or even any income) is an obstacle to the assumption of responsibilities such as an independent home (Hutson & Jenkins, 1989).

**Beyond Smotherhood: The Value of Emotional Support**

Independence is often associated with economic criteria; a secure and sufficient income, the ability to pay for housing, as well as lack of reliance on welfare support (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005). However, independence is not linked solely to the financial ability, but also to the emotional interdependencies. Given the tight bonds my participants have with their families, and mothers especially, one of the main topics they shared with me was the psychological impact that has on their everyday interactions with them, and the extent to which their dependency on them allows them to be ‘proper’ adults.

The majority of my participants rely on their families, and particularly their mothers to talk about their concerns and predicaments. There is evidence that parents are a valued source of support and advice regarding young people’s personal concerns (Wyn, Lantz & Harris, 2011). According to Cicirelli (1992), autonomy—which is defined as having control over and being responsible for one’s life—can be divided into two subtypes, independent and shared autonomy. In independent autonomy, individuals act on their own or consult others to obtain information, but they finally make their own decisions. In shared autonomy,
individuals not only consult with others, but actively engage them in the decision-making process. Living or not with their parents, and the degree to which they praise and take their views into account, might affect considerably the decisions they make in their lives.

Elli, described the difficulties she was facing at the time she was unemployed on Crete. Having come back from the town she was studying, Elli found herself without friends and activities that could keep her busy. As she said, with all that time in her hands, Elli was feeling “valueless” and lonely, and her mother was the only source of emotional support who was trying to encourage and keep her spirits up.

"When I was unemployed, my mum used to support me unconditionally. I mean, she was keeping me company, she was taking me into her parents’ village for walks that she knew how much I loved... My mum was very sweet to me and I know that she was trying her best to make me feel better. And even now that I live in Athens, if she finds out that something goes wrong with me, she will tell me “please, tell me what is wrong, I want to help you”. And I tend to open up to my parents because I know that nobody loves me like they do. Their advice can be a bit old-fashioned at times, however they have so much love within... Nobody loves me as much as they do, and I know that my parents want the best for me. And I feel so much closer to them as I grow older... [Elli 25, Athens]"

Elli explained how important her parents were for her, and particularly her mother’s emotional support that had helped her get through the difficult period of unemployment she experienced on Crete. Similarly, Roxani who has been living alone over the last five years, talked about the value of her parents’ input on her life, trusting their life experience as a basis for good advice.

"I have an excellent relationship with my parents. They always support me by all means. Their influence on me is very big. They don’t want me to go abroad. Your family will share with you your happiness; they will support you in your difficult moments. Therefore, you can’t just ignore them. They are older than me and they know better. I get easily excited, but it’s good to combine your excitement with your parents’ knowledge and wisdom. [Roxani 29, Thessaloniki]"
Roxani referred to an incident which had happened a while before our interview took place, and used it as an example of how “wise” and “caring” her parents were. In her efforts to find a job, Roxani was offered a temporary position in the public sector in Athens. Initially excited about the fact that she was offered a good job in the capital, she shared the news with her parents. Although Roxani’s parents did not want to dishearten her, they decided to advise her that her incomes would not be enough to cover her needs. Given the fact that her father had lost his job a while ago, Roxani’s parents were worried that their daughter would not afford everyday life in Athens. Roxani expressed her disappointment for having to turn the job down, in a period where nothing was offered to her. Yet, as she admitted, her parents’ intervention was valuable and “saved her from troubles”.

However, not only did my participants rely on their parents’ input, but also parents, and especially single mothers were perceived as relying significantly upon their daughter’s emotional support. Parents and children exchange their roles and act in ways that put them in positions which reveal their reliance upon each other. The reciprocity between the older and the younger generation is a social obligation expected by individuals and by their families (Reher, 1998). Therefore, every time I asked my participants about their independence, I had to consider the question ‘who is becoming independent from whom’? It is more useful to see young women’s experiences of their ‘transitions to adulthood’ as linked to different kinds of ‘inter-dependencies’ which involve their parents. The latter departs from what has been described previously in this section as ‘smotherhood’; that is, the different forms of suppression perceived by my participants, stemming from their interactions with their mothers. Instead, here my participants interpret their relationship with their parents as supportive and loving, whilst their interference and influence on their lives is treated more positively.

Sofia, for example, who lived with her widowed mother and younger sister in Athens, described the difficulties her mother was going through due to her husband’s recent loss. Sofia was aware of her mother’s emotional dependence on her and her sister, however as she said, living with her was a conscious choice.

*My mum doesn’t do anything unless she asks me first. And every night she wants me to kiss her before she goes to bed. How sweet is that!* [Sofia 31, Athens]
Sofia defined herself as a “strictly family-orientated individual” who was not seeking independence from family, but was rather happy to appreciate family moments in the aftermath of her father’s death. Not only Sofia, but rather half of my sample were aware of their mothers’ reliance on them. In the majority of the cases, these were widowed women and had become dependent on their daughters for emotional and practical support. These kind of relationship dynamics reflect how support and care work are gendered within families. Rastogi (2002) defined three dimensions in mother-daughter relationships as connectedness, which is the ability to share their feelings and ideas, interdependency, which means the advice and help-seeking in emotional and practical issues, and trust in hierarchy, which represents the presumption that older women know what is best for their daughters. A further example comes from Margarita who talked to me about the reciprocity in the parent-children relationship, making clear that she is well-aware of the inter-dependency:

Our parents did not let us get detached from them; it’s not only that we don’t want to leave them. I got the impression that even if their contribution was not purely financial – which is not always only financial – they don’t let us go away. And the financial support might be a way they use to keep us close to them! [Margarita 32, Athens]

In support of Margarita’s view, Douglass (2005) suggests that some parents not only discourage independence, but also actively strive to keep their children close to them, by providing them services as well as material support. The former quotes raise the question how young people define their independence from their parents in respect to different aspects of their lives, such as being economically or emotionally independent. Arnett (1998) argues that for young Americans, the criteria for the transitions to adulthood have individualistic qualities of accepting responsibility for one’s self and making independent decisions, along with becoming financially independent. As Gillies suggests though, an emphasis on the achievement of financial independence from parents is culturally biased, “reflecting an individualistic ideology central to Western social and economic organization” (2000: 214). In support of the statement above, Aapola et al. (2005) maintain that in some southern European countries, the achievement of adulthood is not necessarily attained by a fixed and complete independence from parents, but rather by a shift in the inter-generational dependence amongst family members. Similarly, given that financial independence was not
an option for the majority of my participants, making independent decisions for their own lives is what they consider makes them adults. Yet at the same time, my sample’s ideas of emerging adulthood also included a strong sense of connection and responsibility to their family members.

Leaving the parental home. Towards independence?

One of the questions that arises from discussion about my participants’ ability (or inability) to leave their parental home is the extent to which this process of leaving might change their lives and their relationships with their parents. 16 out of 24 participants, who left their parents’ home, still live close to their parents geographically, including some living in the same apartment block. The remainder of participants who had left home live in different areas. Living in different areas where physical contact can be more challenging, resulted in some of the women reconsidering this decision and opting to find a home in closer geographic proximity to parents. This re-evaluation to move closer to the parental home was predicated on benefits of both acquiring practical help (such as help with shopping, childcare, and other associated tasks) and forming closer emotional bonds. However, at the same time as my participants were seeking benefits from a more geographically close interaction with parents (and mothers especially), it was also viewed that assistance could also be offered to parents, particularly elderly parents, with health and mobility issues.

One example of these processes of seeking closer ties comes from Elli. Elli left Crete to work in a kindergarten in Athens. Elli described having a great time in Athens with friends and colleagues, whom she could go out with away from her mother’s gaze. Yet, although she enjoyed her lifestyle in Athens and independence, she was worried about her mother who would need to be looked after by her daughter in the future.

I don’t want to leave my mum alone in the future. Although at the moment we live far from each other, I don’t worry too much because I know that she is healthy and she’s doing well. Yet in the future I wouldn’t opt for a job outside of Crete, because I want to look after her. I will never abandon her, because she’s been supporting me by all means throughout my whole life. [Elli 25, Athens]
Elderly/sick parents are an important factor that can result in women feeling emotionally responsible for returning to look after them (see Labrianidis, 2014). Yet, despite the significant role which parents, and their mothers especially, played in their lives, my participants who lived on their own recognised the importance of taking responsibility for their choices to become independent. Sasa from Thessaloniki argued that she had very close bonds with her parents, yet she valued her decision to leave her parents’ home and live in her own flat. As Sasa argued, her experience of living alone had let her feel like a complete person, an ‘integrated individual’, as she had found out what she could achieve on her own.

*Everyone should live on their own before their 30s, because this is the only way to feel like an individual and autonomous personality. You’ve got your own schedule and you don’t expect anything from anyone. Although my mum used to take care of everything, I realized that I can manage on my own, take responsibilities, and look after myself. Now I feel like an integrated individual.* [Sasa 30, Thessaloniki]

Similarly, Roxani stressed the importance of privacy, as a way of building up self-identity.

*I’ve been living on my own since 2008 and this has changed me significantly. It changed my character, my personality – I’ve taken over all my everyday expenses and this is very important for me. I believe that I’ve become an integrated person since then and it’s important, because you need to be somebody well before you find your other half.* [Roxani 29, Thessaloniki]

Both the above participants talked also about the sense of freedom that the experience of maintaining their own homes offered them. Leaving home is typically associated with independence. According to Allatt and Yeandle (1992), independence is symbolised by leaving home and setting up an independent household. Yet, living alone was not always associated with my participants’ ability to maintain their space financially and cover their expenses on a monthly basis. For Holdsworth and Morgan (2005), independence is often associated with economic criteria; a secure and sufficient income, ability to pay for housing, and lack of reliance on welfare support. Nevertheless, in my research I did not find
similar emphasis on economic dimensions; rather, independence was largely understood in terms of emotional and psychological criteria. This accords strongly with family traditions and norms in Greek society which place heavy emphasis on regular and continued child-parental attachment throughout the life course (Konstantinidis & Xezonakis, 2013; Drakaki et al., 2014). Although these patterns have long been established in Greece, there is little recent empirical research with which to fully assess how the crisis has altered these family traditions and norms.

Establishing a new home is taken as the indicator of independence (see Cordon, 1997). The latter arguments suggest that a woman’s inability to achieve leaving the parental home marks her failure to attain independence from her parents. Yet, taking into account the fact that cohabitation with their families has been normalised by my participants, due to both cultural and economic factors, this should not be regarded as necessarily problematic. My participants who live at home do not necessarily view themselves as being dependent, but define their independence in different ways. A minority of my participants (6 out of 36) have what they perceive to be ‘nice jobs’ but still live at home, while some unemployed participants or those working in low-paid jobs have left home. Most of them have agreed – and this may have to do with their current inability to actually leave their parents’ home – that leaving their parents’ home is an important, but not the most necessary marker of economic independence. Financial support from their parents is commonplace for the 34 out of 36 participants from this study. Meropi from Crete, for example, considered herself ‘more or less independent’, despite her parents’ significant financial support.

*When I don’t get paid, my parents send me money. Every time I have no money, they will send me everything I need.* [Meropi 25, Athens]

The day we had arranged our interview, Meropi was very excited because she got paid from her job after a four-month delay. Therefore, her parents’ material support was vital during these times without finances. The link between leaving home and being independent is not a clear-cut or direct one. Leaving the parental home does not necessarily entail independence, as for most of my participants, the main source of financial as well as emotional support is their parents. At the same time though, leaving home gives my
participants the feeling of being in control of their relationships with their parents, and therefore, being more autonomous also. The outcome of the move out of their parents’ home is not just a new home address, but the beginning of a new way of being and living, which is usually welcomed in a positive way. Elpida left her parents’ home five years ago. Although she did not move far from them (Elpida lived in a flat just below her parents), she argued that she would never be able to share the same space with her parents again. Elpida had lost her full-time job as a graphic designer a year before the interview took place, and struggled to keep up with her household’s expenses by doing some casual work from home, as well as receiving finances from her mother.

"I don’t even want to think of the possibility to get back to my parents’ home. I can’t live with them anymore. I can’t, there’s no way... I mean, sometimes I wonder how I managed to live with them, honestly! Now it feels like I’ve never lived with them, I’m so used to living on my own. We’ve got completely different lifestyles and I think that we cannot coexist anymore. Neither can they tolerate me, nor can I them. I will do anything I can to make sure that I can maintain my household. [Elpida 37, Athens]"

Finally, Dina who in the past experienced a few tensions with her mother who wanted her to get married and become a mother, decided to move into her own flat with her best friend. Dina described her new home as her ‘shelter’.

"At the end of every day I feel a sense of relaxation, and although it’s been a long time since I’ve left my parents’ home, I still say ‘thank God, I’ve got my little sweet home’. You know, it feels like the place which calms me down. It’s my shelter. Otherwise, I would have been freaked out. [Dina 35, Athens]"

Given that complete financial independence is not always achievable, managing money is still important to live an independent life, an ‘adult’s life’. My data illustrates that participants who either live on their own or with the families that they have formed argue that they now do not relate to their parents in the same way they used to when they lived together. These ‘leavers’ regarded themselves as more autonomous, as ‘proper adults’. Meropi illustrates the above argument quite clearly.
I live on my own since 2008; therefore, I don’t connect with my parents directly. I feel more independent since I’ve left their home. [Meropi 25, Athens]

Narratives like the above indicate that the physical distance from parents might allow a relevant emotional autonomy to be developed. Since leaving home, some of the young women’s relationships with their parents had changed. Forming stable primary relationships and having children mattered most to my participants, in establishing a state of independence. In these situations, priorities changed through direct commitment to children, and a need to make personal decisions.

Of course, moving out from the parental home does not imply a necessary recognition of their new adult status, nor that they were treated as such. Although leaving the parental home might sound like the key element for the achievement of independence, autonomy, and adult status, my findings have shown that these terms are much more complex and negotiated than they seem. As I have shown, whilst the initial reading of these women’s narratives could be interpreted to mean that they rely on parental support as a means of survival (which they plausibly do), they also package their narratives alongside ambiguity regarding receiving this support. Taken back to the theoretical underpinnings of this study – the fusion of symbolic interactionism and standpoint feminism – these women were carefully ‘doing identity work’ (Goffman, 1961), as a means of expressing how they felt some loss of independence through having received parental support. Loss of independence for these women was therefore significant.

The core principle underpinning the concept of attaining adulthood is one of taking responsibility for one’s own decisions and actions (see also Arnett, 2004). Although most of the time adulthood is a status which is welcomed as something desirable, valuable, and moral, only few participants departed from this more positive viewpoint. Of those departing from the notion that adulthood is positive, it is the growing set of responsibilities and concerns which put them at unease. My data has shown that emerging adulthood is neither fixed nor certain (see also Kloep & Hendry, 2011). Adulthood is a process, rather than a fixed state (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005) that my participants have definitely reached from a chronological perspective. Yet, they always have the sense that their adulthood status is a
blurred one and they move back and forth, according to the situation they have to confront every time. Young middle-class Greek women may still live with their parents, leave home, or even may form their own families, yet their status as autonomous adults is being constantly negotiated with their parents. Although this idea of independence as a negotiated state may seem self-evident, given that meanings of independence are culturally specific (Hutson & Jenkins, 1989), my data illustrate some distinct patterns. Leaving home and having a stable job and finances are not viewed as characteristic of independence in Greece compared to other European societies, where contact with parents tends to reduce through ageing (see Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Silva, 2013).

**Current parental support and future uncertainties**

My participants expressed their concern about being financially supported by their parents whilst having a full-time job, and how the current climate in the Greek labour market would allow them to perform in similar ways towards their children’s needs. The lack of safety and wage cuts made them doubt themselves and their capacity to form families, where they would act as responsible parents. Katia was highly praiseworthy about her parents’ generosity to raise her. Katia lived with her male partner in Thessaloniki, where she worked morning shifts in a clothing company, then in the evenings she gave traditional Greek dancing classes to young children. Although Katia did two different jobs, she still could not cover her living expenses and continued to receive money from her parents. Katia was concerned how she would provide for her own children in the future, the way her parents delivered for her during her childhood.

*I have never been deprived of anything. Our generation used to have more than it needed. I’m very grateful to my parents, because they’ve done two different jobs in order to send me and my sister to the university. Sometimes I sit down and consider how much I work and what I earn, and then I start wondering whether I will manage to offer the same to my children in the future. It is the uncertainty I’ve got about the future. I don’t know what the next day will bring.* [Katia 25, Thessaloniki]
In a similar way, Dimitra talked about her admiration for her parents who formed their family without being offered any financial support from their own parents. At the time I interviewed Dimitra, she was five months pregnant. Dimitra’s job contract as a secretary was expiring soon, and she was worried that her parents’ material support would not just be short term, as her needs would increase with her baby’s birth.

*I really admire my parents, because from a very early age they managed to build everything up without any assistance from anywhere. I’m concerned about my own ability in the future to offer my children what my parents offer me at the moment.* [Dimitra 32, Athens]

Antigoni worked with her husband as an actress in a children’s theatre and she was a mother to a seven-year-old boy. Antigoni explained how difficult and sometimes unbearable the last four years have been for her and her family. She argued that the arts’ sector was one of the first areas to be cut under the financial crisis, feeling that people have ended up underestimating artists’ work to the point that they demand them to perform for free. Antigoni used a few examples to defend this, such as her interaction with the owner of a fast-food restaurant who asked her to provide him with free tickets for the performance she was preparing. When she asked him to provide her with free souvlakia, he overreacted and argued that food costs money! Antigoni suffered severely from the crisis, to the point that occasionally she had to send her son to her parent’s home to be fed, as she had literally no food to put on the table.

*My dad is supporting us financially very regularly, as he is the only family member with a stable income. He got laptops for all his grandchildren, he buys them clothes and shoes, he gives them pocket-money... My parents support us a lot... And I’m wondering sometimes, will we be able to do the same for our children?* [Antigoni 32, Athens]

Similarly to Antigoni, Margarita, a very family-orientated mother whose husband had been unemployed for over two years, was receiving her parents’ material support to manage
bring up her young daughter. At the same time, Margarita’s parents were the main providers of any sort of support towards their own parents.

I see my parents still taking care of their own parents, and although our parents are fatigued, they still look after them and they are in an economic position to do that. Will we be able to do the same to our parents when they need us? The latter puts lots of pressure on me. Our parents have a kind of pension that they still receive and they manage to get by. I don’t know when and whether I’ll get mine and how long I got to be working for... [Margarita 32, Athens]

Margarita was concerned about both her current role as a mother, as well as her future role as a daughter towards her own old parents. ‘Strong family’ systems see a long residence in the parental home with more involvement of children in the care of their elderly parents. Allowing one’s children to stay at home longer, and supporting their educational and labour-market transitions would allow parents to claim care when they age (Billari, Philipov & Baizan, 2001). Additionally, my participants viewed the phenomenon of the prolonged cohabitation with their parents inter-generationally. They made comparisons between leaving home ‘then’, in their parents’ generation, and ‘now’, in their generation.

I can’t understand how former generations who suffered much worse than we are at the moment... My father experienced the German occupation, and my grandfather very tough social situations... And still, they managed because they had stronger bonds. They had a different kind of cohesion with each other. People were different – they were saying ‘it’s fine, some food is enough for us’. I mean life was different at the time. Now we only care about ourselves, our own wishes and needs... We’ve created a consumerist society; what we will have for dinner, where we will go, what we will buy, who will look at us... In the past, you could figure out what was right and what was wrong... [Sofia 31, Athens]

Sofia romanticized the past and the parent generation who were people viewed as struggling financially in their everyday lives, yet having stronger values and getting by in their own ways to nurture ‘fantastic families’. According to Sofia, people nowadays are focused on more individualistic needs and are subject to a more consumerist lifestyle. Similarly, other
participants made comparisons between their own experiences and what ‘other’ people do both in Greece and abroad.

*I know that some people might consider it sort of abnormal... But for me, the image of ‘living on my own’ is not something I am familiar with. The three female and two male friends of mine decided to leave their parents’ home either because they got married or because they wanted to cohabit with their partners. None of my friends has said so far ‘I’m leaving my home because I want to live on my own’. All my friends live with their parents!* [Maria 30, Athens].

Maria worked as a Greek teacher in a private school in Athens, where she lived with her mother and sister. Although she sometimes questioned the legitimacy of living in her family’s home in her 30s, she also attempted to justify and normalize her living arrangement by comparing herself to her friends who “all live with their parents” – a common feature amongst my participants.

At the same time, almost all participants liked to make comparisons between the life ‘here’ and ‘there’. They had the impression that Greeks who moved overseas now enjoy the welfare State benefits that the host countries offer them, whilst they are considerably disadvantaged in Greece. My participants’ knowledge and positive impression about ‘life abroad’ came either through conversations with friends and family who left Greece, or via the mass media which present how young people live in more fortunate ways overseas. One example of this comes from Dina, a secretary from Athens, who made a comparison between the Greek State, which does not support young people by any means, and the UK ‘strong welfare system’, which supports her friend’s life who works as an academic in Oxford.

*The Greek State is inept to support me financially; it’s not like abroad where there is a welfare State.* [Dina 35, Athens]

During the last 20 years, the migration of highly educated population, the ‘brain-drain’ from Greece, has increased as an outcome of its economic and social structures. According to Labrianidis (2011), around 180,000 Greek professionals (around 12% of people with graduate
degrees) are currently employed abroad; 130,000 of them have left Greece since the financial crisis. Labrianidis argues that the main reason for the latter is a lack of knowledge-based jobs in Greece for the overqualified young people. The statement by Dina above was further contextualised by her opinion that the Greek State has a fundamentally different relationship to its citizens, whereby the provision of financial assistance and support used as a means of assisting certain groups, such as those on low incomes, with children, or with certain disabilities for example, is not offered. The nature of the State is unique in Greece, where a formal structure of welfare is minimal compared to other European countries (Diamond & Lodge, 2013). None of my participants had any faith or reliance upon the Greek State for the promotion of material resources. The consequence of this was a greater reliance upon family only, both financially and emotionally.

Summary

This chapter has examined how young middle-class Greek women experience their relationships with their parents as they grow older. The ongoing role of family support is highly important and recognised in the Anglophone literature (Shoeni & Ross, 2005; Furstenberg, 2010). Yet, what differentiates the Greek case is the intensive relations that young women maintain with their mothers in particular. Initially, emotional strain, parental authority, and control place restrictions to personal freedom, and interference with my participants’ lifestyle. I have argued that tight family bonds in Greek society facilitate many of the tensions which can exist in families between young people and their parents (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005; Kraemer, 2006). There are clear gendered dimensions to these relationships, as mother-daughter relations can be conflictual at times (Fischer, 1981; Kraemer, 2006; Onayli & Erdur-Baker, 2013). Yet, overall relations between the young women in my study and their mothers (and parents generally) were regarded as crucial materially, and in many respects, also emotionally. Therefore, despite tensions, family relationships were positioned in terms of the wider benefits afforded to the young women as a means of economic survival. This was presented as even more paramount, due to the absence of welfare State support, in conjunction with limited employment options which allow suitable wages to pay for everyday living, as I outlined in chapter 4.
Secondly, the dependence on their parents for material and emotional support gives way to the young women forming a new definition of independence based not upon economic criteria, but upon the ability one has to make independent decisions (see also Arnett, 1998). Yet, the extent to which independence can take place is problematic for many young women, precisely because of difficulties besides financial independence. It has been argued that mothers in particular can, at times, place considerable restrictions on the freedom of their daughters, thereby limiting their independence. These restrictions occur even as these young women enter their 30s, and occur largely as a by-product of still living at home.

The concept of ‘emerging adulthood’ heralds leaving the family home as an important marker of attaining a status of adulthood. Conversely, I argue that a clear demarcation from leaving the parental home to ‘becoming adult’ is inaccurate. Rather, it is more useful to see young women’s emerging adulthood linked to ‘inter-dependencies’ (Punch, 2002) which involve their parents, and mothers particularly. These inter-dependencies are culturally specific, with my data on Greece illustrating that gender plays an important role in the role expectations young women have as far as supporting their parents during periods, such as illness and old age, are concerned. Therefore, the wider contribution of this chapter has been to challenge the universality of ‘emerging adulthood’ as based on mostly Anglophone countries, as well as to understand the ways that these social processes of ‘becoming adult’ as far from gender neutral.

Building on these themes about the role of parents in the lives of the young women, in the next chapter, I draw on a further component of ‘emerging adulthood’ – the formation of intimate relations. As already argued, the context of the Greek crisis has played a major role in damaging the capacities of young women to have financial freedoms, such as living outside the parental home, with implications for how intimate relations can be formed and developed within these contexts.
Chapter 6

Love and Intimacy in Times of Crisis

The previous chapter explored how young Greek women experienced relationships with their parents through either co-residence, or proximity outside of the family home. It was argued that the common reliance on parents for material and emotional support is not only a key part of social survival in the absence of financial independence, but brings with it occasions of emotional strain for young middle-class women – induced by the effects of the crisis, fused with long-standing cultural norms around intensive mother-daughter relations in Greek society. Proceeding from these themes is the need to assess other relationships besides those with parents, namely the role of intimate partners during the context of the crisis. How intimate relations are sustained and altered through the crisis is the theme of this chapter.

The focus on intimate relationships is a well-established area of research on emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2004; Connolly & Mclsaac, 2009; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). For young middle-class women, emerging adulthood includes a variety of features ranging from the process of finding a supportive partner to build a fulfilling relationship with, to the structural pressures which may have an emotional impact on the ability to find and sustain intimate relationships. It has been widely recognised that economic strains on employment, social mobility, and financial security can impact on intimate bonds, largely in a negative way (see Ross, 1985; Conger et al., 1990). In extreme conditions of financial uncertainty and structural disadvantage, these effects on intimate relations will arguably be even more extreme – the context of Greece providing an important test case of this position.

In the context of significant socio-economic upheaval in Greece, intimate bonds have been found to be severely hampered through factors relating to the crisis, such as restricted finances and increasing debts placing stress on relationships (see Gudmunson et al., 2007). Additional restrictions on personal space and privacy, as a result of curtailments in housing and physical living conditions, have also been observed (see Iacovou, 2002; Petrogiannis, 2011; Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017; Vleioras & Mantziou, 2017). At the same time, one should also recognise that the effects of the crisis on intimate relationships may, in some
instances, provide women with the ability to re-negotiate relationships on their terms or alter prior expectations for relationships in more productive ways. Examples include how the absence of traditional male breadwinner expectations may create greater levels of equality in relationships via situations where women work and men are unemployed. In other contexts, reductions in production-based work has been associated with an alteration to traditional working-class masculinities (e.g. McDowell, 2003; Nayak, 2003), which may in turn impact on the ways they negotiate their role in intimate relationships (see McDowell, 2002a; 2002b). Therefore, the effects of the crisis are not only gendered, but can create differential impacts on intimate partnerships.

In this chapter, I outline how the young middle-class women in my sample have negotiated love and intimate relationships in the context of Greek society, and the extent to which their relationships have been affected by the crisis. Here, I will present my participants’ views on partnerships in illustrating that either coupled or not, young women express the important role of a meaningful intimate relationship in their lives. Following this, the chapter will develop by presenting the participants’ critique of Greek culture which they see as imposing unachievable expectations about their gender role. Proceeding this, I will present my participants’ criticisms of the individuals and the responsibility they hold for the bleak reality of the profound economic and societal transformations Greece, before unpacking the ways that financial pressures can have both negative and positive impact on the interactions with partners.

**The Emotional Significance of Partners**

Partners were recognised as playing an important role in the lives of all my participants, specifically in relation to emotional warmth, reciprocity, and support. As well-established in previous research examining emerging adulthood, the role of a partner is key in terms of how young adults understand their own lives and social roles (Blatterer, 2005). Gala and Kapadia (2013) for example, discuss the positive effect a romantic relationship can have on the young individual’s quality of life, including positive feelings of happiness and reducing negative states such as sadness and anger. As well as providing material and emotional outcomes for women, a partner can be a source of learning and orientation about the future, even in
situations where the relationship is terminated or characterised as negative. In the interviews, these points are contextualised acutely within the Greek crisis, which has altered the nature and quality of relationships to varying magnitudes.

Nefeli who had painfully separated from her partner argued that the current crisis had basically managed to “make people question and re-orientate themselves towards what was really meaningful for them”. Nefeli suggested that the time people lost their luxuries gave them the opportunity to appreciate that “a happy person is the one who has a meaningful romantic relationship”. Below, she described how meaningful her partner used to be for her:

> Our break-up hurt me a lot, as I had ended up believing that he was the man of my life. We used to share a similar spirituality on things. We had an incredible mental and spiritual communication which I find very important. [Nefeli 30, Athens]

According to Silva (2013), emerging adults seek a partner who they see as having similarities with themselves, especially in relation to class position. Shared interests, beliefs, and values are seen as key qualities to look for in a partner, as they make up the idea of compatibility that emerging adults envision when they think about marriage. The ideal partner would be someone who is your ‘soul mate’. Other participants, for example Stella, talked about the great significance of being with somebody you love. Stella’s husband, who worked as a door and window constructor, had been severely affected by the crisis, as his already reduced clientele were unable to make their agreed payments for ordered goods. Although Stella stressed the severity of the financial strain she was experiencing at home, she “would never change such a meaningful relationship for all the money of the world”.

> I’ve been very conscious of my decision to marry my husband, because I knew from the beginning that he had no money. Yet, I chose him and his hardships, and I support him in any way because he deserves it. As long as my relationship is meaningful, that’s all that matters. [Stella 30, Athens]
Finally, Efi also mentioned the importance of her romantic partner in her life. Efi argued that if she had to choose between a career and a meaningful partner, she would go with the latter.

_I prefer having a meaningful relationship and not a decent job than vice versa. Sometimes when I think that I am unemployed and feel upset about it, I remind myself that Giannis is a significant part of my life, and this thought brings me joy and relief. For me what matters most of all is having a meaningful partner._ [Efi 30, Athens]

Efi’s partner served the purpose of helping manage her disappointment about the lack of any career opportunities. Efi decided that she had to re-alter the core goals she was setting about her life towards her relationship with her romantic partner in the wake of the long-term unemployment she was already facing. The meaningfulness of partners for young Greek women is perhaps not surprising, as reflected across international research (Arnett, 2004; Woestman, 2012; Henderson et al., 2013). However, in the context of Greece, my participants were careful to frame the significance of partners via a sense of emotional well-being which aided their ability to withstand material pressures brought about by the economic crisis. The ability to find and indeed maintain a partner is however a complex process, with a number of my participants either ‘choosing’ to be single or otherwise reflecting on the implications of singlehood on loneliness and other social outcomes.

_The effects of the crisis on loneliness and lack of intimacy_

The findings of this study reveal that all single participants (n=14) who had a relationship which ended continue to experience emotional pain, distress, and an absence of intimacy. All the above negative feelings were linked in the interviews with loneliness. Russell et al. (1984) and Wittenberg and Reis (1986) found that emotional loneliness is most strongly correlated with measures of limited romantic involvement. Similarly, my single participants reported that their feelings of loneliness are connected to the lack of close intimate attachment. The majority of Weiss’s (1973) writings on emotional loneliness emphasise the lack or loss of romantic ties, with those unmarried most vulnerable to emotional loneliness (see also Green
et al., 2001). Indeed, a romantic relationship is observed to contribute significantly to a young person’s well-being (Odaci & Kalkan, 2010). Absence of romantic relationships has been identified as an important predictor of emotional loneliness, as it deprives individuals of the ability to share, open up, and establish proximity (see DiTomasso et al., 2003; Glickman & La Greca, 2004). Mina’s working pattern in a shopping centre in Thessaloniki as a retailer did not allow her to have much of a social life and make new friends. While Mina was complaining about her lifestyle which was “leading her to loneliness”, she became emotional during the interview when explaining that she feared that if she carried on like this, she would end up alone.

There is no quality of life. I get 500 euros/month and all it pays for is my bills. Nothing is left for me. I live like a robot. This crisis has put me in the worst position. I have no life. I only live and wake up for this job. I won’t realize if by any chance a man comes up in my life. And on Saturdays I finish my work at 7, when I am already tired and in bad spirits to hang out for a drink. [Mina 34, Thessaloniki]

Mina was unhappy both with her working schedule and income, whilst her belief that she had no alternatives, left her disheartened and feeling that she would always be lonely. The inability to keep and make new friends due to the inequity between their workload and their incomes has been expressed by several single participants in my study. The workload, which increased due to employers demanding more effort and time from their employees in return for the same or lower wages (Pentaraki, 2013), creates a skewed work-life balance which impacted heavily on quality of life:

Honestly, I haven’t got anything good to tell you about the last 4 years of my life, as I haven’t had any private life over that whole period. I mean somebody, a young man to tell me something nice, that I’m beautiful, or just to look at me! That could make me feel like a proper woman! It might sound crazy to you, but the last 4 years I have literally no time for such things! [Eugenia 27, Athens]

Eugenia’s narrative acutely framed the impact of poor work conditions on her ability to spend time socialising, and thus increase the potential for her to find a partner. As she
demonstrated, limited time due to the pressures of work impact strongly on her and others’ sense of loneliness, which are compounded further by the material pressures of living. In a similar vein, Lena talked about the effect her busy work schedule in a private school had on her enthusiasm to socialise and the reduced opportunity to find a partner. Lena expressed her concern that her single status might have become a ‘convenient’ habit for her, as it was keeping her away from commitments and responsibilities.

Although I don’t enjoy being single, I’m afraid that it’s become my routine. Sometimes I think that I don’t want to get involved in any relationship, because my everyday routine is very tiring and I don’t want to be bothered to go out and add more commitments... If I go out, I’ll be tired next day at work. I prefer staying at home, watching a film, and going to bed straight after... I have no energy whatsoever... [Lena 29, Athens]

Lena’s description points to the struggles to maintain a good work-life balance, as well as earning enough money to survive economically. Whilst characteristic features of many societies beyond the context of Greece, poor work-life balance has been linked to a number of negative social outcomes such as mental health stress and emotional strain (Kentikelenis et al., 2011; Economou et al., 2012; Greve, 2012; Dafermos, 2013). In Greece, however, the crucial distinction is the ways that these pressures of living are compounded even further by the extremities of the economic situation, where loneliness, poor work-life balance, low incomes, and other related dimensions impact strongly on young people’s hopes about the future and opportunities to escape such a set of circumstances (Greve, 2012; Drydakis, 2015; Christodoulou et al., 2016). Whilst my participants did not directly form a link between their intimate lives and the economic crisis, the work conditions they experienced were strongly associated with the consequences of the crisis – low wages, fragile job security, and long hours (Pagoulatos & Triantopoulos, 2009; Kretsos, 2013; Pentaraki, 2013; Gounari, 2014). Because my participants experienced loneliness so acutely, they often blamed themselves for their loneliness, matched by feelings of inadequacy and personal failure (Rokach & Brock, 1997).

The expectations of being part of a romantic relationship imply closeness and intimacy and when these outcomes are not met, it can lead to withdrawal from commitment. This was
explained by my participants as something they were selective about in terms of building quality relationships, with loneliness rather than bad relationships preferred. This selectivity about choosing the right partner is situated firmly in the strive for quality, where limited time for finding a new partner, and in turn a past record of difficulties finding the ‘right’ partner, places other adverse outcomes on their lives. For example, Anastasia, a young woman who has been single for some time stated:

I am single. I don’t really like it, but I prefer it than being in a relationship I don’t enjoy. When I have no fun in a relationship, I just walk away. I would like to get married at some point to somebody who wants to be a proper partner. I don’t mind responsibilities and commitments, but it’s essential to be together, to be fellow travellers in the life course... [Anastasia 33, Thessaloniki]

Anastasia outlined her ability to move quickly from relationships which were not suited to her, a view similar with findings from elsewhere (Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009; Connolly & McIsaac, 2009). Yet, what is significant about her quote is the constant striving for a partner to be with her – paradoxically anyone who does not meet this standard was quickly rejected. Similarly, for Elli finding the ‘right’ partner was conceived as a ‘life project’. Elli recalled a negative experience in a former relationship and assessed the value of a truthful and quality relationship, arguing that loneliness is more preferable than a bad relationship.

I talk about partnership, because it concerns me a lot. I don’t care about sex, I care about love, company, protection. Although I feel that I am strong enough, I sometimes feel like I need someone to look after me. A partner should come into your life in order to facilitate it. If he comes to make it worse, it’s better to remain single. [Elli 25, Athens]

Although the difficulties my single participants were experiencing with finding the ‘right’ partner, they still acknowledged the value of a meaningful partnership in general terms. Nefeli, who lived in Athens, where she was feeling very lonely away from her family, tried to keep herself busy with a number of activities (morning office job, translations, and
organising feminist festivals). Nefeli explained that the ideal way to stop feeling lonely would be to have a real romantic partner who would make her “forget all her problems”:

If I went back home and somebody waited for me, someone I could talk and share a nice moment with, then I’d forget all my problems. A hug can make you forget everything. Yet, if you sleep on your own, you wake up in the morning and all your problems are still there! That hug makes such a big difference! [Nefeli 30, Athens]

Despite the adversities in Greek society, combined with my participants’ feelings of self-responsibility about their loneliness, there was an inherent belief that there must be somebody out there ‘only for them’. This can be explained partly as a result of their stage in the lifecourse – as young women transitioning into adulthood, the experience of turbulence and uncertainty about finding a stable and secure partner is common (see Bruckner & Mayer, 2005; Wagner & Davis, 2006; Widmer & Ritschard, 2009; Oesterle et al., 2010). Yet, as has been described, these transitions can be compromised by the economic context of their lives, most notably their work which was linked to stressful conditions, long hours, poor pay, and other adversities. These conditions of work were strongly associated with difficulties being able to socialise, limiting the possibilities of finding partners by constraining their time and leisure networks. The latter runs in opposition with what Beck and Giddens (1992) have suggested to be women’s stronger role in the labour market as an example of emancipating them from men and offering them a social and economic independence unknown in previous generations. My participants’ pressures at work impacted on intimate relationships, constraining the options and possibilities of ‘emancipation’ and independence from men. These structural contexts, which are scarcely mentioned in the theoretical claims of Beck and Giddens, have a major role to play in shaping intimate relationships.

Yet, for those women in relationships, the economic context can operate differently – that is to say, to help them withstand the pressures of life emotionally. As the forthcoming section describes, these narratives were however broader than simply a justification of relationships as a means of social support and emotional security, actively blaming Greek society for the outcomes and pressures my participants faced on an everyday level.
Young women’s critique of the culture of marriage and relationships in Greece

As explained in chapter 2, traditionally the Mediterranean, and Greece especially (Campbell, 1964; Peristiani, 1966; Friedl, 1967; Triandis & Vassiliou, 1972; du Boulay, 1986), have placed importance on marriage as a rite of passage for women, as they transition to the status of adulthood. Despite numerous social changes in Greece since the 1960s and 70s, namely the more common role of women in the paid labour market (Karamessini & Rubery, 2014), there have been some questions about the continued importance of marriage as a marker of adulthood. Rates of cohabitation have increased in Greece (Maratou-Alipranti, 1999), although marriage rates have not seen a decline as witnessed in other Western nations (e.g. Cherlin, 2004; Liefbroer & Dourleijn, 2006; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007). Therefore, marriage still plays a part of everyday understandings of ‘adulthood’ in Greece – a view shared by most of my sample. Marriage was regarded as a key part of their self-identities, and indeed their perceived expectations for living in Greek society, more generally.

**Social norms and marriage in Greece**

The importance of marriage is still dominant in Greece. Yet, as I will show below, my participants condemned the cultural idea that ‘a woman should put her life in order before she turns 30’. Feeling the pressure from society’s expectations on the fulfilment of their role as wives by the age of 30, my participants tried to come to terms with these contradictions. On the one hand, Greek culture tends to claim that a woman by the age of 30 should be married, as this is a significant attribute for their adult status; yet on the other hand, though, the structural conditions in Greece do not allow women to commit themselves to stable relationships. Eugenia, who worked in a bakery in Athens, expressed her indignation about society’s reluctance to put individuals’ lives in the current context and revise its cultural expectations. Her negative working experience within the context of the crisis held her personal development back and made her see her life from a more ‘realistic’ perspective; in her view, it was now better to set smaller goals depending on each individual’s life conditions, rather than try to conform to the unrealistic societal expectations.
What if I don’t marry in my 30s and marry in my 40s instead? What’s the difference? Who is chasing me? Of course you could argue that the life itself is chasing me, but I could argue that I’ve been given the life to live it, not to be chased by it! I mean, what does it mean that I should get married by the age of 30, or I should have kids, or a successful career? What should I do within three years to be accepted by the society? What I aspire for my life in three years is not to be in the same job I currently am. What matters is to be happy, regardless of your marital status. [Eugenia 27, Athens]

Similarly, Margarita who clarified that she was a “mother by choice and not because she had to”, critiqued society’s normative expectations, expecting women to adhere to their gender roles by the age of 30.

Our society expects you to get married and have kids as soon as you turn 30. I think that it tries to impose responsibilities on you. I turned 30 with no stress because my life was meaningful at the time. You have a child when you want to. If you want to have it in your 40s, fair enough. Nobody will make you do it, although people say ‘you’ve turned 30, won’t you have a child soon?’ [Margarita 32, Athens]

The biological pressures to have children are a common feature of women’s lives (Earle & Letherby, 2007), yet Margarita framed this as a “relative choice”, rather than an imposition placed on her by Greek culture. At the same time though, despite my participants’ critique of their culture and the obligations it tries to impose on them, they are still unable to fully dismiss it. The constructed biological element of the female body comes to add another pressure on my participants who perceive their reproductive timeframe as restricting their choices of when to have children. Nikoleta, from Athens, talked about her frustration with biological ‘limitations’, compared to men’s capacity to reproduce at a later age.

I’m already 30 and that puts a considerable pressure on me. I try to calm down, but the pressure that women in their 30s suffer is incredible, especially in Greek society. And this pressure comes basically from the fact that you are a woman and therefore, only up to a certain age able to give a birth. After 40 is usually more difficult compared to men who can be active up to a very old age. If women could, I don’t think they would rush to form a family before their 40s. Personally, I want to get married after my 40s, as I have many unmet expectations. But if I have to do it, I have no option basically... [Nikoleta 29, Athens]
Relatedly, Nikoleta conceived of the biological pressures to have children as imposed on her by Greek culture. Here, Nikoleta’s sense of stress and frustration is obvious. Let down and profoundly hurt and disorientated by her ex-partner who moved to England without her, she tried hard to confront both society’s expectations from her and her fear of getting older. Nikoleta shared that she sometimes panicked not as much because she was unmarried, but mainly because she was single in Greece, whose society has never stopped dismissing unwed women in their 30s, unlike other more comparably socially liberal countries, such as those in Scandinavia and parts of Northern Europe. In a similar vein, Martha referred to her female friends’ agony to find a candidate husband to marry by the age of 35:

*Most of my friends decide to get married by the age of 35, while the ones who are 30 and single are in a panic and do their best to find somebody. I don’t agree with their attitude though, because they kind of coerce their partners to marry them; they do it because they don’t want to get through the process of forming a new relationship…. For example, I’ve got friends from abroad who never think in such a way; this is a Greek thing! And when your parents put pressure on you and ask you to marry, you haven’t got much choice.* [Martha 30, Athens]

Martha attributed young women’s ‘panic’ to get married by their 30s to Greek culture, comparing herself to friends from overseas who have lower expectations of the importance of marriage. At the time I met Martha, she was about to submit her Master’s thesis at the University of Liverpool. Martha had the chance to make friendships with a few foreign young women who “had a very different mentality to the Greeks”. As she mentioned, those women were more relaxed about marriage, as they did not have to confront similar cultural strains about their gender role. Interestingly, all participants mentioned the chronological aspects of women’s biology that in many respects predetermine the timeframe within which women should get married. For example, Sasa from Thessaloniki argued that “in our 30s something happens to our body”. She explained that since she turned 30, her metabolism changed significantly; she had noticed an increase in her appetite, but at the same time she did not care about her body shape as much anymore. She then unpacked the society’s perceptions
of women aged 30 years, arguing that the age of 30 signals women’s maturity and indeed capacity to make decisions for themselves.

In our 30s something happens to us and our body, our metabolism. It is ‘heavy’ for a woman to be 30. When you say “I’m 30” you realize how strong that is; it means that you are a mature woman who decides for herself, her career, her personal life. You ought to decide for yourself. When number ‘two’ precedes, you are still a little girl; even if you are 29,5 you are considered as such. Number ‘three’ makes such a big difference... [Sasa 30, Thessaloniki]

In conjunction with the twinned effects of society and biology on getting married and in particular having children, the source of influence regarding intimate relationships also featured strongly from parents. As explained in chapter 2, literature on intimacy during emerging adulthood indicates the significance of a romantic relationship, as the timing of the individual’s departure from their parents’ home (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Intimacy is paralleled with a ‘rite of passage’, where the individuals develop their identity and autonomy as adults. As already described in chapter 5 of this study, the strong influence which the family has on young peoples’ decision-making and opportunities to live independently is particularly evident in Greece. As will be discussed below, parental pressure feeds into assumptions about the ‘right’ age to get married and have children, as part of a wider representation of what family life means to the parent generation of Greek society.

**Parental pressure: divorced or a spinster?**

Societal, and more commonly, parental pressure is quite intense among emerging adults, and especially young women (Pnevmatikos & Bardos, 2014; Papadakis et al., 2015). According to traditional norms and female gender roles in Greece, young women are expected to find a husband and have children. A single woman in her early thirties may still be considered a ‘spinster’, especially if she is unemployed and cannot ‘justify’ her singlehood through her career choices (see Dubisch, 1991; Loizos & Papataxiarchis, 1991). The stigma of being a ‘spinster’ is very intense and very well rooted in the Greek mentality, and is attributed
exclusively to women rather than men. Dina from Athens described her mother’s view on marriage, as well as her fear that her daughter would end up a spinster. Dina’s mother believed that if her daughter had a ‘white marriage’⁴ and then got divorced, her friends would stop considering her a spinster and would not ask again “what's wrong with Dina? She is neither fat nor ugly”.

*I don’t care about people calling me a spinster. I don’t give a shit really! I get mad with it, because I genuinely believe that such a status has died. I don’t know how to begin with now because I go nuts! Do you know why? Because what do you want from me? Do you want me to be divorced with a kid? I'll be honest and say to you that my mum has told me ‘you’re 35; at least have a child and don’t get married if you don’t want to’. And I say to her ‘what are you talking about?’ And then she goes ‘yes, and people will stop calling you a spinster!’ And she makes me feel outraged because she finds such a discussion very normal! [Dina 35, Athens]

According to Dina, her mother’s generation assumed that by the age of 30 women are no longer attractive to men and valuable ‘candidate brides’ to the ‘bridal market’. Dina’s mother did not want her daughter to be distressed, as this could have a negative impact on her appearance, namely her hair colour could begin to turn grey! Behind all those pressures that my participants experienced by their mothers was the fear that their daughters faced a biological deadline — similarly explained in the previous theme — that conception chances become more difficult as a woman ages. Below, Sasa gave her own definition of the term ‘spinster’. She reframed the concept of being a spinster, challenging its traditionally assumed connotations.

*You are not considered spinster any more. I don’t think there are spinsters in our days. Even a 50-year-old single woman is not considered spinster nowadays. Personally, I call spinster a woman who moans about being alone, and not necessarily a single woman. As long as you are active, social, you hang out and have fun, you are not a spinster. You don’t need to get married in order to find happiness. Likewise, a married miserable woman might be considered spinster. Women used to be called spinsters in the past, because they could not enjoy themselves out of marriage; they were condemned to

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⁴ White Marriage is a marriage which does not include sexual intercourse between the couple. The couple may have a variety of reasons for this, such as social or economic. Another example is when somebody wants to disguise the homosexuality of one or both partners.
Sasa’s quote describes what she deemed to be a shift in societal attitudes of people from her generation – that marriage is no longer a necessity for women before the age of 30, but can take place after this age. Her narrative is also significant in that it reflects an inherent frustration that her generational worldview has not been followed by that of her parents, whose conceptions of marriage are rooted in an ‘old fashioned’ manner. Sasa explained her belief that marriage should not be just about conforming to societal expectations, but about a decision informed by a willingness to want to find the right partner and live a happy life independent of what other people think. These decisions to marry, however, are not always a straightforward process of ‘happy living’, and especially when understood within the material context of the Greek crisis, they are inherently risky.

**The Fears and Uncertainties of Marital Commitment: Religious versus Civil Marriage**

Marriage in Greece is overshadowed by uncertainty and fear due to the economic crisis, where leaving home and moving in with a partner place greater economic risks on relationships and the material struggle to exist. Because marriage in Greece is synonymous, like most countries, with co-residence as partners, the absence of stable work and income influence decisions to avoid getting married until these risks are reduced.

Several participants were cynical about marriage and expressed directly the pressures of making such bonds. As explained elsewhere, my participants wanted to create a traditional, two-parent household with clearly divided gender roles, but as mentioned also in Silva, “they were confronted with the reality that they do not have the sufficient economic means to realize this goal” (2013: 70). Magdalini from Athens expressed:

> My boyfriend delivers me his anxiety, as his job has been massively affected by the crisis. I don’t like that. I really don’t know where this relationship will go considering what we are going through financially at the moment. I wouldn’t consider marrying him at the moment... [Magdalini 25, Athens]
The crisis and the financial instabilities following it made my participants think more seriously about committing themselves to a marriage with serious implications on their life choices. A religious wedding, compared to a civil one, was perceived by Fani more as a serious commitment. The crisis has created financial uncertainties, which in association with general feelings of insecurity she was experiencing (including her family’s or friends’ experiences), discouraged her from the choice of having a religious wedding. Fani viewed a religious wedding as more serious, and hence more complicated because of God’s involvement. A year before our interview, Fani, a 24-year-old unemployed physician from Thessaloniki, had an unplanned pregnancy which she happily announced to her partner. To Fani’s surprise, her partner did not respond positively to it, as he was worried that he would not find a job to bring up their baby. Fani was not convinced and she argued that his reaction was the typical excuse her generation used “to get away with responsibilities”. Unfortunately, Fani miscarried. She held her partner accountable for that, as she argued that “his laziness was distressing her”. Fani maintained her relationship with him, yet “more casually”, as she now knew that she could not rely on him. Below, she explained the reasons why she would only cohabit and not get married.

I wouldn’t like to have a religious wedding at the moment, because every day I see people breaking up; men do not bring money at home, they lose their jobs, they constantly look up for jobs... Therefore, I would just cohabit in order to be able to send him back to his mum if he didn’t cover my needs. [Fani 24, Thessaloniki]

Fani’s traumatic experience made her perceive cohabitation as a less troubled way of coexisting with her partner, as a potential decision to follow a separate pathway in the future would not have the same implications.

The current crisis has profoundly affected my participants’ marital choices. Economic uncertainties function as an impediment which prevents young women from uniting with a man. My participants’ reluctance to have a religious wedding could suggest not only their fear of commitment, but a sense of their expectations for a conservative vision of what marriage
should be – a sign of social commitment and bond, with clear gender roles where a man provides for his family.

Another source of my participants’ reluctance to get married in the Church was their tendency to associate religious wedding with an excess which was reminiscence of different era. With their preference for a wedding outside of the Orthodox Church, some participants tried to distinguish themselves from the pre-crisis era which was allegedly characterised by extremity; expensive wedding dresses, exclusive wedding parties, and holidays. Although the Orthodox Church’s dogma is against such an excess, my participants tended to associate their religion with traditional cultural rituals associated with these examples of excess.

Lena worked as a childcare worker in Athens. She explained that she would only like both a ‘calm’ relationship and a mere formalisation of it.

*I'd love to find a nice partner who would make me happy. Somebody that I would be able to talk to and who would bring calmness and peace in my life; peace sounds like an oasis in my head! I am not interested in a wedding though, and especially a religious one. I'd rather prefer a civil wedding; I'd invite a few relatives and friends in such a restaurant and have fun with each other. I don't dream of anything else.* [Lena 29, Athens]

Lena expressed her detest about a traditional set of rituals which were “imposed” on young people who “love each other and choose to live together”. Rather than conforming to cultural ideas of how a wedding “should” be like, Lena expressed her preference for simplicity. The interview was taken in a restaurant in Athens, where Lena claimed she could potentially “see” her own wedding taking place in the future. Finally, Lena pointed out that she didn’t mind the Christian religion itself, but she was rather resisting a traditional mindset of excess which was not appealing to her.

Although Lena was not the only participant who opposed to a religious wedding, others expressed their willingness to a potential compromise in case they would have children, where children confirm a stronger commitment anyway. As Elpida explained:

*The idea of getting married in a Church freaks me out; it always used to. Unless I become pregnant. That’s a different matter. In that case I would do everything properly.* [Elpida 37, Athens]
Elpida questioned the idea of marriage as an uneasy experience which imposed on people certain values. Although she was in a stable relationship for more than seven years, and she didn’t have any interest to date with other men, Elpida was cynical of the institution of marriage in general, and a religious wedding more specifically, which felt like a daunting event. Although Elpida argued for the importance to make choices in her way, she admitted that she would eventually compromise for the sake of her potential children.

In a slight contrast to the rest of my participants, Glykeria from Thessaloniki, a single woman who worked as a clothes stylist, actively recognized both religion and the standards it sets. Glykeria admitted that religion’s sets of values were strict as they “should”. However, she positioned herself outside the conformity it demanded, except in the case she would have a child.

*Of course I’m thinking of getting married at some point only with the prospect of having a child. Our religion is quite strict and I agree, because it sets the standards, which means that marriage is a kind of commitment. But for me marriage equals a child; there is no other reason of getting married unless you have a child.* [Glykeria 37, Thessaloniki]

Like Elpida, Glykeria argued explicitly that for her marriage is equated with parenthood. The perception that marriage is associated with parenthood is distinct from other European countries, where social attitudes to marriage do not contain such a hard-line position (Furstenberg & Kiernan, 2001; Upchurch, Lillard & Panis, 2002; Seltzer, 2004). Distinctions were evident in terms of the material expectations of marriage however.

Despite the claims that Greek society and its social context of the crisis has had a major bearing on experiences and attitudes towards intimate relations amongst my participants, the language through which they articulate these situations is moreover individualising and individual blaming – as will be explained in the forthcoming section. These narratives, used to explain their pressures and adversities to form good quality intimate ties, are bound up with a language of social criticism and contempt – where individuals and not the culture per se are held to be reasons for the struggles they experience in forming and maintaining intimate relationships.
Individualizing the Crisis: Gendered Blame and Stigma on Intimate Relations

As noted in chapter 2, the individualization thesis has been widely understood as affecting intimate relationships. Giddens (1992) argues in his book *The Transformation of Intimacy* that there exists a high level of anxiety and lack of certainty around love relationships in a social world of changing gender and family roles, characterised by a tension between retaining a sense of autonomy as an individual and a need for close relationships with others. The complexity of these structural processes, akin to individualisation, also parallel and closely connect with the neo-liberal topography of Greek society. In confronting the stark reality of these societal transformations, Greek citizens have launched into a myriad of criticisms of society – ranging from the nature of the State, to the actions/inactions of its people. One symptom which was widely discussed amongst my participants is the degree of individual responsibility that one holds for their situation amidst the crisis. Within their narratives my participants, at times, reproduced common stereotypes about ideal gender roles in explaining their ideas around responsibility in relationships, often regarding women as responsible for many of the challenges in developing and sustaining intimate relations. Yet in other situations, my participants showed an acute willingness to explain the crisis as having impacted more heavily on men than women, courtesy of the fact that men’s restricted choices on finding work had affected their masculinities.

‘Men are more immature’. Perceived excuses for delaying relationship commitments.

A frustration articulated in my participants’ narratives was the perception that men have been lacking in character and sufficient levels of responsibility for their social position in the hardships of the Greek crisis. Sasa was specifically frustrated by men’s reluctance to take on the responsibility of forming their own families, even when they had a job. Sasa argued that men are not willing to leave their parents, whilst women tend to be stronger and more mature, despite the strain and difficulties they experience.

A common problem is that men especially choose not to take on any responsibilities, and even though they might have a job, they prefer to live with their parents. This means that they are not mature to form a family. The women are more mature and
independent even now with all these hardships they are experiencing. [Sasa 30, Thessaloniki]

Below, Sofia explained how the new economic state has led young people – men especially – to procrastinate in relation to long-term commitments. Sofia’s perspective that men’s maturity was different (and lacking) compared to women was an attempt to individualise what she regarded as men’s failings to take the same responsibilities as women. By individualise, Sofia regarded the conditions of the crisis as having had considerable impacts on both genders, except that men had adapted less effectively compared to women.

I think that we all procrastinate – I guess men more than women. And now especially they can use the excuse “you see how difficult things are... what sort of family do you expect us to form? And how are we going to make such a decision?” One the other hand, women are more mature and can adapt themselves better to the adversities. [Sofia 31, Athens]

In most interviews, men were represented as immature individuals who were doing their best to avoid commitments and responsibilities by prolonging their period of singlehood and ‘freedom’. On the contrary, women were presented as more aware of the responsibilities that are associated with adulthood and claimed to adhere to these. Strong gender stereotypes in Greece expect women to place more importance on family and caring for all family members (Papataxiarchis, 2012). Paxson (2004) explains that Greek women complete their sense of self through marriage and ‘relational motherhood’. Indeed, Fani who has been in a relationship for eight years shared with me her frustration about her partner’s lack of motivation to pursue a career. Fani reckoned that “most men are like him because they don’t want to put themselves at unease”.

He’s been sitting in front of a PC playing videogames, using the pretext that due to the crisis there are no jobs. And I say to him “hold on, the prime minister will call you in a minute and tell you ‘come on, I need a minister’”! [Fani 24, Thessaloniki]
As I mentioned earlier, Fani told me about her miscarriage in the first months of her pregnancy. Her boyfriend’s reluctance to look for a full-time job and take on the responsibilities of her pregnancy, made Fani question the quality and future of their relationship. In Fani’s view, her boyfriend was not the same person anymore, as “men who do not pursue a career are not attractive”, a finding similar to what Silva’s (2013) female participants argued about men. Fani’s frustration that her partner had not made sufficient efforts to find a job, and failed to show enough resilience to overcome the struggles of doing so. The attitudes expressed by women towards male partners were similarly negative, at times, re-inserting the longing for more traditional gender norms in Greece where men (allegedly) took on greater responsibilities to provide for the family – an argument which Nikoleta uses to frame her discontents with the attitude of contemporary young men in Greece. “Men” Nikoleta argued “are scared kids and feels like you should put them in bed as you would with a baby”. Nikoleta held women as well as men responsible for the hedonistic attitude they have adopted over the last few years, which she claimed had affected men’s confidence:

*I think that what applies to men’s attitude and mentality currently is what the ‘little prince’ used to say about the fox – that it takes time until you manage to tame it. It should get used to your presence and feel relaxed with you. I think that we should go back to those times, as both genders’ attitude has been unacceptable and hasn’t served anyone’s interests anyway. The ‘Sex and the City’ model is old and obsolete and doesn’t help anyone. Nowadays men are not flirting because they are scared kids and they can’t imagine themselves married with children. They need to feel safe and relaxed first.* [Nikoleta 29, Athens]

From these narratives, such as those of Nikoleta and Fani, assumptions are drawn about male partners’ alleged immaturity and lack of effort to find work in the wake of the economic crisis. These concerns are framed as a wider challenge to previously held ideas of gender roles in relationships, Nikoleta especially who explains how males have allegedly become more passive and scared of commitment in the wake of the economic conditions surrounding them. These sorts of characterisations, of men failing to live up to their gender expectations as ‘providing’ and ‘dictating’ the rules of relationship enactment and flirtation, appear to be methods by which the women, at times, individualised the effects of the crisis –
where men are claimed to have not taken sufficient responsibilities to find work, despite the adversities in the economy. The outcome of such beliefs is to, at times, engender a more traditional approach to gender norms and a sense of nostalgia about men’s behaviour in previous generations – arguably at least, where work and family lives were not under the same economic pressures. These beliefs, shared by women, also corresponded with similar attitudes associated with dating rituals, and again, expressed concerns with what the women perceived to be a shift away from traditional gender behaviour – where men were allegedly not pursuing women due to damaged masculinities brought about by the crisis.

‘Men do not pursue us’ (‘but we women can be partly responsible’)

My participants also perceived men as not performing traditionally held dating rituals and flirtation. In particular, some of my participants thought of men as lacking confidence to pursue women, where comparisons were drawn between the pre-crisis era in which these dating rituals were said to have occurred more regularly. Drawing upon Smith’s (1987) theorisation of production of knowledge, my participants made sense and interpreted men’s attitude from their own ‘standpoint’ and perspective. Standpoint feminism knowledge is not only gender-specific, but also socially situated, and the women of this study gave their own meaning to men’s lack of confidence, situating it in the context of the current crisis. The narratives given by the women were infused with social explanations for why men had seemingly lost their confidence to flirt with women, drawing on interpretations of how men’s mental health and masculinities had been damaged since the crisis due to the long-term effects of unemployment. Yet, the narratives also contained personal frustration from the women, who perceived these situations affecting men as also affecting themselves through difficulties forming relationships in the first place, or otherwise maintaining them effectively.

At the time I interviewed Roxani, she had been single for over a year but she did not enjoy being alone. She explained that although she tried to have a social life, she was struggling to meet new people, as men were not keen on socialising with women they didn’t know through their social network.
Men do not approach women anymore. And it’s a given that they don’t pursue them either! My interpretation for this is that in the past women used to be unapproachable for men, and this had been an interesting challenge for men. Nowadays the roles have shifted significantly and men take everything for granted. The argument is that if you don’t want to flirt with me, there are another 50 who are available, and they might want me more than you! The relationships get really tough over time. [Roxani 29, Thessaloniki]

Roxani held women responsible, in a subtle way, for men’s reluctance to pursue them. Her perception was that gender roles have been re-shaped in Greece – away from a situation of women playing ‘hard to get’ as a stereotypical attribute of dating rituals – towards a point where men are no longer chasing women as before. Similar viewpoints were evident across several interviews. Nikoleta used an example from her parents’ early romantic relationship, where they both adhered to their gender roles – her mother’s strategy to not take any initiatives in their romantic interactions encouraged her father to pursue her. As her quote below shows, Nikoleta considered women accountable for the alienation between the two genders, removing men from any sort of critique.

Nowadays, men do not take the initiative to come and talk to a woman they hadn’t met before, as they used to in the past. And I think that this is predominantly women’s fault, as although they send a message to men that they are interested in them, as soon as men approach them, women turn them down. They just want to confirm themselves and feel flattered at men’s expense. That had a very negative impact on men’s confidence who try to protect their ego from getting hurt. [Nikoleta 29, Athens]

Nikoleta expressed her disappointment about women’s behaviour by maintaining that they should had known better that men’s self-confidence gets very easily affected. Therefore, in Nikoleta’s view, women should be more understanding and sensitive to men’s feelings and sense of confidence. This contempt for women’s attitudes was also expressed by Elli who referred to women’s attitudes towards men along similar lines to Nikoleta.

In the past, I used to live in my own pink cloud that everything is about love and care. The more I get to know the society, the more I realize that everyone cares about themselves only. And unfortunately, it’s not just men, but also women who now think
likewise. Everyone is interested in having fun only – women especially who have turned into bitches. In the past, women used to be more respectful. The new generation argues, swears, gets divorced, and abandons children for nothing. With no reason young people cheat on each other, lie to each other, and moan about everything. [Elli 25, Athens]

Elli’s arguments about contemporary norms around moral standards in relationships having deteriorated featured a broader critique that both men and women had become more selfish and self-seeking. In the wake of clear social pressures on relationships as a result of tensions and pressures associated with finances and maintaining work, Elli still upheld the view that there has been a growing tendency to abandon, rather than ‘work on’, relationship pressures.

Dimitra, from Athens, had similar remarks. Her narrative drew a comparison between then and now, in order to underline women’s loyalty and devotion to men in her grandmother’s generation. As she argued, women then tended to try harder to maintain a relationship, however challenging it could have been. Equally though, men were viewed as more respectful towards women and did not tend to approach them just with the intention to sleep with them.

In the past, couples used to hold each other’s hand in any hardship and moved on... together... Now with the first difficulty we say “goodbye”. If you don’t need him, you get rid of him and you live alone. On the other hand though, men are shameless now... The other day somebody said to my friend: “I’ll help you to lose those five kilos you need. In the meantime, are any of your friends available”? [Dimitra 32, Athens]

Dating for some of the women had become a challenge due to difficulties finding time to meet suitable partners to go on dates, affected by extreme work commitments. Smaragda was one such example, who after a lengthy period of not having gone on any kind of date, decided to go out with a young man. Despite declaring that she was not very attracted to him, she met him in a bar for a drink. The date did not go well according to Smaragda, due largely to the young man’s inability to engage in open conversation with her. Rather than explaining this solely as a result of the character deficits of the man, Smaragda also attributed this persona to his damaged self-confidence stemming from unemployment.
I didn’t fancy him very much but I thought of giving him a chance. We hung out for a few times, we got to know each other, but he was saying nothing – he had his own issues. He was depressed, everything was black for him, whilst I am such a jolly person! He was moaning all the time “I’m so bored, I wish I had a job...”. We were going out and we were not saying a word, it was just myself talking... I mean, things are so much harder when the person sitting next to you says nothing... [Smaradga 24, Thessaloniki]

Aside from more casual dating practices, the pressures of maintaining what were long-term relationships among some of the women were also felt. One dimension was the decline in excitement in the relationship due to male partners frequently spending long periods at home, without employment and alternative sources of activity. Anastasia cited how her relationship with her partner had seen a marked deterioration since his lengthy period of unemployment, during which arguments began to increase over the lack of love and expressions of intimacy, including going on dates and engaging in regular sexual activities as a couple. This reached a crisis point for Anastasia, who despite giving a very honest and reflexive narrative of her partner’s lack of confidence resulting from unemployment, felt she could no longer maintain the relationship because of these pressures:

I told him that it would be better to break up, because it was not going anywhere. You could see him panicking, getting red and asking for some water, but he was saying nothing! You could tell that he didn’t want this to happen to him, however he couldn’t express his feelings. “I want you too”. And I said “it’s like you are telling me you are hungry. In front of you there is a pasta, a pie, pizza, and some soup. Have something”. “No, I don’t want any of these”. “Ok, order something different then. But you don’t do either! You stay there starving and you do nothing. The food is here! Grab it! I’m asking you! And he just stayed there looking at me... [Anastasia 33, Thessaloniki]

Outside of the Greek context, studies (Falconier & Epstein, 2011; Dew, Britt & Huston, 2012) have examined the ways that economic situations may alter men’s self-confidence and broader masculine self-identities. This finding within the data, whilst drawn from women’s perceptions of men’s behaviour, indicates the ways that traditional gender norms are also being re-drawn. As discussed in chapter 2, financial strain tends to impact on husbands’ social...
role and identity in different ways than women, resulting in different interactions with other family members (see Jenkins et al., 2002). Although these perspectives were not directly attributed to the crisis by the participants, there were indirect impacts of the crisis apparent in these attitudes and behaviours. Examples include the pressures of work on women limiting their leisure options, and in turn, the perception that the impacts of the crisis have affected men’s mental state and levels of confidence to engage in flirtation and dating. The incompatibility between traditional social expectations and men’s failure to provide for their partners impacts on their self-esteem and confidence. As has been outlined, women have begun to expect less from relationships, whilst at the same time continually inserting assumptions of what a ‘traditional’ relationship should be. This has led to a sense of anxiety about finding a stable partner, which had implications on my participants’ sense of adult status. Stability in intimate relationships is traditionally associated with independence from family (Pnevmatikos & Bardos, 2014) and adult roles. In such a socioeconomic context, the breakaway from previous patterns of dating and flirtation have created doubts about what women can do to begin a relationship in a context where men are perceived to be suffering emotionally as much as women.

The Crisis and Relationships, or Relationships in Crisis? The Effects of the Crisis on Intimate Relations and Parenthood

Globally, the economic crisis has increased the number of families struggling with financial problems related to unemployment, reduced income, depleted savings, and increased debt (Sanchez & Gager, 2000; Moore & Palumbo, 2009; Dew, 2011; Falconier & Epstein, 2011; Dew, Britt & Huston, 2012). In Greece, multiple austerity measures, cuts in wages and social needs, high direct and indirect taxation and unemployment, have led to a sharp decline in standards of living (Panagiotou, 2010; Koukiadaki & Kretsos, 2012). When economic difficulties affect the family, the detrimental impact of these adversities is exacerbated by the fact that it has a direct influence on individual well-being, as well as an indirect effect through the responses of other family members (Dew, 2011). All the married female participants in my study (n=8) argued that economic pressures were testing their marital stability. Research on the effects of economic strain on couples suggests that financial hardships are likely to increase
depression, as well as marital dissatisfaction and conflict (Stanley, Markman & Whitton, 2002; Gudmunson et al., 2007; Dew, 2008). Yet, as I will show below, financial strain can impact both negatively and positively on the spouses’ interactions; day-to-day solutions may create bonds between the couple and connect them again.

Financial issues are somewhat different than other marital issues in that they cannot easily be ignored (Papp, Cummings & Goeke-Morey, 2009). Monthly struggles to pay the bills, feed and clothe the family, and pay the doctors when somebody is sick, can increase a family’s debt and upset the balances at home. Sasa, who at the time of the interview was working as a matrimonial lawyer in Thessaloniki, described her professional experience of witnessing frequent divorces due to the effects of the crisis, namely the consequences of unemployment on marital strain.

_The divorces seem to be more frequent now and they happen when one of the partners loses their job; they don’t have a comfortable lifestyle any longer, and love jumps off the window._ [Sasa 30, Thessaloniki]

Financial problems are associated with increased levels of stress amongst spouses, decreased levels of family satisfaction, troubled feelings about breadwinning failures, and marital duress (Dew, 2011). The fact that young children create more responsibilities was mentioned by four participants who were concerned about their future capacity to support their children’s needs. Margarita, for example, the mother of a one-year-old baby, expressed her agony that in the future she might not have capacity to provide for her daughter, due to financial strains on the family resulting from her husband’s unemployment.

_When you are a mum, your priority is your baby. I used to live in my own little cloud; I’m a mother now though. When you become a mother, you see everything from a different perspective, through your child’s perspective._ [Margarita 31, Athens]

My findings suggest that of all married female participants who were facing economic difficulties also complained about the negative impact on relations with their husbands. A by-
product of financial strain can be to increase arguments between couples and to add stress to relationships.

The primary ideology about marriage remains that women should make a house a home (Sanchez & Gager, 2000), while it is the husband’s duty to provide for his family, even if his wife’s financial contribution at home is essential. Traditionally in Greece, through gender socialisation processes (Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017), women are trained to put more emphasis on caring for their families, whilst men learn that they should work hard and provide for their families (Pnevmatikos & Bardos, 2014). Drawing upon standpoint feminism, it can be explained that gender roles are socially constructed. As such, men and women are expected to ‘do gender’ (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and perform in ways which adhere to the society’s expectations of gender roles (see Kessler & McKenna, 1978). However, the current recession has profoundly shaken many of these gender norms, particularly in terms of the higher proportion of women now in paid (part-time) employment (Kalleberg, 2000; Del Boca, 2002; Booth & van Ours, 2008), who have made growing levels of financial contributions to family life in the wake of considerable male unemployment levels (Verick, 2009; Choudhry, Misbah & Signorelli, 2012; Papadopoulos, 2014).

Three single participants shared their experiences about men who could not cope with their job loss. Nefeli, for instance, believed that the latent reason for her relationship break-up with the man she had been with for over four years was his job loss, which “turned him into a totally different person”.

The reason why we broke up was because he lost his job and this changed him and his behaviour towards me enormously. He had a very nice job in terms of money and status. Nowadays the people who face the danger of unemployment are not the unqualified people, but the overqualified ones who demand more money for their good services. Anyway, his masculinity had suffered so much, that he was now feeling an incredible insecurity which was affecting all aspects of our common life. He kept a distance from me and I experienced his attitude as a rejection; I thought that I didn’t deserve such a behaviour. [Nefeli 30, Athens]

Financial issues are related to powerful emotions that can trigger conflicts between partners. As Shapiro (2007) suggests, this is because individuals connect extremely powerful meanings such as caring, security, success, and esteem. Victoria was in a short-term
relationship with a man in his early 40s, who lost his well-paid job working for a company in Athens. Since then, he had tried to pursue a similar career in companies which offered him up to 500 euros/month.

*I met a guy a while ago, quite concerned about the crisis, screwed up with his job... And then I realized that the current situation determines our personal lives, because that guy was actually a very nice person, with a good heart... He was feeling so dead as a man with no job and money, that even if we had sex for two or three times, we couldn’t carry on because he was... You understand now, a man in his 40s gets severely affected compared to a woman... And this is men’s mentality. [Victoria 37, Athens]*

Victoria described both herself and the man who she previously had developed relationship with as “two life failures put together”. Victoria’s own life working in a bank – a job that she profoundly hated and for which saw no prospects of improving – had impacted on her self-esteem and ability to find suitable partners. The man described in her narrative – a relationship which only lasted for a short time – was for her, indicative of a wider set of challenges in finding a partner who could “bring her up” and “not bring her down even further”. Although Victoria appreciated the man’s good character and struggle to stand up on his feet again, she argued that this was not enough.

In a similar vein to Victoria, Martha described how her relationship “had been tested severely”. Her well-educated 32-year-old partner lost his job with no warning and remained unemployed for over a year. This had a major impact on his family life, as his parents were financially dependent on him. At the time I interviewed Martha, her partner had managed to find a low-paid job in an Italian computer company, and he was considering moving abroad with Martha. Although Martha’s partner’s job loss had been a difficult process both for his masculinity and their interactions as a couple, she felt it had “bonded” them.

*Generally speaking, my partner is a very creative man, and exactly because he is a man, the unemployment castrated him. He was being constantly apologetic, yet our relationship’s bonds got tighter. He ended up doing several difficult jobs. In order to put him at ease, I was letting him talk about it, although he was basically reiterating himself. He didn’t want to talk to his family, because he would distress them. It’s been a phase which bonded us very much. [Martha 30, Athens]*
Martha’s description of her partner as feeling “castrated” deploys metaphorical language to explain his damage to his masculinity as a result of unemployment. Throughout the interview with Martha, she spoke about how her partner’s unemployment had increased the level of communication and empathy in their relationship, especially from his offloading about his anxieties and feelings of insecurity surrounding unemployment. These reflections on the countervailing effects of the crisis on strengthening, as opposed to weakening bonds are analytically significant and corresponded with four other cases in the sample.

One example of relationship improvement came from Antigoni who had experienced severe financial pressures. She argued that economic strains can sometimes make spouses reflect on their priorities and values, and ultimately re-evaluate their relationship per se. That process can reconnect the partners and keep the family bonded.

*We’ve been through hardships with my husband. Sadly, we’ve been through a phase where we got distanced because, as you know, stress makes you more introverted and isolates you. Gradually our relationship improved because we realized what matters and what not, what is more essential and vital; we got rid of our caprices and focused seriously on our family bonds. Now it feels like we are closer to the reality, we are more organized as a family, we communicate better, and we keep our value system intact. You can’t maintain a family otherwise.* [Antigoni 32, Athens]

Antigoni’s narrative describes how her husband’s struggles to maintain money for the family had led to a reflection on life priorities, besides those associated with finances. Rather than argue and exhibit hostility towards one another, Antigoni explained how her and her husband made a conscious effort to try and communicate better with one another, and to express their love and support to one another more frequently.

These narratives explain that financial strain brought couples closer together. However, that is not to suggest that relationships were free from adversities and continued an upward path towards improvement. Rather, they expressed continued fears about the crisis, but did their best to maintain relationships and become more resilient through repeat adversities. As Stella argues

*Since the crisis commenced, things started getting harder. I’m not going to lie to you – we have been through periods where our marriage got on the rocks. I just got tired*
guess... However, although my husband works for short periods only, I don’t know how it happens and we always make it! And whilst one moment you have 1 euro, something happens and you get another 10! Since I’ve started having a more positive attitude towards life, my relationship with my husband got significantly better. Because he is a very optimistic man and he makes me feel better. Now I know that we can make it no matter how hard it is... [Stella 30, Athens]

Exhibiting optimism as a way of coping with the turbulence of life may be one method by which couples manage and cope with the daily realities of economic uncertainty. Others had been forced to begin the new prospect of changing careers after becoming unemployed, which with it, brought new fears, but also a degree of excitement – that at least there was hope of having sufficient money to survive and pay the bills. Glafki and her partner had, for example, decided to open a bookshop in Athens after both lost their jobs. As she argued, although her disappointment and constant sense of failure to achieve a career in International Relations, her decision to run a small business with her husband and all the economic challenges with the occasionally unpredicted expenses which followed it, brought the couple closer.

Financial adversities brought us even closer. Amidst crisis, we decided to run our own bookshop as a means to survive. It is creation. You are with your other half and you create. I mean, it is hard, but at least we spend our days together and it is a solace we can share our problems. [Glafki 32, Athens]

Spending time and working through challenges together, in Glafki’s case, both in an intimate and professional form, was productive for their relationship. In the final case explaining how relations had become stronger since the crisis, Margarita referred to how her husband’s unemployment had meant she now had to take on the core role as ‘breadwinner’ as a means of survival for her family – a predicament which she argues allowed her husband to become more supportive of her. She appreciated her husband’s efforts to contribute in more practical ways (by giving her lifts in the car for example) and argued that her husband’s alternative contribution was a challenge to what the “traditional Greek society expects from us”.

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The predicaments and financial hardships brought us closer. When you are conscious of the decision you’ve made and you truly love your partner, either married or not, you have to support him by all means. It doesn’t matter if the gender roles change for a period of time; we live in an emergency and any kind of help you can offer from the position you are is important and very much appreciated. At the end of the day, you have to support and look after your partner, to put him at ease for his well-being. [Margarita 31, Athens]

In contrast to most studies which indicate a variety of negative consequences of unemployment on the quality and strain on couples’ relationships (Conger, 1994; Falconier & Epstein, 2010; Britt, Huston & Durband, 2010), these effects are not universal, with adversity, at times, improving certain aspects of relationships. My research has shown that accepting spouses’ conditions and being willing to support them might establish a trustful relationship, during which adversity may in fact encourage a greater level of reciprocity and understanding between couples. The narratives above display several examples of this, such as situations where the impact of unemployment on male partners had a major effect on their sense of masculinity and self, and which brought couples closer together via sympathy and mutual understanding of hardship. In similar ways to Wieland and Baker’s (2010) argument, it is the wife’s support and compassion that tends to resolve conflicts and strain in relationships. This is not to simply argue that the crisis creates a positive impact on couples, where no doubt major upheavals and strains are evident. Rather, as a means of coping and surviving – both emotionally and materially – couples find ways to reach out to one another and engage in mutual reciprocity of understanding.

Summary

This chapter has examined how the young middle-class Greek women in my sample negotiate love and intimacy in the general context of the crisis in Greece. I have shown that for my young female participants, intimate relationships are an important aspect of their emerging adulthood. Initially, the significant role of a fulfilling partnership has been presented. I have shown that the inability to maintain or even find a meaningful intimate relationship due to
structural pressures, such as unemployment and financial strains, has a major impact on my participants’ emotional well-being. This finding is generally consistent with much research explaining the consequences of unemployment, and wage declines, on relationship stability and quality. Economic pressure and financial strain have been linked to a wide range of negative psychological symptoms and adverse behavioural outcomes (Gudmunson et al., 2007). According to my participants, financial strain affects their husbands or male partners in a profound way, resulting to delivering anxiety and distress. Economic pressures reflect adversely on the husband’s social role and identity, and are consequently likely to reinforce most strongly his negativity in family interactions (Conger et al., 1990).

Secondly, although the main finding that the crisis has had a detrimental effect on intimate relationships, this was not universal in the data, with some important examples of where relationships had improved due to the adversity experienced. Whilst unsurprising in a country such as Greece undergoing considerable social upheaval, one distinctive aspect which emerged from the data was the ways that couples can use their disagreements to encourage greater understanding and solidarity in their relationships, a finding similar to Jenkins et al.’s (2002). Examples of couples’ communication skills improving as a result of unemployment, empathy, and resilience to withstand adversity and maintain their love and support to one another were all expressed. These points should, however, be caveated in that they concerned only a small number of cases (n=4), and were usually apparent in cases of long-term married or unmarried couples. The investment in, and commitment to, long-standing partners therefore informs us that these were important properties underpinning the select few cases where relationships were strengthened because of the crisis.

Thirdly, the research has shown that the effects of the current instability on the intimate relationships provide most of my participants with the ability to speak from their own unique standpoints, (see Haraway, 1988), question, and challenge their gender expectations. My participants, as narrators of their own life experiences and credible producers of knowledge (Harding, 1986), renegotiate their own role as caring mothers and wives who, in many instances, provide financially more than men. More recent literature suggests that women and men no longer divide breadwinning and homemaking according to a strict gender division of labour (Sanchez & Gager, 2000). However, my research has shown that despite the argument that gender roles have changed (see Desmarais & Lerner, 1994;
Gager & Marini, 1996), role expectations still follow traditional ideas of what a husband and wife are supposed to do.

Fourthly, the data have shown that the participants present men as responsible for the ways they confront structural hardships, such as unemployment, and the consequential impact the latter has on their (in)ability to pursue women. This was found more commonly among the younger women in the sample who were either not in current relationships, or had been involved in more fleeting, casual ties with men. These narratives which explained men’s ‘character deficits’, rather than structural sources of discontent, were used as a critique for why the young women could not find or sustain quality ties with intimate male partners. The latter created feelings of stress and uncertainty in a stage of their life course already characterised by turbulence and instability. Examples of the crisis having affected men’s confidence and overall masculinities all have plausibility as factors underpinning the effects of unemployment (Verick, 2009; Dew, 2011), yet the language of male deficit was common in the narratives of the women. The broader ways through which neo-liberal contexts can individualise complex structural problems as ‘personal deficit’ and ‘bad character’ (e.g. Skeggs, 2000; Pimlott-Wilson, 2015) inform us that young women explain their sources of (relationship) discontent, with potentially damaging and misleading results if these judgments are used to condemn men for their failures to find work etc.
Chapter 7

Discussion and Conclusion

This study has focused upon middle-class Greek women aged in their 20s and 30s, examining how they have experienced ‘emerging adulthood’ amidst the post-2008 social and economic crisis. Through the narratives of these young Greek women, I have assessed how they have negotiated adulthood in Greece, and how they have interpreted what ‘independence’ and ‘adulthood’ mean within these major upheavals to their lives in the wake of the crisis. The open-ended interviews gave my participants the opportunity to lead the research through their own self-definitions and language, paying homage to the theoretical perspectives of symbolic interactionism and standpoint feminism. Amongst the upheavals symptomatic of the crisis have been considerable cuts to jobs and wages, resulting in a higher likelihood of young people living at home for extended periods beyond those characterised as ‘typical’ in most Northern European societies. Within such conditions of low wages, job insecurity, lack of personal space, and limited prospects of improvement in these conditions for most people, I have charted how exactly emerging adulthood has been shaped by these socio-economic contexts, focusing on the core themes of work, family and intimacy.

Compared to the large number of studies exploring emerging adulthood in Anglophone societies, I have argued from the outset of the need for a greater diversity of studies to help support or challenge many of the assumptions laden within these geo-political regions. Theorists like Heinz and Marshall (2003) and Reitzle (2006) have argued that emerging adulthood depends on the cultural contexts and social institutions that young people encounter. The transition to adulthood is not merely biological, but rather cultural, social, as well as psychological, and different societies may have quite different criteria for the definition of a successful transition into adulthood. What happens in nations like the USA or UK is important for the development of conceptual and theoretical approaches, however questions remain about the degree to which the usual ‘markers of adulthood’ are necessarily universal across nations. Features that are part of emerging adulthood in one culture may not apply to other cultures (Arnett, 2011). Several dimensions of these markers of adulthood are
important to mention for young people – having a job, acquiring accommodation, establishing stable romantic relations and forming families are among the most significant. Yet in Greece, these markers of adulthood have been considerably curtailed. This has largely been because of the crisis which has a more evident impact on many social groups including young people (Aasve, Cottini & Vitali, 2013). Yet the effects of the crisis also mix with a combination of cultural traditions which place social expectations on certain groups – young women being one major group examined in this study. Life-course opportunities, constraints, and pathway decisions can be affected by both structural and cultural settings (Elder & Shanahan, 2006). Despite some social changes to gender autonomy, Greece remains a society which is still principally patriarchal (Karakatsanis, 2001; Woestman, 2010). Young women are still expected to carry out care work for sick or elderly parents, usually are required to marry before leaving the family home, and face major restrictions in achieving careers.

Arguably, Mediterranean societies share some commonalities to each other in young individuals’ transition to adulthood (Iacovou, 2002; Vogel, 2002). As such, late parental home leaving, high unemployment rates, and low wages especially for young women are common characteristics. Furthermore, in Mediterranean countries features such as high youth unemployment and lack of welfare State benefits are infused with cultural factors such as clientelism in the political arena (Gal, 2010), and strong family values which offer some means of support for young people in the absence of any welfare State support (Inguglia et al., 2016). However similar, this study argues that the Greek case is not identical to other Southern European examples (for example, Piumatti et al., 2016). As I have shown, Greece shares many values with the Westernized world, with a major effect on developmental features of emerging adulthood (Mastrotheodoros & Motti-Stefanidi, 2017). I have presented the unique attributes of Greek society with strong family bonds and the general influence of Greek family on the emerging adults’ lives, together with continued restrictions on providing care work and not leaving home until marriage, persisting even in contemporary times. Yet conversely, the participants in this study consider individualistic criteria, such as accepting responsibility for their own actions, independent decision making, and establishing equal relationships with partners as important markers of a successful transition to adulthood.

The findings of this study challenge the Anglo-American conceptualisation of ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnett & Padilla-Walker, 2015; Wangqvist & Frisen, 2015). Not surprisingly, financial independence was not argued to be a necessary criterion for a
successful transition to adulthood amongst my participants, reflecting the realistic financial hardships they are confronted with and their inability to ‘stand on their own feet’ without their parents’ material support. This finding is different not only to other Western countries, such as the USA (Arnett, 2003) and Denmark (Arnett & Padilla-Walker, 2015), but also to Petrogiannis’s (2011) findings on Greek students’ conceptions of the transition to adulthood, where Greek young adults consider financial independence to be an important criterion for adulthood development. Here it is important to note that Petrogiannis’s study was published in 2011 (and conducted around 2008-2009), a time where the effects of the crisis were still in comparative infancy. For example, in the time between Petrogiannis’s research and my study which was conducted in the summer of 2015, three different Memorandums of Agreement (bailout packages) were signed by three different prime ministers. As I explained in chapter 2, the first Memorandum was signed in May 2010, whilst at the time I was conducting my study, the third Memorandum had already been signed, imposing austerity policies with major effects on wages for young people, cuts in social needs, and a general decline in the population’s standards of living. Therefore, it is not surprising that Petrogiannis’s participants whose lives had not yet been affected by the cumulative austerity measures to the same extent that my participants’ lives did, considered financial independence from parents important for a successful transition into adulthood. On the contrary, the young women in this study, having experienced a deterioration of their financial state as well as emotional resilience, were not in the position to define adulthood in terms of financial autonomy and independence from parents.

Whilst individualistic criteria for a successful transition to adulthood, such as accepting responsibility for your own actions, or making independent decisions are common in many Anglophone studies (Arnett, 1998; Williams & Guest, 2005; Wangqvist & Frisen, 2015), the women in this study consider emotional bonds with parents as an important attribute of adulthood development. This emphasis on collectivism is what makes my Greek participants different to the rest of the Westernized world. Being an adult woman in Greece does not exclude close relationships with immediate family, but rather the establishment of equal and respectful relationships with them. My participants’ views reflected a society where young women embrace individualism, whilst also valuing collectivism and strong ties with family. The Greek family is even more integral to the support of young women in the absence of a welfare State (Michael-Matsas, 2010a; Christodoulou & Christodoulou, 2013; Dafermos,
2013). My participants’ experiences also involve the continued importance placed on caring responsibilities towards older (and sometimes younger) family members. Similar to Petrogiannis’s (2011) as well as Leontopoulou et al.’s (2016) findings, the participants in my study did not challenge family values associated with caring roles, but rather showed a general acceptance of Greek cultural expectations for young women to look after their parents.

Another important finding of this study is the ways that my participants placed comparatively less emphasis on markers of adulthood such as chronological age, as well as other transition events, such as finishing education, and forming one’s own family. The downplaying of age milestones and biological features as criteria for adulthood is not surprising, taking into account the fact that the definition of youth has been extended halfway into the fourth decade of life in Greece (Iacovou, 2002). The findings of this study partially agree with Arnett et al.’s (2014) argument that only after the age of 30 do young people feel that they have fully achieved adulthood. Although reaching 30 was mentioned as an ideological transition where norms about life goals such as getting married and leaving home were still held as important, the broad success in achieving these goals was, moreover, limited by the consequences of the crisis. Therefore, the young women’s inability to pursue lifestyle trajectories independent from family support made them feel more uncertain and insecure about their future and identity as autonomous adult individuals.

My approach to exploring emerging adulthood also focuses on a group who are often ignored – educated, middle-class young women from Greece. The young, middle classes are usually able to weather the storm of economic crises more smoothly than most other groups, namely the working classes (Birdsall, Graham & Pettinato, 2000; Russell & O’Connell, 2001; Ravallion, 2009; Danziger & Ratner, 2010; Silva, 2013; Tsekeris, Kaberis & Pinguli, 2015). Although disparities by class still exist in Greece as a result of the crisis, one major consequence has been that both the middle and working classes have been hit hardest (although not necessarily equally). This is due to the structural unravelling of the Greek State, leading to a major reduction in medium-high skilled employment which would normally be reserved for those young people exiting university with degrees. It has been widely reported that in such conditions, a large number of young Greeks have left the country to begin lives in Northern Europe and elsewhere (Labrianidis & Vogiatzis, 2013; Labrianidis, 2014). My study
therefore contends with these blocked opportunity structures, explaining how the combination of being young, woman, and middle class affects emerging adulthood.

**Key contributions of the study – Summary of key themes**

Chapter 2 provided a conceptual and theoretical framework for examining emerging adulthood. After initially researching the literature to assess key life events and pathways, I decided on the formation of the framework based around the themes of work-education, families, and intimate relationships. Here I argued that despite the important developments of research on emerging adulthood, several gaps remain; a limited analytic dissection of gender, and scarce examination of cross-cultural alternatives to the majoritarian Anglophone literature. Here I provided an analytic assessment of the possible differences in the lives of young women in their transitions to adulthood, focusing on the case of Greece and the crisis as an important angle through which to interrogate how the structural conditions of this nation in transition play out in terms of restricting or enabling life transitions in areas such as family, intimacy, work, and education.

In chapter 3 I established the case for a methodological approach which placed importance on women’s voices as central to the study. I argued for the need for combining some of the original emphases in symbolic interactionism on unpacking the lived experiences of the crisis from the perspective of young women – the latter where I drew closely on standpoint feminism as a lens through which to situate my participants’ narratives. I argued furthermore for the use of open-ended interviews guided by the interviewee, limiting structure as far as possible, and inviting the participant to develop their own narratives. Despite some initial uncertainty about the effectiveness of this methodological approach, this in the end proved to be a significant contribution to my project, where the participants spoke in highly detailed forms about their emerging adulthood. As a researcher, I was reduced largely to steering these conversations, with minimal input, and overall with adherence to the principles of feminist methodological standpoints.

As I mentioned in chapter 3, I found the praxis of self-reflection helpful in the research process, as it bridged differences between me as a researcher and my respondents. And although the distinction between my role as a Greek woman with similar experiences and a researcher was not clear-cut, distance and experiences from life abroad aided me to better
understand my participants’ feelings and meanings and critically analyse their accounts; by the end of the writing process, the fluidity in my insider/outsider status was not as strong. This research helped me rediscover what I already knew about the Greek State’s incapability of supporting adequately its young people, as well as ‘using’ them productively for the benefit and progress of the whole country. This research also reminded me of young Greek women’s endless ways of putting up with adversities, by using their humour and sarcasm which I hope that I have translated in ways that did not devalue their unique character.

Looking back into the research I conducted in the summer of 2015, I remember those women who very kindly gave their time to share with me, somebody who seemed to understand them, their inner thoughts and feelings about an ongoing deterioration which did not show any signs of improvement. Those women were smart and pleasant, and under different socioeconomic conditions, they could have the potential to thrive and fulfil their dreams and aspirations. In the process of doing the research, there were times I, as a researcher and/or a ‘native’ of my own culture, had moments of frustration, disappointment, and pessimism about the situation in Greece, while I was feeling deeply sorry for the injustice and impasses my participants were experiencing. This research was, at times, an unpleasant trauma for me, yet I tried not to fall into my vulnerability, but rather let my participants ‘produce their own knowledge’ (Lindsey, 2015), and show up their unique standpoints, values, and experiences.

In chapter 4 I examined the importance of education and work for young women during emerging adulthood. As I have shown, both education and employment are of pivotal importance for young women’s social status and class. Higher education, comprising degree and postgraduate qualifications, is one traditional method used by middle class women to gain social status and advancement through job opportunities. Due to a reduction in supply of labour market opportunities in medium-high skilled work (Russell & O’Connell, 2001; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Tsekeris, Kaberis & Pinguli, 2015), most of my sample had not benefited in terms of job prospects by having a degree/s. Despite this, several participants still continued further studies as a means of ‘keeping busy’, and with the hope that one day the conditions of Greece will change. Ten years on from the crisis these improvements in labour opportunities have not occurred.

The second half of chapter 4 then examined those of my sample who were either currently, or had been previously, employed. Unsurprisingly, given the context of the
economic turmoil in Greece, the majority described working in negative conditions, amongst them poor pay, unfair and exploitative treatment by management, and often long hours with few added benefits or security. For young women, these conditions had a profoundly negative impact on their personal well-being. Their testimonies were many times a cry for help trying to come into terms with the impasse they were experiencing in a bleak labour market which was exploiting and rejecting them. On many occasions, my participants’ narratives were marked by a common acceptance of their plights, where just having a job was rated as fortuitous, and where a resignation to coping and ‘putting up with’ these conditions regarded as the only source of survival.

Following the themes of education and work, during chapter 5 I have examined how women in my sample experience and negotiate on a day-to-day basis their relationships with their parents as they transition into adulthood. I have shown that the current crisis and the total absence of the welfare State has brought family members closer, although tight family bonds have traditionally been an important trait of the Greek family model. These relationships are usually positive, as they work as a secure safety net, as an important helping hand at times of financial strain, and emotional insecurity and fear. At the same time though, this very solidarity can put emotional strain on young women who feel that their sense of autonomy and independence is restricted by their mothers’ control especially. Here I have shown the importance of the gender dimension in family relationships, as not only daughters seek emotional support and advice from their mothers, but also mothers rely significantly upon their daughters, especially when their husband/partner is absent.

Finally, during chapter 6 I have examined how young women in Greece negotiate love and intimacy under conditions of financial hardships and a general context of uncertainties and insecurities. Initially I showed the important role that a caring and committed partner plays for the transition to adulthood of both my coupled and non-coupled participants. A fulfilling partner is important for them in the ways they understand their lives and social roles in a society which, as I have shown, still pays attention to established partnerships and marriage for the recognition of somebody’s adult status. Women’s anxiety increases due to their felt pressure to accomplish their gender role and become mothers by the age of 30 on the one hand, and their perceived reluctance from men to adhere to traditional flirting rituals and pursue them, on the other.
Developing the core themes of the study

In order to highlight key contributions of this study, I outline each of these with reference to conceptual research themes. These comprise education and work, families, and intimacy. Each theme is assessed in relation to the empirical findings of this study and linked with sociological research in each of these areas, which are explained largely through the concept of transitions to adulthood.

Education – work

I have discussed the significance of education and work for young women’s transition to adulthood. As I have shown, both education and work are important components of their journey towards the adult status, enabling or restricting them from positioning themselves in society and working out their social and gender roles. Danziger and Ratner (2010) argue that a young adult’s ability to achieve success in the labour market by working steadily and becoming economically self-sufficient is the key marker of the transition to adulthood. In studies outside of Greece (Russell & O’Connell, 2001; Biletta & Eisner, 2007; Vosko, MacDonald & Campbell, 2009; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Choudhry et al., 2012) it has been explained that both education and work have profound impacts on future prospects for young people to establish a status of independence from parents, as well as question their gender role. My study contended with the question of how my participants see their futures in a society which offers few opportunities to pursue a successful career, and indeed their gender impact on those experiences. As I have shown, the Greek context does not provide young women with the opportunity with which education and work could offer them a means of assessing their sense of independence from parents, and indeed the ability to question the role that gender plays in these trajectories.

The majority of Anglophone research literature argues that higher education is likely to improve career prospects and lead to better earning potential (e.g. Woolbers, 2000; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011). Yet, as I have discussed, in Greece, the financial crisis and the subsequent radical socioeconomic transformations have disassociated higher education and work opportunities in complex ways (Russell & O’Connell, 2001; Livanos, 2010). Despite my participants’ efforts to gain academic credentials, they all recognized that personal drive and
devotion were not enough for the pursuit of a career in Greece. I have shown that personal networks in Greece are either key barriers or key facilitators in accessing work. Personal associations were sometimes the only way to access a job, regardless of whether or not my participants invested time in high level qualifications. This raises the question of why young women kept investing in high education studies, despite knowing that the labour market conditions would largely be unfavourable to their chances of secure and well-paid employment, especially in medium-high skilled jobs (see Papadakis, 2013).

Unlike young adults in the Anglophone context who tend to pursue education as a means to either maintain their jobs or achieve a more successful career (Heath & Cleaver, 2003; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006), my participants, being conscious of the incompatibility between career and education in the Greek labour market (Patrinos, 1997; Livanos, 2010), situated education as an ongoing pursuit for knowledge, and not necessarily as a means to gain highly prestigious careers. As has already been suggested, lifelong learning is encouraged as a policy by Western European countries in a constantly changing global economy (Edwards, Ranson & Strain, 2002; Biesta, 2006). My participants’ advanced education was a response and a way of coping with the uncertainties of the current times, as well as a means to cope productively with the bleak reality of unemployment and/or precarious working environment.

One of the key features of the interviews was the ways that middle-class professions which demand higher qualification, such as teaching, law, and medical practice, have been severely hit by the current financial crisis (Eurostat, 2012). The Greek crisis has impacted heavily across various social groupings, with middle classes being the most notable one. The Greek middle classes are now experiencing an extensive subjective and social suffering (Tsekeris, Kaberis & Pinguli, 2015). In the introduction, I posed the question of how negative working conditions can impact on the perceived status position of those women. My participants who belong to the so-called middle class of Greek society, were experiencing feelings of hopelessness, difficulties in planning for the future, and ontological insecurity, as they realise that they are targeting to a labour market which does not allow them to accomplish their human potential. As discussed in chapter 2, unemployment and a general uncertainty about future perspectives increase symptoms of anxiety and depression (Power et al., 2015).
The women in this study had experienced several incidents of precariousness and toxic working conditions. Their employers were exploiting them in various ways, for instance by depriving them of their annual holiday leave, their health insurance, their overtime and bonuses, whilst they kept asking for an extended working pattern without intending to compensate them. What was making their working experience even harder was their employers’ lack of respect, appreciation, and understanding for what they were going through. So, how do these work conditions impact on my participants’ emotional resolve and well-being? Working conditions, as described above, had the most negative impact on their self-esteem and well-being. I presented relevant recent research on the impact of economic recessions on young people’s mental health which witnesses how emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 30 years are particularly vulnerable as a social group due to their insecure future and the lack of career prospects (Giotsa & Mitrogiorgou, 2014). The negative consequences of the neo-liberal restructuring of the economy on the middle-class professions are not a unique phenomenon in Greece (Russell & O’Connell, 2001; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011), yet in Greece it has more extreme dimensions both in terms of wage cuts and length of working hours (Eurostat, 2012; Kretsos, 2013; Featherstone, 2014).

Families

Parents play a primary role in providing material and emotional support for young people during their emerging adulthood. Several authors have argued, in nations such as the UK and USA, that significant cuts to the welfare State, together with more insecure employment for young people, has resulted in greater reliance on parents for support (Fuligni & Pendersen, 2002; LaHelma & Gordon, 2008; Furstenberg, 2010). Young people are also more likely to live with parents into their mid-20s, because of the high costs of living, and lack of ability to attain sufficient wages to live independently (Bagnall, 2005; Leccardi & Ruspini, 2006; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). In many respects, the Greek case has many overlaps with these contexts.

More than half of the women in my study cohabit with their parents, mostly as a result of financial deficits limiting their capacity to live independently in their own homes. Whilst partly attributable to the crisis in Greece, I have further argued that the ‘decision’ to live with parents is also partly due to the cultural expectations of young women who have a long
history of living in close proximity to their mothers. In Greece, it is common in many households to have three generations of family members living together – from grandparents, to parents, to children. These conditions can often result in young women taking on roles of emotional support and assistance with domestic tasks such as caring, and household chores for both parents and grandparents.

I have argued that these conditions of care work and emotional labour in the home, whilst offering some benefits to young women, also place burdens on their transitions to adulthood. My data indicate that prolonged contact with family members creates major stress and strain on young women, as well as creating tensions with family members. The lack of personal space and privacy in the home also restricts these young women’s sense of freedom, autonomy, and well-being. I have also argued that there is a strong gendered dimension to the conflictual at times relationships between daughters and mothers, supporting a corpus of literature focusing on daughter-mother relationships (Fischer, 1981; Rastogi, 2002; Penington, 2004; Wall & Gouveia, 2014; Shenaar-Golan & Walter, 2015).

This study posed the question of how my participants defined their adult status and independence when the key markers of adulthood, such as a stable job, financial independence, and leaving home have not been achieved. As has been explained, financial (especially) support can put my participants’ identity as ‘adults’ at unease. Studies suggest that whilst financial independence and family formation still constitute the main attributes of adulthood for the working classes, middle-class young women and men define it in terms of independence and personal development (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998; Maguire, Ball & Macrae, 2001). Also, as has been suggested (Iacovou, 2002), receiving material support from parents is common in Greece more than in other countries. However, I explained that although receiving support is frequent in Greece, it still requires moral justification from my participants, as they experience it as a threat to what they perceived to be ‘independence’.

Therefore, how did the young women define independence when they are still financially and emotionally dependent on their parents? My participants provided a new definition of independence, based not on economic criteria and their ability to maintain their own households, but on their ability to make independent decisions. This definition of independence relates to Arnett’s (1998; 2000; 2004) argument that young Americans make a successful transition to adulthood when they take responsibility for their own decisions. Therefore, the criterion of becoming an independent adult is not necessarily becoming
financially autonomous and/or leaving the parental home; it is rather understood in terms of emotional and psychological criteria. Economic independence and privacy are desired and are recognised as important components for somebody’s sense of independence; however, as in many cases it has been impossible to attain either, my participants defined their experience of independence in their own ways.

The link between leaving home and becoming independent is neither clear-cut nor direct. Living arrangements and privacy do not necessarily connote independence and a straightforward attainment of adult status (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005; Aasve et al., 2007). Rather, those amongst my participants who have managed to move to their own home have maintained strong ties with their parents for emotional, material, and/or practical reasons. Furthermore, I have argued that it is more useful to see young women’s transition to adulthood linked to ‘inter-dependencies’, an intergenerational solidarity which is usually the only option that daughters and their parents (mothers particularly) have for both emotional and practical support. The latter echoes what both Rastogi (2002) and Douglass (2005) suggested about mother-daughter relationships, that is the advice and help-seeking in emotional and practical issues by both sides. This intergenerational solidarity and mutual caring and love is not challenged, but is rather a main feature of the collective nature of the Greek family, and a matter of constant negotiation amongst family members. Along with the significance of family relationships, the formation of intimate relations is another important component of emerging adulthood. As in the case of attaining financial and emotional independence from parents, intimate relationships and dating practices have been reshaped by the context of the current crisis, which has been responsible for affecting women’s capacities to feel and act as ‘proper’ adults.

**Intimacy**

The focus on intimate relations was positioned around the question of how intimate relations are created and sustained within the context of the crisis. The current social and financial insecurities have disheartened young women and limited their chances to socialise and find a romantic partner. Factors such as insecure and short-term work, in conjunction with long working hours have placed restrictions on the capacities of young women to find a meaningful
romantic partner, with the latter having a major effect on their lives, as emotional loneliness tends to increase individuals’ anxiety levels (Woestman, 2010; 2012; Drydakis, 2015; Christodoulou et al., 2016). Indeed, women’s unemployment or precarious employment, severe lack of finances, living arrangements that restrict their privacy and sense of independence deprive them of the emotional stability, warmth, and practical assistance they would normally get from a romantic partner (Henderson et al., 2013).

Following previous critiques that have criticised Giddens (Jamieson, 1999; Arber, Davidson & Ginn, 2003; Elming et al., 2016), I have likewise challenged both Giddens (1992) and Beck (1994) who have tried to explain how contemporary social, economic, and technological transformations have had a major impact on romantic relationships. They argue that women’s entrance into the labour market has emancipated women from men, leading to changes in the traditions of romantic ties. This process eventually transformed personal relationships and the traditional nuclear family model into a different family life, where people have more agency and do not have to adhere to gender roles the way they did in past years. I have criticized the work of Beck and Giddens for its absence of any recognition of issues of class and other structural disadvantages in women’s lives. Far from ‘emancipated’ by work, the women in this study were chained by work, without any heavily restricted chances of finding a stable partner, as a result of short-term, low paid, and poor working conditions.

My findings also challenge Maratou-Alipranti’s (1999) work which suggested that in Greece the family structure is more relaxed to what has been known so far, and therefore young people tend to cohabit more easily than in the past. Despite some relaxation of traditional norms towards marriage in Greece, cultural norms still maintain the view that marriage is an important rite of passage into adulthood (Papataxiarchis, 2012). The strong presence of the Greek Orthodox Church plays an important role. As most of my participants have declared, their departure from their parents’ home would happen as soon as they form their own family. Therefore, a significant intimate partner plays the key role for their successful transition to adulthood.

My findings support certain aspects of these changes, namely the continued presence of the masculine breadwinner role and the homemaking female role (Clark & Chrisman, 1994; Desmarais & Lerner, 1994; Gager & Marini, 1996; Sanchez & Gager, 2000; Del Boca, 2002; Booth & van Ours, 2008). The increasing needs in everyday family lives, as well as the cuts in
wages or unemployment by the male members of Greek families, rendered women’s financial contribution vital (Kretsos, 2013; Papadopoulos, 2014). This very active contribution to the family finances and participation in the labour market, however underpaid, has shaken the traditional approach to the gender roles and calls for an alternative understanding.

With respect to the question of how the conditions of the crisis resulted in renegotiation of relationships and gender expectations, my findings demonstrate insights into young Greek women’s perspectives on male behaviour, and assumptions of masculine performances towards dating rituals. One finding was that men were alleged to have stopped flirting with women, which was attributed to the crisis, low energy levels, and a general despondency created by unemployment and lack of finances. Whilst this finding is difficult to fully validate without investigating through the viewpoints of men themselves, the perceptions of women are nonetheless significant. That men have allegedly stopped flirting reflects on the one hand a frustration with men through their failure to enact a traditional masculine performance in relationships – the romantic idea of the man chasing the woman for example was certainly a viewpoint held by most of the sample. This finding is consistent with research on dating preferences among women (Puts, 2006). Yet, why young women held such views about the need for men to perform ‘traditional’ masculine role performances could demonstrate several issues. One is the sense of loss of traditional Greek values and associations with the parent culture where it was assumed to be more common for men to initiate dating (Bird, 1996). Greece still remains a society heavily influenced by masculine values of the Balkans in the North, and the traditional familial roles of the male breadwinner from the Mediterranean (Trifiletti, 1999; Ateljevic & Hall, 2007). Therefore, the perspectives of my participants may well reflect these same values, and disappointment with their disappearance. The way young women are situated in Greek society is crucial to how they understand and interpret their own experiences and status of being. Another view is that young women perceive these masculine performances as part of the reciprocity of dating – that men are not playing their part of the game, thereby leading to frustrations and disappointments. This is not so much to suggest that the women are seeking to proclaim the importance of men performing traditional masculinities, but rather to argue that women see it as a necessary part of dating rituals which give them agency to engage in such processes. Women constantly assess men for their gender performances (see West & Zimmerman, 1987), based on what they have been taught about the society’s expectations of what is
masculine and what is feminine. Without this involvement in such dating rituals, the women not only miss out on this important mode of interaction and pleasure; they are also called to renegotiate their gender roles, as well as how to perform ‘natural attitude’ (see Kessler & McKenna, 1978).

Reappraising Emerging Adulthood

During chapter 2 I presented Côté’s thesis of the ‘arrested adulthood’ that mass consumerism has impeded traditional pathways from adolescence into adulthood, resulting in an egocentrism and a dismissal of traditional markers of adulthood such as marriage. Yet, as I have argued, Côté’s thesis is problematic, as it derives from a North American context, excluding societies which still prioritise and value traditional markers of adulthood like marriage. In the present thesis, I have stressed the key role of marriage for a woman, as a rite of passage to adulthood, meeting the aspirations and expectations of the Greek society to accomplish her role as a wife and a mother by the age of 30.

Like Côté, Arnett suggested that young people are now more likely to delay their marriage, as in order to get more prestigious jobs, they should extend their period of studies. Again, I have shown that this is more likely to happen within a highly industrialised/technological or post-industrial environment where high education levels are required. As discussed, there are significant differences amongst countries in terms of risks of unemployment. Like Leccardi (2006) suggested, the young middle classes have now less control of their own financial destinies regardless of their hard efforts. No matter how hard the women of this study tried to achieve careers and incomes that could provide them with stability and security, increased socioeconomic instabilities prevent them from proceeding to long lasting commitments and stable relationships (Russell & O’Connell, 2001; Bell & Blanchflower, 2011; Kretsos, 2013).

Therefore, compared to Arnett’s developmental theory (2004), my participants’ feelings and experiences of instability were not the outcome of explorations of different career options and romantic relationships, but rather the outcome of the structural difficulties in post-crisis Greece. My participants were not feeling unstable due to a quasi-experimental attitude towards their lives and an array of options offered to them, but rather
because they had reduced options to what they had expected. This finding is consistent with a large body of developmental research which explains how a socioeconomic recession can impact on emerging adults’ identities and life choices (e.g. Domagala-Krecioch & Majerek, 2013; Côté, 2014; Piumatti et al., 2014; Di Blassi et al., 2016). Arnett’s theory of lengthy explorations of identity and optimism about the future needs re-consideration in light of my participants’ experiences. The worsening of the current economic state of Greece does not allow to present a positive image of the way my participants grow up, as it is creating a sense of failure to achieve their ambitions, however hard they try.

In general terms, my thesis also highlights several important points to research on ‘emerging adulthood’ concerning women’s experience. My thesis has focused on middle class young women – a group who have not been studied comprehensively within the transitions to adulthood literature. Through the context of Greek society, I have challenged many of the common assumptions about the ways that gender and class operate within the midst of a vastly disruptive structural context of high unemployment, low wages, and the impact these processes have had on the everyday lives of my participants. Unlike Silva (2013), I disagree that experiences of ‘emerging adulthood’ are distinctly class-based. Rather, through my data on young middle-class women – a group who typically are able to utilise their cultural and social capital to gain advantage (Bourdieu, 1984) – I have shown that, as a group, they have generally been disadvantaged by the crisis compared to where we might expect them to be, both materially and emotionally. This is because of the structural effects of the crisis impacting to social extremes not witnessed in most other Western nation States. As a case study, Greece informs us that the structural effects of the crisis are profound, with the effects transcending class position. The transmission of cultural capital via parents as a means of gaining social advantage in education and work (Brooks, 2008) is, at best, partially effective in Greece. Whilst not ignoring that parents do offer these young women important social and emotional support, including provision of cultural capital, the Greek State limits what can be achieved through these. Therefore, positive outcomes traditionally garnered by cultural capital depend heavily on the labour market conditions of a given society, together with the wider economic conditions. In Greece, there are fewer possible opportunities to gain advantage from cultural capital where few jobs exist, where pay levels are among the lowest in Europe, and where high-medium skilled jobs have been drastically cut (Tsekeris et al., 2015; Molokotos-Liederman, 2016). Yet, cultural capital appears to have been re-worked in Greece,
with parents now willing to invest even more in their children, despite limited financial resources in some cases. This investment has involved sending their children abroad to study or seek employment – colloquially known as the ‘brain drain’ (Labrianidis, 2011; Mylonas, 2011). Therefore, whilst my study has focused only on the young women who had stayed in Greece, the argument that middle-class families are now looking beyond Greece for middle-class advantage for their children is an important social feature for scholars to examine in more detail (Dalla, Chatzoudes & Karasavvoglou, 2013; Labrianidis, 2014).

**Broken Hopes and Dreams: The Crisis as ‘Amor Fati’**

My data also demonstrates that within the midst of these significant social uncertainties, most of the young women were downtrodden by the repeated economic and political ‘shocks’ to the social structure, and ultimately their own private lives. Several authors have pointed to the effect which repeated experiences of personal injustice and social strain (e.g. long-term unemployment) have on aspiration and well-being (e.g. Feather, 2012; Thern *et al.*, 2017). Rather than angry and frustrated with their lack of work and ability to gain materially from their education (e.g. Chalari, 2012), the women in my sample were mostly resigned to their plight – having a job was better than no job, however badly paid and treated by employers. It is difficult to ascertain whether or not these attitudes are due to the women having formed a post-hoc view to allow them to cope with their plights, or a genuine feeling of frustration and hopelessness. Formed in the context of the previously mentioned economic crisis in Greece, it is further possible that now seven years into the crisis (2008 to the time of fieldwork in 2015) the young women in the sample had begun to reconfigure their life goals and aspirations, especially for those ‘choosing’ to stay in Greece (Di Blasi *et al*., 2016; Leontopoulou, Mavridis & Giotsa, 2016).

This resignation – that for example earning five euros per hour is better than no wage – is a direct result of an economic situation which is increasingly precarious, especially for young people in Greece. This outcome parallels what Bourdieu (1984) has called *amor fati* (*moirolatria* in Greek) – an accepted state of one’s life events with few alternatives and hopes of positive change. Whilst not to deny any sense of agency for these young women (some could rightly find work by leaving the country, or through the fortune of finding a new contact
in Greece), the fact that they were more fearful of their lives getting worse than getting better is highly significant. My participants chose to adapt themselves to a resilient behaviour which would allow them to cope in a country which deprives them of any institutional support (see Moreno, 2012).

This ‘vertigo-like’ feeling, as opposed to an aspiration or hope for change in Greece, is also widely reflected in more recent research. Di Blasi et al. (2016), whose research on emerging adulthood focuses on Italian college students, argue that the economic recession, as a state of uncertainty and precariousness, has created a sense of failed life-course trajectories, whilst it has strongly undermined the motivation and any pursuit of personal fulfilment. Moreover, these findings are consistent with other studies (Gutman & Schoon, 2012; Côté, 2014) which explain that continued difficulties and disappointments about social structural obstacles and lack of opportunities lead to feelings of resignation. Di Blasi et al. (2016) make an interesting argument, suggesting that instead of fighting against the adversities, young people tend to endorse both resilient and adaptive attitudes to avoid feelings of defeat and failure. Silva (2013) explained that her working class young participants tended to harden themselves against social institutions and the American government which troubled their coming of age journeys, not by fighting against them, but rather by embracing neoliberalism. Similarly, my participants’ response to the current crisis that undermined severely their efforts and motivation is a strive to adaptation and resilience to this new socioeconomic era which constantly betrays and wounds them.

What is suggested then is that poor expectation about the future tends to undermine agency, affecting severely young women who enter the workforce for the first time. This weakening of agency is likely to result in a high risk of social exclusion as well as challenges in identity development (Johnson, Sage & Mortimer, 2012). Thinking about why the young women held this feeling of vertigo, it is likely that this may be explained by repeated experiences of dashed hopes where politicians, like Tsipras, but also before that, Papandreou (both ‘socialists’ who promised change) in effect led to even deeper destruction of Greek society and its citizens’ hopes. Or, as has been suggested by others (Arnett, Zukauskiene & Sugimura, 2014), lack of opportunities and the repeated disappointments have drained young people’s energies. It is this accumulated disappointment in politicians and the State more generally which explains the vertigo of the young women in this study – their sense of
witnessing their material lives get repeatedly worse over time, and not wanting this to continue any further.

**Limitations and areas for future research**

I am acutely aware of the need to be cautious with the ways of measuring what ‘emerging adulthood’ means in my study. My study is cross sectional and therefore unable to assess how actual transitions may change over time. Instead, I have used a retrospective method, asking my sample of young women to recall their experiences from recent periods in their life up to their current stage.

I am further aware of the need to be cautious over the markers and definitions of what emerging adulthood means. I purposefully adopted an open-ended symbolic interactionist and feminist-inspired methodological approach which limited the setting of agendas and boundaries to restrict the interviewees’ own sense of what their emerging adulthood comprised of. With this, I was sensitive to consider the meanings of my participants, and not a pre-set script of markers of adulthood. There was remarkable consistency in what their markers were across the interviews, despite not prompting or steering the discussions towards these. Yet, despite this, I do not make any claims that my markers of adulthood acquired through my participants’ narratives are necessarily definitive or exhaustive.

Finally, I further note that the sample was developed largely through my own personal networks akin to a snowball sample. Having originally started with the ambition of recruiting from neutral settings such as community centres, I was met with restricted access and take-up of participants. I therefore note that generalising from my sample as representative of all young, educated women in Greece is certainly difficult within the confines of this study. I have however sought to pave the way for future studies to extend my findings through alternative sample designs, and with groups such as those who are male, from ethnic minorities, working class backgrounds, and with different sexual orientations – all of whom may have very different experiences in their transitions to adulthood.

From the outset, I have argued for a greater diversity of studies on the subject of emerging adulthood across other nation States. Sensitive to the theme of gender, one possibility could be to examine societies undergoing major social changes, where traditional
cultural norms have been challenged through the influx of globalisation and post-industrialisation. In parts of the Middle East for example, strong religious norms which have traditionally restricted women’s agency and capacities to work and gain education have been relaxed, but at the same time still undergo major challenges in reconciling religious and familial norms in these communities. Therefore, assessing gender as a core theme underpinning emerging adulthood in such vastly changing social landscapes would be a valuable area of future enquiry.

Implications

My findings provide useful information for policy makers, as well as educators with focus on improving the lives of young women in Greece. Of course, given the complexity of the current social and economic conditions in Greece, these policies are in many respects aspirational. However, if and when the conditions in Greece improve, future governments should seek to address the high underemployment and precarity for young people. These include policies which would provide safer and more secure labour market conditions more generally. Work opportunities in high-medium skilled employment are distinctly lacking in the current economic climate, forcing many young people to look overseas for work. The social costs of unemployment on the mental health and well-being of young people also require urgent resolution. Greece is a country which at the moment suffers from a complete lack of investment in youth labour market programs. The continuous and overlapping austerity measures imposed by successive governments over the last ten years have created a resigned and non-questioning social group which although at first shocked by their fierce and punitive spirit, later on tried to come to terms with them, accept, and adapt to them. As I have shown, my participants’ constant sense of uncertainty is the outcome of much reduced options and opportunities offered to them. A more solid structure is vital for those young women’s reshaping of self-confidence and mental health. Further social policies in need of revision concern the abilities of young people to attain their own home, with current economic circumstances pricing young people out of the market.

These policy solutions are something of a ‘wish list’ in a country which looks to have no sign of change. The deeply complex structural conditions of Greece which have seen little
turnaround do however look increasingly tentative as the social order and civility in the country look under threat. At the time of conducting and writing up this study, there were few examples of mass collective reaction from the people against the dramatic economic downturn in the country, especially after the dramatic U-turn of Tsipras after the referendum in 2015. With their confidence broken, there is some hope that a collective spirit of change is now on the horizon in Greece. Large-scale public protests to defend both the name and the land of Macedonia from their neighboring country (FYROM) is one such example. The shoring up of collective action towards the State may well come from this unlikely source, with the long-term future of the government looking in doubt. Whether these conditions will bring about change in the social and economic order of Greece is perhaps unlikely given past record, yet of all recent events looks the more likely to be a factor in lighting the torch paper of public discontent.
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## Appendix 1

### Participants’ Information

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Appendix 2

Ethical Approval

Miss Julia Kazana  
Department of Sociology  
FAHS

20 July 2015

Dear Miss Kazana

**UEC ref: UEC/2015/048/FAHS**  
*Study Title: Young women’s lives in the context of the financial and humanitarian crisis in Greece*

On behalf of the Ethics Committee, I am pleased to confirm a favourable ethical opinion for the above research on the basis described in the submitted protocol and supporting documentation.

Date of confirmation of ethical opinion: 20 July 2015

The final list of documents reviewed by the Committee is as follows:
This opinion is given on the understanding that you will comply with the University's Ethical Principles & Procedures for Teaching and Research.

If the project includes distribution of a survey or questionnaire to members of the University community, researchers are asked to include a statement advising that the project has been reviewed by the University’s Ethics Committee.

If you wish to make any amendments to your protocol please address your request to the Secretary of the Ethics Committee and attach any revised documentation.
The Committee will need to be notified of adverse reactions suffered by research participants, and if the study is terminated earlier than expected with reasons. Please be advised that the Ethics Committee is able to audit research to ensure that researchers are abiding by the University requirements and guidelines.

You are asked to note that a further submission to the Ethics Committee will be required in the event that the study is not completed within five years of the above date.

Please inform me when the research has been completed.

Yours sincerely

Dr Sophie Wehrens

Research Integrity and Governance Officer, Research & Enterprise Support

Copy to. Dr Andrew King, Department of Sociology, FAHS
Appendix 3

Consent Form

Please carefully read the boxes below and tick those which you agree. Please initial next to each box which you tick and leave blank those which you do not tick.

- I the undersigned voluntarily agree to take part in the study on the young Greek women’s transition to adulthood in an era of social and economic crisis

- I have read and understood the Information Sheet III, 16th June provided and have been given a full explanation by the investigators of the nature, purpose, location and likely duration of the study, and of what I will be expected to do. I have also been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the advice and information given as a result.

- I agree to comply with any instruction given to me during the study and to co-operate fully with the investigator, and consent to being interviewed by a researcher.

- I give consent for my answers to be audio recorded and transcribed.

- If I don’t consent for my answers to be audio recorded, I allow the researcher to keep some written notes instead.

- I shall inform the researcher immediately if I suffer any deterioration of any kind in my health or well-being.

- I consent to my personal data, as outlined in the accompanying information sheet, being used for this study. I also understand that all personal data relating to volunteers is held and processed in the strictest confidence, and in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act (1998).

- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to justify my decision and without prejudice. There will be no adverse consequences if I choose not to participate.

- If I withdraw from the research I consent to allow the researcher to use my data.
• If I withdraw from the research I would prefer my data not to be used by the researcher.

• I give my permission to the researcher to keep my data for a minimum of 10 years.

• I confirm that I have read and understood the above and freely consent to participating in this study. I have been given adequate time to consider my participation and agree to comply with the instructions and restrictions of the study.

Name of volunteer (BLOCK CAPITALS) ..........................................................

Signed ........................................................................................................

Date ............................................................................................................

Name of researcher/person taking consent ..................................................

(BLOCK CAPITALS)

Signed ........................................................................................................

Date .............................................................................................................
Appendix 4

Participant Information Sheet

The study has been reviewed and received a Favourable Ethical Opinion (FEO) from the University of Surrey Ethics Committee.

PROJECT TITLE

Women in Crisis? How Young Greek Women Navigate ‘Emerging Adulthood’ following the Effects of the 2008 Economic Crisis.

Introduction

I am a Postgraduate student at the Department of Sociology, University of Surrey, and I would like to invite you to take part in my research project. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve for you. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish.

What is the purpose of the study?

This study seeks to investigate how young women who live in Athens and Thessaloniki, Greece, experience their transition to adulthood amidst the current social and economic crisis.

Why have I been invited to take part in the study?

Because you are a woman between the ages of 20 and 35, resident of the Athens/Thessaloniki prefecture and a citizen of Greece.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study. If you
decide to take part in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any
time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Data may be kept if you choose
to withdraw part way during the study, only with your permission.

What will my involvement require?

You will be asked to meet the researcher either in a community centre or in a café, in the city
of Athens/Thessaloniki. Participation will require up to 90 minutes of your time.

What will I have to do?

If you would like to take part, the researcher will interview you in person. Your interview will
be tape recorded with your consent only. If you do not want to be tape recorded, the
researcher will take some notes again with your consent. You will be asked to bring along
approximately 3-4 pictures (either as physical or digital images) or to bring along any objects
which you think best characterize the past 4-5 years of your life. You will then be asked
questions about why you selected these objects and what they mean to you during the
interview. The objects or pictures will not be retained by the researcher but will act as a focus
of discussion at the interview. The interview will take place in a neutral venue such a
community hall where you will have sufficient privacy to discuss with the researcher.

What are the possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal everyday
life. In the event of you becoming distressed, the researcher will temporarily, or if need
be completely terminate the interview at your request.

A list of support services can be accessed in the event that you do become distressed
by speaking about your experiences during the interview. These include:

KLIMAKA (suicide prevention center) – 1018 (Freephone)

Womensos.gr – 15900 (Freephone)

Dipla sou (domestic violence centre) – 800 11 88 881 (Freephone)

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is unlikely that you will benefit directly but it is hoped that information will be gained about
the ways the young Greek women experience their transition to adulthood under the current
social and financial turmoil.

What happens when the research study stops?

The data acquired from interviews will be used to inform my doctoral thesis which will be
published. The data will be anonymised of any personal information which could identify
you (such as personal names, places, or other specific details). The data will then be used to
inform research publications and policy documents which will be available to the public. If you are interested in the key outcomes of the research, a summary of the research in the Greek language can be sent to you.

**What if there is a problem?**

Any complaint or concern about any aspect of the way you have been dealt with during the course of the study will be addressed; please e-mail Ioulia Kazana, Principal Investigator at i.kazana@surrey.ac.uk You may also e-mail the Head of School Professor Rachel Brooks at r.brooks@surrey.ac.uk or my supervisor Dr Andrew King at andrew.king@surrey.ac.uk

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Yes. All of the information you give will be anonymised so that those reading reports from the research will not know who has contributed to it. Data will be stored securely in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998 and 1997 Protection of Individuals with regard to the Processing of Personal Data. Data will be kept for a minimum period of 10 years after which it will be destroyed. However, should you disclose that you or someone else is at risk then the researcher may need to report this to an appropriate authority. This would usually be discussed with you first.

**Contact details of researcher**

E-mail Ioulia Kazana, Principal Investigator, at i.kazana@surrey.ac.uk if you have questions about this study.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research is not funded by an external research funding body.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this Information Sheet.**

The study has been reviewed and received a Favourable Ethical Opinion (FEO) from the University of Surrey Ethics Committee.
Appendix 5

Interview Guide

**Education and employment**

- Could you tell me about your past studies?
- Are you currently employed? What’s your history employment?

**Family Relationships**

- Could you talk to me about your family?
- Who do you live with?

**Intimate Relationships**

- Have you got a partner? Are you married?
- Have you got any children?

**Living in Greece**

- How have you experienced the general political context up to now?
- What are your hopes about your future in this country?
- Do you see your environment changing in terms of both your city and your personal environment?
- What, if any, other thoughts would you like to share with me about the topics above, this study, or anything else?